

“Wise Words About Worship and Wealth”

Ecclesiastes 5

Before we look at ch. 5 we need to review the first 4 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the point that life lived “under the sun” (with a perspective of life without God, of what we only see and experience around us) is soap bubbles. It’s here today, gone tomorrow. It’s like chasing after the wind. Purposeless. Solomon will show this throughout the book.

However, that is not Solomon’s final word. You have to understand Ecclesiastes by the small reminders in the book and the final conclusion of the book that life lived with God’s perspective (above the sun), has purpose. If we fear God and seek to keep His commandments, we will enjoy life because we will see all things through His perspective.

Solomon did not always live with God’s perspective in mind. Ecclesiastes was written to show us that if we had all the money in the world and the time to explore everything there is to do under the sun that people think makes them happy and gives meaning to life, we will not be satisfied.

He proved that In Ch. 2 he telling us he explored laughter, drinking, sex, possessions, doing projects, entertainment, money and knowledge, as if these alone make one happy.

“I refused my heart no pleasure . . . yet when I surveyed all my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless.” (2:1-23).

At the end of ch. 2 he gives the first of many small refrains that life has meaning when we understand it is a gift from God and that whatever God has given us to do, we can find satisfaction in it if we recognize it’s from God and seek to glorify Him in it.

In ch. 3 Solomon reflects on God’s sovereignty. He has a time and purpose for everything under heaven. Everything is ‘beautiful’ (appropriate, with purpose) even if we don’t understand it all. We try to because God has set eternity in our hearts – He’s made us so that we search for meaning and purpose in everything. Again, he encourages us to find satisfaction in God’s plan and purpose for us. What each one of us has is a gift from God

^{3:12} I know that there is nothing better for men and women than to be happy and do good while they live. ¹³ That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever.

In Ch. 4 he meditates on problems in life that might cause us to doubt God’s control. Like injustice – yet he reminds us God will have the final word one day. Like death – yet for those who fear God their spirit returns to God in heaven. Or loneliness – yet even if we have no friends or family God is the cord that wraps tightly around us and doesn’t let go.

Ch. 5 has a different style; very Proverbs like. Here Solomon offers us some wisdom on worship and wealth. Why these two? If God is sovereign over everything we need to take Him seriously all the time. And regarding money, probably because money, if we’re not careful can seem to be sovereign over us. Every day we make monetary decisions. We can’t live without income, nor can we live without God. I believe, he says if we get these two right, then we will have a very healthy ‘above the sun’ perspective on life.

Solomon assumes whoever reads his words is some-one who has an understanding of God and attends worship. But he issues a warning to us not to do so flippantly and take God for granted or treat Him the way you treat the false gods. That if you just show up and give Him what He wants He'll make life good for you. God is not vending machine. He doesn't exist to meet our needs. He has no needs. We exist only by His grace and mercy. So,

Approach God Reverently **(5:1-7)**

5:1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. ² Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. ³ As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

⁴ When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. ⁵ It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. ⁶ Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷ Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

The prophets and even Jesus rebuked the Israelites many times for their irreverent attitude towards God. They offered sacrifices without feeling. They prayed many words without thinking them through. They made promises they didn't intend to keep. They put on a good show on the outside but inside their hearts were callous.

And we're no different at times. We too can look faithful on the outside but lack conviction and heart. We need to approach God reverently. How? "Guard your steps". Literally it means watch your feet. It's a warning to watch what you're going to do, but it's also a word picture. If you're watching your feet, where's your head? Directed downward. It's a picture of humility.

Specifically, Solomon says here's 2 ways you can show humility in order to approach God with respect:

Listen more than speak (vv.1-3)

"Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools." The fool is one who goes to worship to 'get it over with' and then leaves. He's a fool because God will speak to us through His Word, through music, through our sharing, our prayers, and even through our offerings. If we've left worship and think we didn't hear from God, then one of two things happened: 1) those of us who led in worship or in the Word or in prayer were not spiritually prepared to be the tools through whom God wanted to speak through. Or 2) we did not come to hear from God and so we didn't listen. God calls us fools when we do that.

