

## Ecclesiastes- Chapter 5

If you would please be turning with me to the book of Ecclesiastes and today, we will be focusing our attention on chapter five looking at the first seven verses. We have been going through this study of wisdom at a fairly rapid pace and it was my desire to do this chapter in one fowl swoop, but there is just too much here to cover in one sitting.

Fortunately, this chapter divides nicely into two parts. Verses 1-7 concerning our subject for today and verse 8 through the end of the chapter dealing with the subject of chasing after wealth and honor. I cannot cover one section without doing disservice to the next in the time allotted.

But in saying that I expect this message to be on the shorter side.

Now by way of reminder, we should all know by now, at least for those that have been with us on this journey, that Solomon has been looking at life from the perspective of one who is living under the sun. That is one who is living their life apart from any real desire to serve God.

What we have discovered in this book so far is that life without God is worthless. Everything you have fades away- including yourself. Dust to dust as we are reminded. In the end, you don't even really own the dirt you are buried in.

Over and over, Solomon speaks about the futility of this type of existence, but the ultimate goal of this book is not to sulk over the fact that life under the sun has little meaning. Rather, we are building to the point that we can see yes life apart from God has no meaning, but life with God is the greatest of rewards. We are getting there- we just aren't there yet.

Along Solomon's road from life under the sun to life under heaven he breaks through with snippets of wisdom concerning God instead of

just looking at the foolish existence of some and that is really what we are going to see in the first seven verses of this chapter today. Here we have a prelude to the conclusion of the book of sorts.

Let's read together.

*Ecc 5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.*

*Ecc 5:2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.*

*Ecc 5:3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*

*Ecc 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.*

*Ecc 5:5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

*Ecc 5:6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?*

*Ecc 5:7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.*

Let us return to verse 1,

*Ecc 5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.*

We start with this phrase "keep thy foot". That's a phrase we don't use in our everyday English anymore.

The New King James says,

*Ecc 5:1 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God*

The NASB and ESV both read,

*Ecc 5:1 Guard your steps*

Today we have another similar phrases, “Watch your steps” or maybe “tread lightly”.

So Solomon says guard your steps, tread lightly, walk prudently- you get the point- when you are going to the house of God.

Now what does Solomon mean when he speaks about the house of God? Here he has very clearly the holy temple of God in mind. That great house that was erected for the worship of God and to house the ark of covenant.

So then, for a moment, think about what we have just said. Guard your steps when you go to the house of God or temple. That almost sounds like a strange thought to us right from the start. Because it starts off in warning about coming to the house of God.

I know that it is a warning because I remember being on the other side of that phrase, “you better watch your step” more than a few times in my life growing up especially in school and let me tell you that was a phrase that didn’t come lightly from my teachers. There was command behind it because usually my mouth was going to get me into trouble.

I looked back at my old report cards once in grade school and my teachers seemed to be united in this thought that I talked way too much and perhaps I talked back way too much because I found myself on the other side of this phrase too often.

So, I know this is a phrase of warning and again that seems strange because Solomon is warning us about the gravity of coming to the house of the Lord and that seems strange to us because we read of all the cheerful verses like:

*Psa 122:1 I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.*

and

*Psa 100:4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.*

You see, we are used to reading about coming into the house of God with joy and praise and thanksgiving. We have visions in our minds with people entering into the temple with a spring in their step, a smile of their face, and a song in their heart.

And the fact is, the people were told to come to the House of God in that joyful state, but Solomon warns us here, even still, when you come to the house of God you better also guard your feet. You better tread lightly. Why? It’s because when you go to the house of the Lord you’re entering into the very presence of God- a God who is all holy and all knowing.

God knows why we come. God knows our hearts when we come. He knows our motives.

And let’s just get this out of the way for the moment for the sake of application. Yes, I know we don’t have a temple we worship in today in Jerusalem. That was destroyed long ago. Nonetheless, when we come into the presence of this assembly- not this physical house- but in the presence of this assembly we call Grace we are coming equally into the presence of God as when Solomon walked the halls of the temple himself.

You see God in the person of Christ has promised to the church alone that where two or three are gathered together he would be in the midst of them. That is not a promise that was made to you and your buddies on the boat or golf course or at the mall. Christ when he said those words was clearly speaking of a church capacity.

So, he is here today. Right here at Grace in Ceredo. And as much as we should have

entered into this house with thanksgiving and joy and praise- as much as we should come with a spring in our step, a smile on our face and a song in our heart- we should have also entered into his presence of this assembly guarding our steps walking both carefully and reverently because God knows our hearts and motives. God hears not only what you say, but what is in your heart.

What I'm trying to say then is this as we read on here, the message that Solomon had for the people when he wrote this is still just as valid for us today in these seven verses. Just because the temple is gone doesn't mean we don't enter into his presence for we most certainly do every Sunday and every Wednesday and as much as we enter in with joy, we should enter in with caution guarding our steps.

Look again what he says in this first verse about our behaviors when we come into the presence of God. He says we need to be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools.

