

# chasing the wind

## The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes

### Chapter 5

### Church-Goers and Wealthy Folks

#### PRIMERS

- Ever sung a hymn or praise song in worship and never thought of the words? Ever daydreamed in church or thought about the Vikings (or even the Packers) game? Ever been so stressed you never heard a word of a sermon?
- Is there really a downside to being “filthy rich?” If so, is it so down it’s dirty?

#### 1. WHAT’S GOING ON IN CHAPTER 5?

Solomon gives counsel on approaching God in worship. He then moves on to show the downside of being wealthy.

#### 2. NOTES ON CHAPTER 5

<sup>1</sup> Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

<sup>2</sup> Do not be quick with your mouth,  
do not be hasty in your heart  
to utter anything before God.

God is in heaven  
and you are on earth,  
so let your words be few.

<sup>3</sup> As a dream comes when there are many cares,  
so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

<sup>4</sup> When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. <sup>5</sup> It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. <sup>6</sup> Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, “My vow was a mistake.” Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? <sup>7</sup> Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

When going to worship....<sup>1</sup>

- Vs. 1: **Be on guard and listen.** This is the first of four commands for worshippers. The alternative to this is “the sacrifice of fools,” that is, a lot of words, a lot of noise, but little listening. See Hebrews 13:15 on the “sacrifice of praise. The command here is to be ready to listen, prepared to come under the power of God.
- Vss. 2-3: **Be still in spirit.** Try not to bring stress, daydreams, and so many empty words to your worship. Why? You’ll not get in touch with God of infinite perspective and counsel. Clear your mind of every distraction. See Psalm 46:10
- Vss. 4-5: **Keep your commitments before God.** In Old Testament days, vows were a part of worship and were taken very seriously. See Deut. 23:21-23. Songs in worship were often accompanied by vows (Ps. 50:14; 56:12; Jonah 2:9) as well as a thank offering. God holds us to the commitments we make. He expects us to keep them.
- Vss. 6: **Don’t think you can use words to weasel out of your commitments to God.**
- Vs. 7, “fear God”: *All of this is about taking God seriously.*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted and expanded from Charles Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Word, 1985), pp. 144-172.

<sup>8</sup> If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. <sup>9</sup> The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.

<sup>10</sup> Whoever loves money never has money enough;  
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.

<sup>11</sup> As goods increase,  
so do those who consume them.  
And what benefit are they to the owner  
except to feast his eyes on them?

<sup>12</sup> The sleep of a laborer is sweet,  
whether he eats little or much,  
but the abundance of a rich man  
permits him no sleep.

For those leaning toward materialism, consider these three downsides of being wealthy:

- Vss. 8-9: Wealthy people often have no heart for the poor and contribute to the oppression of the poor. See Amos 4:1-4 for a vivid illustration of this.
- Vs. 10: Wealthy people never seem to be satisfied. Their love of goods and money knows no bounds. Notice the word is “loves.” See Luke 12:13-21; 1 Tim 6:10; Hebrews 13:5.
- Vss. 11-12: Money gathers friends or at least a lot of people who want a piece of the action. Solomon saw it in his own life. See 1 Kings 10:4-8 and Proverbs 19:4-7. The sequence here is more money, more people. More people, more worries. More worries, less sleep. Solomon was not so detached that he couldn’t see it: poor people or everyday middle class people tend to sleep better than the rich.
- Summary: Chasing after money and things? Just a warning: you can expect to become an oppressor, never satisfied, and sleepless in your palace.

<sup>13</sup> I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:  
wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner,  
<sup>14</sup> or wealth lost through some misfortune,  
so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him.

<sup>15</sup> Naked a man comes from his mother's womb,  
and as he comes, so he departs.  
He takes nothing from his labor  
that he can carry in his hand.

<sup>16</sup> This too is a grievous evil:  
As a man comes, so he departs,  
and what does he gain,  
since he toils for the wind?

<sup>17</sup> All his days he eats in darkness,  
with great frustration, affliction and anger.

<sup>18</sup> Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. <sup>19</sup> Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. <sup>20</sup> He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

- Vss. 9-14: You can’t take your wealth with you. You don’t need suit pockets in a coffin or a U-Haul behind a hearse. See Proverbs 23:1-5 for a good parallel text from Solomon.
- Vss. 15-17: You can live high and still die hard – alone, sick, angry, and bitter.
- Vss. 18-20: Three great gifts of God are celebrated in these wonderful verses, to be claimed by even the wealthy: 1) the gift of enjoying life; 2) the gift of fulfilling work; and 3) the gift of contentment. For Christians passages like Matthew 6:33 and Philippians 4:13 come to mind.

## UNDER THE SUN TRUTHS

1. God wants to be taken seriously when we worship Him.
2. The downsides of loving money too much are oppression, constant dissatisfaction, and frustration.
3. God gives us – even the wealthy – the opportunity to enjoy our life and work and to be content.
4. The secret to receiving these gifts is an intentional decision to live in God’s kingdom, not our own.