

11.2.24 pm

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Date: 11 February 2024

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening, a warm welcome to the service this evening. We're going to begin this time of worship. We'll sing from Psalm 46 and the last two verses, the last two stanzas in the psalm we sing in Gaelic.

Be still and know that I am God. Among the heathen I will be exalted. I and earth will be exalted high. Our God who is the Lord of hosts is still upon our side. The God of Jacob, our refuge forever will abide.

These two verses to God's praise. We sing in Gaelic. Remain seated to sing and afterwards Don McSween will lead us in prayer. In Gaelic, please. NINGNING!

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SAMNING

[illegible]

[14 : 47] I need thee every hour, most gracious God. I need thee every hour, most gracious God.
No tender voice like thine can peace afford. I need thee, oh, I need thee.
Every hour I need thee. Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.
I need thee every hour, stay thou near by. Temptations lose their power when thou art
nigh.
I need thee, oh, I need thee. Every hour I need thee. Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I
come to thee.

- [16 : 27] I need thee every hour, enjoy your prayer. Come, drink me now, my Savior, I come to thee.
- For life is vain. I need thee, oh, I need thee. Every hour I need thee.
- Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee. I need thee.
- I need thee every hour, teach me thy will. And thy rich promise in me. And thy rich promise in me fulfill.
- I need thee, oh, I need thee. Oh, I need thee every hour, my Savior, I come to thee. I need thee every hour, most holy one.
- [17 : 38] Oh, give me thy will. Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee. I need thee every hour, my Savior, I come to thee. I need thee every hour, most holy one.
- I need thee every hour, most holy one. Oh, give me thine indeed, thou blessed Son.
- I need thee, oh, I need thee every hour, my Savior, I come to thee.
- If you turn now, please, in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 5. Ecclesiastes chapter 5.
- And we'll read the whole of this chapter. This is God's Word. Guard your steps when you draw, when you go to the house of God.
- [19 : 01] 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 busyness, or business, and a fool's voice with many words.
- 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 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. 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.
- [20 : 12] But this is gain for a land in every way, a king committed to cultivated fields. He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.
- This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase to eat them. And what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a labourer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.
- There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun. Riches were kept by their owner to his heart, 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 and much vexation and sickness and anger.
- [21 : 24] 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 gives 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 remember, he will not much remember the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

Amen, and may God bless that reading of his word to us. We're going to sing again to God's praise, this time from Mission Praise 50, which is a prayer as we come back to God's word that we would be still and know the presence of God here with us.

Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

Come bow before him now with reverence and fear. In him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground.

[23 : 10] Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

He burns with holy fire, with splendor he is bright.

How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light.

Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

[24 : 09] Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace. NINGNINGNING Let's pray as we turn back to the passage that we read.

Holy God, we thank you for the words that we have been saying that remind us that you are here in this place with us. We thank you that that's the truth, that where two or three meet together in the name of Jesus, you will be amongst us, that you will be with us.

And we thank you for the promise also that your word, when it is read even, will not go forth in vain. It will not come back empty, but it will achieve all that you set for it to do.

And so we ask, Lord, that you would be moving in this place. We pray that you would be working in our hearts. We pray that you would be seeking and saving those who are still lost.

[25 : 53] We pray that you would be sanctifying and making more like Jesus those who are found, those who are in Christ. At work in us, we pray, for your glory, for the salvation of souls, for the encouragement of your people.

We pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. If you could have Ecclesiastes chapter 5 open before you, that would be helpful, please.

Amen. Amen. Sometimes when a film or a TV show has been shot, there will be previews, there will be trailers that come out in advance of the film being released.

And sometimes you'll get a kind of behind-the-scenes video. You'll see in the PR stuff, in the publicity stuff, before the film goes out, these shots, interviews with actors.

And sometimes you're taken behind the scenes. You see these videos on YouTube where you've got the film set and you see all the actors and they're all in character.

[27 : 05] They're dressed for the part. They've got the right accents. They're in the zone. They're playing the part of the character that they're portraying in the series or the film.