"Be quick to hear and slow to speak" applies to our worship as well (James 1:19). Later in his epistle James says, "we don't have because we don't ask" (4:3). Jesus said, "ask and you will receive" (Matt. 7:8). Did we ask God that we would hear from Him today as we came to worship? That's why we began the service with asking God to open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in His Word and to have receptive ears to hear what the Spirit has to say to us.

Sometimes we use Sunday morning as the time when we've got our list of people we got to touch base concerning a number of things. In other words, we've come to talk rather than listen. Sometimes these things can't be helped, but many times we could easily call each other in the week to touch base or remind each other about certain things. That frees us up more to listen to what God wants to say.

Solomon says let's not be too hasty in our worship or in prayer. Let's not just say words for the sake of saying something because we are talking to God. He's in heaven, we're on earth. That's not a geographical statement, that's a perspective statement. Psalm 100:3 says:

Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

Or Ps. 46:10, *Be still and know that I am God.*

Be still means stop, cease. Think about who it is we're worshipping. The eternal, sovereign, creator God who has no need for us whatsoever but in His grace has made us and saved us. It is a privilege to know God through his Son Jesus Christ. Faith is a gift from God. Very few truly know God. Let's be still more than we talk so we reflect on who it is we serve. Let's be open to hear what God's saying to us each day but especially when we open His Word and gather for worship.

Do what you told Him you'd do (vv.4-7)

These verses warn about making rash promises to God. When we tell God we'll do something, He takes that seriously. Don't make promises to God you have no intention of keeping. Perhaps we've told God we'll obey Him in a certain area: yes Lord, I'll read Your Word or pray more faithfully. Or maybe we've told God we would obey his Word when He said to forgive, or to use our spiritual gifts or be baptized or tithe or serve in missions. Don't make excuses v.6 says. Yes, well I made that promise before my circumstances changed. Solomon warns us: *"Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?"*

God may undo the good work we've done for Him that we've used as an excuse not to do something else we've promised to do. The Pharisees did this in Jesus' day. To avoid the command to look after ("honour") their parents in their old age, they would claim their money was Corban – dedicated to God. An excuse to avoid their responsibility. Jesus accused them of nullifying the Word of God (Mark 7:9-13).

If we stand in awe of God, we'll be more careful with our words and be sincere in keeping our promises. So approach God reverently.

From worship he turns to wealth. Funny how these two seem to clash. Jesus said you can't serve both. You must choose. So we're not tempted to live for wealth or possessions, Solomon says we need to . . .

Handle Wealth Loosely **(5:8-17)**

Why should we handle it loosely?

⁸ *If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.* ⁹ *The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.*

Someone's always taking it (vv.8-9)

The poor are oppressed and denied their rights often by those who have power. The land was the main means of support for everyone. Everyone earns from the land. They all get their cut. Each guy up the ladder takes some from the guy lower than he, right to the top. Solomon's just telling us that's the way it is! Taxes! Injustice! Oppression!

What happens when you make more money? You get into a higher income tax bracket, which means losing more money. Whether it's gas prices, taxes, the prime lending rate, or increased allowances, someone is always taking some of our money. It's part of living in a fallen world and we can't do a whole lot about it. So don't hold it too tightly. Another reason?

¹⁰ *Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.*

¹¹ *As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?*

¹² *The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.*

It can't satisfy you (vv.10-11)

Whoever loves money never has enough. It's empty, meaningless to want more and more – money can't satisfy you because it's not eternal. Remember, 3:10? God has set eternity in our hearts. We're wired to be satisfied with the eternal – God Himself and what we do for Him – not earthly temporal things. Because all that God does endures forever (3:14) therefore what we do for Him with all our hearts also endures forever. That satisfies us.

