

01-08-19b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now in Ecclesiastes chapter 5. The thing to remember about Ecclesiastes is that it's a great advance in Old Testament revelation because up to the point of David and Solomon you just had the law of Moses. You had Genesis that gave the history beginning with Adam and Eve and coming forward to the time of the patriarchs, Jacob's 12 sons and their descent to Egypt. And Moses having found these records, the family records in the archives of Egypt, growing up as a prince in the land and finding these things that Joseph had received from his father and had deposited there and being able to communicate to Israel their heritage and the promises that God had made beginning in the garden or just outside the garden and coming forward to the time that they were delivered by God's mighty hand, the blood of the Passover lamb is a great picture of salvation.

And coming out and spending their time of sojourn in the wilderness and only Caleb and Joshua surviving out of that generation to go into the land was a great illustration of the calling and the responsibility that God's people had to Him and to love Him, to have His words and keep them. But then the law as it was delivered to Moses in Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy and some of the records from Joshua perhaps existed, but you have to remember Solomon's Bible was much thinner than ours. The Old Testament prophets had not yet written their prophecies.

Some of the wisdom literature was not yet in existence and Solomon was in the process of writing some of it himself. But the communication to Israel was in the form of symbolism and pictures. The priests were to teach Israel from what the Levitical offerings symbolized.

And one of these days I hope we get to go in detail into the Levitical offerings because what each part of the sacrifice represents, why some animal body parts were used for a sacrifice or not used, why some of them were taken outside the camp, the symbolism of the scapegoat and the birds and all of the different features. Every one of those details has significance and had a valuable teaching point for the Israelites. But the law, especially as Israel came to perceive it, seemed to address itself to external behavior.

You need to bring the sacrifice. You need to be cleansed in such a way. You need to make sure if there's a spot of mildew that it's addressed in such a way.

It seemed to be very behavior oriented and not so much was said in the law of Moses about the thoughts and intents of the heart. It simply said you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength. And so people came to believe that what they did and what they accomplished in God's sight was going to be the measure.

And one of the great things when God gave the wisdom to Solomon that he requested to be a leader of the people, it was not just to be a political leader and a king, it was also to be a spiritual leader. And so Solomon set down in Ecclesiastes truths that expanded on and grew out from

what they could learn from the law. And it addressed itself to some of the inner things.

And it said, you know, it's not enough to be successful. Don't you realize that life is cyclical? The sun rises and it shines for a time and you do things under the sun, but the sun is going to set. And once the sun sets, what do you carry away? What is the profit? P-R-O-F-I-T.

What is the gain from everything that man does under the sun? This is the question that the book opens with. How can you lay hold of something in this life that is going to carry forward into the eternal? Well, where do you find this in Leviticus or Deuteronomy? It's, of course, intrinsic and implied in many things. But Solomon comes right in and says, you know, you've got to be careful or your life is going to end up just being like a vapor.

It's going to be impermanent. It's like the fog that burns off in the morning. And you're going to arrive in the next life with nothing in your hand.

So he says, how can you gain something eternal, beyond salvation, that you cannot lose? Something of value. And, of course, we know in the New Testament, this is much more fully explored for the church in books such as Romans that addresses itself to righteousness by faith. Paul talks over and over again in his epistles about laying up for ourselves an eternal weight of glory and remembering to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven and not on earth, as Jesus told his generation.

Well, Solomon is the pioneer of communicating this truth in the Old Testament. And that's what Ecclesiastes is about. Don't let anybody tell you that Ecclesiastes is the railings of a man who has forgotten about God and gotten soaked up in being the king.

Solomon is at the cutting edge of exploring the plan and the purpose of God. And that vast wisdom that God granted to him almost looks like foolishness to us when we first come to the book. And we say, oh, well, he says, eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

And the book has been translated in that light, unfortunately, when the Hebrew says there is nothing good in eating and drinking and not carrying anything away. And so we've been able to take a fresh look at Ecclesiastes from that standpoint. And as we come now to resume in chapter 5, we've already seen that 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 who do not know that they are doing evil.

