

Worship without Christ is Meaningless

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

Speaker: Matthew Black

Text: Ecclesiastes 5

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Introduction: Open your Bible to Ecclesiastes 5. Tonight we continue in our series called “Finding the Meaning of Life”. Tonight we are going to find out that “Worship without Christ is Vain”.

I want to ask you tonight: Do you love Christ? Does your life revolve around Him. Can you say, “For to me to live is Christ” (**Phil. 1:21**)? Are you totally consumed with Him? Unless you can answer YES to this question, I can tell you that all the religiosity in your life has no meaning.

Let me put it another way. When was the last time God got a hold of your heart? You have your devotions, but when is the last time your devotions had you?

Can I tell you something? If you are not worshipping God, you’ll be worshipping something. You are not an independent being. You are **HARD WIRED** for worship.

Sadly, mankind has forsaken God and placed self at the center. Our heart as Calvin said, “is any idol making factory”. But I want you to see tonight that the nature of the **TRUE** worship of God is radical and all consuming.

Many people say they worship God, even in Christian churches. But most people want just a “little bit” of religion. People love to “play church” and “try God”. You know if all else fails, maybe God will help me.

What we are going to find out in Ecclesiastes 5, is that the God who created us and all humanity ***demands all or nothing***. You are either His friend or His enemy. He will not be trifled with. Worshipping God in any way we please, or approaching Him with anything less than a serious heart is foolish and quite dangerous. So we come again to Ecclesiastes. Here we have the final word on meaningful worship. What is the worship that God accepts? Don’t you want to know?

We had better know, because worshipping God in a way other than what He has prescribed is vain. And one thing you have to know, is worship touches every part of our lives.

I. **The true worshipper is careful in his Devotion:** We need a **Heart** for Worship (vs. 1-4). .

It is more important to draw near to God with your heart than with your words. We can say all kinds of flowery things that mean nothing. It is better to be quiet and “be still and know that He is God” than to offer the “sacrifice of fools”. We are not aware that we are sinning when we speak to God carelessly. We are to be engaged in our worship.

Ecclesiastes 5:1a, “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God”.

Be careful not to put religion in the place of God. We talked about this on Sunday. Form and programs and structure is not our God. None of that makes us righteous with God. But God has given us form. He's given us the order of the local church. There are those who want no membership and no accountability to the local church. They are not following the Lord Jesus Christ. He established His church. He calls pastors and elders to shepherd local congregations. He even speaks to His churches individually in Revelation 2-3.

But we must be careful to use the means of God's grace to meet with Him. Be careful in your devotion to God!

Solomon names three things that will poison your devotion to God: apathy, insincerity, and distraction.

A. **Apathy** kills our devotion. Solomon was an expert on how to approach God; he built the Temple. It took him seven years to build it, so he knows a thing or two. Let's look at this. Ecclesiastes 5, starting in **verse 1**, "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God." This little phrase, "guard your steps," in the Hebrew literally means "to pay attention to your steps, pay attention to the direction of your feet."

Now, why is this so unbelievably important? Here's why. I have found that when difficult and dry times come and when sin grips us, the majority of us shut down the pursuit of God and fall into some sort of spiritual pouting hyper-Calvinism. Where all of a sudden, we go, "Well, this is hard, well I can't find God, so you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to do very little. And what I'm going to hope happens is that the pastor puts together the perfect service that will finally make all this go away.

B. **Insincerity** kills our devotion. You may not realize it, but insincerity and unengaged worship is sinful. It is the sacrifice of fools.

Ecclesiastes 5:1b, "To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil."

Many people come to God without realizing who they are addressing. They come to Him offering the "sacrifice of fools". They are coming to Him without understanding His holiness, His awesome power and majesty.

We end up praying prayers with no meaning. They are all theologically correct, but they are not sincere. They are just empty words.

Matthew 7:7-8, Jesus said: "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

God doesn't want your eloquence – He wants your honesty!

God wants your heart – He doesn't want your hot air! Be careful in your singing, in your prayers, in your attention to the message. Don't be insincere in your heart.