When we come into the presence of God here at Grace we ought to come with a desire to hear the word of God. I hope that is your desire today. Whether it is the preaching of the word, the teaching of the word, or even the reading or singing of the word. I hope that is your priority today. More than socializing. More than listening our own idle chatter. More than the dinner we will have later. I hope you came for the purpose of hearing what God has for us in his word.

And I want you to know that this word "hear" that we read here goes beyond being a ready listener. It speaks of doing what the Lord commands. Think about what is being said. Guard your steps, be ready to listen and obey God. This is what he wants. To obey is better than sacrifice. That is a theme both of the Old and New Testament.

Now look here again at our text. What he wants is for us to come in a way that we are careful in our steps, ready to listen and do in a way acceptable before him instead of bringing the sacrifice of fools.

Now then, we must ask ourselves, what is the sacrifice of fools? The sacrifice of fools is when people come in without understanding the gravity of where they are at, who are not worried about listening and doing, but are rather bent on worshipping God their way. Worship is all about what they want. That is foolish worship and foolish sacrifice.

You know we have mentioned this a couple of times in our Wednesday nights as we have been going through Malachi and how the Lord was just displeased with the priests and the people because they were giving God their second best. The priests were polluting the altar.

God was angry because people wanted to worship God on their own terms, their own ways. The same thing that Cain did when he brought a sacrifice that was unworthy before God. He wanted to worship God in his own way. God didn't like this foolish worship in Cain's day, Solomon's day, Malachi's day and he doesn't like it today.

And the fact is, we may not be bringing a sacrifice of lambs and goats and calves into this house like they did the temple, but you know there are some ways that God has told us to behave in the presence of his church when we come to give glory to Christ.

For instance, he has told us that when we come together, we should worship in spirit and truth. Now a lot of people today want to talk about worshipping in spirit and use that as an excuse to run around and act like a lot of nonsense. I'm not just talking about the charismatics. I've been in churches where people just walk around the whole time like doing laps in church.

Shaking hands along the way. I'm not sure if they are listening or trying to get in a workout.

We've seen videos of people running the aisles and even jumping in the baptistry right? You all have seen these things and they chalk it up to being filled with the spirit.

Let me remind you, the maniac of Gadara was full of the Holy Spirit when he was sitting at the feet of Jesus in his right mind ready to hear the truth.

You know when he wasn't in the spirit? When he was filled with demons and running around acting crazy.

Understand as much as we are to come in his presence in spirit and truth we are to come in decency and order. Our behavior should not be a distraction to others or a distraction to the teaching and preaching of God's word.

Furthermore, there needs to be order, structure. There should be a plan to our worship. We don't come half hazardedly into the house of the Lord not knowing if we are going to sing, pray, or preach or what we are going to preach about.

I've talked with some preachers of other denominations that think you shouldn't have a plan what your going to preach, just get up and start talking and let the Spirit take over and I've heard a few of those sermons and they might be filled with a lot of fist banging and hacking, but they are shallow in the truth because there has been no preparation on the presentation of the word.

Instead, we are to come in decency and order. We come with a plan that has been labored on by me, the teachers, the song leaders, the musicians. Everything prayerfully prepared for the purpose of sharing the truth because we understand it is a joyful thing to come into the presence of the Lord, but it is also grave thing to

come into his presence foolishly and call it worship. We must guard our steps.

We could go on about other things God desires of his church when we come together because God's word tells us about all kinds of things we are to do and how we should behave when we come into his house, but hopefully that is enough to again make us realize we need to guard our steps to make sure we are coming in the right way with the right heart. Why? Because if we aren't then the premise of our verse here in verse one is that we would be better off not coming at all.

You say better off not coming? Yes! Because when you come in and you give the sacrifice of fools.... When you come in ready to worship in your own way like Frank Sinatra once sang, "I did it my way" then forget it. Stay at home because your foolish worship is making God angry. It's evil in his sight. He is not pleased.

Let's read on as Solomon gives more instruction.

*Ecc 5:2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.*

We've been told to guard our steps and listen and now we are told to watch our mouths. Pretty wise advice wherever we go no doubt. That is, to listen more than we speak.

Solomon said in Proverbs,

*Pro 17:27 He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.*

*Pro 17:28 Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.*

Did you get that? A fool that keeps his mouth shut is thought of as wise compared to the fool who speaks and everyone knows the truth.

So, in general we ought to be ready to listen far more than we speak. Probably why God gave us two ears and one mouth. There is not greater place to practice that, than in the house of the Lord.

Contextually though, Solomon is specifically speaking of people who would come into the temple and begin to pray to God and make vows. That seems like a pretty foreign concept to most of us, but we see this in the Bible.

For instance, prior to the temple back in the days of the tabernacle. You might recall a young lady by the name of Hannah who had no child and she went to the tabernacle and vowed to give her son to the Lord if she would give her a son. That son of course being Samuel who because of the faithfulness of Hannah was a priest and last judge over the people.