There's nothing worse than thinking you're doing good and finding out that you were doing evil. Well, how can this happen? How can we not be fools but wise? Remember, Paul says this over in the New Testament. He says we don't want to be fools but wise, knowing what the will of the Lord is.

Well, turn with me to one of my all-time favorite, you know, this is like statesman songs. Whichever one I'm listening to at the time is my favorite. But Proverbs chapter 2, another

scripture that God delivered to us through the pen of Solomon.

This tells us the difference between being wise and being a fool. A fool does not know that he's doing evil. Well, how can we not be a fool? The key here seems to be don't be a fool.

Don't get caught without the knowledge that you need. Well, Proverbs chapter 2, and we get the idea here that these may have been Solomon's diaries or journals recording the teaching that he got from his father David who really understood these principles well. My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands within you so that you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding, yes, if you cry out for discernment and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her like silver and search for her like hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright.

He is a shield to those who walk uprightly. He guards the paths of justice and preserves the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.

So, it's sort of like they told me when I first went to the Naval Academy. If you're going to get through this four years of stress, you have to want it. You have to want what comes on the other side.

You have to want that commission. You have to want that military career enough to endure what's about to happen to you in the next four years. I remember seeing that they had a picture of a midshipman on the left-hand page of the catalog for 1975.

And they had a little quote from him. To get through this place, you have to want it. Well, to not be a fool, to be wise, and to know what the will of the Lord is, you have to want it.

And we see in Proverbs 2 that this is something that grows over time. You start out at the beginning and he says, if you receive my words and lay up my commands within you. This is a very passive thing.

All you have to do is just listen. You just hear it and remember it. That doesn't require a whole lot of effort.

But then in verse 2, we've got a little bit more activity on the part of the hearer. You incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding. Now you're going to make a little bit more of an effort to be sure that you do hear the truth.

Maybe you'll go out of your way to make sure that you find it and listen to it. And now you're going to apply your heart. You're going to try to think about it.

Not just remember it, but process it and see how it might affect what you're doing from day to day. We've heard, all of us have heard wonderfully crafted sermons. We've read books that were just well written by men that are talented and gifted in that area.

And I've heard great... When I went to homiletics class in seminary homiletics, this is the science of delivering a sermon. And they teach how to craft a sermon and how to use alliteration and use memory devices and things. So we can all think back on very well crafted sermons that we've heard where the point was extracted from Scripture and it was observed, it was interpreted, the application was suggested to us.

But the question is, that was a great experience and you come away feeling like, boy, I really sunk my teeth into some meat this morning. But the question is, of all of these well crafted lessons that we've ever heard, did it make a difference in the days and weeks that followed? Did it stick in our mind enough that we applied our heart to it? And we said, you know, I really should think before I speak, whether to God or to man. I really should watch and make sure that I'm not unconsciously exhibiting patterns of behavior that are just not scriptural, not a part of the life of someone who belongs to God.

Do I gossip and I've just done it for so long that I don't really realize it? Do I hurt people with my tongue? Am I critical? Am I short-tempered? Am I impatient? Am I self-centered? Am I blind in some area? We want to look and let what is taught us from the Word of God make a difference. Otherwise, it might as well be a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. If it doesn't produce love in us, love for God and love for one another, it has become just a beautiful sound.

Well, this is what he's talking about. You incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding. We're putting forth a little bit more by way of motivation here.

Then in verse 3, now we've progressed a little bit further. You cry out for discernment and lift up your voice for understanding. This is what Solomon did, didn't he? He went to God and he said, Lord, You've put me in charge of these people.

You've made me king by Your grace, but I'm not smart enough to rule. Give me the wisdom to do this in a way that's pleasing in Your sight. He lifted up his voice.

