

## A Vow Kept • Eccl. 5:1-7

### I. INTRODUCTION – Read Vs.

#### A. Ecclesiastes

1. We start a new book this week Ecclesiastes.
2. Written by Solomon toward the end of his life, it's a chronicle of his attempt to **figure out life**.
3. When he wrote it, he'd **finally** discovered the bottom line & meaning of life.
4. As he records his journey, he takes us with him.
  - a. We hear of his repeated frustrations; the dead ends & pointless endeavors.
  - b. But it wasn't **all** failure; He picked up some pearls of wisdom along the way.
  - c. Like breadcrumbs, they led him home to the truth. He shares some in our passage today.
5. [We'll do a more complete review of the background of Ecclesiastes Wednesday.]

#### B. Stick it to Us

1. Before we dive in, I need to mention that this message **is for Christians**.
2. This passage gets up in our face w/some hard stuff, just as it did to the people of Solomon's day.
3. So if you're **not** a Christian, sit back & enjoy as believers have the Word of God stick it to them.

### II. TEXT

#### A. V. 1

<sup>1</sup> Walk prudently [wisely] when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

1. The background of this is the Temple in Jerusalem.
  - a. A couple decades have passed since it was finished.
  - b. Solomon was the king who built it.
2. At the Temple's dedication, Solomon prayed, acknowledging God is too big to fit into something man-made.
  - a. The skies cannot contain him; **how much less** a building.
  - b. Yet for all of that, in His grace, God showed his acceptance of the Temple as a place to worship Him by sending His glory in the sight of the people to inhabit the inner sanctum, the Holy of holies.
3. So people came there, year after year, to worship God.
4. But now, years later, Solomon can see how the sincerity & intensity that marked the people's worship when the temple was new, has cooled.
5. Worship had become ho-hum; ritualistic & formulaic.
  - a. **God** was no less present than before, but the **people** were less present.
  - b. They were there **physically**, but not so much spiritually. // They were going thru the motions.
6. Solomon speaks here about the **attitude** of worship.
  - a. It's not only important we worship the **right** God, but that we worship the **right way**.
  - b. We can't just do whatever we want; worship anyway we please.
  - c. We have to listen to Him, give heed to Him & how He calls us to Himself.
  - d. That's why Solomon says we're to **draw near to hear**.
  - e. He coaches those coming to the Temple that as they approach they **check their attitude**.
  - f. Instead of bringing an agenda of all the stuff **they** wanted to do, the sacrifices **they** would make,
  - g. They should come **instead** with a desire to meet with God, waiting on Him to tell them what He wants.
7. Worship is about God, not us.
  - a. The **object** of worship is God's glory; not our entertainment.
  - b. Nor is worship an exercise in proving to God how religious we are.
8. The word "Worship" **means** to ascribe worth; to attribute value.
  - a. When we worship God we're saying He's the most important thing in life.
  - b. We love him **supremely**.
  - c. Worship is the act of devoting ourselves wholly to him.
  - d. It **begins** with a recognition of **how great** God is.
9. Worship is **knowing** who God is & **responding** to that knowledge in a way that brings Him glory.
10. That's why Solomon calls us to frame our worship in an **attitude of listening** to God.
11. What he observed as he looked out his palace window on the courtyard around the Temple were folk who

