

Rules for Living

Lesson for Sunday, July 21, 2024

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 11

INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ In 2018, Dr. Jordan Peterson sky-rocketed to international fame with the publishing of his book, *The 12 Rules of Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. The book sold over ten million copies as of May 2023.
- ⇒ What are these rules that so many were clamoring for? Here's a sample:
 - Stand up straight with your shoulders back.
 - Make friends with people who want the best for you.
 - Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world.
 - Pursue what is meaningful (not expedient).
 - Be precise in your speech.
- ⇒ There is a lot to Peterson's book that appears to be common sense. But it was earth-shattering to over 10 million people. They could have saved a lot of time if they would have turned to the pages of Ecclesiastes because Solomon proclaimed Holy Spirit-inspired wisdom for living.
- ⇒ As we approach the last part of Ecclesiastes, it begins to read like Proverbs – bits of Godly counsel that we would all do well to heed. In chapter 11, Solomon presents his version of *Rules of Life*.

BIBLE STUDY:

1. Rule 1: Be generous (11:1-2)
 - a. Verse 1 is difficult to interpret, and many scholars have come to different conclusions. Here are the three most common:
 - i. It refers to maritime commerce when they would ship out a boat full of grain for trading, hoping to return with other goods that were in need.
 - ii. It refers to taking steps to spread one's financial resources in multiple directions. Think about diversifying your portfolio...
 - iii. In older Jewish and Christian interpretation, it was a reference to giving to the poor and hoping that others would be kind in return and in your time of need.
 - b. Verse 2 paints the picture of a generous person in the midst of uncertain times.
 - c. Solomon is encouraging us to be generous in our work and in our attitudes in light of the fact that life is so uncertain. While many responds to uncertainties by retreating from the world, the Christian is to be bold, benevolent, strong in the Lord and working hard every day.
 - d. APPLY: Flash forward to your funeral. Will anyone you know (family, co-workers, friends) describe you as generous? Why or why not? What changes can you make to be more generous?
2. Rule 2: Don't delay in matters of sowing and reaping (11:3-4)
 - a. Waiting for perfect conditions will often lead to inactivity. Too much time "reading the skies" will only distract one from the task at hand. The result is that we never actually sow and we never actually reap.
 - b. Solomon says, "Don't delay!"
 - c. APPLY: This is especially applicable in our spiritual lives.
 - i. If we are waiting for the perfect time and place for personal Bible reading, we will most likely never begin.
 - ii. If we are waiting to find the perfect church, we will never join.
 - iii. If we wait for the perfect timing and opportunity, we will never serve.
 - d. The perfect conditions do not exist. Solomon instructs us to get to it! What do you know you need to be doing today?
3. Rule 3: Don't try to understand the work of God (11:5)

- a. The human spirit is a mysterious entity.
 - i. There is much we do not know about our spirit.
 - ii. There is much we do not understand about the miracle of a new life in a mother's womb.
 - iii. And there is much about the works of God we will not understand this side of eternity.
 - b. Again, Solomon urges us to get busy and do our work. Focus on what we know we ought to do and not what we will never understand.
 - c. APPLY: This reminds us of the saying, "They are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good!" The Christian life is practical! It is to be lived and revealed in every aspect of our lives. Is your faith more theological and philosophical than it is an actual reality in your life?
4. Rule 4: Keep on sowing your seed (11:6)
- a. Solomon encourages us to persevere! Keep sowing! Don't get discouraged and never give up! If you have breath in your lungs you have work to do!
 - b. How many people need to hear Solomon's encouragement! How many have given up because of discouraging circumstances and difficult times?
 - c. Think of the farmer. There is a time to sow. It doesn't matter how he feels, or if he would rather be doing something else. If he fails to sow he will fail to reap.
 - d. APPLY: Is there an area of your Christian life that you have given up? Is there some seed you need to sow again?
5. Rule 5: Remember to rejoice while you can (11:7-9a)
- a. Solomon has experienced life "under the sun", but he knows that there is more to life than that point of view! As Christians, we have something to live for.
 - b. Solomon's counsel: Rejoice! Enjoy life! Live life to the fullest!
 - c. This is not an avoidance of our world and its troubles. Instead, it is a conscious choice to focus on the goodness of God and the multitude of blessings He has given us to enjoy! See 1 Timothy 6:17 – "God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy!"
 - d. APPLY: Attitude check! Are you joyful? Are you thankful? Or do you complain, criticize and condemn!
6. Rule 6: Remember that you will one day meet God (11:9b-10)
- a. At first, one may think, "How can I rejoice in light of the reality that I am racing toward a face-to-face day of judgment?" These last two commands seem to cancel one another.
 - b. Solomon is balancing his command to enjoy life. God wants us to enjoy life and the blessings that He has provided, but we are not to be reckless with our blessings! We are not to use God's intended blessings to sin.
 - i. Example: God may bless you with a house at the lake or beach, a boat, etc. If so, you should enjoy those as gifts from God.
 - ii. But they should not become excuses for unfaithful church attendance.
 - iii. What other examples can you think of?
 - c. APPLY: What difference would it make in our daily lives if we were able to live with the ultimate end in mind? What would you immediately do differently if you could just remember that one day (maybe today) you will stand before God to give an account of your life!

Lead your class members to choose one of these rules for life that they can go to work on this week! If time allows, discuss specific things they can do to being implementing them into their daily lives.