He cried out for wisdom. And God saw that and was pleased. It's a very rare thing in the Bible to find where God is pleased with someone's prayer or with someone's request.

But God was pleased. But this again is an advance beyond just listening and applying. Now you're in the active mode.

I remember when we were, again, learning about ships and things. You can be listening. You can have a little shortwave radio at home where you can hear shortwave broadcasts from all around the world.

Or you can have a passive listening device. They have these planted on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. And they listen for the propeller sounds of Russian submarines and things.

And it's just a little microphone down there that listens for the vibrations in the water. Well, you can listen. And if something comes close enough, it's going to make a sound and you'll hear it.

But, of course, our submarines and our ships have active sonar. They send out a ping and wait for the echo to come back. They're active listening devices where they send out something and see what it bounces off of.

Well, between verse 2 and verse 3, we've gone from the passive, where we're just listening and thinking about what we hear, to the active mode. Now we're saying, Lord, I want to know more. Help me understand what I have heard.

Give me wisdom. Give me understanding. You're crying out.

And these are not silent prayer words in Hebrew. This is speaking with the voice. It's kind of a tricky thing.

I've always been a little bit... I'm much more comfortable with silent prayer than I am with vocal prayer, especially when I'm by myself. You feel kind of strange talking out loud to God. But when I first translated this for myself and I realized that these verbs are verbs of speaking and crying out and that this is the same thing that's in Psalm 55, 17.

Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud and He will hear my voice. And there's something about expressing our thoughts in verbal form to God that is commended in the Scripture. I'm not saying if you pray silently, God won't hear you or that there's anything wrong with doing virtually all your praying silently.

I do. But I would suggest to you that the Bible uses vocal verbs for prayer. Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud and He will hear my voice.

It doesn't say He will hear my thoughts. It says He will hear my voice. And here you have the same idea.

If you cry out, you're motivated so much that you'll talk to God out loud and say Lord, and of course this is a great thing in families, is to pray together and pray verbally. And then in verse 4, we become even more active. Now you're not just speaking and crying out.

You've actually gotten up out of your chair. You've moved yourself physically. If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures and you get the idea that this is something that grows to him that has more will be given is the idea.

And to him that has not, even what he has will be taken away. And if we are just willing to listen

and to hear, the presence of the Word of God within us is going to provide its own energy. It's like a battery that instead of discharging just gets more and more of a charge on it.

And pretty soon you're not content to just sit and hear. You're not content to just remember and apply. Now you're asking for more.

You're willing to get up and go seek it and search for it like treasure. Who are the people who abandon all and they don't live in a house anymore? They get themselves a camper and put it on the back of their pickup and drive out to Arizona or Nevada and go up in the mountains and start looking for that lost treasure of whatever it is that's up there. They heard that there was this big vein of rich silver that nobody's ever found and a dying guy had a map but nobody could find it.

People will spend their lives for this hard to obtain but very valuable commodity. If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, there's a difference in seeking a regular treasure that's right out there on the surface and seeking something that's hidden. They find these ships that sunk in World War II full of Spanish bullion or something and they locate the ship.

They search and search and search until they find the ship and then once they find the ship it's a different kind of operation. Now how do we retrieve the gold that we know is there? But earlier on, they're searching for a hidden treasure. They know it's there somewhere but they don't know where and there's a great amount of effort and money expended in trying to find these things.

Search for it as for hidden treasures. It's at that point that we have progressed to that level of desire and the expression of that level of desire. He says then, when you've demonstrated that you're a serious seeker and you're not just a person succumbing to a fad, you're not just a, well this is sort of the thing of the moment, we're reminded of the parable of the soils where the seed falls in the shallow soil, the sun comes up in a day and it perishes because it has no root.