came to worship **with their own agenda & plan.**

- a. They brought their sacrifice to a priest over here. // They knelt in the court of prayer over there.
  - b. They gave alms in the beggars' corner here. // They sang with the musicians in another place.
  - c. Then they picked up a souvenir T-shirt at the Temple gift shop.
12. Their Temple checklist complete, they went home thinking they'd done their religious duty.
- a. They threw God His bone; now **He** was on the hook to bless them.
  - b. Solomon calls this formulaic religious ritualism a "**sacrifice of fools.**"
  - c. It's **evil** because it **ignores** God.
  - d. It turns Him into a genie beholden to us because we've rubbed the Magic Lamp of religious duty.
  - e. We make worship **about us** instead of God. It's for **our** glory rather than His.
13. The corrective to self-centered worship is to **toss** our religious checklists & approach God **reverently**; asking **Him** to set the agenda. // What does He want?
14. Worship must **begin** with God.
- a. All **true** worship is a **response** to His revelation of Himself.
  - b. If worship **begins** with us, it's not worship.
  - c. Again Worship is response. It's our **echo** of God back to Him.
  - d. Our saying "God is good," does not **make** Him good.
  - e. We say or sing "God is **good**" because He's **shown** His goodness.
    - 1) We say "God is **loving**" because He **demonstrates** His love.
    - 2) We say "God is **just**" because He's **revealed** His justice.
    - 3) We say "God is **holy**" because He's **made it known.**
    - 4) We praise "God is **glorious**" because He's **shown** His glory.
15. Solomon says, "Walk prudently when you go to the house of God."
- a. Other translations render it as "**Guard your steps.**" = Make your approach to God, **wisely.**
  - b. **Question:** When? When do we **begin** that?
  - c. If Levi planned on going to the Temple Thursday afternoon at 3, when should he **start** thinking about his attitude towards God? At noon, 11, 10:45?
  - d. If Miriam left her village for the 5-mile trip to Jerusalem, should she **start** walking wisely when she stepped out her door?
  - e. **If** Levi & Miriam **wait** till then to think about their attitude toward God, that means they've **not** been mindful of Him **before** that.
16. Solomon isn't saying we're to **compartmentalize** our lives like that.
- a. It's the opposite: He's saying **don't divide** your life up between the secular & sacred.
  - b. **All of life belongs to God.** He is as present with you at home & work as at the Temple.
  - c. Worship isn't something reserved for special times & places. // **It's for all of life.**
17. The Apostle Paul echoes this in 1 Tim. 2: 8 when he says -  
I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;
- a. Prayer isn't just for church nor worship for Sunday's.
  - b. Men's hands are to be kept holy Monday-Saturday, not just raised to God on Sunday mornings during the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> songs.
  - c. A man is to pray throughout the week-lifting up his voice to God in prayer & praise at home & in the car.
  - d. If he's profane & angry, cussing at his wife & kids, how can that same mouth utter sweet words of praise for half-hour on Sundays?
18. Paul tells Timothy what to say to **women** in vs. 9-10 -  
<sup>9</sup> in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, <sup>10</sup> but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.
- a. Ladies-do you have 2 wardrobes & mindsets about what you wear?
  - b. 1 for Sunday's & another for the rest of the week?
  - c. Is "modesty" the Sunday Go-to-meeting mode but "trashy" is the rule for the rest of the time?
19. Listen Christian—Worship isn't coming to church & being real with God for an hour & a half.
- a. It's the **entire week.**

- b. It's honoring God 24/7, guarding your steps throughout the day.
  - c. So when you go into a time of corporate worship with God's people, you're not being a hypocrite.
  - d. You're not a guy who cusses his wife out all week then comes to church & uses his mouth to praise the Lord.
  - e. You're not a woman who under-dresses all week because she loves the attention, then dresses in something more formal to come to church.
  - f. There shouldn't be a distinction between
    - 1) The words we use **outside** this building & the words we use **in** it – or –
    - 2) The clothes we wear **outside** & the clothes we wear **in**.
20. God isn't buying our clever, religious charade.
- a. We may fool each other if all we know is the **Sunday morning version** of each other.
  - b. But God's not fooled because He sees the Friday night version too.
21. In Isaiah 1:15 God speaks to the same fools Solomon refers to here; posers who went to the temple to perform empty rituals devoid of heart. God says to them -  
When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.
- a. The hands they lifted in prayer had been used the previous week to cheat, steal, & commit crime.
  - b. They washed them before coming to the temple but God saw the blood stains still.
22. In Matthew 15, **Jesus** said something similar to the religious leaders of His day –  
<sup>8</sup> 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. <sup>9</sup> And in vain they worship Me.
23. Vain worship! Loud, slick, well practiced, elegant, artful, appealing, lengthy, impressive Sounding. But in God's sight? Pointless!
24. Solomon says **worship is a 24/7 deal** – not just a little portion we carve out for God once a week.
25. We have to **repent of** & resist the idea that because we give God an hour on Sundays we can live as we want the rest of the week.
26. We also need to **enlarge our idea** of what worship is.
- a. Solomon urges the people of God to drawn near to **listen to Him**.
  - b. In our religious tradition, worship is almost exclusively identified with music & singing.
  - c. Singing **is** a part of worship, but worship isn't **limited** to music.
  - d. Worship is also Service, Giving, Waiting on God, Listening **attentively** to Him.
  - e. One of the **greatest ways** I can **show love** to my wife is to shut my cereal-port & **listen** to her;
    - 1) I mean **really** listen; listening not only to the words but to what those words reveal about her heart.
    - 2) When I'm listening attentively to her like that, she **knows** it's love.
27. Worship didn't end when the band played the last note this morning.
- a. **This** is worship, as we listen for what the Spirit is saying thru Scripture.
  - b. It's **WHAT** we hear & learn now that **informs** our singing, which is **response** to His revelation.
26. This is why we put such a heavy emphasis on **Bible teaching** here at Calvary.
- a. We live in an age when preaching God's Word has fallen on hard times.
  - b. Frankly, most churches have given up on it in favor of all kinds of **crowd-gathering programs**.
  - c. We're not interested in gathering a crowd. We aim at glorifying God. So we preach & teach His word.
  - d. We want you to know the Bible; to hear what God says.
  - e. Because we study **thru** the Bible, we end up dealing with passages like this.
  - f. Preaching Ecclesiastes is tough. What's our subject today – "**Idiots who go to church!**"
    - 1) That's not gonna' draw a crowd.
    - 2) I'm not getting any requests to share my Eccl 5 sermon at a pastor's conference.
    - 3) This isn't going to on my **greatest hits CD**.
    - 4) If I did a 5-week series "**Fireworks in Bed**" it'd be like Bam! Narrow the rows to get in more chairs.
    - 5) But a message on **Yappy Fools in Church** means some of you will probably skip next week.
    - 6) I'll get a few emails, "Pastor - I didn't like what you said."
      - a) Well, **I** didn't like what I said! **But was it true?**

