

01-08-19a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning in our Bibles to Psalm 49. Our scripture reading this morning is from Psalm 49 because it addresses the particular theme that we find in our passage in Ecclesiastes. Our ongoing study in that book has brought us to chapter five where Kohelet, or Solomon, the author, is reminding people that it is an important time when we come before God.

When we come to God, he says, don't rush into the presence of God with many words. Don't rush in telling God things rather than coming to listen. And we find that Solomon's father David had talked about much the same thing, or actually this is in the Hymnal.

This is not labeled as a Psalm of David. This is a Psalm of the sons of Korah. But it was in the Hymnal that David began for Israel.

The sons of Korah, of course, were that division of the tribe of Levi that were in charge of the music and contributed to that aspect of the worship life of Israel. Psalm 49 begins this way. Hear this, all peoples, give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together.

My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb. I will disclose my dark saying on the harp.

Why should I fear in the day of evil when iniquity at my heels surrounds me? Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him. For the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever that he should continue to live eternally and not see the pit. For he sees wise men die, likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others.

Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations. They call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man, though in honor, does not remain.

He is like the beasts that perish. This is the way of those who are foolish, and of their posterity who approve their sayings. Sila.

Like sheep, they are laid in the grave. Death shall feed on them. The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning, and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling.

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me. Sila. Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased.

For when he dies, he shall carry nothing away. His glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lives, he blesses himself, for men will praise you when you do well for yourself.

He shall go to the generation of his fathers. They shall never see light. A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish.

I think from our coverage of the first four chapters of Ecclesiastes, you see the harmony of thought here, where there is an allure, as we sang about the things that can allure our sight, are either heavenly or earthly. And there is an attraction, there is an incentive and a motivation that we have to do well for ourselves in this life. And there is nothing wrong with so doing, as long as it does not obscure our sight and divert us and make us live too much in this world.

And this song was a reminder to those in Israel that there is a future beyond the grave. It's very fascinating. You remember in chapter one of Ecclesiastes, where he talked about the cyclical nature of what we see around us in the world, how the streams flow and return, the wind blows and returns, the sun rises and sets.

And we saw that as a metaphor for the beginning and ending of human life, as Solomon uses it. The sun rises, our birth. The sun sets, our death.

And after the sun sets, there is another sunrise. And it's our resurrection and the beginning of our life with God in eternity. And the song refers to that in verse 14 and following, where he says, like sheep, they, the thoughtless and those who are caught up with their earthly goods, they are laid in the grave.

Death shall feed on them. The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning. I've heard even in seminary, they talked about how, well, there's so little said about resurrection and the afterlife in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is replete with references to resurrection and the afterlife. If you just recognize them when you see them, and this is one such passage. If you've just talked about someone having been laid in the grave and having died like a sheep, and then it says the upright will have dominion over them in the morning.

Well, who wants dominion over the graveyard? That's not what the song is talking about. It's talking about the fact that we as believers have the opportunity in the resurrection to either be first or last in the kingdom. Depending on what we do here, on what we prioritize here, that's going to determine what happens in the next life.

And he's not, you know, we're not also talking about having dominion over unbelievers who are going to the lake of fire. I don't want to be the king of Hades or the king of the lake of fire or the, the county commissioner of the hot place when it says the upright will have dominion over them in the morning. This is the same thing Jesus referred to when he said the last shall be first and some who are first shall be last.

So people that we might look up to or think we have done really well for themselves in earthly

things, as believers in the resurrection may find themselves chopping cotton on some upright believers plantation. Their beauty will be consumed in the grave far from their dwelling. The things that they've accomplished and the things that they're admired for are not going to necessarily carry forward into the next life.

Well, who determines that? Who decides what's going to carry forward from this life? Is it the people that we impress? Is God going to take an opinion poll, hand out a little survey and say, okay, you knew this individual over here. Tell me what they did that was meritorious. Tell me what they did that was impressive that you were happy about.