It's just kind of a temporary thing. Well, I kept that seed for a while and I let a plant grow up but it wasn't a lasting thing. But it's then, he tells us, that you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

The Lord gives wisdom and out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding but who does he give it to? He comes to those who guard their steps, who go to the house of the Lord to hear rather than to speak. God is not the genie of the lamp. He's not the big secret weapon to solve problems and to make things come out right and to give me a happy life because my basic agenda is to have a happy life and so I've got the big secret weapon.

I'll go to God and pray and he's going to give me the desires of my heart. We go to God to hear. What is God's agenda? What is God's plan? What is God's desire? I want to conform myself to what he wants.

That is the time when the very things that we have said I can do without my personal happiness, I can do without whatever it is that seemed attractive to me in life, things that are higher, things that are nobler, these have allured my sight and it is at the very point that we let go of those things that God can give them to us in spades and it doesn't destroy us, it doesn't distract us, it doesn't wrap us up in this world and cause our life to turn into a vapor that doesn't last beyond the grave. So this is the idea in Proverbs 2. God is in heaven, you are on the earth, therefore let your words be few. Remember your place would be sort of a vernacular rendering of this.

God is in heaven and you are on earth. It's a heavenly plan. It's a heavenly agenda.

We can't see. We're like the soldier who's a member of a squad on the battlefield. We can't see the progress of the battle and where the battle lines are and where the objectives are.

We just have our one small area that we can observe, but God is in heaven. He's got the entire picture and we want to be a part of his battle plan. Then we have this fascinating verse, verse 3, the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

The last part sort of makes sense, but the first part, a dream comes through much effort. Now this has been understood to mean, in fact I have a co-worker that was with me this past week in Lufkin and she was telling me in the morning when we were getting ready to go back to the facility and do some more work that she was so nervous about making sure that we got everything done that she had dreamed about it in the night and the level of stress seemed to cause her to have dreams. There are people that have understood this in this way that when you're engaging in a lot of effort it causes you to dream at night.

Well, even if that is true, it's kind of a strange thing in this context. He's talking about approaching God and guarding your steps and coming to listen rather than to hear and then he says, for the dream comes through much effort. Well, others have thought, well, dream was a means of Old Testament revelation and they say you've got to work really hard before God will speak to you in a dream and there's people that take that meaning today who are thinking that God is going to use a supernatural means of communication, something other than His Word.

But what this really means, and we did the work on this, because the word translated much effort here is *inyon*, I-N-Y-A-N. And we have already encountered this word several times in the preceding context and in those cases the New King James and American Standard and some of the other translated it task. They said it is an evil or a grievous task that God has given the sons of men to be occupied with.

But that doesn't make a whole lot of sense either and when you go back to the root meaning of the word, it means answer. It is a response. *Inyon* is a response.

It's a, this is the solution to the problem. This is what you're looking for. Well, so it says the dream comes through many *inyon*, many answers.

What is this talking about? What is a dream? We could take this word in Hebrew and look at it throughout the Scripture, but let me just take you to a couple of passages that will do in terms of representing to us what the Old Testament view of dream is. We know that God spoke to men in old times through dreams. But you remember Hebrews chapter 1? In many parts, in many ways, God spoke in times past, but in these latter days, He has spoken to us through His Son.

God doesn't need to use dreams and visions and angels and supernatural manifestations anymore because Christ has come and Christ is the fullness of deity in bodily form. Everything we need to know is in Christ and in the revelation of Christ in God's Word. But look at Deuteronomy chapter 13.

We have our word here, *chalom*, which is the word for dream. If you want to write this down, let me make sure I give you the right spelling here. The numbering is different in Hebrew because we're one off.

It's verse 2 in the Hebrew text, but it is *chalom*, *chalom* is the word for dream. And we have the Hebrew verb *boh*, which means to come or to go. And it says literally, for comes the dream in many inyon, in a multitude of inyon, a multitude of answers.

Dream comes in a multitude of answers. Well, Deuteronomy chapter 13 and verse 2, Moses, communicating the word of God to Israel, talks about and uses this word. My pages are sticking together here in Deuteronomy.

