



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Lessons from Mike Black

Ecclesiastes 11: 1-6

Lesson 14 of 16

2007-08

“Be Bold”

TRANSCRIPT

We are in the eleventh chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes—‘The man with the powerful mind’. And I have one passage I'd like for you to mark that will supplement our study tonight: Acts 10.

Our Teacher will conclude the Book of Ecclesiastes, beginning in chapter, 11 with a number of exhortations and a final thought. So, this is the outline and structure of our lesson for tonight and for the remainder of the book: Tonight's lesson; 11:1-6; **“Be Bold”**. And then next week; 11:7-10; **“Be Joyful”** and Chapter 12:1-8; **“Be Godly”**. Then lastly; 12:9-14; **“The Conclusion; the thinking of the man with the powerful mind”**.

So, let's begin and look at our text for tonight; chapter 11, beginning in verse 1.

Cast your bread upon the waters,
for after many days you will find it again.
Give portions to seven, yes to eight,
for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

If clouds are full of water,
they pour rain upon the earth.
Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where it falls, there will it lie.
Whoever watches the wind will not plant;
whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

As you do not know the path of the wind,
or how the body is formed in a mother's womb,
so you cannot understand the work of God,
the Maker of all things.

Sow your seed in the morning,
and at evening let not your hands be idle,
for you do not know which will succeed,
whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

Ecclesiastes 11: 1-6

Now may the Lord God, the author of the Word, add His blessing to our study tonight. Let's open in a word of prayer.

Father, we come to You in the mighty name of the Lord Jesus Christ; that Name which is above every name. That at that Name every knee shall bow down and every tongue shall confess that 'He is Lord' to the glory of God, the Father. As we come together tonight around the Scriptures, we ask that You would provide this speaker with the adequate support from the Spirit to teach Your Word with clarity and with the power of the Spirit that only You can supply.

Equip every hearer to have eyes to see and ears to hear the Word of God; that You would make our 'unwilling-hearts'—very willing: And that You would give us that measure of Grace that we all desperately need to live each and every day unto You.

Lord, we're so grateful for a new year, as we contemplate 2008. We're very grateful for the life that You have given us; for there is nothing better for a man to do 'than to eat and to drink and to enjoy the life' that You have granted him to live. And we do that with thanksgiving, with devotion and worship and praise. And we do that with a heart to rededicate ourselves at the beginning of another calendar year; for this very well may be our last year: Or we may not see Christmas or the coming summer. So, teach us by Your grace, to number our days with a heart of wisdom and to apply Your Word to live a life that is truly honoring and pleasing to You. Or in Peter's words: 'Since

everything on earth will be destroyed by fire, what kind of holy and godly lives should we be living' (2Pet 3:10-11). We ask Lord that You give us and imbue us with that Spirit: Beginning tonight and for the rest of this year.

Lord, would You bless Believers Chapel and bless the elders and deacons. And we particularly want to pray for the teachers: We ask that You would give them great wisdom as they give their instruction on so many levels. Also, we pray that You would use the Scriptures in a great way in the lives and hearts of Your people. Bless the outreach and the growth of this church that it would be the kind of growth that would be pleasing to You: One of depth, sincerity, and integrity, that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, would be honored always by our words and conduct.

And so, Lord, as Your Word that goes forth from your mouth: It will never return void, but always accomplish the purpose where unto you send it. So now, use Your Word in our lives tonight, to the honor and glory of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Well, this evening we are going to pick up our study in the Book of Ecclesiastes in Chapter 11, verses 1-6. And our lesson tonight is simply titled, in an exhortative form: "**Be Bold**". The encouragement to *be bold* is an exhortation that we all need to hear, because this world—this life—is a confusing place. In the garden, when the man and the woman were there, things were peaceful, pleasant, and predictable. But life, as we all know, is not like that now. Now we must walk by faith; we must believe the Word of God. That is the true reality in a skewed world that promises so much—but delivers very little—if anything at all. There are mirages and traps for us spiritually, everywhere. That's this world. That's this reality 'under the sun' that we all live in.