And I'll take those things and reward them in the next life. God isn't really going to consult us, is he? He's not going to ask us who was the smartest, who was the prettiest, who was the richest, who was the most successful. God makes a determination by looking in our heart and seeing whether or not we are seeking him and thinking about pleasing him both in this life and in the next.

So he continues that thought in verse 16 when he says, Do not be afraid when someone becomes rich or when the glory of his house is increased. Now, I don't get afraid when I see Donald Trump on TV. I'm not afraid when I see the hunts and the other successful people.

What does this mean? Do not fear. It means don't let your mind be destabilized. Don't think, wow, maybe I'm missing the boat.

Maybe I've taken the wrong course here because I'm trying to live to please the Lord. But look at this person over here. Look how well they're able to provide.

Look how admired they are and how successful they seem to be. Maybe I should be doing that. I always am tempted to think this way when I hear someone, you know, how they have the birthdays for the celebrities.

You hear the radio or the news or something. And they'll say, well, so-and-so turned 43 today. And I think, wow, I'm 43.

And look at them. I mean, they're up in the constellation of the famous. And I've had the same amount of time that they've had.

And, you know, nobody knows my name. And you tend to think, well, have I wasted these first number of years in my life? Should I have, you know, done something different? And that's what this is talking about. It says don't let your mind get unsettled.

Don't fear that you've taken the wrong course when you see someone appear to succeed in the world in whatever area of life. Don't let that. This is the same thing we've seen in our Luke study.

Don't let what people say or what you see in people or what you see around you or the presence

of people change you and destabilize you from what you know to be right from the scriptures. Just remember, he says, when he dies, he's not carrying any of that with him. And even the unbelieving world says, well, you know, you can't take it with you.

And it's true. His glory will not descend after him, though while he lives, he blesses himself. He blesses himself.

He says, boy, you know, look at how admired I am. Men will praise you when you do well. He will go to the generations of his fathers.

They will never see light. Now, this doesn't mean that they're never going to be resurrected or that they're never going to, you know, that we're talking about unbelievers in some sense. Remember, these worship songs and the passages of scripture that we look at are almost totally addressed to the people of God.

There are warnings and exhortations and rebukes and corrections for the people of God. We tend to think, well, you know, if you're saved, it's everybody will be happy over there. We're all going to have the blessings of the overcomers that are talked about in Revelation.

We're all going to have the mansions and the plantations, and we're all going to rule with Christ, and we're all... And many of the warning passages of scripture say you have need of faith and patience if you're going to inherit the promises. You have need of endurance so that after you have suffered a while, you will receive the promises, Peter says. There is going to be a spectrum.

Jesus said that there are going to be first and last in the kingdom. He didn't say, you know, in my kingdom, everybody's first. Everybody has all the rewards.

He said there are many who are going to be in the kingdom who were well thought of in this life that are going to be among the last. They're going to be there by the skin of their teeth. So when it says they will never see the light, this again is a reference.

You'll remember our studies on the darkness which is outside. There are some who have the privilege of entering into the house where the feast is going on, and there are others who are outside. The wise and foolish virgins, half of them were admitted to the celebration and the other half were not, but they were all there.

They were all alive to speak to the master. They were all... When Jesus opens the door and someone says, Lord, Lord, in your name, do we not do this, that, and the other? And he says, I never knew you. You have to be there.

You have to be resurrected to have that communication with the Lord. But there are privileges that are reserved for the faithful. There are rewards for those who have placed God first in their scale of priorities in this life.

And this is one of the passages that says that. A man who is in honor yet does not understand. It doesn't say that he doesn't have faith or that he disregards God.

It says that he's well thought of in this life, but he does not have understanding. He hasn't learned and heeded the Word of God as a believer. He's like the beast that perished.

The fruit of this life doesn't carry forward. We used to have a Persian cat. He was a white cat, and he was well thought of in our household.

But he perished. He got cancer at the ripe old age of 16. And they went in to see what they could do, and he was too far gone.

We had to have them go ahead and put him to sleep. And I missed that cat after he was gone. I liked his personality because he wasn't cloying.