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him.

We have the same exhortation here in Ecclesiastes, don't we, at the end of this section. He says, fear God. That's the last phrase in verse 7 of this chapter.

Keep his commandments, obey his voice. You shall serve him and hold fast to him. The prophet or the dreamer of dreams shall be put to death because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage.

He has spoken to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst. How would this work itself out in practical terms? Why would somebody dare to speak up and say something other than the truth of God? Why would a prophet or a dreamer of dreams come up? It's because they've got a vision of how things ought to be.

They say, let us go down to Egypt and make them our allies as the Assyrian hordes or the Babylonian hordes are swooping down on us. This is the answer if we just make an alliance with the Egyptians. This happens later on in the days of Isaiah.

Remember, there was this big military threat, political threat coming down from the north, and people were saying, we've got to get Egypt on board. They've got armies. They've got chariots.

They've got much more military might than we do. If we can just get an alliance with Egypt, we can resist this threat. This is the answer.

This is the answer. This is my vision of how things can work out. I can see it all now.

The Egyptians coming up with their chariots and their horses, and here's the Assyrians, and we go into battle and we win. I can see it in my mind's eye if we can just get the alliance with the Egyptians. And the prophet is saying, if you lean on Egypt, it's going to be like leaning on a reed that's going to snap, and the sharp point's going to drive itself through your hand.

It's not going to be an aid. It's going to be an injury. There is no aid in Egypt, God says.

So there's a contrast between what people say the answer is and what God says the answer is. The people's answer is a dream. And this is the language that Solomon is using.

It's in the context now of going to the house of God to listen rather than to speak. And why does he continue in this vein? Because if you go to God and you've already got the answer, you've got the vision of how things... How many times has this already happened to us? We're believers. We've lived for a while.

We think we know how God's going to work this out. I've got this problem here and I can see already God's provision for how this is going to be solved. I can see it right here.

And we see it in our mind's eye. We see how it's all going to work out. We go to God and we say, Lord, I can already see, please bring so-and-so in to do this and so, or please help me do this and the other.

If I can just have this financial thing or this relationship thing work out and thus and so away, everything will be solved. And God turns out doing it in a completely unexpected way that we didn't foresee. We had a vision of how it would turn out.

We had the answer. We went to God just pestering him for this answer. He solves the problem or addresses the difficulty in a completely different way.

And then in hindsight, we look back and we say, oh boy, I'm sure glad God had that figured out and didn't listen to me. I thought one time that I wanted to buy property out in Rockwall. We were living out there in a mobile home and we were on a lot and it was the last lot near the top of a

hillside and none of the other lots had been improved.

They had no plumbing, no electric, and they weren't in use and didn't look like they ever would be. So we had this beautiful field. We could get up in the morning and look out our windows and we saw this field with the dew on the grass and the birds chirping and flying back and forth.

And the lot next to us was available and we could buy it and it wasn't too expensive. And so we were trying to be in God's will and we prayed and said, Lord, it would sure be great if we could just get the money together. And it looked like I could work it out.

I thought, Lord, you know, if this particular contract where I'm working comes through and we get this network job and this, that, and the other, I can have a down payment, I can buy this lot and we'll have a place. We can improve, we can do whatever we want. Had it all figured out and it just kept hitting snags and didn't come about.

Well, we recently drove back to Rockwall and drove through that mobile home park and guess what? Every single one of those lots has been quote unquote improved. It's got the electric and the plumbing but these ramshackle, tumbledown mobile homes are in there. The entire neighborhood has just gone to the dogs since the ten years ago that we lived there and literally gone to the dogs running loose in the streets.

And it's just, it's an awful place. And I thought, oh Lord, thank you for not listening to me and not giving my solution to what I thought would give us permanence and property and that kind of thing. He is so much smarter than we are.

