

# Ecclesiastes

## Lesson 4 (5:1-7:15)

### 1. Fear God in all circumstances (5:1-7).

- a. The Preacher offers important instructions for all who desire to approach God.
  - i. This must be in worship and obedience.
  - ii. There are no other options to be in relationship with Him.
- b. Walk prudently and guard how you walk before God or seek to approach Him.
- c. The highest level of reverence should be offered to God as Lord of all.
- d. As we approach God, it should be with the intent to hear from Him; approaching God with our own agenda or to make demands does not constitute walking prudently before Him.
- e. The Preacher regards those who fail to honor God with all appropriate reverence as fools who offer vain sacrifices that God will not receive.
- f. Failing to approach God correctly is considered evil, regardless of what the “worshiper” thinks he is doing.
- g. True worshipers must not be rash with their speech. Words spoken before God must be done in honor and fear of His holiness.
- h. Worshipers must be careful not to allow their hearts to utter anything hastily before God.
  - i. Reverence, not irreverence.
  - ii. Honor and respect, not informal or dishonoring.
  - iii. Well thought out, not letting the evil heart of flesh speak without prudence.
- i. Accept the reality of the differences between God and man.
  - i. God is in heaven (superior), but man is on the earth (inferior).
  - ii. Therefore, let the worshiper’s words be few.
  - iii. “For a dream comes through much activity” is perhaps a statement suggesting that dreams can be disconnected from reality and must not be taken as fact.
  - iv. The fool is revealed by speaking to God beyond what he should.
- j. Honor vows to God.
  - i. Do not delay in paying what was promised or in fulfilling a vow that was made.
  - ii. God has no pleasure in fools who make insincere vows or fail to keep them.
  - iii. Once a vow has been made, it must be fulfilled or paid.
  - iv. Therefore, it is better not to make any vows than to make a vow and then not pay it.
- k. Guard your speech and do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin. Claiming you spoke in error will not be accepted as an excuse by God.
- l. God is justifiably angry with those who make baseless excuses, and He may destroy the work of your hands (the reason for approaching God).
- m. Following dreams and speaking many words are vanity before God, who is not impressed by our arguments or pleas to have our will done instead of His.
- n. Man’s place is to hear from God and obey Him, not to lay dreams and requests before God as if He is there to serve as a mindless grantor of every request.
- o. Rather, we must fear God as the fundamental basis of our relationship with Him.

## **2. Earthly pursuits cannot offer satisfaction (5:8-6:6).**

- a. Systems of government and justice are often corrupted by perversion.
- b. These human systems cannot offer justice to the oppressed because they engage in the oppression of the poor and powerless.
- c. This corruption is intrinsic to the justice system at every level, where corrupt leaders are led by corrupt leaders all the way to the top.
- d. The productivity of the land is universal; both the poor man and the king are equally dependent on the land for their survival.
- e. Material gain is vanity.
  - i. He who loves silver (wealth) never has enough to satisfy.
  - ii. He who loves abundance never has enough to satisfy.
  - iii. When goods increase, the demand for goods also increases proportionally.
  - iv. Therefore, the owner of goods cannot be satisfied by all he sees with his eyes.
- f. The more things we have, the less we sleep.
  - i. The man who labors each day sleeps well at night with no cares for protecting things he does not have.
  - ii. The rich man who has abundance cannot rest for fear of losing what he has gained.
- g. The owner of riches keeps them to his own hurt. This is considered a severe evil because men rarely escape their desire for more wealth.
- h. Riches eventually perish through unexpected misfortune.
- i. All riches are fleeting.
  - i. A baby is born naked with nothing in his hand, which is the same condition he will be in when he dies.
  - ii. Naked we all came and naked we shall all return at the end of our days.
  - iii. No matter what he has accumulated, these things cannot be taken to the grave.
  - iv. Therefore, pursuing material things is also a severe evil that offers no satisfaction.
- j. Living in the fallen world.
  - i. Man eats in darkness as he has no control over the sun.
  - ii. Every man faces sorrow, sickness, and anger as an unavoidable part of life.
- k. The Preacher's observations of finding joy:
  - i. It is good to eat, drink, and enjoy the good life that laboring affords.
  - ii. Labor and toil should be enjoyed as a reward each day; delayed enjoyment is not advised.
  - iii. nevertheless, God has blessed some men by giving them the gift of riches and wealth. Those who are blessed should enjoy those blessings with thanksgiving.
  - iv. God keeps those he blesses busy in labor, but they should also live with joy.
- l. The Preacher's observations of evil under the sun:
  - i. God has given some men riches, wealth, and honor, but then does not allow them to enjoy or protect what they received.
  - ii. Instead, a foreigner may take from the rich man, which the Preacher considers evil since the rich man was denied the enjoyment of what he once had.
  - iii. A man may beget a hundred children (a blessing), but if his soul cannot be satisfied with what he has, then he would have been better off to die during his birth.