He didn't come in and pester you for affection. He would just sit at a distance, and he kind of had his own dignity. And when he wanted to be petted, he'd come up, and you could pet him a little bit, and then he'd go sit down.

I really had a lot of respect for him. But when the beast perishes, there's nothing left. For a long time, we had white Persian cat hair in various places in the house that sort of were lingering reminders.

But as time went by, there's nothing that survives an animal's demise other than perhaps your memories of him. But we have the opportunity, and this is the theme of Ecclesiastes. A lot has been said about Ecclesiastes and that, well, Solomon was out of fellowship when he wrote it, and he was trying to pursue human happiness and so forth.

What he's really talking about, as we've seen from our word study on Hebel, is that things in this life, things under the sun, are a vapor. And a vapor is not vain. It's not worthless.

It's temporary. It doesn't last. And there's a lot of things that we can do in this life that seem good and seem valuable and seem worthwhile, and that we take pleasure in.

We get a big task accomplished. I'm trying to put the pool in in the backyard, and if I ever get it finished, I'm going to take great pride in having accomplished that task. I'm going to be very satisfied that after, lo, these many weeks of digging and leveling and pouring vermiculite, trying to figure all these things out from the one little piece of paper of instructions, and investing hours in that project, I'm going to, you know, here's the pool, family's going to dive in and swim, and it'll be a great thing.

But is there a way that that project or any of our tasks can be accomplished and have something that goes beyond this life? Can I do that task in a spirit? Can I do that heartily as unto the Lord? And through faith and through recognizing that there are, even in something as non-important as

that, I keep reminding myself, you know, it's a recreational thing. It's not a necessity. It's not a requirement.

It isn't life or death. It's just a thing to save having to go down to the public pool and pay a dollar. But is there a way that we can do things of that nature in this life and contribute, store up treasure in heaven? And Solomon's going to tell us in Ecclesiastes there is, just as in our other passages in the New Testament.

We know that we can do mundane things. We can do ordinary things in a way that stores up glory, reflecting God's glory in the future as well as now. And this is the theme of Ecclesiastes.

And it's a shame that it's been so often missed. We don't often hear a lot of the good truth that is contained in that book. Well, this is the contribution that Psalm 49 makes to that theme.

And let's resume our study now over in Ecclesiastes chapter 5. Ecclesiastes chapter 5. This section, verses 1 through 7, where we currently find ourselves, says this. Walk prudently when you go to the house of God, and draw near to hear, rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God, for God is in heaven and you on earth.

Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it, for he has no pleasure in fools.

Pay what you have vowed. Better not to vow, than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin.

Nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse, and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words, there is also vanity. But fear God.

Well, we began attacking this passage last time, and we have to do some work out of the Hebrew here to make a little better sense perhaps out of it than the reading in the New King James that I just gave you. Verse 1 says, walk prudently when you go to the house of God, and it sounds like, for the first time really, Solomon has lapsed into an exhortation mode, where he's saying, here is an admonition, here's a warning for you. But what he's really saying here, these are infinitives.

You know what an infinitive is in English. It's to swim, to go, to walk. Well, this word that says walk prudently, it's the Hebrew word that means to guard.

And it doesn't say walk, it says your foot or your feet. Regel is the word, I mentioned this last week, but it really amuses me. It's one of the first Hebrew words I learned when I went to a school up in Tulsa with Glenn Carnegie.

And he was telling us how fascinating Hebrew is and the different ways that words can be used. And we were talking about the spies going into the land of Canaan. The 12 spies, when they went in, bought back the grapes, but they said, oh, we were like grasshoppers in the sight of the giants.

But the word for spies in Hebrew is *regelim*. And if you look at the consonants in that, Hebrew is all consonants, it's R-G-L, and then *im* on the end makes it a plural. Well, this is that same word, *regel*, R-E-G-E-L, it's the word for foot.

And in the plural, it's feet. But the *regelim* are footers, they're ones who creep in when you're not looking. And Hebrew is a very graphic language, and so the *regelim* are the ones who footed into the land when you're not looking and spy out and come back.