b) Before you send me an email, consider if I've misrepresented God's Word or you just don't like what God is saying.

c) If it's God you have a beef with – send Him your email.

B. Vs. 2-3

<sup>2</sup> Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few. <sup>3</sup> For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice *is known* by *his* many words.

1. One of the frequent themes of Proverbs echoed here is the tendency of the foolish to be **yappy**.
  - a. They talk too much.
  - b. Excitement spins up their tongue to say things they shouldn't.
2. Solomon cautions against hasty words to God.
3. **How** we pray is a good indicator of how we understand God.
  - a. In Matt 6 Jesus warned His followers **not** to pray as the other religions do, **w/ endless repetition**.
  - b. Their gods are busy with other things & the only way to get their attention is by long prayers.
  - c. But our God is not like that. He's a loving, attentive Father who knows what we need better than we.
  - d. And His plan to meet that need goes far beyond what we can imagine.
  - e. So we don't need to spin a prayer wheel, nor countless hours on calloused knees, reciting a mantra over & over till we bug God into giving us what we want.
4. When my kids were little, fell & got a boo-boo, all they had to do was reach out for me to pick them up, take them to the sink, clean the scrape & put a bandage on it.
  - a. They didn't have to cry out repeatedly for my attention or help.
  - b. They didn't have to address me in some special language of request,
  - c. Yea, O great father of the Ralstons. I beseech thee now to come to my aid in this my hour of trial. Attend unto my cry O Dad, & commence the application of thine favor w/a Spiderman bandaide."
5. Is God less a Father to us than **we** to **our** kids? No!
6. Jesus taught us to pray, what? First words = "Our Father."
7. Another problem in hasty words is **attributing things to God** He hasn't said.
  - a. We probably all know someone who drops God's name regularly.
  - b. When talking about spiritual things, they preface 40% of it with, "God told me that . . ." "The other day the Spirit spoke that . . ." / "I just sensed God saying that . . ."
8. In v. 3 Solomon attributes many of our dreams to busy-ness, the **stress** we're under.
  - a. Not every dream is a message from God; it might be that chipotle burrito you ate at 10.
  - b. Not every urge you get is the Lord's prompting.
9. In light of God's warning about false prophets & how they're to be executed for speaking falsely about what He's said, it's a bad idea to assign every idea that pops into our head as from the Lord.
10. Many have come to me with "The Lord told me" to do this or that.
  - a. They want counsel; they want to know what I think and what they should do.
  - b. Here's the problem – If God has spoken, what can I say? I'm just a guy.
  - c. If God has spoken, my counsel means nothing!
  - d. "Dropping the God-bomb" pretty much ends the conversation.
  - e. Now, if someone says, "God told me to leave my husband & kids & move to Nashville with a guy named Elvis I met on Facebook" I can say w/o hesitation – "The God of the Bible would **never** say that."
  - f. But usually when people invoke God over something, saying "God told me," it's not that black & white.
11. I just want to urge caution because God says we're **not to take His name** in vain. Invoking Him as justification for our desires is far more a violation of that Commandment than profanity.
12. This caution against hasty words applies specially to **vows** we make to God. So Solomon says -