The apostle put our lives this way: He said, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2Cor 5:7). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews put it another way in chapter 11, verse 1. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Now at one time, the man and the woman in the garden, they could see. Things are different now, because the man and the woman in the garden fell. And the world now is a very dangerous place, filled with images, messages, and confusion that bewilder and

even can destroy the believer. In such a confusing world, the great frustration is that (and *how* we all know this), our best laid plans can suddenly be washed away; dashed into pieces in a moment. The seeming advantages that we think we have in life our Teacher says, 'You don't have them at all'. Remember chapter 9, verse 11? He told us, 'the race is not to the swift, the battle is not to the strong, nor does food come to the wise, or wealth to the brilliant, or favor to the learned': "...but time and chance happen to them all." That is the life that we live 'under the sun', every day, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

And we all know it to be so, don't we? Life here seems so random. Nothing seems to fit. It's just a bunch of hodge-podge events. That's this life. That's the reality that we all have. And as a result, it works on our psyche. We begin to have paralysis. We draw back. We think, 'If there's so much uncertainty, better that we lay low in this life, keep our resources to ourselves, finish this life staying close to the shore, not launching out into the deep.'

Now if what I have just said to you is confirmed by a little voice down deep inside saying, 'That's exactly what I believe', then let me stab you awake tonight by the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. John, chapter 12, in verse 25. Listen. He said, "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." To one degree or another, whether it be in business, or generosity, or Christian labor; in everything in life we are to **be bold**. Now, consider with me: Without that simple truth, Abram would never have left Ur of the Chaldees; Moses would never have returned to Egypt and faced Pharaoh's court; Joshua would never have taken Jericho; Gideon would never have been 'the great Judge Gideon'; and David, small and ruddy David, would never have parted away from the company of the troops and faced that giant on the battlefield alone.

Charles Bridges, Puritan, writes, "Unbelief looks at difficulty. Faith regards the promise. Unbelief makes our work a service of bondage. Faith realizes it as a 'labor of love'. Unbelief drags on in sullen despondency. Faith makes the patience, with which it is content to wait for success, 'the patience of hope'." The question for you and I is this:

Boldness, or fear and intimidation, in the life that we live 'under the sun'? Dr. Carey, before heading off into India, left the Baptist missionary society with two ideas from his preaching in the Book of Isaiah. The first: *Attempt great things*. And the second: *Expect great things*.

So, writes the Teacher; a proverb: Ecclesiastes chapter 11 in verse 1. "Cast..." (literally *send*). 'Send your bread upon the surface of the water, for after many days you will find it.' Now this proverb has a metaphorical nature, as well as a puzzling aspect that raises two questions itself. The first: Of bread, or corn meal; it will immediately be soaked when cast upon the water. It will apparently be wasted; or perish. Now, of what value is that? And the second query: Of what use can it possibly be to the sender if he casts it from himself?

In a world of 'weights and measures', when our only reality is seen and understood by the visible world, the answer is simple: This is nothing but waste. Bread upon the water?! Water logged bread?! That is of no value to anyone 'under the sun'— That is, if there is no God.

If His revelation to us makes no sense whatsoever, then the proverb, and its imperative to 'cast' has no benefit at all. But again, we must remember, that we are called to live by faith. We are to follow the dictates of His Word. And His Word declares that we, in everything, are to **be bold**, to take risk. Why? We are to take risk because we are the people of a great King, and a great Kingdom: Far beyond anything that we could ever imagine in this world, in this life 'under the sun'. We're not interested in ourselves, but rather, we are interested in Him, and the things to Him and for Him. That's the proper way to think about our lives. No matter what position God has placed you in this life today, tonight, 2008; your life is to be lived in **boldness**; at risk. You are to join Peter and 'climb out of the boat; stand on the waves of water, while looking at Christ'; and going to Him. That is our life. That is the life that He has given us to live.

So, my friends, tonight, from the Word of God, 'the man with the powerful mind'; *sow your seed corn without any hope of harvest*.

You see, in the life that you and I are given 'under the sun', the way we sow seed is that we take it in hand and we scatter it over rich, black, fertile soil. Not upon water! There it cannot germinate; there it cannot take root. So, you and I are to do good and be there for people who cannot possibly ever pay you back anything at all. And you are to do it because that's how your Master acted. That is how the kingdom works: And we are the people of that kingdom.