They foot their way in and they foot their way out. So this literally says, and it's an infinitive, and it says to guard your feet. So we say, well, how's the rest of this sentence going to come out if it starts with an infinitive instead of an imperative, you know, a command that says walk prudently.

But it says to guard your feet when you go to the house of God, and to draw near to listen. Both of these are infinitives. So to guard your feet when you go to the house of God, and of course this is talking about you're going to go to worship, you're going to go into the presence of God.

In ancient Israel, the temple in Solomon's day was the place of the presence of God. That's where the Ark of the Covenant was. That's where the mercy seat with the angels and their wings, and God's presence was pictured as sitting there between the wings of the cherubim and the holy of holies where only the high priest could go once a year.

So to go to the house of God was to go into the presence of God. Well, we don't have the temple today, so where is the presence of God? Do we have the opportunity to go into the presence of God? We do. Every time we go to God in prayer.

We don't have to go through the rituals that they had in the Old Testament. We don't go into the outer court, the court of the Gentiles, or the court of the women, or into the place where the priests were outdoors with the great bronze basin full of water, and the altars, and the sacrifices, and the hacking and slashing of the bulls and the goats, and watching the priests going into the holy place where the showbread and the candlestick was. We don't have any of that today.

We, as believers in Jesus Christ, and sharing in His priesthood, we can walk directly into the throne room of God, and we do that every time we pray. There's a lot of prayer that goes on today that doesn't seem to be aware of the respect and the awe that used to be attached to coming into the presence of God. Israelites knew.

The law told them, if you've touched a dead thing, you can't even go near the temple. If you are guilty of sin, before you can even approach God in worship, you need to go kill an animal, and

you need to lay your hand on that animal, and symbolically transfer your sin to that sacrifice, and have it cleansed by blood before you can even think about coming before God. We have such a privilege, and we're so familiar with it, we just go rushing in literally where angels fear to tread sometimes.

And the Bible, when you look at the prophets, when God would speak, or when an angel would come, they would fall down on their faces in the dirt. But you remember at the beginning of our worship this morning, we stood for prayer, and we do that consciously, because it's a privilege that the Lord Jesus Christ has granted to us, because we share His priesthood, and He is seated at the right hand of the Father, indicating that He, as a man, as the God-man, is acceptable in God's sight, and we are complete in Him. We are acceptable in Him, and we can stand in the presence of God.

We don't have to fall on our face like an Old Testament prophet. We have the privilege of addressing God directly in our prayers, because of what Christ has done for us. And that's why the hymn we sang this morning about the greatness of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on our behalf was so pertinent.

So Solomon here is talking to his audience, and he says, you need to guard your feet. What does it mean to guard your feet when you go to the house of God? Think about the way you're walking in. You're walking into the very presence of God when you go to His house.

There's a great passage over in Genesis. You remember when Jacob was traveling to the north to go see Laban, and it was a day's journey from Isaac and Esau. He was running away because Esau was going to kill him for stealing the blessing.

And he stopped, and he laid his head down on a rock, and then he had a dream. And in the dream, he saw heaven open, and he saw what's been called Jacob's ladder. It was a staircase, and there were angels ascending and descending on the staircase.

And when he woke up, he said, surely this is the house of God. Beit ha-Elohim, it says in Hebrew. And this is the gate of heaven, he says, because here's the gateway to the very presence of God.

And, of course, he erected a pillar and poured oil over it and made a vow there, which is kind of reminding us of what Solomon is saying here. But that was in Genesis 28, 17, if you want to look at that later on. He uses the very same phrase, the house of God, Beit ha-Elohim, and the gate of heaven, he calls it.

Genesis 28, 17. You can also take a look at Exodus chapter 19 and verse 12. Exodus 19, 12.

It also reminds us of the awe that is to be expected in the presence of God. This is Mount Sinai, when God came down to deliver the law. And he says, you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it.

Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Why was it so holy? The presence of God. It's an awesome thing to be able to go directly into the presence of God.

And Solomon says, guard your feet. Be careful when you go to the house of God. And he says, to guard your feet when you go to the house of God and to draw near to listen.