And this is what Solomon is talking about. The dream is expressed in many answers. We go to God and we give Him our many answers.

We say, Lord, just make so and so well. Just do this and that and the other. Down at work, our prayer list, I've mentioned this a few times but it doesn't seem to change.

But our prayer list at work for devotions is nothing but medical needs. Here's Buckner Baptist Benevolences. It has children and family services.

It has adoption and maternity services. It has retirement services. Meeting the needs of people with a human touch.

All of these things that we do. And there's a lot of infrastructure and a lot of effort that goes into that. There's a lot of things that need to be done.

There's meetings and conferences. There's relationships with churches and other organizations. Our staff at the corporate office is very busy trying to make these things happen.

And what a great field for prayer. To say, Lord, guide us as we make these decisions, as we set

our course, as we enter into partnerships with the state and with other people who are funding and doing this and the other. And we meet every week and do nothing but, oh, well, so-and-so's aunt is going in for surgery next week.

Please pray that God will guide the surgeon. There's nothing wrong with praying for people who have medical needs, but it seems to, just by repetition and by habit, to become, well, we just go to God when there's a crisis and we say, please fix this crisis. And we always pray that they'll be healed.

Well, if you think about the larger plan of God, God has allowed these things to come into our lives. It is a factor. It has a purpose.

It has a... It creates the opportunity for witness. It creates the opportunity for application. It creates the opportunity for faith.

And if we start looking at these as opportunities to lay hold of something permanent that goes beyond this life, righteousness by faith, reflection of the glory of God in trust and in application of His Word, the field of prayer opens wide up. It's much more than just our crises. It's our plans.

It's our plans, Lord, as we look at making this decision or setting this course, going in this direction, and so on. So this is what chapter 5, verse 3 of Ecclesiastes is all about. We think that we have the answers.

We express our dream. The dream comes... You know, he's been talking about coming before God, walking, guarding your feet. This is the context.

What does it mean to come? The Hebrew verb *boh* means it's the same thing. You're walking up into the presence of God. What does God see when He sees the door open and hears something comes? It's the dream.

It's the many answers. You've seen these things where many small people try to look like one big one and they get a big long overcoat and they all stack themselves up and the head is sticking out the top and the feet are sticking out the bottom. This is the dream.

It's this construct of how we want things to be and it comes in composed of many answers and the voice of the fool. This is literally the sound of the fool. The word is variously translated sound or voice, but the sound of the fool is found in many words.

Scripture is replete with references to this. Take a look at Jeremiah chapter 23 and verse 27. Jeremiah 23.

This reminds us of what we just saw over in Deuteronomy 13. And we can begin in 23-23. Am I a God near at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him, says the Lord? Do I not fill heaven and earth, says the Lord? I

have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart. They've got an idea of how things ought to be and they say, I have dreamed. They try to make my people forget my name by their dreams, which everyone tells his neighbor as their fathers forgot my name for Baal.

The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream. And he who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. Go ahead.

Let's put them side by side. Let the tellers of dreams stand up and tell their dream, their perception, their vision of how things are going to be. And let the one who has God's word stand up and communicate that word faithfully.

God says, you're going to see the difference between the chaff and the wheat. Is not my word like a fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? You can throw all the chaff you want to at a problem, it is not going to break it in pieces like a hammer does a rock. I don't care how hard you throw that chaff, you can put that chaff in a tornado, it is not going to break the rock the way the hammer of God's word is going to do it.

Verse 30, therefore behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who steal my words, everyone from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongue and say, He says. Now this is a caution, and I do not say this lightly, but if you look around in the Christian world today, there are a lot of people saying, you know, the Lord revealed this to me, the Lord told me this, the Lord said, He says, He says.

Well, if you don't find that in the pages of your Bible, you want to be really careful, because Jeremiah says, God tells Jeremiah, there is a syndrome where people are running around saying, God said, and maybe He did, maybe He didn't. Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams, says the Lord, and tell them and cause my people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. I did not send them or command them, therefore they shall not profit this people at all.

