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The Values Of Life

ECCLESIASTES 5:1-20

Introduction

1. What is it that really counts in life?
2. There are many things which we are constantly told we must have or ways in which we must behave if we are to get ahead in life.
3. In our text tonight, Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon addresses three areas with a wisdom that stands in direct contradiction to what the world tells us.
4. As we work through this chapter, I would like to encourage you to think about the various "truths" of which Satan seeks to convince us.
5. Hold those "truths" up against the light of God's Word and ask yourself, "Who is telling me the truth?"
6. I believe you will come to the conclusion that God, through His servant Solomon, is the One speaking the truth.

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I. Valuing The God We Serve

A. IN OUR WORSHIP

"Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil."
(Ecclesiastes 5:1, NASB95)

1. Our worship of God is the highest service to which we may give ourselves as Christians.
2. Such worship must come from devoted hearts and yielded wills.

3. To “guard your steps” (NASB95, ESV, NIV84), to “keep thy foot” (KJV) and to “walk prudently” (NKJV) all mean that we should be careful about the way we approach our holy God.
4. Solomon said that for us to be casual with God is “evil” (v. 1).
5. We are to “draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools.”
 - a. To “listen” means not only ‘pay attention’ but ‘obey’ as well.
 - b. As Moses stood before the Israelites for the last time, in the plains of Moab, he said “O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it” (Deuteronomy 6:3).
 - c. In the very next verse he said, “Hear, O Israel!” (Deuteronomy 6:4).
 - d. The prophet Samuel told King Saul, “to obey (lit., to listen) is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22).
 - e. The “sacrifice of fools” are those acts of worship offered to a holy God by sinful worshipers with calloused hearts.
 - f. Through His prophet Isaiah, God told the people of Judah that He had had enough of their worthless offerings and that He hated their appointed feasts because their hands were covered in blood (Isaiah 1:11-15).

Slide 3**B. THROUGH OUR PRAYERS**

“Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.” (Ecclesiastes 5:2–3, NASB95)

1. Solomon warns us here about being quick and impulsive in our speaking to God.

2. We must be careful that our words and thoughts directed to God have purpose and thought behind them.
3. If you or I were given an audience with the president of the United States and were told that we only had so much time to speak with him, would we not think beforehand about what we want to say?
4. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautioned us about the content of our prayers:

“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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (**Matthew 6:7–8, ESV**)

5. In verse 3, Solomon presents us with an analogy:

“For the dream comes through much effort (“business,” KJV, ESV; “activity,” NKJV; “cares,” NIV84) and the voice of a fool through many words.” (Ecclesiastes 5:3, NASB95)

- a. Dreams come as a result of either much work (business) or much worry (cares).
 - b. In the same way, “many words” in prayer come from “the voice (speech) of a fool.”
6. In Proverbs 29:20, Solomon wrote, “Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”
 7. Charles Spurgeon once said, “It is not the length of our prayers, but the strength of our prayers, that makes the difference.”

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C. BY OUR VOWS

“When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that

you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.”

(Ecclesiastes 5:4–7, NASB95)

1. Though God did not require that vows or promises be made to Him, we often find individuals committing themselves to some kind of action if God would grant their requests (Genesis 28:20-22; 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalm 132:2-5).

a. Jacob’s vow at Bethel as he was fleeing from his brother Esau:

“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”” (Genesis 28:20–22, NASB95)

b. Hannah’s vow to God if He provided her with a son:

“She made a vow and said, “O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head.”” (1 Samuel 1:11, NASB95)

c. David’s vow to the Lord, according to the psalmist, concerning his building of the temple:

“How he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, “Surely I will not enter my house, nor lie on my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”” (Psalm 132:2–5, NASB95)

2. Here, Solomon is warning us about two sins:
 - a. Making a vow or promise to God with no intention of keeping it. This amounts to our lying to God.
 - b. Making a vow but delaying to keep it, hoping to get out of it (i.e., “it was a mistake”).
3. God hears what we say and holds us to our promises.
4. If providence prevents us from fulfilling what we have promised, God understands and will release us from our promise.

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5. We need to be like the psalmist in Psalm 66:13-14, who said,

“I shall come into Your house with burnt offerings;
I shall pay You my vows,
Which my lips uttered
And my mouth spoke when I was in distress.”

(Psalm 66:13-14, NASB95)

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6. Notice the way that verse 7 is translated by the ESV and the NIV84:
 - a. “For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.” (ESV)
 - b. “Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.” (NIV84).
 - ❑ His point: “fools seek to advance themselves before God with great vows and promises” ¹

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¹ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, vol. 14* (The New American Commentary, Broadman Press: Nashville, TN, 1993) p. 311.

