

Ecclesiastes 11: 1 and 2; “Cast Your Bread upon the Waters”,
Message # 74 In the series – “Remember Your Creator”,
A Bible Study prepared for the evening of June 13th,
2012, and presented by Pastor Paul Rendall.

Solomon gives us an injunction here to do that which is sometimes displeasing to our nature; to give to people who are in need. The way that he phrases it is somewhat peculiar. He says that we should “Cast our bread upon the waters”. Bread is described in the Bible as that which is the main stay of life. It is the necessary food to sustain life in this world. Turn with me over to Ezekiel 4: 16. It says here – “Moreover He said to me, Son of man, surely I will cut off the supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread, that they may lack bread and water, and be dismayed with one another and waste away because of their iniquity.” So we see here that it is God who gives food and we can also conclude that our verse is telling us that God would have us to “share our portion” with others in need around us. Casting this bread upon the waters is a word picture for peoples as we read in Revelation 17, verse 15 – “Then he said to me, ‘The waters where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.’” (See also Psalm 144, verses 7 and 8) So I think that we can conclude, without stretching the meaning of our text, that the waters are all kinds of people who we may providentially know that they have a need for the basic necessities of life. Tonight we want to look first at what it means to cast your bread on the waters. And 2nd – We want to look at the reward for the righteous person that does the casting.

1st of all – What does it mean to cast your bread upon the waters?

You can see here that verse 2 explains or at least amplifies the truth asserted in verse 1. “Cast your bread upon the waters” is explained by the first phrase of verse 2 – “Give a serving to seven, and also to eight”. Casting is giving. To cast your bread upon the waters means that you should give to those needy persons that providence places in your way; people who you may live near, or people who you come across, who you know need a meal or help of some sort that you know that you could give them. Matthew Henry say that these verses are “alluding to the husbandman, who goes forth, bearing precious seed, sparing bread-corn from his family for the seedness, knowing that without that he can have no harvest another year; thus the charitable man takes from his bread-corn for seed-corn, abridges himself to supply the poor, that he may sow beside all waters.” Let us ask if we think this way? To be able to give to those in need, we need to see, is a Christian grace. It comes from loving your neighbor as yourself. Turn with me over to Luke 6: 30. “Give to everyone who asks of you.” “And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back.” “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.” We must learn to ask ourselves whether we think this way? Or

whether we are entirely selfish and stingy at certain points where we could help someone in true need. Turn with me over to Proverbs 22: 9. “He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor. Notice that God’s blessing is not to the stingy person, but to the one who has a generous eye. In other words, that person who has a generous eye is looking out to see whom he might help. It is often on his mind, and these kind of thoughts proceed from a generous heart which has come to know God’s giving heart and the greatness of His grace.

We can see also see a good example of generosity in “dividing a portion to seven or eight”, if we will turn over to Nehemiah Chapter 5: 14-18. “Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor’s provisions.” “But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver.” “Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not rule over the people but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.” “Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land.” “All my servants were gathered there for the work.” “And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us.” “Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep.” “Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine.” “Yet in spite of this, I did not demand the governor’s provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people.” Do you see how thoughtful of the need of those under him, was this man Nehemiah? Let us be just as thoughtful.

One man has said of Bishop Hooper that – “As for the revenues of both his bishoprics, although they did not greatly exceed, as the matter was handled; yet, if anything surmounted thereof, he pursed nothing, but bestowed it in hospitality. Twice I was, as I remember, in his house in Worcester, where, in his common hall, I saw a table spread with good store of meat, and beset full of beggars and poor folk: and I asking his servants what this meant, they told me that every day their lord and master's manner was, to have customarily to dinner a certain number of poor folk of the said city by course, who were served by four at a mess, with hot and wholesome meats; and, when they were served, (being before examined by him or his deputies, of the Lord's prayer, the articles of their faith, and ten commandments,) then he himself sat down to dinner, and not before. After this sort and manner Master Hooper executed the office of a most careful and vigilant pastor, by the space of two years and more, so long as the state of religion in King Edward's time did safely flourish and take place: and would God that all other bishops would use the like diligence, care, and observance, in their function!