And then the director ends the shot with the board. And you see all these actors and they break character. So they shift from playing the part to being who they really are.

So the dangerous gangster puts down the weapon and stops speaking in a broad Cockney accent and speaks normally. And the cowboy puts down the Stetson hat and picks up this mobile phone and starts scrolling through it.

And it's a strange thing to see when these actors, they break character and you see the real person. And I wonder if Ecclesiastes 5 is a wee bit like that.

Because up until now, Solomon is he, if it's Solomon that's writing this, Solomon, he's looking at the world from the perspective of someone who doesn't know God.

[28 : 21] And he concludes over and over again that if all there is is what's under the sun, then it's vanity. It's meaningless. It's like chasing the wind.

And Solomon, he often puts that out there. He often plays that part and takes that perspective. But now, in this section, in this chapter in the book, it's as if he breaks character.

And he moves away from this position, this argument that he's following. And he tells us what he really thinks as one who does know God and who knows that there's much more than just what's under the sun.

And there's three lessons in the chapter that we've read, three lessons that I've noted anyway in terms of my own structure. The first thing we're given here is a lesson about worship.

And then Solomon gives us a lesson about wealth. It's one of these repeated lessons going through the book. And the final word that we come to at the end of the chapter is there's a lesson about well-being, holistic well-being.

[29 : 39] So first of all, and what we'll spend most of our time on this evening, is this lesson that Solomon gives us about worship, about worship of God.

And the lesson is actually summarized in the headings that were given in the ESV and the NIV anyway. In the ESV, the first title, the first section is given the title Fear God.

Or in the NIV, it's given the title Stand in awe of God. And that sets the tone for worship.

John Piper wrote an article just a few weeks ago and in the course of the article he was writing about what's missing from church as we know church today.

And he was arguing that churches often can actually look more like coffee shops than they look like places of worship. He was arguing that there's some churches where you're given a cappuccino and a cake on the way in the door.

[30 : 55] And people kind of wander in and they wander out and the phones are on and they're scrolling through the phone and having a chat and it's all very casual. And this is what he says.

John Piper, I'm quoting him here. He says, let me try to get right to the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter is not coffee in the sanctuary. The heart of the matter is the absence of an existential, ongoing, terrifying, shocking, awe-inspiring, trembling, mouth-shutting, comforting, safe, satisfying encounter with the majesty and mercy of the great I am who I am.

What's missing, says Piper, is a kind of experience of God that shapes a person's entire life with serious joy, glad gravity, sweet sorrow, and the weight of glory.

It's the kind of experience of God that has transformed reverence and awe. So that's Piper's thoughts.

And long before John Piper wrote that, essentially this is what Solomon is talking about. He's teaching us in this lesson that our worship of God is to be full of reverence and awe.

[32 : 45] It's what it means to fear God. So what does that look like in terms of a little more detail here? Well, Solomon, as he gives us this lesson about worship, he gives us two sub-points.

First thing he says is, watch your steps. The second thing he says is, watch your words. So first of all, watch your steps.

Look at verse 1. Guard your steps, says the writer, when you go to the house of God. So what does that mean?

Well, I think it means that we don't just rush into the house of God unprepared. without any sense of expectation.

We don't spend our afternoon filling our minds with this world's stuff, or rushing around with a schedule that's jam-packed as we try and do a million things, or maybe sleeping for three and a half hours.

[33 : 53] and then at 5.55, we just jump in the car and we go. There should be some preparation, not just for the minister, but for everyone.

Why? Because we are about to meet with the living God. That's why we're here. not because it's a social engagement in our diaries, not simply so that we'll see each other, although there's encouragement in seeing each other.

We are here to meet with the living God who has promised that he will be here as we meet in the name of Jesus, his son.

And remember, this is the same God that Moses met with in Exodus 19. Turn with me to Exodus 19 for just a moment. So Exodus 19.

Remember, the children of Israel, they are preparing to meet with God. Moses is having this meeting, this encounter with God, and the Lord speaks to Moses in order to prepare the people.