II. Valuing The Government We Have

A. DON'T BE SURPRISED BY CORRUPTION IN HIGH PLACES

“If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.” (*Ecclesiastes 5:8, NASB95*)

1. There are two things which Solomon tells us we should not be shocked at the sight of.
 - a. “Oppression of the poor”
 - b. “Denial of justice and righteousness in the province”
2. When there are many levels of government administered by many officials, some corruption is inevitable.
3. To put it another way, “if enough people have opportunity to enrich themselves by abuse of political power, some are bound to succumb to the temptation.”²
4. His last line here in verse 8 may mean that government officials have a network for protecting one another thus making it impossible to root out corruption.

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B. TYRANNY IS STILL BETTER THAN ANARCHY

“After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.” (*Ecclesiastes 5:9, NASB95*)

1. While Solomon recognizes the abuse and corruption inherent in any political system, he argues that government, represented by a king, is still better than anarchy.
2. He makes his point from agriculture.

² Ibid, p. 312.

3. In a country where there is anarchy, no king, neither boundaries nor property rights can be maintained.
4. Access to wells and other common resources cannot be fairly regulated.
5. There is no organized resistance to ravaging armies (i.e., consider the days of the judges).
6. Solomon's point: Government may be evil, but it is a necessary evil.

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III. Understanding The Myths Of Wealth

A. WEALTH BRINGS SATISFACTION

“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.” (*Ecclesiastes 5:10, NASB95*)

1. Solomon, however, tells us that money creates a craving which cannot be satisfied.
2. The person who loves money longs for fulfillment and believes that enough money will provide it.
3. Instead, he or she finds that an abundance of money only leaves an emptiness, because God has set eternity in their heart (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*), and no amount of money will ever satisfy.
4. The apostle Paul in his first letter to Timothy, wrote in 1 Timothy 6:10, “the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

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B. MONEY SOLVES EVERY PROBLEM

“When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?” (*Ecclesiastes 5:11, NASB95*)

1. I think all of us would agree that a certain amount of money is needed for

us to live in this world.

2. That being said, money *of itself* is not the magic “cure all” for every problem.
3. Instead, more wealth creates new problems that we never even knew existed before.
4. Relatives and friends start showing up to take advantage of our hospitality.
5. We soon realize we owe more in the way of taxes.

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C. WEALTH BRINGS PEACE OF MIND

“The sleep of the laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.” (*Ecclesiastes 5:12, NKJV*)

1. According to Solomon, the common laborer sleeps better than the rich man.
2. Though the laborer works hard at physical labor and is exhausted by the end of the day, regardless of how much he eats, he is able to sleep soundly.
3. The rich man may also work all day, but his “abundance” (increased wealth) brings with it increased anxiety and increased vigilance which prevent him from sleeping well at night.
4. John D. Rockefeller was almost ruined by his wealth.
 - a. At the age of 53, he was the world’s only billionaire.
 - b. He earned about a million dollars a week.
 - c. However, he lived on crackers and milk and could not sleep because of worry.
 - d. After he started giving his money away, he experienced a radical change in his health and ultimately lived to celebrate his 98th birthday.

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D. WEALTH PROVIDES SECURITY

“There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him. As he had come naked from his mother’s womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. This also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.” (*Ecclesiastes 5:13–17, NASB95*)

1. Solomon shares with us the story of what he twice calls “a grievous evil” (vv. 13, 16).
2. It is about a man who “hoarded” his riches, even to his own hurt — to the point of causing suffering to himself.
3. He then lost it all “through some misfortune” (v. 14, NIV84).
 - a. This could have been “a bad investment” (NASB), “bad venture” (ESV, HCSB).
 - b. It could also indicate a misfortune similar to that which befell Job (*Job 1:13-19*).
4. Either way, because of his loss, he had nothing to leave his son (v. 14).

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5. Solomon’s comment is that this man will end his life just as he began it:
 - a. “Just as he came, so shall he go” (v. 16).
 - b. “As he had come naked from his mother’s womb, so will he return as he came” (v. 15).
6. Solomon’s question to us is thought provoking: “So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?” (v. 16).

7. This man “spent the rest of his days in the darkness of discouragement and defeat” (Wiersbe, p. 69), unable to enjoy life.

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Conclusion

“Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.” (*Ecclesiastes 5:18–20, NASB95*)

1. In the last three verses of this chapter, Solomon closes by reminding us once again of the importance of accepting our station in life and enjoying the blessings which God has given us.
2. That which he tells us is good and fitting is “to labor faithfully, enjoy the good things of life, and accept it all as the gracious gift of God” (Wiersbe, p. 70).
3. In verse 19, Solomon shares another thought with us — the ability to “enjoy” these blessings of life is also a gift from God.

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- a. The key word here is “God.”
- b. The secret of life is our readiness to take what comes to us as heaven-sent — whether it is toil or wealth or both.
4. In the final verse, Solomon provides us with “a glimpse of the man for whom life passes swiftly, not because it is short and meaningless but because, by the grace of God, he finds it utterly absorbing.” (Kidner, p. 58).