- iv. These examples of blessings come with vanity and depart in darkness (death) and are buried with even more darkness.
- v. There is no rest for the man who lives and tries to find earthly sources of satisfaction.
- vi. Even if the man lived to two thousand years, the vanity of life would not change. Such a man would still die and would still take none of his possessions with him.

### **3. The Preacher's summary and conclusion of finding pleasure in life (6:7-12).**

- a. The reason men labor is to fill their mouths and meet as the basic needs of life.
- b. However, even a man who has never missed a meal does not have a truly satisfied soul.
- c. All men are equal in their ultimate pursuit of true pleasure.
  - i. The wise man and the fool face the same destiny.
  - ii. The poor man and the rich man also face the same destiny.
  - iii. The poor man adapts and generally lives by meeting the same basic need as the rich man because both put food in their mouths.
  - iv. It is better to enjoy what you have (can see) than to have eyes always wandering with unfulfilled desires.
  - v. Attempting to fulfill every desire is vanity and grasping at the wind.
  - vi. Man cannot become anything other than a man, and he cannot successfully contend with God, who is mightier than all men.
- d. There are many things (pursuits of pleasure) that increase vanity, and man will not find satisfaction in any of these things.
- e. The Preacher, therefore, asks rhetorical questions about what man should do with this information.
  - i. Who knows what is good for man in life? [God does].
  - ii. Who can overcome the vanity of life, which passes like a shadow? [God can].
  - iii. Who can tell a man what will happen with his legacy after he dies? [God can].

### **4. The value of practical wisdom (part 1, 7:1-15).**

- a. Chapters 7-12 provide insights into wisdom rather than an evaluation of the vanity of life.
- b. The Preacher will still describe things that he considers vanity in this section, but generally without attempting to prove his thesis by example as he did in the first six chapters.
- c. Even though mortal life is vanity (chapters 1-6), the Preacher is willing to offer practical wisdom for men to live by.
- d. How to live by wisdom (part 1).
  - i. Seek to have a good name, for this is better and more valuable than any precious ointment.
  - ii. The day we die is better than the day we are born [if we fear God] because birth begins a life subjected to futility, whereas death ends it.
  - iii. It is better to go into a house of mourning and face the reality of death than to go into a house of feasting where it is ignored.
  - iv. Rightly contemplating our own mortality will guide us to the proper view of God and eternal life.
  - v. Sorrow is better than laughter.

1. Laughter must end; when it does, the emotional high created by laughter must come back down (unavoidable outcome).
  2. Conversely, sorrow opens an opportunity for healing to come to the heart and thus elevates emotions from their low point.
  3. The heart of the wise goes to the house of mourning, but the heart of the fool seeks the house of mirth (jubilation).
  4. This is poetic parallelism (stating the same idea in slightly different ways).
- vi. Rebuke is better than false praise.
1. Better to be rebuked by a wise man than to hear the song of fools.
  2. Danger lurks behind the laughter of fools.
  3. Seeking the approval of fools is vanity and should be avoided.
- vii. Living under oppression destroys a wise man's reasoning in the same way that a bribe debases a man's heart, causing it to abandon reason.
- viii. The end of a thing is better than its beginning because whatever purpose is finished.
- ix. It is better to be patient than proud.
- x. Do not be quick to be angry, for anger fills the heart of the fool.
- xi. Do not claim that the former days were better than the present, for this is vanity. Each day should be enjoyed for what it offers.
- xii. It is good for men to possess wisdom and to inherit it from those who were wise before them.
1. The wise man cannot use wisdom once he is dead, so it must be passed on.
  2. The one who lives can benefit by learning wisdom from his elders rather than having to discover it on his own.
- xiii. Wisdom is a good defense, just as money can pay for a good means of defending a home or a nation.
- xiv. The excellence of knowledge teaches that wisdom gives true purpose in life to those who understand it and use it.
- e. Consider God's handiwork through wisdom.
- i. Man cannot change what God has purposed and done – if God has made something crooked (life), then no man can make it straight (find purpose without Him).
  - ii. Men can have pleasure in their prosperity as a gift from God, but they must also be willing to accept any adversity that God may appoint for them to have.
  - iii. No man can know with certainty what may come tomorrow, and indeed not after he dies; therefore, man must trust God in everything and be grateful for His blessings.
  - iv. The Preacher has seen all things, and he knows both wisdom and folly.
  - v. Therefore, men should receive the wisdom he offers.