[35 : 25] Exodus 19 and verse 9, And the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.

When Moses told the words of the people to the Lord, the Lord said to Moses, go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day.

For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. So the Lord is saying to Moses, I will meet with the people, but go to the people in advance of that and consecrate them.

And to be consecrated is another way of saying guard your steps. As you prepare to meet with God, guard your steps.

To be consecrated is to separate ourselves from the things of this world, the things that would distract us. It's to repent of all the sin that weighs heavily upon us and it's to devote ourselves to God.

[36 : 54] And that's necessary as we prepare to meet God in his house. But even in our own quiet times, we're to guard our steps.

as you and I resolve tomorrow morning, whenever it is that we have our quiet times, we're to guard our steps.

We're prepared to meet with God. That's what a quiet time is, isn't it? We're preparing to meet with God, so we're to guard our steps, we're to consecrate ourselves, and it involves putting our phones away.

it involves closing the doors, Jesus taught us to, shutting out this world, and waiting upon the Lord, and expecting that the living, holy, powerful, awesome God will meet with us.

So watch your steps, guard your steps, says Solomon, as you prepare to come and worship. And the second thing he says is, watch your words, guard your words.

[38 : 17] still in verse 1, 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.

And the teaching in this section, which we're moving through at high pace here, it's got a common thread, and it's a thread that goes all the way through scripture.

We are to be silent before God. We're to be still, Psalm 46, before God. not to blabber on, as we're prone to do.

We're not to speak words thoughtlessly, because that's to speak in vain. We're not to speak words that don't connect with where our hearts are at, because to do that is foolish, so it's best to be quiet, to listen, to be still before the Lord.

[39 : 51] One commentator, Gibson, says this, we are geared to speak, and to act much more than we are to listen. But listening to God, more than doing things for God, is the path of wisdom.

Listening to God is the primary sacrificial act of spiritual worship of the true believer, and it does not come naturally. We want to go alone and do what we think needs to be done.

The falling to sin in the Garden of Eden, before it was ever a taking and touching of forbidden fruit, was a failure to listen, was a failure to listen to the word of God.

So we're to watch our words, we're to be quiet, we're to listen. As Solomon goes on in verse 4, when you vow a vow to God, do not delay in paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools.

Pay what you vow. It's better that you should not vow than 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.

[41 : 08] 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.

Again, there's a development of the same point. Watch your words. Our mouths, verse 6, can lead us into sin. We know that, don't we?

We know that out there, but we also know that in here. Our mouths can lead us into sin. Our many words can be an expression, verse 8, of vanity.

Meaningless. So we're to watch your words and be careful about what we say in the context of worship.

Some people never sing. I notice that. Wherever you go, as you glance around, you can see that there's some people, they never sing, never open their mouths. When we stand to praise, there's some and the mouths stay closed.

[42 : 20] I don't know why that is, it just doesn't seem right. Because we're told in Psalm 100 we're to make a joyful noise. we're to sing with cheerful voice to the God who is worthy of praise.

But our observation would be most people do sing. And when we sing, we make promises. Many of the Psalms and many of the hymns are songs, they are poems, they are prayers, where we're promising to serve the Lord and love the Lord.

We're promising, we're saying, we're professing that we're trusting God. We're singing that out. But sometimes our hearts don't connect with our words.

Is that not true? Sometimes we're singing out words, but our hearts are not connecting with the words that we sing. this is a problem, especially for ministers.

They'll light you into a trade secret. When you're standing here and you're preparing to preach a message, there can be a praise that's on the screen, there can be music that's playing, words can be coming out of our lips, and yet our minds are going to the thing that we're about to say.

