

January 29, 2017

“Guard Your Steps”

Focal Passage: Ecclesiastes 5:1-20 (NASB)

Cross References: 1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew 6:24; 16:19-21; 22:20-21; Acts 4:18-20; Romans 13:1-6; 1 Timothy 6:10; 1 Peter 2:13-14

Lesson Idea: We need to guard our attitudes and actions in worship and center our lives on revering God and not chasing riches.

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Jan 22 Exodus 13-15	Jan 23 Exodus 16-18
Jan 24 Exodus 19-21	Jan 25 Exodus 22-24
Jan 26 Exodus 25-27	Jan 27 Exodus 28-29
Jan 28 Exodus 30-32	Jan 29 Exodus 33-35

Ecclesiastes 5:1-20

1 Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. 2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. 3 For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

8 If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them. 9 After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity. 11 When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? 12 The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

13 There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. 14 When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him. 15 As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he

can carry in his hand. 16 This also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? 17 Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

18 Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. 19 Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. 20 For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

DISCUSSION:

- v 1. What does it mean to “guard your steps” as you go to worship? Why should we “draw near to listen?” What would be consider a “sacrifice of fools?”
- v 2. How do people become “hasty in word or impulsive in thought” when in God’s presence? Why should we “let our words be few?”

NOTE: from Guzik:

“Fruitful and acceptable worship begins before it begins.” (Maclaren)

Draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools: The sacrifice of fools is the hasty speech mentioned in the next lines. Solomon counsels us the come to the house of God to hear more than to speak without thinking.

To hear: “Has the double force in Hebrew which it sometimes has in English: to pay attention and to obey. So this saying is close to the famous words of Samuel, ‘to obey (literally to listen) is better than sacrifice’ (1 Samuel 15:22).” (Kidner)

“When we come before God, our minds are full of our own business rather than with the worship of God. When we talk too much, we usually talk like fools. This can be especially bad in the house of God.” (Wright)

The priests of Baal prayed hard and long on Mount Carmel; Elijah prayed short and sweet, and full of faith to the living God. God heard and beautifully answered Elijah’s prayer (1 Kings 18:1-46).

J. Edwin Orr used to advise brief, earnest prayers, especially in prayer meetings. He said that when one prays in a meeting, for his first three minutes everyone prays *with* him. Should he continue a second three minutes, everyone prays *for* him. Should he continue for a third three minutes, the others start to pray *against* him. :-)

- v 3. How does he compare the voice of a fool with the accomplishment of a dream? How are they the same, and how are they different?

- v 4. What kind of vows do people make to God? Why should you keep the promises that you make to God?
- v 5. Does this verse mean that we should never make any promises to God? why or why not?
- Do verses 4-5 have anything to do with our financial commitments to the Lord through our tithes and offerings? why or why not?

NOTE: from Guzik:

A commonly overlooked and unappreciated sin among God's people is the sin of broken vows - promising things to God and failing to live up to the vow. Those who honor God:

- Will not be quick to make vows to God.
- Will be serious about fulfilling vows made.
- Will regard broken vows as sins to confessed and to be repented of.

- v 6. How does our speech often cause us to sin? Who does he mean by the "messenger of God" in this verse? Why should we keep our commitments that we verbalize to each other? How and why might God "destroy the works of your hands?"
- v 7. What else did Solomon find about man's dreams and words? Why would fearing God change this?
- v 8-9. What do these verses say happens within the realm of earthly governments? How have you seen these things in today's world? How should we respond to our governmental authorities? (see Matthew 22:20-21; Acts 4:18-20; Romans 13:1-6; 1 Peter 2:13-14)

NOTE: Here is how the New Living Translation renders these verses:

8 Don't be surprised if you see a poor person being oppressed by the powerful and if justice is being miscarried throughout the land. For every official is under orders from higher up, and matters of justice get lost in red tape and bureaucracy. 9 Even the king milks the land for his own profit! (New Living Translation)

NOTE: from Guzik:

For high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them: Solomon was especially aware of how bureaucracies can bring oppression.

Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field: Even with a complex (and possibly corrupt) bureaucracy, everyone depends on what comes

from the farmer's field – even the king. The Preacher seemed to delight in these ironies of life.

- v 10-11. Why are those who love money never satisfied with how much money they have or make? What also happens when someone's business increases? Why can success become a burden?

NOTE: from Guzik:

Of all people, Solomon knew that the gathering of riches did not satisfy. He knew, this also is vanity.

"If anything is worse than the addiction money brings, it is the emptiness it leaves. Man, with eternity in his heart, needs better nourishment than this." (Kidner)

When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners: Solomon knew that as one's net worth increased, so did one's expenses – and the expectation of others.

- v 12. Why is the sleep of the working person "pleasant?" Why does the rich man's "full stomach" prevent him from sleeping? How should we approach prosperity?
- v 13-14. What did Solomon see as a "grievous evil" and why? How do these verses speak more about priorities and what you treasure than on riches and investments? (see Matthew 6:24; 16:19-21; 1 Timothy 6:10)
- v 15-17. What is the main point of these verses? This presents a pretty pessimistic view of life. Should we feel this way? why or why not? (see John 10:10)
- v 18-20. What did Solomon see as worthwhile?

NOTE: from Guzik:

It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun: We sense that Solomon – still very much with the premise of under the sun – simply hoped to make the best of a bad situation.

As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth . . . this is the gift of God: Though the Preacher knew that riches did not bring true meaning to life, he was no fool. He understood that it was better to have wealth than to not have it, and under the sun, one should enjoy both wealth and the capacity to enjoy it as the gift of God.

APPLICATION:

- ✓ How are you keeping your promises to God?
- ✓ How are you staying "occupied with the gladness of your heart?"

Lesson by Bro Stan