

Sunday, October 12, 2025

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Introduction: The Way of Worship

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- Ecclesiastes has been helpful for many of us in recognizing that what is “under the sun” is not sufficient enough to satisfy our deepest longings.
 - Not wisdom
 - Not pleasure
 - Not toil
 - Not justice
 - Not righteousness
- These things are not wicked in and of themselves, in fact, they can be enjoyable or noble pursuits, but when we put our hope in them for life, we will be let down, we will come up short, and we will despair.
- We are made to worship. There is no doubt of this.
- So the preacher brings us to the "place of righteousness".
- Surely this will be where we find our satisfaction. At this place.
- In the “place of righteousness” the Preacher said there was found wickedness. We cannot discount that the sinful heart of man is the reason why.
- And yet, in chapter 5, the Preacher brings us to the “place of righteousness” to put a focus on worship.
 - The focus is shifted largely away from looking at the world around us and asking the question, “is it hevel?”, and instead brings many of us home to a place we recognize.
 - Those who have grown up in and around church, and those who have lived in the bubble that is “the Bible Belt”, and for those who have established a rhythm for church that makes sense, the Preacher challenges our comfort and complacency.

We have seen so far that no thing under the sun can satisfy, so the Preacher brings us to a place most of us are familiar with and sit right now: the place of worship.

- The preacher is not setting out to determine that worship is “hevel”. Instead, he is drawing our attention to the fact that “going through the motions” will not satisfy, and will produce hevel.

There are three parts to the Preacher’s analysis of worship

- The preparation for worship (v1)
 - “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God”
 - The idea is approach the house of God with care
 - Be intentional and purposeful as you come together to worship.
 - The church gathering is not a social club, a networking event, an entertainment venue, or a business opportunity.
 - Worship begins before we get into the parking lot.
 - There is no gospel switch to flip that lets me turn it on when I walk in the door and turn it off when I walk out.
 - Moses and Jacob were instructed to remove their sandals because the ground they walked was holy.
 - Not to say that we should or should not be worshipping barefoot, but we should be coming in to the worship gathering with the understanding that “where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there among them” Matthew 18:20.
 - But our attendance is not the same as obedience to God.
 - If my presence in the worship setting is more about compliance, people-pleasing, and play-acting, then I may as well go home.
 - When my mind and heart are disconnected from my worship of God, it is hevel.
 - It’s almost like the version of myself I present at church on the outside, is in itself “hevel” or a vanity.
 - “To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.”
 - The Preacher next warns of not only the futility of merely attending church, but the “going through the motions” of it all.
 - He says it is better to sit and listen in the service than to participate with a foolish or unknowing heart.
 - I want to point us to two examples of this:

- Matthew 5:23-24
 - 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
 - Hold your gift from the altar and refrain from participating
- 1 Corinthians 11:27-28
 - 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning 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
 - We have often read this during the taking of the Lord's supper and it is a reminder that we as members of the body have a responsibility to not only be present in mind and heart, but to be in examination of them as well.
- One commentator put it this way, "be swift to hear the exposition which the priests give... and do not think it enough to gaze upon what they do."
- To Hear and obey
 - The practice of worship (v2-3)
 - Be not rash with your mouth, nor not 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. For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.
 - We can be too hasty with the words that come out of our mouths, especially with those we are close too.
 - Be reminded that "God is in heaven and you are on earth"
- Keep it simple before God:
 - Approach God with reverence, not rashness
 - Remember God's position and power
 - Keep your words simple and sincere
- God is the one who comforts, the one who is near, and the one who sits with those who grieve.