To draw near to listen is better than. And there's a lot I could take you to, the great Hebrew grammarians to talk about how this is constructed in Hebrew. There's a preposition and then the next phrase talking about the sacrifice of fools.

But you know how thus far in Ecclesiastes, we have said it is not good to do this, that and the other. Well, here it says, it is better than. To guard your feet when you go to the house of God and to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice of fools.

The verb to offer is not even there. It says it's better than the sacrifice of fools. So it's the way that you approach.

It's more important than the sacrifice that one might bring. And he says here it's the sacrifice of fools. Well, we've got to read a little bit further to find out what the sacrifice of fools is.

But it goes on to say, for they are not knowing. This is the ING form of knowing and it's made a noun. They are not knowing ones would be the most literal way to put it into English.

To do evil. And then to do evil is another infinitive. So what does this mean? If you guard your feet when you go to the house of God, if you draw near to listen, to receive something, to hear truth, it's better than the sacrifice of fools who go there and they don't even know that they're doing evil.

They don't have the knowledge to discern good and evil. And what they're doing in bringing their sacrifice winds up being evil. Well, the Bible has a lot to say about this.

There is Proverbs chapter 15 and verse 8. Proverbs 15.8 talks about the sacrifice of the fool. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.

Now here's somebody who's obeying the law of Moses. They can point to the scriptures. They've got their Bible, the five books of Moses.

They might have the book of Job and one or two other books perhaps in Solomon's day. And they say, look, it says bring the goat, bring the bull, and that's what I've done. I've conformed to the letter of the law.

But if it's a wicked man bringing that sacrifice, if it's someone who doesn't have the heart that God is looking for, it's an abomination. The very obedience that's prescribed in the Bible because his

heart is wicked, his sacrifice is an abomination. I've used the example before.

It's sort of like if I came over to your house and you had a pet cat or a pet dog and I came in there with my Colt .45 Commander model and plugged your pet and just shot him dead, and then the next day I sent you a nice expensive Seiko watch, what would you think of that watch? Well, that's the guy that shot my dog. Hey, but it's your birthday. I sent you this nice watch.

Yeah, but yesterday you shot my dog. The way that you view someone affects how you're going to view their gifts. And if we have disregarded God, if we have gone our own way and not guarded our steps, and then we come in and try to offer something to God and say, Look, here's my sacrifice.

Here's my goat or my bull in the Old Testament. What are our sacrifices as believers in this age, as priests after the order of Melchizedek? Jesus is our high priest and we are our own priests. What does a priest do? Represent somebody before God.

We can represent ourselves before God because of Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father in glory. So, what sacrifice do we bring? Sacrifices of praise. We can go, you know, there's lots of people this morning on Sunday singing praise songs.

We praise you God. We thank you God and so forth. But if all the other six days of the week people are living for themselves and disregarding God, is God going to be pleased with a praise song? Is God going to be pleased with somebody dropping money on the offering plate? Is God going to be pleased when somebody teaches their Sunday school class or does whatever they do at church on Sunday when the other six days of the week they've disregarded God? They've hated their neighbor? Jake Hess and the Statesmen had a great song called I Don't Want This Modern Religion.

It says you go to church on a Sunday to let them know who you are, but as soon as the service is over you head for the nearest bar. You know, that's back in the 50s where you had your... And it goes on to talk about, you know, how can you say that you love your Savior when you still hate your brother next door? He says, I don't want this modern religion. Well, it's not all that modern.

That's been going on since well before Solomon's time. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. We want to guard our feet when we go to the house of God.

When we come before God are we coming with an acceptable sacrifice because we ourselves have cleansed ourselves in the blood of Christ. We've made ourselves clean by claiming His grace, acknowledging our sins and seeking to walk in the light, seeking to walk on that narrow road that goes through the straight gate that leads to life. Well, this principle, as I said, is mentioned several places.

You can turn a few pages forward in Proverbs to Proverbs 21:3. Proverbs 21:3. This gives us a

slightly different angle. To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. The daily practice of righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

Go down just a few verses in that chapter to verse 27. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when He brings it with wicked intent? If I do this for God, if I bring Him the sacrifice, then maybe I'll get my way.

