



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Fear None But God

February 14, 2021

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Clint Pressley

*5 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.*

*<sup>4</sup> When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. <sup>5</sup> It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> 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? <sup>7</sup> For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.*

*(Pastor prays)*

I can think of no better text to be dropped in the middle of at this time in history. A year is a long time to not be functioning at 100% especially for a church. But there does seem to be some good news on the horizon as COVID-19 numbers decrease and restrictions loosen. So now seems to be a good time to prepare our minds and hearts and lives for what it looks like to worship together corporately on the Lord's day. And this passage is a really good introduction to corporate worship. Humans are remarkably adaptable and mostly resilient as evidenced by what so many of you have been through and are even in right now. And a lot of us have adapted to not being with the church because you had to. And I do believe there is some danger in getting used to an unhealthy absence. And today I'd like to use this passage to get you thinking about how good and vital and necessary it is to be with the church. Now,

Ecclesiastes is a tough book! Up to this point, in many ways it has felt like a cruel and hopeless world. It would be very easy to understandably ask, where has God been? In my heart? In my struggle? In my frustration? In my pain? You go through chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 and you ask, where has God been? And then the floodgates open in chapter 5 as the preacher refers to God six times in seven verses which is remarkable for the book of Ecclesiastes as the preacher brings us to face to face with the transcendence of God; the goodness of God. And he calls us as his children to worship! Now for the next few minutes together, I want to use this passage to convince you of the glory of God and the need to worship him because ...

### **Our God is Good and Worthy of Worship**

I'd like to offer five admonitions based on this passage.

#### **Guard your life**

We get that right out of verse 1, Guard your steps when you go to the house of God! Here Solomon probably has in mind worshipping at the temple complex that he built and the idea of worship being so much more than just physically showing up. Even the phrase, guard your steps, is akin to us telling someone to watch your step, be careful how you live your life. This goes beyond the legalism of right things and well into the attitude of the heart. Here is prudence, reverence, respect and caution. And I think this has direct application for the New Testament church. Although we no longer go to a temple to worship since the body is God's temple, God's people still gather. And that which holds us together is the lamb that was slain. Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection secured salvation for any sinner that repents and believes. And now, because of Christ, we don't need a priest. He is our priest that has gained access to God for us. We come to God the father through Jesus the son and Jesus has established his church, that's you and I, gathered in assembly. We set aside Sunday, the Lord's day, as a sacred time when we collectively come to say, by the blood of Jesus, our God has saved us and is worthy of our lives. We aren't just dropping in on a neighbor or stopping by for a friendly chat, we are going to meet with our redeemed people and celebrate how God has stooped down and, in Jesus, meets with us. And this admonition here is to guard how we live. Not as a hypocrite, functioning atheist, lazy Christian, abusive person, hateful, unforgiving, bitter, and unreconciled, but thoughtful about what you are actually doing here on a Sunday. It's actually thinking about your singing, preparation, your attitude, your timing. It's thinking

about your phone. You wouldn't check Twitter or play a game on your phone while you were talking to your boss. Why would that be what you do as you sit in His holy presence on the day he raised Jesus from the dead? Even beyond that, for some of you there are significant loose ends of sin that need to be dealt with even today so that your worship is acceptable to God. I can't help but think how Ravi Zacharias and the years of abuse he inflicted on so many woman, and yet could go and teach these truths. Now your sin may not be like his but the principle is the same. Let me just ask some questions. What sin do you need to repent of? What relationship needs to be restored? What questionable activity do you need to stop? Worshipping God is serious business. Our God is good and worthy of our worship. Guard your life.

### **Learn to listen**

Look at the second half of verse 1. *5 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.* To listen is better than the sacrifice of fools. Listen. That means to hear from God and the only way we hear from God is through his word. That's how he speaks. That's why our service is saturated with the Bible. Our church has a Bible reading plan and other tools to help with this. It's why we stand to read it and then preach it because this book gives us the whole story of the gospel.