- [43 : 46] There's a disconnect between the words that are going out and what's going on in the heart. So it's possible for us to go through a form of worship, and it's not worship.
- It's not true, it's not spiritual. It's not full of the awe, the respect, the wonder, the praise that God is worthy of. So we're to watch our words.
- We're to watch our steps. So what's Solomon saying, if we put it positively as we think about the area of worship?
- Well, Solomon is saying, expect to meet with God when you come to worship. Expect to meet with God when you come to worship.
- worship. So come prepared. And come with reverence. And Solomon is saying, expect God to speak to you when you come to worship.
- [45 : 10] So be silent. Be still. listen. And listen. And Solomon is saying, expect God to listen to you when you come to worship.
- So be careful with your words, what you say. Gibson again says, take care every single time you come to church.
- Don't let habit and custom and familiar routine become rote and superficial. spiritual. You are worshiping a holy God. As the Bible is read and expounded, know that the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- Be sure to listen more than you speak. listen to God and bend your knee in reverence to him.
- A lesson about worship. Second point is a lesson about wealth. As we go from verse 7 to verse 8, we might think, where's the connection?
- [46 : 53] Sometimes when you're driving a car, you go from gear 1 to gear 2, and sometimes it's smooth, sometimes it's a bit of a crunch, there's a grind and there's a crunch, and we might think, well, going from verse 7 to verse 8, is Solomon grinding the gears here?
- Because is there a clear connection between verse 7 and verse 8? Well, I think there is. There is a clear connection between worship and wealth. All of us are worshipers, that's the truth.
- All of us in here and all of us out there, we're all worshipers. All of us have been made to worship God, but if we don't worship God, we will worship someone or something else.
- And one of the most commonly worshiped things is wealth. We often hear the phrase being misquoted. People say, money is the root of all evil.
- It's not. It's the love of money, it's the worship of money. That's the root of all evil. That's 1 Timothy 6 and verse 10. And Solomon here is giving us a lesson about how true that is.
- [48 : 03] He talks to us about the vanity of wealth and honor. That's the heading given to verse 8 and following. Verse 8 says, 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 yet there are higher ones over them. But this is gain for a land in every way, a king committed to cultivated fields.
- So what's the point here in verse 8? Well, essentially what Solomon is saying is that for one person to be super rich, there are many people that end up being super poor.
- that's the way of the world. One commentator here says, officials use their authority, each one takes some land for himself, usually with the connivance of the official above him.
- The king himself profits from the system. And that's the way it was all the way back then and that's the way it still is today. And yet Solomon is reminding us that there's a God who is higher, there's a God who is over every official.

[49 : 11] And he sees all the oppression of the poor. He sees everything in terms of the wealth that we accumulate. There was a headline in a paper called The Evening Standard, it was in 2012, it's perhaps not relevant today, but the headline was exposed.

Primark sweatshops that pay children just 60 pence a day, that's the way it was and they were exposing this as an exploitation of a big company of poor people far away.

That may all have changed today, in case Primark come and sue North Addis Free Church, they won't have much to take. But the point is God sees it all. He sees into the sweatshops of these far away lands where these children are working all day and all night.

And yet the same God who sees into the sweatshops, sees into the luxurious office of the CEOs who profit from the slave labor. And this is the God who will judge those who oppress the poor and who violate justice.

So there's a lesson here. about wealth. It's consistently threaded through this book. There's a challenge for us here. God sees how we spend our money.

[50 : 48] We don't see each other's bank accounts, but God knows how much is in our bank accounts. He knows how we spend our money. And so we're to be careful with what he's allowed us to have.

I suppose there's a comfort in this lesson as well. knowing that God will hold to account those who exploit others so that they can get much more money than they need.

To the fat cat who lives in luxury, perhaps young children in another country suffer, may benefit from that arrangement in time. time. But there is a God who is outside of time, who will require an answer from these people in eternity.

verse 10. He who loves money will not be satisfied with his money, nor he who loves wealth with his income. This also is vanity.

When goods increase, they increase to 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.

[52 : 02] And it's that repeated teaching. We need the repetition because it's so slow to go in our heads. Money will never satisfy. That's the point.

The more we get, the more we want. And often those who have the most have all the stress that goes with it. So the CEO of Amazon or the CEO of Apple may be super rich, but he is under so much pressure, likely his and her sleep will not be sweet.

