

Refuge City Church — February 26, 2023 Ecclesiastes — “Watch Your Step!” (Chapter 5)

Introduction

- **LAST WEEK:** Solomon went on a ‘walkabout’, witnessing various aspects of ‘life under the sun’. [injustice, envy, loneliness, and power/prestige]
- **TODAY:** He carries on, now stepping into the temple, witnessing various aspects of spiritual and material wealth & poverty.

In an article in the Wall Street Journal, columnist Elizabeth Bernstein has written about the benefits of prayer. The onset of the Coronavirus pandemic has increased worldwide interest in prayer. Google searches for prayer has skyrocketed. She interviewed numerous people who have turned to prayer to handle the anxiety and fear.

Some researchers say their studies on prayer show it can calm your nervous system, shutting down your fight or flight response. It can make you less reactive to negative emotions and less angry.

Other research has shown that the most effective prayer results comes from those who view God in a positive light and themselves as a co-laborer with God.

- **1 Corinthians 3:9**, “For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.”

“Watch Your Step!” [Verses 1a]

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.”

- Watch your step! Be careful how you approach the house of God.
 - **REMEMBER:** God is not fixed to a church building.
 - **Joshua 1:9**, “I’m with you wherever you go.”
 - **Matthew 18:20**, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there.”
 - **Matthew 28:20**, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
 - We’re talking about the very presence of God!
 - In our “Light of the World” series, we talked about God dwelling in unapproachable light, yet He welcomes us to seek His face!
 - **Psalms 105:4**, “Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!”
 - The sacrifice and blood of Jesus tore the veil of separation and allows us to enter into the very presence of God.
 - **Hebrews 4:16**, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
- **REMEMBER:** The ground you stand on is Holy ground. [Moses and the burning bush; Exodus 3:5]
 - We are Ambassadors for Christ [2 Corinthians 5:20]. Our ‘embassy’ [sovereign territory] is wherever we stand!
 - **1 Corinthians 6:17, 19**, “But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him... Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,”
 - **1 Peter 1:15**, “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”

- How many times are we encouraged to consider our steps??
 - “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,” **[Ephesians 4:1]**
 - “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:” **[Colossians 1:10]**
 - “whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way he walked.” **[1 John 2:6]**
 - **1 Thessalonians 2:12**, “we exhorted [implored] each one of you and encouraged [compassion/comfort] you and charged [insisted] you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”
- We are representatives of the Lord God. So guard your steps.
 - How are you representing Jesus to the world around you?

“Watch Your Mouth!” [Verses 1b-3]

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to *listen* is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes with much business, and a fool’s voice with many words.”

- We don’t walk into God’s presence as if we have something to offer.
- “*Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks*” **[Matthew 12:34]**, and when our hearts are “*deceitful above all else*” **[Jeremiah 17:9]**, we need to learn to be quiet in the presence of God and listen.
 - **Psalm 46:10**, “Be still, and know that I am God...”
 - **Psalm 19:14**, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”
- If out of the abundance of our heart, the mouth speaks, then we ought to “meditate” **[melody, song, worship]** on Him and His glory... and from that position, we can offer words of praise.
- **Verses 4-7**, “When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.”
- Can we please stop trying to rob God of what He wants us to understand about Himself so that we can get our hands on the things we *think* we need!
 - God has kept every single promise He has made to us.
 - I think it important that we keep our promises to Him!
 - *Common prayer*: “If you will just do this for me, or give me that, or answer this prayer, then I will...”
 - God is holy and worthy of our praise. Therefore if you make a promise to the Lord, follow through!
 - We just sang this morning...
 - “You alone are my heart’s desire.” *Is He?*
 - “I long to worship you.” *Do you?*
 - “You alone are my strength and shield.” *Is He?*
 - “I want you more than gold or silver.” *Do you?*

- “I surrender all.” *Have you?*
- There’s a saying that goes, “Say what you mean. Mean what you say.”
 - Be true to your words. Hold fast to the promises of God. Be disciplined and obedient to what you offer Him.
 - **James 5:12**, “But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.”
- When do we typically offer our words to God? In prayer.
 - **Luke 18:10-14**, “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.”
 - Far too many clamp up by claiming they don’t know how to pray, or are embarrassed by their fragmented statements of need to God.
 - **Romans 8:26**, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”
 - Jesus taught us how to pray!
 - **Luke 11:2-4**, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”
 - In this model prayer, the words are few. Yet, there is a very specific order.
 1. His name is holy, sanctified. Honor the Lord by praising His name!
 - **QUOTE:** “The motivation of prayer: God is worthy to be sought. So seek His face before you seek His hand.” [Daniel Henderson]
 2. Make your request, but do so from a place of knowing who God is, and what He really desires for our lives.
 - What are you requesting? Why are you requesting? For whose glory and honor are you requesting?
 - He asks us to ask. Never be afraid to ask. But do so *after* you’ve sought His face.
 - “Give us what we need this day. Forgive our sins, so that we may walk on the holy ground you’ve laid before us, keeping our eyes fixed upon you. In so doing, we will not fall into the temptations this world will set before us.”
- With all this in mind...the rest of the chapter should make sense in how we approach our dealings with life, money, and others.
 - **[8-9]** “If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and

there are yet higher ones over them. But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.”

- We get extremely concerned by the way in which those in authority lead.
- **REMEMBER:** God has placed them in that position for a purpose beyond what we may understand.
- **Romans 13:1**, “For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”
- **[10]** “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”
 - You can not serve a holy God, and bow down to the idols of materialism.
- **[11-12]** “When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.”
 - The more you consume your life with the accumulation of wealth and material goods, the more anxiety and stress will enter your life.
 - You’ll be more concerned about how to keep what you got, and therefore consume your life with how to increase your goods.
 - Sleep well knowing that a faithful God promises to take care of all you need.
 - **Matthew 6:24-25**, “You cannot serve God and money.. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”
- **[13-17]** “There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.”
 - Have you ever seen a hearse towing a U-Haul??
 - You might be saving for retirement, which is important in this day and age.
 - But are you saving to enjoy your life? Or saving for the glory of God?
 - Are you investing to sip umbrella drinks on the beach, or investing in the Kingdom of God?

Conclusion

- **[18-20]** “Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.”
- **QUOTE:** “If we focus more on the gifts than on the Giver, we are guilty of idolatry. If we accept His gifts, but complain about them, we are guilty of ingratitude. If we hoard His gifts and will not share them with others, we are guilty of indulgence. But if we yield to His will and use what He gives us for His glory, then we can enjoy life and be satisfied.” [Warren Wiersbe]