- Remember that when we approach God in prayer He is our loving Father. He is the one who comforts us in our time of need. He is near to the broken hearted. He sits with those who grieve.
- God is the one who spoke all things into creation, brought down wicked nations, raised up His own people, But let us not forget that this same God who is all of these things, is the same God who spoke all things into being. The same God who brought plagues on the nation of Egypt and parted the Red Sea. The same God who led his people through the wilderness for 40 years, providing for them, caring for them, and disciplining them all the way. The same God who brought down the walls of Jericho, sent a fish to scoop up Jonah, fed Elijah in a cave, and consumed the sacrifice and false prophets of Baal.
- God is the one we are approaching and the Preacher reminds us that God is in heaven and we are on earth. We are still under the sun and limited. He is in the heavens and unlimited.
- So, let us not be hasty with our words.
 - It can be easy to have things go sideways and begin wanting to point the finger or question God.
 - Why did you let this happen? What did I do?
 - It's what Job's friends advised him to do
- We come before God, open and honest, knowing that He listens, but understanding that He is God and we are not.
 - The product of worship (v4-7)
 - When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 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? For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

Three exhortations in these verses.

1. Be dedicated in paying your vows (v4-5)
 1. Give to God what you have said

2. Do not delay in doing so
2. Be cautious in making your vows (v6)
 1. No vows that may lead to sin
 2. No vows that you cannot pay
3. Keep up the fear of God v(7)

In John 4, Jesus addresses the issue of worship when he says that the day use coming and is already here when God won't be worshipped on a certain mountain but in the heart of each believer. In spirit and truth

It's the call of each and every believer to worship God with gladness and sincerity of heart, and an invitation to the non believer to know Jesus and the power...

There are many gospel tie-ins to this text

- Jesus' warnings to the religious leaders about being white-washed tombs
 - Matthew 23:27-28
- Tithing in their excess but not taking care of others
 - Matthew 23:23-24
- Repetition of words and phrases to sound more righteous
 - Matthew 6:7
- Those who claim the name, but did not do the will of the Father.
 - Matthew 7:21-23

There is a great importance placed throughout scripture of the heart being behind the act of worship. It is not a ritualistic magic-driven act that magically produces the end result we desire if we hit the button combo right.

In the Old Testament there is great importance placed on the heart of man as he worships

- David knows what God desires for worship
 - Psalm 51
- What do we bring to the LORD, bulls, rams, our firstborn? Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly before Him.
 - Micah 6:6-8
- He desires steadfast love, and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
 - Hosea 6:6
- Psalm 40:6-8
- Isaiah 1:11-31

****John Keats gravestone, "Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water"*

- *that's a hard line...*

I recently heard an expression, "plowing with water" that I think is beautiful and terrifying. ***

Ecclesiastes 5:1–7 — "The Way of Worship"

Icebreaker (optional)

- Have you ever caught yourself singing or praying in church but realizing your heart wasn't really in it? What caused that disconnect?

1. The Preparation for Worship (v.1)

"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God."

- What does it mean to "guard your steps" when approaching worship today?
- Why do you think the Preacher begins his analysis of worship with *preparation* instead of participation?
- How can the routine, comfort, or familiarity with church life dull our awareness of God's holiness?

- What helps you personally prepare your heart for worship before Sunday even begins?

2. The Practice of Worship (vv.2–3)

“Let your words be few... God is in heaven and you are on earth.”

- Why is it so easy to speak thoughtlessly or carelessly in worship or prayer?
- How does remembering that “God is in heaven and you are on earth” change your posture toward Him?
- When have you been tempted to speak more than listen to God? What came from that?
- The Preacher contrasts many words with few—how can silence or simplicity express deeper worship than long or eloquent prayers?
- How do we balance approaching God boldly as Father (Hebrews 4:16) with approaching Him reverently as Lord (Ecclesiastes 5:2)?

3. The Product of Worship (vv.4–7)

“It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay.”

- What kinds of “vows” or commitments do believers make to God today—formally or informally?
- How can a lack of follow-through in spiritual commitments reveal misplaced motives in worship?
- What does it mean to “fear God” in the context of worship, and how does that differ from being afraid of Him?
- When does worship become vanity, even when it looks sincere on the outside?

4. The Heart of Worship — Bringing It All Together

- Why does God care more about the *heart behind worship* than the *form of worship* itself?
- Jesus often confronted religious people for their hypocrisy (e.g., Matthew 23:23–28). How might those same warnings apply to us today?
- If true worship begins with listening, humility, and obedience, what practices could help you cultivate that kind of heart this week?

- In what ways can remembering the gospel—Christ’s finished work—protect us from turning worship into performance?