This book tells us who God is, that he is holy. It tells us who we are, that we are sinners in need of a savior. The bible tells us who Jesus is and what he did; dying on the cross in the place of sinners. It tells how God raised him from the dead. This book tells us that without faith, it's impossible to please God and without believing in Jesus, it's impossible to be God's child.

But the good thing is that this book gives us hope, clarity, and strength. It makes us resolute. And look at the alternative to word-based worship. Let's read verse 1 again. *5 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.* The sacrifice of fools that don't even know they are doing evil. These are the people that have gotten used to playing games with God and have done it so long that they don't know how to do anything else. The sacrifice of fools in

verse 1 is the talking, actions, entertaining, and experiencing without listening. Listening takes work. What is God saying to me in his word? In light of that, what needs to happen? Right worship is informed worship. It is informed of who God is, who I am, and what I need. The Bible teaches that our God is good and worthy of our worship. Guard your life. Learn to listen.

### **Pray from the heart**

Let's look at verses 2 and 3. <sup>2</sup> *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.* <sup>3</sup> *For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.* Verse 2 is a command and verse 3 is an illustration. Here the preacher gives us two negative commands that speak to prayer. Do not be rash with your mouth. Do not be hasty. And then the reasons for these two directions is that God is in heaven and you are on earth. There is a vast Gulf between God and man that we can never forget. Here is the picture of a person praying deliberately and thoughtfully, thinking about who it is we are talking to. That we are in front of a holy God. A God that should've sent us all to hell but because of grace, because of the cross of Jesus he receives us and welcomes our request. We pray from the heart, we pray by the spirit, we pray informed by the Bible, we pray like Jesus taught us that we need to think it through. Pray the Bible. Structure it on the Lord's prayer. Pray a Psalm. Write it out. Remember that the only way that your prayer goes into the ear of God is because of Jesus. Our God is good and worthy of worship. Guard your life. Learn to listen. Pray from the heart.

### **Do what you say**

Let's read verses 4 through 6. <sup>4</sup> *When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow.* <sup>5</sup> *It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.* <sup>6</sup> *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?* Here the preacher brings up vows, a free act of worship that involves a commitment and a follow through. One of the most famous vows is from Hannah when she said in 1 Samuel 1, if you will give me a child, I will dedicate him to God, and she did. All of us here make some kind of commitment that involves follow through. There are marriage vows, oaths of office, swearing in ceremonies, promise to a friend and commitment to a church and to the Lord of the church. Jesus is Lord. A vow is a baptism. A vow is a church covenant. It is

joining the church. A vow, it's one of the greatest energizing effects to your worship of God and the struggle is doing what you say to the glory of God. And when you break a vow, you fall on the mercy of God found at the cross of Christ. Let us never forget that the only one that never broke a vow is Jesus, so we run to him and his cross and find our healing there. We find our basis and right of worship at the cross of Jesus. Guard your life. Learn to listen. Pray from your heart. Do what you say.

## **Fear God**

Here is the primary punch of the entire passage. And New Testament believers often wonder, should we be afraid of God? I hear words like reverence and awe and respect and I agree but I would also suggest that in today's church we are not in danger of fearing him too much. The writer of Hebrews tells us it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He also says our God is a consuming fire. People dropped dead in Acts because they were deceptive in worship. People were dying in Corinth because they were flippant with the Lord supper. Jesus himself said in Luke 12:4-5, <sup>4</sup> *"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. <sup>5</sup> But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!* How do we fear God? We recognize God as God and we recognize our wretched condition. That's the gospel. We respond to his grace at the cross with conviction and the Holy Spirit. We receive his love in Jesus. We trust his holy name. We wait for his perfect will and rejoice in his mercy. We hope in his steadfast affection and worship him. Our God is good and worthy of our worship and it finds its heart at the cross. Let me close with a few questions. What is hindering your worship? What problem do you need to trust God with? What's sin do you need to repent up? What vow have you broken? Who do you need to forgive?

*(Pastor prays)*