C. Vs. 4-7

<sup>4</sup> When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For *He has* no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed— <sup>5</sup> Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger *of God* [priest] that it *was* an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and

destroy the work of your hands? <sup>7</sup> For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there is* also vanity. But fear God.

1. Solomon says this because of what Moses said in Deuteronomy 23:21–23 –

<sup>21</sup> “When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. <sup>22</sup> But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. <sup>23</sup> That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

a. God **doesn't require** us to make vows, / But if we DO, we're bound to them.

3. Solomon repeats that & cautions against making rash vows; promises to do this or that because of the emotions of a moment.

4. He was there at the dedication of the Temple when the glory of God fell & everyone had an intensely close encounter of the God-kind.

a. He saw the massive, excited response; how fervent & passionate the worship was.

b. He heard the many vows to love & serve God alone. But as each year went by, fewer came to worship.

c. God was no less real, no less present in the Holy Place than on that day the glory came.

d. So – **Where** were the people & their vows?

5. My brothers & sisters – be careful of when & how you pledge yourself to the Lord.

a. I'm not saying “Don't” – I'm saying, consider **what** you're promising, because God holds you to it.

b. It's an intensely real & exciting time of worship & the HS is moving in a powerful way

1) Be careful what you vow.

2) Why not **wait** till the excitement of the moment has passed – THEN **think** about what you want to pledge to the Lord.

c. Or how about this; you're in trouble & need help, so you bring out the list of things you think will talk God into rescuing you.

1) Okay, I know this is a little risky, but it's something MANY of you have done, so I'm going to just throw it out –

2) You're not married, but you or your girlfriend is late, & you get desperate – so you pray:

a) God, I know I messed up. I'm so sorry. If you'll get me out of this jam, I promise I'll memorize Leviticus.

b) I'll give you 11%. I know you only ask for 10, but I'm going to go crazy & give 11.

c) And I promise, I will never touch him/ her every again. I'm celibate from now on!

d) I'll be a missionary. I'll go to Africa & catch some funky fungus You can heal me from & I'll be this amazing testimony of Your power.

e) I'll help in the Nursery, or even better, I'll in the Junior High.

3) Then good news You're/She's not pregnant, & it's “Phew, that was close.”

What about those promises? //

“Well, God kept His end of the deal. That's all I really cared about.”

d. “God, please give me a wife. I'm getting older & odder.

1) “The hair on my head is getting thinner but growing in places I didn't know **where** places.”

2) Please give me a wife & I will love her, serve her, treat her like a princess.”

3) “Okay, here's a wife.”

4) A month later, you're **yelling** at her. // You treat her more as a maid than a princess.

5) But wait – **you promised God!** You stood in front of a group of people & vowed!

6) You took a shower, wore deodorant, & got all gussied up in a set of fancy duds, then stood before a minister, God's stand in, & you promised to love that woman in sickness & health, in good times & bad.

7) You **made a vow!** And there was no “If” in it.

6. Solomon's point is that it's not wise to get carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment & make vows we have no intention of keeping.

7. Excitement, enthusiasm, passionate emotion is wonderful – but it's foolish to make **major decisions** while in their grip.

8. Don't shun making a vow to the Lord, but make it **soberly**.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. A Vow Kept

1. We're to keep our vows to God, because He keeps His to us.
2. Jesus made a new covenant with us at the Cross. He sealed it with His blood.
3. It was costly; He paid a price far beyond what we will ever know.
4. But He kept it because He loves us & has pledged Himself to us.
5. Our God **keeps His vow** to us. // He's promised to never leave nor forsake us.
6. The best worship we can give to God is to draw near to Him, to **listen** to Him.
7. Then **do** what He bids -& keep our promise to love & serve Him,
8. Not just within these walls, but everywhere we are.