

Ecclesiastes 4:4-5:7
For the week of May 7, 2023

Reflection

1. What were some of the takeaways, for you, from Sunday's sermon?

2. Were there questions, comments, concerns...?

The *Preacher* now turns to the case of a person who, having achieved material success, remains unhappy due to his or her social isolation. Its special contribution to the *Preacher's* overall argument is the demonstration that human success is measured not only in material goods, but also in the quality of people's social life.¹

Earth's 'vanity' has been recognized (1:2–2:23) but considered in the light of the life God gives (2:24–26) and the assurance of his sovereignty (3:1–15). Injustice (3:16–22) and various forms of isolation (4:1–16) have been faced. We stand in need of an altogether greater companionship. The *Preacher* earlier told of a God who gives a life of joy and pleasure. May he be approached? This question is now answered in terms of the house of God, obedience, sacrifice (v. 1), prayer (vv. 2f.), vows (v. 4). But there are dangers. If God is 'in heaven', the ruler (3:1–15) and judge (3:16–22), he cannot be approached casually. So, a proverbial unit is inserted dealing with our approach to God. The first note of exhortation in *Ecclesiastes* comes here, and assumes God may be approached, addressed in prayer, and will receive our vows.²

Observation (vs. 4-6)

3. What is the *Preacher* saying?

Interpretation

4. Why does the *Preacher* emphasize envy in toil?

¹ Knut Martin Heim, [*Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary: Commentary*](#), ed. David G. Firth, vol. 18, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2019), 80.

² Michael A. Eaton, [*Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 18, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 112.

5. How can toil “eat you alive”?

6. How much is too much?

Application

7. Are you one who works to live or lives to work? Why?

Observation (vs. 7-11)

8. What is the Preacher saying of being alone and being within relationships with others in these verses?

Interpretation

9. In verses 9 and 10, what is the Preacher’s view on cooperation? Why?

10. How do verses 10 and 11 speak to relationships?

11. Do these verses parallel Genesis 2:18? Why or why not?

Application

12. How are you at building and maintaining relationships? Why?

13. Do you need the blessing of companionship? Why?

Observation

14. What is the Preacher saying?

Interpretation

15. Does self-sufficiency create isolation? Why or why not?

16. Is self-sufficiency a form of pride? Why or why not?

Application

17. How are you at taking advice? Are you more of a “know-it-all” or willing to learn? Why?

Observation (5:1-7)

18. Now the Preacher reveals more of God than just “under the sun”. What is he saying?

Interpretation

19. What is the Preacher telling his audience about:

Fearing God –

Prayer –

Making a vow (see also Deuteronomy 23:21) –

Application

20. How is your relationship with God? Is it more of “under the sun” (me), or relationship with God (Him)? Why?