That's the kind of thing we are talking about in verse 2 when Solomon warns us not to be rash with our mouths even when those vows or promises are spoken foolishly and people make some pretty foolish vows at times don't they?

Oh Lord, if you would just give me this person as a husband or wife I'd serve you all the days of my life all the way to the Congo and back. Oh Lord, if you just give me this job I'd serve you all the days of my life and put 20 percent in the offering plate.

First of all those foolish vows presuppose that God doesn't already know what is best for us in life and what we want for our life is better, but also how often are vows like that spoken and God actually answers and we don't fulfill our part of the bargain. Too often.

Solomon is saying don't come into the house of God all caught up in what you want so bad that you make promises you cannot keep or in the end, not willing to keep. It's far better to guard

your steps and listen more than it is to speak rashly.

Let's read on,

*Ecc 5:3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*

You know you can't really control your dreams at night can you? Your dreams are often the result of things you have been thinking about that day or doing or something you have watched. Those activities that we engage with or engage our minds with is what is meant by the phrase "multitude of business" in this verse and when we lay our heads down at night to rest our dreams start and we have no control over how strange they get and how much we dream of something.

Solomon here is liking a fool's words with a dream sequence. The fool talks so much he can't control what he has said and probably won't remember it for that matter in the end.

Let's read on,

*Ecc 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.*

This is pretty simple for us to understand when you make a promise to God, you need to keep it. Plain and simple. God has no pleasure in the one that makes a promise and doesn't fulfill.

And you might wonder why it even matters to put all this emphasis on being faithful to promises since God knows from the start whether we will honor them or not. But this is so important because it is so contrary to the nature of God to make a vow and not repay. God always keeps his promises. He never falters on paying what he has decreed he will do.

So, to make a promise and not pay is against the nature of God.

*Ecc 5:5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

This is the logical conclusion. You can't control what tomorrow brings. You don't know if you are going to be able to repay what you have said, so it is better to not vow at all. Don't make promises to God you can't keep or will be unwilling to keep later.

You know I read the gravity of the verses spoken here and I think people in general just don't really care much about keeping the promises they have made to God these days. Maybe it is because we make so many other unfulfilled promises to people all day that it seems like nothing to break a promise to God as well. But again, Solomon was serious about the gravity of a vow taken before God.

I can't help but to think of a man name Jephthah back in the days of the judges of Israel. Jephthah made a rash vow. You can read all about it in Judges 11 if you like. But Jephthah made a vow before God that he would give him victory in a battle that he would offer up whatever he saw first at his door for a burnt offering. Maybe he thought it would be an animal in his yard, but when he got home what was there to meet him? His daughter.

And you read that text and people have debated for 1000's of years if he actually physically sacrificed her or not. Now that wouldn't have been God's desire, but neither is making a foolish vow before God. It's a chapter that shows the gravity of a foolish vow.

Let's read on,

*Ecc 5:6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?*

Solomon warns here about the danger of vowing a vow and not repaying. The word angel here int

the KJV in the Hebrew Text is the word we translate typically as messenger.

The Septuagint, the Greek version of the Bible, uses the word angel and the KJV translators used that word for this verse instead. The Hebrew text is preferred. We aren't talking of a real angel here, though I dare say the angels hear our vows as well, but rather temple priests.

You see Jewish writings outside the Bible teach us you didn't just come and make a vow between God and you and then when you didn't repay it no one would know. What they would do is make a vow in the temple and it would be recorded by a priest and that priest would remind you of that vow.

Solomon warns don't go find the priest and tell them that your vow was an error. Don't say you just got caught up in the moment and wasn't thinking. In doing so you will make God angry and he might destroy the labors of your hands.

Like I said today people have no values of promise and they seem to think nothing of breaking a vow before God. But I'm reminded in Haggai when the people weren't building the temple like they said they would and God told them you've sown much and bring in little, drink, but not filled, clothed, but not warm and earn wages and put it into a bag with holes.

God withheld blessing because of their disobedience, and they didn't even realize it. That is what Solomon is saying here. If you don't do what you should do God may withhold and even take away things from your life. I wonder how many people have suffered loss even in today's world because they failed to pay a vow they have made before God?

Starting to see where it is better to never vow at all?

*Ecc 5:7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.*

Dreams and many words foolishly spoken amount to nothing. What God wants is for you to guard your steps, guard your words and listen to what the Lord has to say and then do. Same things he wanted then is what he desires of us today. And instead of making rash vows, just trust God that he is working all things out for the good of those that love him.

So as we bring ourselves to conclusion this morning, let me ask you how much have you

prepared yourself for services today? Have you treaded lightly into this house knowing that though it is a joyful thing to be in the house of the Lord it is too a serious matter because our God is watching our hearts and minds.

Have you set your heart towards him and his Son? Have you set your heart and worship towards him in the ways that he has desired and required or have you prescribed to do it your way?

There is only one way to be pleasing before God and that is to do it his way.