

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 20TH, 2019 // BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 5 examines 3 common places where humanity tries to find meaning- religion, politics, and money. He exposes them as "myths" and again points us to our only hope to find satisfaction.

THE MYTH OF RELIGION (ECCLESIASTES 5:1-7)

Solomon knew a bit about religion- he was responsible for the construction of the temple in Jerusalem and had no doubt watched worshipers come and go performing their religious duties.

- He had noticed that many of them were not at all sincere in their worship, and their religious activity wasn't reverent or honorable- it was hypocritical and simply a routine.

So he tells us, "guard your steps when you go to the house of God"- in other words, "watch yourself" or "think about what you're doing"!

- It's better to come to the "house of God" to listen, than to "offer sacrifice of fools" (vs. 1).
- God's presence doesn't dwell in a building anymore, but when we gather as believers His presence is amongst us and in our midst. We're here to listen to Him.

The "sacrifice of fools" could be understood as irreverent, faithless, religious activity that's done simply so we might get something from God or feel better about ourselves.

- It's this self-serving mindset that thinks that God exists to serve me and the main point of a worship gathering or a religious exercise is what I can get out of it.
- Solomon exposes the vanity of three religious activities

OFFERING OF SACRIFICES ("THE SACRIFICE OF FOOLS") (VS. 1)

- We don't offer up animal, grain, or drink sacrifices today as worshipers would have in the days of Solomon- Jesus has fulfilled all the sacrifices in His death on the cross.
- But we DO offer up spiritual sacrifices to God.
- Offerings without obedient faith become the "sacrifice of fools", because only a fool thinks they can deceive God! (1 Sam. 15:12-23)

CARELESS PRAYER (VS. 2-3)

- When we pray, Solomon says watch out for careless words & too many words (vs. 2).
- The Bible doesn't necessarily prohibit lengthy or even repetitive prayers- Solomon is pointing out that God knows our hearts and we can't manipulate God with our prayers.

MAKING VOWS TO THE LORD (VS. 4-7)

- God didn't require His people in the O.T. to make vows in order to be accepted by Him, but He did give them the opportunity to express their devotion through vows.
- The first is making a vow with no intention of keeping it (in other words, lying to God), and the 2nd is making the vow but delaying to keep it, hoping you can get out of it (vs. 4).
- It's better that you shouldn't vow than that you should vow and not keep it (vs. 5)!

Solomon shatters this "myth" that religion provides meaning with one final statement: "God is the one you must fear" (vs. 7).

- Religious activity void of a reverent, authentic, trusting relationship with God is a meaningless waste of time.
- Giving money, praying a certain way, or making vows to God is absolutely POINTLESS if there's not a heart behind it of humble, sincere, yielded obedience.

THE MYTH OF POLITICS (ECCLESIASTES 5:8-9)

As the King of Israel, Solomon was well acquainted with the political scene and process.

- Even before he'd been king, he'd most likely witnessed government officials and politicians violating the law by using their authority to help themselves and not to serve others.
- So he tells his readers, when you see corruption in politics, "do not be amazed at the matter"

The NIV rendering of vs. 8 is a good one- "one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still".

- Instead of the interests of the people getting a fair hearing, important matters of justice get lost in red tape and bureaucracy.
- Various officials up and down the chain of authority pocket the money that should be going to serve the interests of the people.

Vs. 9 is a difficult one to translate, but what it seems like he's saying is that in spite of the inevitable corruption, it's better to have an organized government ("a king") than anarchy.

- We need leadership, and it isn't wrong to be involved in the political process.
- But Solomon reminds us that the heart of mankind "under the sun" is dark and self-serving.

We're also not to naively place our trust and hope in politicians to save us or fix us.

- Even the best of them are still broken men with the propensity towards greed & corruption.
- So we're to pray for them, vote according to our Christian values, and refuse to compromise our faith by allowing a political party to determine our values.