And if this life would be for you, young entrepreneur in business (planning or already in a business venture) then let me say, "Dedicate it tonight to Christ! All to Christ. For Christ. To Christ. Under Christ. And may God bless you mightily in your endeavor." And through this dedication may Christ be glorified that He might be magnified; and that your endeavor might prosper; so that the entire kingdom of Christ may prosper; so that everyone can be enriched. You see, it's not your career, it's His career; and it's what He chooses to do with you. That's the way for you to look at your business life.

I was in a conversation, (I think I've mentioned this to you before, perhaps even in this series. It left such an impression on me). I was in a conversation with the late, and I might say great Jim Boice; James Montgomery Boice. We were talking in Oklahoma City at the Waterford Hotel. And he was meeting with us to discuss bringing the *Bible Study Hour* to Oklahoma City on a daily radio broadcast. He asked us if we would be willing to take up that commitment for a year. And we agreed to do so. And here's how it worked.

There were three places in the United States that had the *Bible Study Hour* on daily radio. Philadelphia (his home church), New York City, and Oklahoma City. Imagine that. But as he concluded the meeting he said one thing that I have never recovered from. He said, "Gentlemen, I'm not interested in building my own kingdom." Those were the words I've never forgotten. It capsulized all of my reading, and all of my thinking, and all of my study. Boice is so right! And I ask myself, all the time, that same question: My kingdom or His Kingdom: To Him, for Him, by Him, through Him? You see, the Teacher says, that the real philosophy of life according to this *Book* is to live one day at a

time. And right here, in chapter 11 verse 1, is how: 'Spend and be spent, for you never know the *'rippling'* effects of one single life.'

Now let me tell you a story. There was a man by the name of Roland Hill. He has long since passed off the face of this earth. He was a tremendous preacher, and a great theologian. And he was greatly used, and a man of great influence for his day (circa 1770-1830). And on one ordinary day, one particular woman came under his voice and was regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Her name was Selina Hastings. Selina Hastings. But to the VIPs of her day, she was the *Countess of Huntingdon*. She was transformed by that gospel. Suddenly the things of wealth, pageantry, pomp, and the high society that she had been relegated to and grown up in now meant nothing to her. She was a woman of wealth and influence, very rich in that life: But she gave away her money. And let me tell you, she is absolutely much richer now in the life that she enjoys at this very second in heaven.

With her wealth she sponsored George Whitfield; and he came to the Americas where he began to preach up and down the northeastern seacoast to thousands of people: And along with Jonathan Edwards, they helped in the spawning of the 'Great Awakening'. It was her money that backed Whitfield in building the first orphanage in America in Savannah, Georgia—It was her money; under Whitfield's leadership. She gave her money and her interests away. She *cast* what she had *'upon the waters'*. And we can't even comprehend tonight how it has come back to her. But I can assure you of this: In this world of 'weights and measurements' 'under the sun' and according to my understanding of the Bible, Bill Gates is merely a piker standing next to her. Warren Buffett: a dishwasher.

Now notice; your text is talking about corn meal (or bread) that does not have a chance to germinate or take root upon the waters. Do you see the metaphorical idea within the text? The currents of water are the providence of God. He moves those currents as He deems best. Now, as you and I know, water-soaked cornmeal is worthless: Just as much as giving away your cash, or your energy spent on some kind of endeavor for others. Of what value is that to you? It's just worthless. — But in the hands

of the Master controlling 'the currents'...He will take that which is of no value and make something of it. Just look what He has done so far with you and me; we people of such little value.

I was preaching some time back at Believers Chapel, I believe it was on a Wednesday night, and I referenced a story that had come to my mind while studying the passage that I was teaching that night. I had come to the office here at the Chapel one Monday about 30 years ago. As I walked into the office, an upset, distraught Emily Ray, the Chapel's secretary, met me: 'We have a young family whose son has been hit by a car and he is in intensive care'. She asked me if I knew somebody that could go to the hospital and meet with the family and pray with them: And I took off. I got to the hospital and..... found everything to be in order! Everything relatively peaceful.