This is the theme of Ecclesiastes, where is the profit? If you keep coming to God with dreams, if you keep chasing dreams that are not based on God's word, there is no profit, and your life is going to be a vapor. You'll get to the next life, you'll be at the resurrection, and you'll see many coming and sitting down with Christ in the kingdom, and we'll miss out. So when these people, or the prophet, or the priest ask you, saying, what is the oracle of the Lord, you shall then say to them, what oracle? I will even forsake you, says the Lord.

If you make a habit out of listening to every dreamer that comes along, you're not going to be able to recognize the oracle when it comes. And you can go on in the rest of that chapter, it's

fascinating to read, but we want to move forward here. Look a few pages further in Jeremiah chapter 27, verse 9. Jeremiah 27, 9. Do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who speak to you, saying you shall not serve the king of Babylon.

They're saying, no, this captivity's not coming, the nation's not going to go out under discipline and be taken over, and Jerusalem is not going to be sacked, you're not going to be carried off in chains to Babylon. He says, don't listen to them, they're dreaming. There might be people who are praying, saying, oh Lord, don't let us go to Babylon.

God has already revealed to the prophet that they're going to Babylon. They are going to receive this discipline because of the pattern of evil that has manifested itself generation after generation after warning, repeated warning, repeated warning, God says, look, I'm not listening anymore, you're going to have to undergo discipline before you're restored to the land. And there's people saying, oh no, that's not it.

No, I can see it all now. We'll go to Egypt, we'll get this help, it's not going to happen. Another page forward in Jeremiah 29, verse 8. Thus says the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed, for they prophesy falsely to you in my name.

I have not sent them, says the Lord. For thus says the Lord, after 70 years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you and cause you to return to this place. So don't listen to somebody that tells you it isn't so.

And these are the prophets. These are the people who are in the place of respect. They are the ones who are supposed to be the communicators of the truth and they are failing their responsibility.

We saw last week the unfaithful shepherds who muddy the water and make it impossible for the sheep to get their nourishment because they are butted out of the way. And these unfaithful shepherds and these fat sheep are coming under discipline from God. Well, this is the idea.

A dream comes in many answers. You go to God with the answers instead of listening for His answer. You go to God with many words instead of coming before Him to listen to His word.

That's where the answer is. And then back to Ecclesiastes chapter 5. He talks about this vow business. When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it.

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.

Well, this was an Old Testament practice. There is a scripture for this. You can look at Leviticus chapter 27.

The whole chapter talks about making a vow. And you promise God a servant or a sum of money. And this is in return for God accomplishing a certain thing.

And it is addressed in the law. You can redeem. You've dedicated something to God.

You've said, I will dedicate my servant. I will dedicate this sum of money. I will dedicate my house to God.

And then you're going to redeem it for a sum of money. You say, well, I'll give you the value. I will give this money to the temple and get my house back or get my servant back.

And there was this redemption idea. And there is a lot of communication of the principle of redemption that we don't have time to go into. But suffice it to say that making a vow and paying a vow was an Old Testament concept that was a part of the law of Moses.

And it was a great Old Testament concept. Solomon says, be careful when you make a vow to the Lord. It was legitimate in those days to make a promise to God of a concrete nature.

He says, it would be better to not make that kind of promise than to make it and not keep it. What is the idea here? People were going to God and making rash promises because they basically wanted God to solve a problem. Lord, let us win this battle and I'll give you the first thing that comes out of my house.

Jephthah. Wanting to sort of influence God, get some leverage with God. And there is a legitimate vow.

It was a vow of appreciation. It's not the fact that you make a vow. It's the spirit in which you make a vow that counts.