If I bring my tithes into the storehouse, maybe God will open the windows of heaven and rain down blessings on me. You've seen people who preach prosperity by tithing or by offerings and say, you send your money to us, to our ministry somehow. I'm not sure how the equation developed where sending money to the guy on TV is the same as giving it to God.

They don't really explain that link. The Bible says, bring your tithes into God's storehouse. And they say, well, I'm God's storehouse.

Bring your tithes to me and God will open the windows of heaven. There's a little bit of an assumption there that I can't quite follow. But what would be a wicked intent in bringing a sacrifice to God? Well, this is going to be leverage for me.

God's going to owe me something. He's going to sort of be on the hook because, hey, I took the best three bulls out of the herd here and brought them down. Did you see in USA Today this past week, the only reason I saw USA Today is because I was over in Lufkin and staying in a hotel and they hang one on your door in the morning.

And there was an article in there. And Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines is erupting and the lava is coming out. And the villagers were going to go up there and they said, well, there's a low point in the crater and we can dig down in the wall.

We've got to go 16 feet down and drain off this lava so that it will go in a different direction and not wreck our village. But they had a picture of them and there was a pig under their arm. And if you read down in the story, it said, oh, these villagers are also going to go up on the rim of the volcano and sacrifice a pig to appease the god of the volcano so that he'll spare their village.

So I thought, well, this is sort of interesting. They're not just sacrificing a pig and then sitting back. They're going to chop the wall of the crater out and make sure the lava goes a different direction.

But they're not just relying on the sacrifice of the pig and saying, well, we've sacrificed a pig. He's not going to drown our village in lava now. I mean, they're going to make sure the lava doesn't come that way by digging.

But there are people even today who think, you know, I'm going to take the pig up there and sacrifice it and the god of the volcano is going to owe me something. He's not going to wreck my village. And this kind of thinking has gone all the way back to Cain.

Remember Cain? Brought God a big tossed salad, the fruit of his hands, and said, well, you know, look, God, I brought this great salad and completely missed the purpose of the sacrifice. God didn't need a vegetarian diet or something. It was the symbolism of the sacrifice of the lamb.

And you get the idea that Cain was already on the outs with his brother. Abel was the shepherd. Abel had the animals.

And in order to get an animal for sacrifice, Cain would have had to go and say, hey, Abel, how about I trade you some rutabagas or something for a lamb so that I can do the sacrifice also. He didn't want to go to his brother. He said, you know, I've raised these vegetables.

This has got to be just as good as what God prescribed for the sacrifice. So he puts a salad on the altar. And God was not pleased.

And guess what? A sacrifice brought with wicked intent with a corrupted heart is an abomination. And that's what it tells us in Proverbs 21, 27. So, people, this morning, and we want to be sure we're not in this number, but there are people who come before God, who come into the presence of God in worship and in prayer, and don't even know that they're offering the sacrifice of fools, that it's actually an abomination in God's sight.

It isn't pleasing. And they say, but it's scriptural. We're coming.

We're singing. We're worshipping. We're doing this, that, and the other.

I heard a service on the radio this morning where they had a full 21-piece orchestra and a worship leader and everything. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with that. But if you're saying, you know, God has to be pleased because of our orchestra and because of our worship leader and because of our praise songs, and people who come to church and have that done for them, so to speak, you're almost in the audience.

It's like a production. And I was telling Patty this morning, it kind of reminds me, in computers, there's two different kinds of ways that you can get information from one place to another. You can push it out.

You can send it in such a way that it is received and an update takes place. This is what happens with your Internet Explorer browser. If you have Microsoft's Internet Explorer, it will check on the web and see if there's an update, if there's a newer version.

And if there is, the website pushes it down to you and loads it on your machine. You don't even get to say, hey, wait a minute, I like the old version. It just comes down.

CompuServe and AOL do the same thing. Well, that's called push technology, where it just comes to you. All you did was just kind of show up.