This leads us to consider the spiritual meaning of our text here. Turn with me over to Isaiah 32: 20. “Blessed are you who sow beside all waters, who send out

freely the feet of the ox and the donkey.” Now these verses show us that giving is not simply the sowing of physical bread for physical eating, but it is also referring to the sowing of the word of God upon the waters of the peoples of the world. “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” The context of these verses is found in Isaiah 32: 15 where it says, “Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest.” “Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field; the work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.” “My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places, though hail come down on the forest, and the city is brought low in humiliation.” Then comes the verse about being blessed when they sow beside all waters, who send out freely the feet of the ox and the donkey. John Gill says, “The ox and the donkey were used for plowing and tilling the earth, and in making it fit to sow the seed in it.” and to eat off the heads of grain when it is grown thick and full, which some think is here meant; and the one might also be used to gather it in when ripe, and the other to tread and thresh it, as the Targum and Jarchi interpret it; there being a law given the Jews, that these two should not work together, (Deut. 22:10) and from hence it may be concluded, that these words refer to a time when this law should be abolished; and the Jews themselves apply it to the times of the Messiah; and it undoubtedly points to Gospel times, and even to those times when the Jews shall be converted, and great numbers among the Gentiles also, who shall join together in spreading the Gospel, and in promoting the interest of Christ.” And in 1st Corinthians 9: 9 when Paul is talking about a church’s supplying the needs of their pastor, he says, “For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.’ “Is it oxen that God is concerned about?” “Or does He say it altogether for our sakes?” “For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.” No, ministers are the oxen and donkeys that are being spoken about, I believe, in this passage. Jewish and Gentile working together to further Christ’s kingdom.

I would say that although these words can be applied in a general sense to this whole Church Age, I believe that they are more specifically the picture of the Jews and the Gentiles working together during the time of great harvest in this present Church Age, the Millennium, when ministers and others will sow the seed of the word of God beside all waters; beside all peoples, and they shall reap a great harvest. The wilderness of this world has not yet become a fruitful field in the sense being spoken of here. But the city, the city of God the Church, has indeed been laid low in humiliation. But the lesson which we should learn from this tonight is that when a person casts their bread, whether it is the literal bread of helping people out who are poor physically, or whether it is the sowing the spiritual bread of the word of God, attempting to feed those who are spiritually

poor (those unsaved or perishing), he is being generous in the sense that God would have him to be. He is throwing it away from himself as a man scatters seed in planting.

2ndly – We want to look at the rewards given to those who cast their bread upon the waters.

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.” “Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth.” There is a reward for the righteous person who is gracious and gives. It will return to him in God’s blessings after many days. Look over at Proverbs 11: 24. “There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty.” “The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.” Look at all these blessings to the generous person; he sows and scatters his bread and yet it increases all the more. He is made rich by watering others, and in the process, he is watered himself. Look at Acts 20: 32. “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel.” “Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.” “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak.” And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” The peace of mind and heart and the evident blessing to the soul of the give from God Himself makes this giving a great blessing than receiving.

Look over also at 2 Corinthians Chapter 9: 6. The Apostle Paul gives to us here a great principle in relation to our giving. “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things may have an abundance for every good work.” We need to remember that God is well able to recompense the cheerful giver. He is able to make all grace abound to you so that you will always have all sufficiency in everything. Look also at Isaiah 58: 6-9. “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?” “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you do cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?” “Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.” Ah, it is certainly true that great spiritual blessings come to those who cast their bread upon the waters. And look also at Luke 6: 38 – “Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down,

shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom.” “For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

Finally let's look at Luke 14, verse 12. “Then He also said to him who invited Him, ‘When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid.’ “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.” “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Perhaps this is the best kind of giving of all; getting your reward from the Lord Himself on the Day of His appearing. You have laid out of your bread to those who cannot pay you back, but God knows how to repay in the most satisfying of ways. Let us all think of how we can cast our bread upon the waters. Think of those poor persons or neighbors who you can share with