You could say, I will express my thanksgiving to you God when you accomplish this thing by bringing an extra tenth from my crops or by dedicating my servant to serve the Levites down at the temple or something like that. Hannah, who was grateful for the fact that God vindicated her and gave her a son, she made a vow to God that she dedicated Samuel to the tabernacle. And when he was seven years old she sent him down there.

Well, she wasn't trying to put leverage on God, but she said, Lord, as an expression of my gratefulness and my thankfulness for you giving me this stewardship, I will take this son that you give me in answer to prayer and I will give him back to you. It's an entirely different spirit than someone saying, Lord, I'm going to give you this tenth and I'm expecting you to bless my business or make my field more fruitful. It's the attitude with which the vow was made and there's an application even for us today.

Why do we pray what we pray? Are we pursuing our agenda or God's? Hannah knew that there

was the need for a faithful communicator of God's Word. Eli and his sons weren't doing the job. Hannah said, Lord, if you give me a son I'll train him and I'll send him down there to be a faithful minister of worship and teaching and exhortation in the law of Moses for the people of Israel.

I will give him to you so that he can be forth telling your word. He can be a faithful leader for Israel and Samuel was. He was a great influence.

He launched the monarchy of Israel. He anointed King David. So, this is an entirely different spirit than someone that just says, well, Lord, you said if I tithe you'll open the windows of heaven so I want what I want.

Is this a vow that is going to further God's plan and God's purpose or is it a vow that's going to further our own? And this is essentially what Solomon is exhorting people about here when he says it would be better for you not to make a vow and to make it and not pay it. Do not let your speech, he says in verse 6, cause you to sin. This literally says do not let your mouth bring guilt upon your body, upon your flesh.

And then do not say in the presence of the angel, the messenger of God, the malach. Remember Malachi, the last book of the Bible? Malachi, the ending means my and malach means messenger, my messenger, malachi. It's not actually the author's name, it's his title.

He's God's messenger. And who is the messenger of God? Do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake. Well, this again is in the context of temple worship.

You've made a vow and then you say, oh, well I didn't, it was an error. I didn't really mean to make that promise. I know I told you that I would bring in, you know, this brand new bull and so forth, but I was in the heat of the moment.

I was distressed. I was upset and I didn't really know what I was saying. I can't bring you that bull.

I won't have any future for my herd. It says, don't tell the messenger, i.e. the priest, that, oh, my vow was an error. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the works of your hand? And this pertains to everything up above.

Don't be speaking and saying rash things, expressing your dreams, giving God the answer, and make God angry. God will destroy the work of your hands. You're not going to have anything to show for your efforts.

And then in verse 7, and this is a really strange verse. The commentaries go nuts when they get to verse 7 because there's no verb here. It literally says, in many dreams and in havelim, and in many words, and that's it.

It doesn't have a verb. And this is sort of an ellipsis. It just says, all of these things are associated.

Many dreams, many words, many vapors. It's just vapor. It's all the same thing.

Rather, fear God. You know you're on the right track if what you're doing is an expression of reverence for God, respect for God, love for God. How can we not run afoul of these? How can we not fall in the category of the fool? How do we know if what we're doing is foolish or wise? Well, it's all wrapped up in one phrase, fear God.

Is your prayer an expression of respect for God, reverence for God, humility in the presence of God? Are you guarding your steps when you pray? Or are you multiplying words and multiplying answers and missing the boat? So it's a powerful exhortation and it is just as applicable for us today as it was for the ancient Israelites. It's not enough to simply obey by going to the house of the Lord, by offering sacrifice as the Bible prescribed. It is how we walk.

It is how we approach. It is the spirit in which we bring our sacrifices, in which we approach God and pray and worship that God is looking at and measuring. Well, that's quite a bit to chew on.

We'll pause here and we'll resume at verse 8 next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we do thank you for the privilege that we have of representing ourselves before your throne.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest, whose work and whose sacrifice has made it possible for us to exercise the tremendous privilege of addressing you on our own behalf. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will give...