And then the other kind is where you go up and you pull something to yourself. You say, I want this particular thing, and I'm going to download it. I'm going to get this picture or this file or this utility.

And you initiate, and you find it, and you draw it to yourself. Well, church and worship are supposed to be where we go and listen. Guard your feet when you go to the house of God and draw near to listen.

You've gone there because you want to take to yourself the Word of God. You want to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. You want to have God's power at work to change and to cleanse.

Rather than going and having something pushed at you and, well, see if you can lift me up on a wave of emotion. See if you can wind up unconsciously and unwittingly and unknowingly offer the sacrifice of fools. Because if you have not gone to God in humility, in recognition of the need for cleansing and the need for learning, you can wind up being one of the unknowing.

So that's what Solomon is talking about in Ecclesiastes chapter 5. It says, guard your feet when you go to the house of God. To guard your feet and to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice of fools. They do not know that they're doing evil.

Nobody goes to church and says, you know, I think I'll just go down and commit an evil act this morning. I'll go down to the church and, you know, commit an abomination. No one thinks that they're doing evil.

This is why the Bible exhorts us to examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith. Well, what does verse 2 go on to tell us in Ecclesiastes chapter 5? Do not be rash with your mouth and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. A lot of times we are motivated to go to God because we've got something to say.

We've got a request. We've got a need. We've got a crisis.

And we want to, you know, we don't typically think about God until the chips are down. And then, oh God, I need to tell you something here. I've got a problem and I want you to, you know, we're all talking.

We're going to talk rather than to listen. And this is the contrast that is set up. Turn with me quickly to Matthew chapter 6. Matthew chapter 6, verses 7 and 8. Jesus addressed this very issue himself.

In talking about taking heed that you are not like the hypocrites, he says in verse 5, When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have

their reward.

That's all they're going to get. It's a momentary gratification of parading themselves before men. You, when you pray, go into your room.

And when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do.

For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask him.

And then Jesus goes on to give what has been called the Lord's Prayer, the example prayer. It's very short, sweet, and to the point, isn't it? We don't have to pester God. We don't have to repeat.

We don't have to come before him with many words. He already knows what we need. So, you find the same principle, Solomon himself, in the Proverbs he gathered.

Proverbs 10, verse 8, addresses itself to this same idea. Proverbs 10, verse 8. The wise in heart will receive commands, but a prating fool will fall. You know, prating means you're blabbering, you're talking.

If you're wise in heart, you're going to receive commands. If you're prating, if you're talking, you're not listening, he says, and you're going to fall. He who walks with integrity walks securely, Proverbs 10, 9. But he who perverts his ways will become known.

He who winks with the eye causes trouble, but a prating fool will fall. The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. All this has to do with what you say, how you employ your mouth.

Hatred stirs up strife. Love covers all sins. Wisdom is found, verse 13, on the lips of him who has understanding.

But a rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding. This doesn't say devoid of faith, does it? It says devoid of understanding. We're not talking about unbelievers getting the rod here.

These are believers. Whom the Lord loves, he chastens and scourges every son whom he receives. A rod for the back of him who is devoid of understanding.

Wise people, verse 14, store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near to destruction. The rich man's wealth is his strong city. The destruction of the poor is their poverty.

You can be destroyed by obsessing on your poverty just as much as you can by obsessing on your riches. Verse 17, he who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray. We need to approach to hear rather than to speak.

A lot of times we think, well, if I get in the door and do some worshipping and so forth, then now I've got my foot in the door and I can get all of my requests and get my desires in before God, and he'll sort of owe me something and straighten out my life and make everything go well. Well, we are to remember that God is in heaven and we are on earth, Solomon says. God is in a holy place.

We are down here on earth, and when we go to him, we want to be careful. We have the privilege of representing ourselves before God, and we ought to exercise that frequently, but carefully. Well, this is a good place to pause and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to go forward and see what it means when it talks about many dreams. It talks about two different times dreams are mentioned in the next couple of verses. What do dreams have to do with coming before God? Is God going to communicate to us in a dream like he did with Joseph or with Jacob? What exactly is going on there? That's what we'll see when we return.