

Practical Warnings Under the Sun – *Eccles 5:1-20*

Introduction – A cursory read of Ecclesiastes can trick you. You might think this is a depressing book; but it is actually quite the opposite. This is a book of profound and fierce joy for all times, for all circumstances, and for all persons who find themselves in fragile and seemingly futile lives. This joy cannot be obtained, earned, or controlled on our terms. Rather, this is a joy which comes simply as a gift. If one has it, it is the gift of God; and it is good.

First Section (chapters 1-2) – Having seen the inscrutable repetition of everything under the sun, and Solomon having witnessed to pursuing every pleasure possible, we saw that it all is grasping for the wind, a mist, a vapor. There is nothing in man that allows him to find good and enjoyment in life; but God gives it.

Second Section (chapters 3-5) – God is absolutely (and beyond our reasoning) sovereign over every detail of every created thing under the sun. He is the definition of good and therefore every bit of His sovereign plan is beautiful and good in its time; but we cannot find that good ourselves. This raises several objections, all of which find their answer in the fact that there is nothing better than to rejoice in one's work and life. Finally, Solomon leads us through several practical admonitions arriving at a more fully developed conclusion.

Four Admonitions – Chapter five is first of all a collection of four seemingly unrelated admonitions. Upon further consideration, the warnings seem to be quite similar. Little man, remember who you are and who God is. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and do not think too highly of yourself, your words, or your situation.

Admonition #1: Rash Prayers (vv1-3) – While the worship of God's people is central to everything else in life, we are not the center of it all. It's not supposed to be all about us. Guard yourself. Don't talk too much. Don't pray too much. "*A fool's voice is known by his many words,*" (v3b) and it doesn't say, "*...unless of course he or she is praying.*" This flies in the face of the "prayer-warrior" idea so popular today. We are called to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) and to be devoted to prayer (Col 4:2), but we must balance this with the sober instructions of our Lord (Matt 6:5ff) where Jesus gave us a very short prayer to pray and to use as a model for our prayers. Prayer is not supposed to be primarily a time of free-association with the King of kings. Compose your thoughts; think about Whom you are addressing. Avoid media-hyped prayer rallies and events to showboat our spiritualism. Avoid laziness on both sides of prayer: never praying and constant, spontaneous praying. Avoid the attitude that our attendance in worship or our lengthy prayers somehow impress God.

Admonition #2: Rash Promises (vv4-7) – The "whoop-it-up" revivalism, characteristic of a great deal of America's religion, leads to much hand-raising, card-signing, aisle-walking, pledge-giving, and vow-making. But God is not impressed with our thoughtless vows. Who keeps their marriage vows, their membership vows, or their financial promises anymore? Swearing to God, or on a stack of Bibles is usually a sign that no one should trust your word at all (Matt 5:37).

Admonition #3: Do Not Marvel (vv8-9) – There was no "Golden Age" and there is no "Golden Place." Wherever we look, there has always been the poor and weak and they have been abused and exploited. Don't be naïve to think you live in a peculiar time or in a peculiar place, and don't think peace will fall upon the world if we just think happy thoughts. But there is always a tyrant above a lower tyrant. And even the king depends on the common grace of rain, sun, and this autumn's harvest.

Admonition #4: Do Not Covet (vv10-17) – Of course, the answer is not to pursue stuff as an ultimate end either, for it becomes an idol and a tyrant as well. When money becomes your god, it will never satisfy, even if one gets a lot of it (v10). The increase only brings an increase in headaches (v11). Sleep is much sweeter for the one who may have less but who doesn't have to worry about what the Dow does tomorrow (v12). Most rich people do live as though they can take it with them and this is a severe evil (vv13-15). They labor for the wind and die in darkness, sorrow, and anger (vv16-17).

The Goodness of it All Which God Gives (vv18-20) – Here it is. God is in control of everything, even if we can't see it. God is good in all His activities, even though we often cannot make sense of it. We cannot find ultimate satisfaction, meaning, purpose, answers, or joy in and through our own pursuits or attempts to control, even though we are commanded to work hard, take dominion, obey and trust God. **But God gives....**

God not only gives the work and the good that comes from it and often in spite of it, most importantly, He has "*given him power to eat of it....this is the gift of God*" (v19). In His grace, God gives us things to do which keep us busy. And He keeps us busy giving us enjoyment of it all. If you enjoy your work, it is the gift of God. If you enjoy your things, behold the gift of God. If you can take life as it comes, this is nothing less than the gracious gift of God. Take it. Embrace it. Enjoy it. He is freeing you from the trap of finding meaning "*in the mist*" where you cannot find it.