It will be broken. But the laborer in the field who has little in comparison sleeps well after a hard day's graft.

Verse 13. There's a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun. Riches were kept by their owner to his heart, 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.

[53 : 11] 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 and much vexation and sickness and anger.

the best commentary on these verses is not from some scholar in an academic institution.

The best commentary on this short section is given to us by Jesus in Matthew 6, verses 19 to 21. And Jesus says this, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. That's what Jesus taught, and that's what Jesus lived out.

The most contented man that ever lived was Jesus. And yet he had no money.

[54 : 28] He had no house. He had no bed, no place to lay his head. He had no treasure in this world, because he saw how vapor-like this world is.

He saw how disposable the riches of this world are in comparison with the lasting treasure of glory. And Solomon is teaching us to see wealth, like Jesus did.

Lesson about worship, a lesson about wealth, and finally, just in a word, a lesson about welfare. God. Behold, says Solomon, what I have seen, verse 18, 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 this toil, this is the gift of God, for he will not remember the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

So to conclude this chapter, essentially this is a summary of a lot of what we've come to so far, and Solomon is underlining the answer for us in terms of well-being.

[56 : 05] How can we know well- being? How can we know that holistic welfare of body and mind and heart in this world? Is Solomon telling us that if we're wanting to have a well-being, we have to give away all our stuff and close our bank accounts and go off-grid, dig a hole, live in some cave like a modern-day monk?

Well, no, that's not what we've been taught to do. So what are we to do? We're to worship God and be thankful for the things that he has allowed us to have, but be careful not to let these things take his place.

We're to be thankful for the good gifts, the food, the drink, the work, the wage that the Lord has put in our hands.

We're not to worship these things. We're to hold them loosely and we're to use them for his glory. Jesus said in Matthew 6, 33, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

A lesson about welfare, a lesson about wealth, and a lesson about worship. We'll pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would help us not just to hear, but to believe, to respond, to obey, to live in accordance with your will and for your glory.

[58 : 05] We pray that when we are in this building here or any other church building, that we would come prepared, that we would come with that sense of expectation that you, the living God, will meet with us.

And even in our own homes, as we open the Bible, as we close the door, we pray that you would fill our hearts with that sense of reverence and awe, that the living God would meet with us, that the God of heaven and earth would seek to draw near even to us as we seek to draw near to you.

We pray that we would never lose that sense of wonder and love and praise. We think back to last week. We think about the advice we were given, never to lose that sense of wonder at the cross.

We pray that you would forgive us, Lord. Sometimes we do. We pray that you would forgive us for the times that we have a form of godliness, where our hearts are disconnected from the form and the words that we speak.

Forgive us for such hypocrisy. Touch our hearts, Lord, day by day, we pray, and help us to worship you in reverence and awe, in love and praise, both in here and out in the world.

[59 : 32] We thank you for the things that you allow us to have, for the time that you give us each day, every day that we are given as a gift from you. The talents that we have given are a gift from you.

The things that we are allowed to have, the money that's in our bank accounts, the roof over our heads, these things are gifts from God. May we never take them for granted, but may we seek to use them and use the lives that you have given us to worship you, to glorify God.

So hear our prayers, cleanse us from sin, and help us to worship you in spirit and in truth. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll sing to conclude Mission Praise 1209.

My heart is filled with thankfulness. to him who bore my pain, who planned the depths of my disgrace, and gave me life again.

Who crushed my curse of sinfulness, and clothed me with his light, and wrote his law of righteousness, with blood upon my heart.

[61 : 22] heart. My heart is filled with thankfulness to him who wants to shine.

Who floods my weakness, with strength, and causes fears to fly. whose every promise is enough for every step I take, sustaining me with arms of love, and crowding me with grace.

my heart is filled with thankfulness, to him who raises the heart. Whose wisdom is my perfect peace, whose every thought is high.

For every day I have on earth is given by the King.

So I will give my life, my all, to love and follow him.

[62 : 47] Amen. And I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.