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, your first allegiance is not to a flag, a government, a constitution, a party, or a politician- your first allegiance is the King and the Kingdom.

- Even the best nations on this earth will someday be completely gone and forgotten.
- If you idolize your nation or your political party, you will be angry, frustrated, & disappointed.

THE MYTH OF MONEY (ECCLESIASTES 5:10-17)

Solomon has already discussed the futility of wealth in 2:1-11, so he's repeating himself

- But in another way, he's zooming in on some of the popular myths that people believe about money to dismantle them and expose them as simply illusions.
- We all say we know money isn't the answer, but how we live often shows a differently.

MYTH #1- MONEY BRINGS SATISFACTION (VS. 10)

- The person who loves money can't be satisfied no matter how much they have.
- The myth is that once we reach a certain income or once we get a certain amount, we'll be satisfied- but that amount & income seems to always move.
- The human heart was made to be satisfied only by God, so without a relationship with God there's no satisfaction.

MYTH #2- MONEY SOLVES EVERY PROBLEM (VS. 11)

- There's no escaping the fact that we do need some money in order to live, but money itself is not a "cure-all" for every problem.
- In fact, an increase of wealth usually creates more problems that never existed before.
- Solomon mentions one- relatives & friends (or even the tax man) starts showing up and "eating" up wealth- and all we can do is sit back and watch.

MYTH #3- MONEY BRINGS PEACE OF MIND (VS. 12)

- Many of us believe that we would simply stop worrying about our lives and our finances if just had \$ _____ in the bank.
- Solomon says that those who are rich and have "full stomachs" actually worry MORE and can't sleep- probably because peace has nothing to do with external circumstances.
- A common laborer with nothing can sleep well with "little or much" if he has true peace

MYTH #4- MONEY PROVIDES SECURITY (VS. 13-17)

- Solomon gives us a parable of a rich man- at first he was miser who kept it all "to his own hurt", then he attempted an investment and lost everything.
- Holding onto it didn't provide security, and investing didn't either.
- The truth is, your money isn't 100% secure in bank or in the hands of investors.
- Not only that, someday you'll die and "shall take nothing for your toil" (vs. 15) with you.

So what happens when we believe these "myths" about money and think it's the aim in life and the answer to every problem?

- We "eat in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger" (vs. 17).
- We end up miserable, lonely, angry, and absolutely "sick" with worry, anxiety, and progressively increasing greed. Money is a necessary resource, but a terrible god.

WHAT IS GOOD AND FITTING (ECCLESIASTES 5:18-20)

Meaning isn't to be found in religion, in politics, or in money- these are simply myths that can't satisfy the human heart.

- So what does satisfy and bring fulfillment? What is "good and fitting" is "...to eat and drink and find enjoyment in our work...in the few days that God has given" (vs.18).
- A relationship with God allows us a proper perspective about life and its gifts.

When our hearts find their fulfillment and satisfaction in God- money and work are understood as gifts given to glorify Him and provide for our needs.

- Politics are no longer seen as the solution to the problems of our nation, but simply as the necessary means by which broken men through God's help provide leadership.
- How we view religion changes as well also.

Religious activity becomes about listening to and connecting with God- not performing and trying to get something from God.

- The gift that can be only attained from God is the enjoyment of the things of this life and the ability to accept our lot in life and rejoice in our work (vs. 19).
- Those who fear God aren't overly preoccupied with the transient things of life (vs. 20).
- Rather, they're occupied with "joy" in their heart.

So we can rejoice in the good times and bad, the times when we have a lot or a little, or even in the times when our political situation is peaceable or in crisis. We can take each day as it comes and use it to serve the Lord and enjoy it as a gift. Why? Because we're not primarily living for life "under the sun"- we're living for what's "beyond the sun", the King and the Kingdom.

Two Paths: 1. The Temporal ("under the sun") 2. The Eternal ("the Kingdom of Heaven")