I quickly discovered that 'peace' was because Howard Prior had been there during the night. According to their testimony, he had been there all night with them. And not only that, he had made all the tough calls when they were emotionally strung out. He was there with his mind and clear thinking. He did all the heavy lifting and he did all the praying. And what's amazing about this story to me is, he came up to me a week or so later and he asked, "Who was that family? I don't remember their name. I don't even remember the incident." And I thought to myself: 'Here's a man that was there for a family in the greatest single crises of their life, and he can't even remember it. Oh, that I might just have half that life. Just half that life.'

Look at this passage and don't miss the promise—Look at it right here! Water logged corn meal, worthless bread, will, at its *providential time*, come back to you in ways that you can't even imagine.

Risk? Well sure there's risk, but you see, we're the people that are involved in a great enterprise in everything that we do. The smallest details of life; eating, drinking, providing for our family, caring for the needs of others, employing people, putting them to work, taking care of them: In everything that we do, we are seeking to glorify God. And we live that way. And we seek to bring honor and glory to Him in all of our

endeavors. Now that's our lives. And if that's our lives then let me ask myself, and ask you tonight: 'Why are we not more grandiose? Why are we not more bold?'

This is the reason that I asked you to mark Acts, chapter 10. I want to show you a passage, Acts 10:27&28, that could be the very reason that you're not as **bold** or gracious as you need to be: It could be the way you were raised; the family that you came from. Acts 10:27, "... he went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our Law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him..." Now look at these words. "But God has shown me..." (Would you underline that?) "But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean." Look: Peter broke the way that he was raised, because God had shown him what was really impure and unclean. Now, can you think of a better place to start than right here in 2008? **Be bold**: You and I need to be likewise.

So why are we not more generous with what He has given us when the promises of God are so clear? II Corinthians 9:6, "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." So here it is: The clear teaching and wise instruction from 'the man with the powerful mind', (vs1) 'Cast your bread upon the surface of the water. And after many days you'll find it.' But this means **you must be bold**. That means you must put yourself at risk. But if it's all for Him; my friends, if it's all for Him, then nothing is lost, nothing is wasted. You have really nothing to lose, do you?

Next look at verse 2. "Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land." The question here is the nature of a *portion*, and the number of seven and eight. Some see this as advice in business or financial risk. If one or two fail, then others can make up for the losses. So, the wisdom here is to diversify one's portfolio. Now that might be a wise principle. But I don't think that's the teaching that we have here from our 'man with the powerful mind'. You see, it may be a good principle to diversify. But diversity is one thing: Generosity is something entirely different.

The *portion* would be the distribution of a wide variety; the spreading of the seed of the sower. The number 'seven or eight' identifies the function of the giving, the impression of a large number of cases. Now, I worked in the oil and gas community in Oklahoma City from 1982 to 1996. And I know a lot of 'Big Hitters' in the oil business. And some of them collect horses. Some of them collect cars. Some of them collect houses. But let me ask you, 'How many of these 'Big Hitters' collect the names of saints and pray for them on a daily basis?—You're going to be given just that opportunity tonight'.

Now in verses 3 and 4 he gives us two illustrations from the created world. Verse 3 tells us, 'when clouds are full of water it will rain (That's certainly straightforward enough). And, 'when a tree falls, it stays where it falls, no matter what'. Now if I was ever prepared to teach a lesson on this verse 3, I got it in December; because in Oklahoma we got 'The Great Ice Storm': So, there I was, at three in the morning, and my wife is shaking me. It sounds like bombs are going off outside. I get dressed and I go outside; and I look at my driveway: It looks like World War III had begun. So, I get my saw, and I start sawing. I saw and I stack. I stack and I saw. And around 7:30 in the morning, I had my driveway clear and was very proud of my accomplishment. I got my cars out of the driveway; got them in a safe place; and I go and fall back into bed. About 10:00AM, I get up...and look at my driveway...it looks like I've never been there!

The point of the verse is that you don't control the fallen tree. It can't be predicted. Life, by its nature, can't be predicted. Where will it rain? Where will the drought be? Where will the tree fall? Who knows? Life involves uncertainty. But the Teacher here says, 'So what? **Be bold.**'

One other thing we need to recognize in the latter part of this verse 3: This verse right here; this illustration of the tree; this is the Word of God that regenerated the soul of RC Sproul. He was a young intellectual. He had heard the gospel. He was brought under conviction, and he was reading the Book of Ecclesiastes when he came to this verse; and specifically, the illustration of the tree. He was frozen by it, for instead of

a tree; he saw himself; cut down; lying in the forest; unable to rise. My friends, that's life.

