

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 5

Questions:

1. What is one of your favorite gifts that you ever received? What is it about this gift that makes it your favorite? [Slide 2]
2. What are some examples of different kinds of gifts that God gives to people? [Slide 3]
3. What are some specific gifts that God has given to you? [Slide 4]

When we realize what we have comes from God (All of it) this radically changes our perspective on life.

Slight change in direction...So far, the teacher has made many observations about life, and some about human relationships, but hasn't spent much time speaking directly about our relationship with God. That changes here in the first section of Ecc 5. (p555)

Read Ecc 5:1-7 [Slide 5] [Slide 6]

¹ Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. 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. ³ For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

⁴ 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. 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? ⁷ For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

The NIV translates the latter part of v7 as: **Therefore stand in awe of God.**

[Slide 8] 1 Samuel 15:22 has the same distinction between real and superficial worship.

And Samuel said,

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams. (p238)

“House of God” – what is mentioned here? Do we have a house of God today?

Distinguish: Temple, church buildings, our bodies.

Here, the teacher talks about being careful and reverent in how we approach God. OT Prophets theme is to say how it frustrates God when people come to worship him and go through motions of devotion, but then their daily life doesn't match that devotion.

Does the person we look like on Sunday resemble the person we look like on other days of the week?

Teacher also warns us to be careful of our words. Knowing when to speak and when to be silent. (Recall Ecc 3:7)

“God is in heaven and you are on earth.” What is the point in saying this? We do well when we acknowledge our ‘place’ in the creation.

Not saying God is distant so we cannot know or understand him. God WANTS us to know him. [Slide 9] **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son[a] from the Father, full of grace and truth. (p886)

Recognize God is distinct from us. He is sovereign, sits on throne of universe. We do not control him by our worship.

Ecc 5:4-5 shows how we need to be wise in making vows to God. If you promise something, do it.

The original audience of the teacher would have recognized that from the law:

[Slide 10] Dt. 23:21-23 ²¹ “If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. ²² But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. ²³ You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth. (p165)

“I’ll pray for you” ...follow through.

Read (p212) Judges 11:34-40. Jephthah made a vow before going into battle.

[Slide 11] [Slide 12] ³⁴ Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. ³⁵ And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.” ³⁶ And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.” ³⁷ So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.” ³⁸ So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. ³⁹ And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel ⁴⁰ that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

Discuss: What does it mean to fear God? (See 5:7)

Does not mean to live in terror of God. Not looking to see us so he can zap us. God does see all things, but he is not the “Cosmic Creeper”.

Fearing God has to do with being an upright and honest person. We “fear God” by respecting his ethical and moral demands for our lives.

[Slide 13] [Slide 14] [Slide 15] Read Ecc 5:8-17

⁸ If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. ⁹ But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

¹⁰ He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. ¹¹ When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? ¹² Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

¹³ There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, ¹⁴ and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. ¹⁵ As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶ This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? ¹⁷ Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

This section echoes Ecc 4's handling of economic injustice and oppression. But it seems to go higher; a dishonest bureaucracy a network of corruption.

[Slide 16] In Ps 12:5 we see how God feels about oppression: "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the Lord; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs." (p452)

5:9 stands out in righteousness: But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields. A leader who will take responsibility for the economic well being of his people and will seek justice. Such is a great benefit to society. Also serves as an example of stewardship.

Vs. 17 paints a picture of the character of Ebenezer Scrooge.

Money is a focus in this section. Bible speaks a lot about money. As we've seen, the Teacher was wealthy, so he knew all about what money could buy. Still, he said it was "hebel".

[Slide 17] Read (p993) 1 Tim 6:9-10

⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

[Slide 18] Discuss: What problems can money bring that are mentioned in this section?

- Addiction / dissatisfaction 5:10
- Attracts the greedy 5:11
- Becomes a status symbol/trophy 5:11
- Promotes worry 5:12
- Causes lack of sleep 5:12
- Leads to hoarding / stockpiling 5:13
- It is easily lost 5:14
- Cannot follow us after death 5:15-17

[Slide 19] [Slide 20] [Slide 21] Read (p824) Mt 19:16-26

¹⁶ And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" ¹⁷ And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸ He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ²⁰ The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" ²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying,

“Who then can be saved?”²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Discuss: Is money inherently bad?

Not inherently, but scripture has a lot to say about wealth that should make us careful in how we view it.

All our material possessions are “on loan” from God, for our use and stewardship. Remembering that can help us not get too attached to it and to look for ways to use it to help others and glorify God.

[Slide 22] Read Ecc 5:18-20

¹⁸ Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. ¹⁹ Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

Summary statement emphasizing importance of enjoying the blessings that God has given us. Carpe Diem is hidden in there.

[Slide 23] A similar admonition is given to us in Heb 13:5 **Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”** (p1009)

Work is good. God placed Adam in the garden to tend it. From the beginning, humans were intended to be workers.

The teacher is clear that much about life is “hebel” and hard to figure out.

Work, food and family are blessings God bestows on us to enjoy. If we think of these things as gifts rather than achievements, it helps focus our perspective.

There is a lot of joy to be found in living a simple life: constructive work, sufficient food, and fellowship.

We close this chapter with a focus on the last two verses of Ecc. 5:

[Slide 24] 19 Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. 20 For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

The “he” refers to the one who accepts his lot and rejoices in his toil.