Have you ever prayed without thinking? God hates it! It's insincere!

Ecclesiastes 5:2, "Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few".

Be careful and thoughtful when you come before God. Be careful how you pray! John Bunyan said when you pray "it is better to have a heart without words than words without heart".

Remember, if you take prayer seriously, God will take you seriously. **James 5:16**, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much".

C. **Distraction** kills our devotion. **Ecclesiastes 5:3**, "For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words." When we allow ourselves to be too occupied in life, we start daydreaming. Someone said that Solomon here is talking about mental "doodling". We are here but we are not here. We are not engaged. We are somewhere else.

It is so important when you are here to be all here. Jim Elliott, missionary martyr to the Auca Indians said, "Wherever you are, be all there! Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God."

There are so many distractions in prayer and in worship. When you come to services, don't daydream. When we pray, don't be thinking about something else.

Application: Get here on time! Put God first. Don't walk out at the invitation. Stay a while and enjoy the fellowship.

Transition: Not only should we take God seriously in our devotion to Him, but also in our commitments to Him.

II. **The true worshipper is careful in his Commitments:** We need a **Hand** for Worship (vs. 5-6). We need to be good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ and press on with a radical determination to please God.

Understand, all that we do in this life is ultimately a commitment to God. God is supremely worthy, and there needs to be a seriousness to our commitments in life.

A. The **Shallowness** of Commitments today.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, “When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay”.

We live in a day of superficial commitments. We’d rather bail out than follow through. Whether it’s a commitment to stay *faithful in a marriage* or a commitment of *covenanting together in church membership*, people are afraid of committing. Most people will make shallow promises and never follow through. Some of you young people have made a vow with God *to remain morally pure until marriage*.

Today you have “no fault divorce”. There is no accountability for wrong. In finances, you have bad bankruptcy laws that let the one who cannot pay his debt off scot free! If you are a believer you need to keep your word.

Keeping your commitment means you carry through even when it is painful.

Psalm 15:1-4, “A PSALM OF DAVID. O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? 2 He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; 3 who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; 4 in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change”.

Ecclesiastes 5:5, “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay”.

Why?

- B. The **Radical** nature of commitment to Christ. Something changes when a person comes to know Christ. When you come to know Christ, your words begin to mean something.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, “When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay”.

Our commitment ultimately is to Christ.

So radical is our commitment that Paul describes his old self-centered life as crucified with Christ. Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

What does Jesus say about our commitment to Him?

John 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Matthew 10:37, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”.

Matthew 13:44, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

Luke 9:62, Jesus said: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

C. The Response of God to Disobedience.

You know that if you are not serious with God in your commitments, He’s going to chasten you. He’s called you to be serious about Him. You now must take God seriously, or God will purify you through His loving chastening.

Ecclesiastes 5:6, “Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. **Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?**”

Ultimately, our life’s goals are worthless unless motivated by our affection for God. If our motive is wrong, God will correct us. He will destroy the works of our hands.

For unbelievers, he will judge them. They fill up the cup of His wrath. For believers He will chasten them.

Hebrews 12:6, “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

They may be given over to be harassed by Satan for a time.

1 Corinthians 5:5, “you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 11:27-30, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.”

III. The true worshipper is careful in his Conviction.

A. Empty **words** cannot cover up true Holy Spirit conviction.

Ecclesiastes 5:7, “For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.”

Here's what he's saying. A dream is not reality, so here's what he's saying. “When your understanding of God becomes a dream and not based in reality and you cover up the fact that you don't know Him with your many theological words, that's all pretty much in vain, useless.”

B. A true worshipper has a life based in the deep conviction and fear of God. **Ecclesiastes 5:7b**, “God is the one you must fear.”

If you've been born again, you are no longer in pursuit of satisfying yourself. You are on a completely different path. We have surrendered to God with our whole heart, and we want Him alone. We want His will, not our will.

C.S. Lewis said: “Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms...This process of surrender...is what Christians call repentance.”¹

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), 59.