I know a man tonight, in Atlanta, Georgia, who was going through the holiday season singing Jingle Bells, along with all of us. Then three days before Christmas, his wife came in from an early meeting. She found him, surprisingly, at home. And he was disoriented. She grew concerned. She called an ambulance. Took him to the hospital. They began to run tests. Found out he had a very deep brain tumor. Inoperable. Two days later they found out it was cancerous. Since then, it now takes him an hour to put on his clothes. He has now fallen in the shower and two days ago, he has lost his ability to write his name. Cut down. Not able to rise.

The first illustration of the rain was in the *inevitability*. The illustration of the tree was one of *randomness*. See the term 'south and north'; another *merism*. We've discussed that figure before: Two extremes, assuming everything in between. The world we live in, the life that we have, is so unpredictable. That's the point. But you and I are the people of a great King and a great Kingdom. So **be bold**.

See, verse 4: 'Those who watch the wind don't sow, and those who observe the clouds don't harvest.' Two more illustrations from the creation: Specifically, agricultural. We don't control the wind and the rain, and we don't live our lives waiting for perfect conditions. You're afraid to plant, thinking your seed will be blown away. Afraid to harvest for fear that the rain will come before the crops come in and flood. The Teacher says, 'Don't think that way'. The Teacher says, 'Don't live that way'.

Verse 5: 'The future is unknown and unknowable'. There is just so much in life that we don't know, and again two examples from the creation. The direction of the wind, the formation of life as an embryo. So, if there is limited knowledge, you and I can't possibly understand God's plan for your tomorrows. So what do we do? Well here's what we do: We follow the Word of God. And in following the Word of God, we know that we live a life that is in His plan—Always. And what incredible plans He has for His people. To think, one obscure man from Ur of the Chaldees, Abram, would be now the revered religious leader of the world: Revered by the Christian; revered by the

Muslim; revered by the Jew. To think that one of the sons of Jacob would be second in command of all Egypt. Think about that. It's incredible.

You think your career has been tough and shattered? You think your life has been broken? Well look at Moses. His life was like that. You think God can't resurrect a career? You don't think God can't put your life back together? You don't think he can't put the pieces of you back together? Why look at Moses; and what did He do with that loser? He made him the greatest single leader on the face of the earth. Why the children of Israel left the most powerful nation on planet Earth without ever firing a shot. He was so ready to lead 40 years earlier with a whip and a bow and a sword. Oh, he killed the Egyptian, remember? God said, 'No. We'll have none of it. You'll lead like a shepherd. You'll lead with a staff; and by and through My power. That's how you'll lead.' That's our God. That's who He is. That's His plans. So, **be bold**. You and I have no idea what He is going to do with you tomorrow.

Verse 6: The Teacher clinches this passage with his own advice. He says, 'since we don't know if the seed planted in the morning will germinate and produce food, we can always redouble our efforts; working from morning till the evening because you want to be good by working hard. And let's just carry that over into New Testament thinking—Whatever you set your hand to do, do it with all your might: 'Make the most of your time. The days are evil' (Eph 5:16). 'Be urgent, in season and out of season' (2Tim 4:2). But in everything, my friends, you **be bold**. Take your regenerate life into a confusing world, a complex world that doesn't seem to make sense. And you go at it: And you go at it like a buzz saw, because you're not doing it for yourself. You're doing it because you are the people of a great King, and you represent that great King and His Great Kingdom.

You see, what we do, we do for Him. What we do, we do by Him. What we do, we do through Him; through His power and through His might. And if we do that, then what we do will never be lost. It will never be squandered. It will never be wasted. It will never be simply thrown away. But rather, my friends, you will get it back. You'll get it back—Back, after many days.

Now that's the word, the exhortative word, of the 'man with a powerful mind'.
So, let us take that Word, together, into this new year and let us apply it one day at a
time; all the days that God has given us left to live.

To the honor and the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen

(End of Audio)