The common labourer with no significant wealth sleeps better than the rich guy because he's all worried about his wealth! He's worried about the bills. He's worried about how the increase in gas prices is going to affect the tourists who come and spend their money? They're worried about the stock prices and the dollar and how to pay that money they loaned for that new expansion. And it keeps them awake at night, or they're working late into the night. Stop worrying about money, Jesus said in Matt. 6. God will provide for your needs. He's in control. He knows everything. The less we worry the healthier we are too. Why else should we handle money loosely?

It stays here – use it wisely (vv.13-17)

We entered the world with nothing we leave with nothing (v.15). This too is a grievous evil. What does he gain for all his toil? Well if we live for money we spend most of our life in isolation (darkness), frustrated and angry at why things aren't going the way we want it.

However, if we're wise, godly people, knowing that our money stays here also means we can use it for God's purposes here on earth. That's how we store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Give faithfully to His work and with ministries that you are passionate about. Use your home and possessions to encourage others. That's the wise way to handle money loosely so that God is honoured. This is how we reap spiritual benefits by faith believing we'll see the results in eternity

If we follow Solomon's wise words about worship and wealth, he concludes that we'll

Enjoy Life Abundantly **(5:18-20)**

This is the 3rd time Solomon has given this summary. First at the end of ch. 2, after he tried to find happiness in earthly pursuits. Then in the middle of ch. 3, when he explained that God has a time and purpose for all that happens to us in life. And here at the end of ch. 5 in the context of warning us about the dangers of careless worship and earthly wealth. Why here? Because some people misunderstand God, thinking He doesn't want us to enjoy life.

God says it's good for us to enjoy satisfaction in our hard labor while on earth because this is the lot (reward) we've been given by God. V. 19 says God gives us our wealth and possessions and He enables us to enjoy them. So we'll enjoy life abundantly by ***thanking God for our lot (vv.18-19)***

All that we have and all that we're able to do is from God. When we enjoy something that we do, make, have or see, that comes from God. God made us all different to enjoy different tastes in food, in different activities and in different things to see and places to go. These are gifts from God.

Enjoy the things that God has enabled you to enjoy and ask God how you can bring Him glory in that. You might use that hobby, interest, talent, knowledge or activity to build relationships with non-Christians or strengthen those with believers. Don't put out the Spirit's fire in other believers' lives because they enjoy something you don't. God did that and He can use all of our differences for his purposes.

Solomon says the person who enjoys God's gifts and thanks God for her/his lot in life seldom reflects [worries] about things she/he has no control over because *God keeps her/him occupied with gladness of heart (v.20)*.

The joy of the Lord lives within us when we acknowledge Him in everything. If we delegate God only to Sunday morning or fail to connect the reading of His Word to our daily life, we've missed the whole purpose of what life is all about. Life is all about glorifying God. Worry does not glorify God. Worry is not trusting God's ability to meet our needs and fix our problems. We fail to enjoy life when we're occupied with worry. Worry robs us of enjoying life abundantly.

Solomon keeps trying to show us life from God's perspective. Live life above the sun, not under the sun. We'll enjoy God and the life He's given us much more if we approach God reverently and hold wealth loosely.

If we've been careless about approaching God or even indifferent about worship we need to ask His forgiveness. Ask Him to open your heart and your eyes to be more sensitive to His presence around you. Follow through on what you've told God you would do. Don't make excuses.

Release your grip on your possessions and wealth if that's a major worry in your life. Let God be glorified in how you use what you have. Study God's Word about giving and pray that you would trust Him to meet your needs and desire to meet God's needs for ministry.

These are two very basic but very big ways we can learn to enjoy the life God has given you. Thank Him everyday for how He's made you, your family and friends and for the unique likes and dislikes we all have. Don't rob others of God's enabling them to enjoy something He didn't enable you

to enjoy. Let God occupy your thoughts more than your concerns or people and watch how much more you enjoy life.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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