**BCM Bible Study: April 7/8, 2021**

**Ecclesiastes 5-6**

Follow-up: How did the challenge go? (Research fair trade, give something away to someone in need, seek out a tangible way to help your neighbors/friends)

Listen First: Do you enjoy being in silence or do you find yourself filling your life with sound?

**Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**

* Focus on verses 1-3. What distinguishes a wise worshipper from a foolish one?
* What is the reasoning for using few words in verse 2? Why would this perspective move us from talking to listening?
* “Those who know God well understand that it is much more important that he address us than that we address him.” (Iain Provan) What does listening to God look like for you? Do you ever spend time quietly listening? What makes this difficult?
  + When do you use noise/entertainment to “escape” or fill the quietness? Why do you think you do this?
  + How could listening to God be a key to avoiding the fate of the fool who does wrong and does not know it?

Now focus on verses 4-6. This is what we talked about at 633! The concern here is integrity. God wants us to be people who say and do the same thing. But since the beginning of sin, people have lacked this integrity. As Christians, we should not merely say Christian things and know good doctrine, we should walk the talk! **Read Jeremiah 7:3-8, James 1:22-27**.

* What do these passages have in common? What do they say about integrity?
  + Do these passages help you identify any personal struggles in this area?
* Why do you think an overabundance with words is tied to false religion and oppression?
  + In this section and throughout the Bible, unnecessary wordiness is seen as symptomatic of a self-focused mind. The Pharisees who prayed with many words, were only concerned that people revere them. So, this mindset will step on the heads of others to achieve and climb the ladder. A quiet heart is one that is listening, attentive, and in awe of God. This is the person transformed by being with God.
* What is the solution to this misguided mindset in Ecc. 5:7?
  + What about God makes you stand in awe?

The Danger of Wealth: Do you have financial goals? What are they?

**Read Ecc. 5:8-13**. In verses 8-9, why should we not be surprised that we see oppression?

* These verses tell of the inevitable dangers of government. Either people in power are greedy or behave in ways of advantage to their superior. This is not a political statement! God warns his people what having a king means: **Read 1 Samuel 8:10-18**.
  + This is not the place to debate the proper role of government in aiding people. Rather, we need to recognize that government is limited. What is our role in a world where this is the reality?
* The Teacher says that wealth comes not only at the cost of others, but it can be damaging to the person seeking wealth. How does he describe this damaging effect?
  + Have you seen these realities in yourself or in others?
  + What is something that you consume yet never satisfies?

**Read Ecc. 5:14-20** (see notes for the divide between 13 and 14)

* This section first describes wealth that is unexpectantly lost. Have you ever experienced the lost of something in an unexpected way? How did that shape your outlook on life?
* **Read James 4:13-17**. What effect should the fleeting and fragile nature of life have on us?
  + What do you think it looks like to make plans in light of what these verses tell us?

**Read Ecc. 6:1-6.** Long life and abundance of children are typical Old Testament indicators of wealth. The point here is to look at a man who has everything he could want!

* Given what we have read so far in Ecclesiastes, why can’t this man enjoy what he has? (He is constantly chasing wealth and is endlessly unsatiated. Because of this, he neglects the blessings and missing the only place of joy in life.)
  + Do you ever find yourself neglecting good things (friends, family, etc.) in favor of work or gain? What does this look like for you? How do these verses challenge you?
  + What is the balance between being a good steward of God’s blessings and enjoying those blessings?

**Read Ecc. 6:7-12.** These verses accent much of what has been said and wrap up with the familiar challenge of Ecclesiastes. I particularly like this quote about verse 10: “Human beings prefer to make a name for themselves; but in fact, they already possess one.” (Provan)

* What name are you tempted to make for yourself in your life?
* What does Provan mean that you already possess a name? How does this nullify the need to make much of yourself?

The overarching theme of this section is the danger of wealth and its inability to satisfy. A life focused on wealth as the marker of success or contentment will end not simply in dissatisfaction, but in harm to self and others. This is an idea discussed repeatedly in the New Testament. Take a look at these examples: **Read 1 Timothy 6:5-10, Matthew 19:16-24.**

* What do these passages say about wealth and its relationship to following Christ?

When we read passages like these, we often try to minimize the point. We say “money is the *root* of evil, not evil itself” or “that was just what that person needed to hear, it doesn’t apply to everyone.” Why do you think we try to minimize verses in this way?

* How do these verses challenge you with respect to the first question in this section about your financial goals? What are some options for people with above average incomes?

Conclusion/Challenge

**Read Deuteronomy 8:17-18.** We must remember that God gives us all good things. We are not powerful, smart, or gifted enough to produce our own possessions. To forget this is to slip into self-centered thinking, which will lead to sin. To focus on God this week, take up one of these challenges:

1. Spend 30 minutes being quiet and attentive to what God might say to you. When your mind wanders, use a phrase like “God is with me” to quiet your thoughts.
2. Give to an organization or a church.

Notes:

* I like this quote about verse 1 but couldn’t find space to include it above: “The sin of the foolish person is natural to them and does not require any conscious design. The sacrifice of the fool is thus careless observance of religion, unattached to any genuinely Godward movement of the soul and enacted out of custom, peer pressure, or habit.” (Iain Provan)
* The way some translations format Ecc. 5 is a bit strange. The way we will be reading, v. 13 and 16-17 are summaries of what comes before them. So, v. 13 summarizes 8-12 and vv.16-17 summarize 14-15. If you compare the ESV and NIV, you will see that verse 13/14 is difficult to translate. It reads like verse 13 begins an idea that is added to by verse 14. But it is clear that riches harming the hoarder (v.13) refers to what has just been discussed while wealth being lost to misfortune (v.14) deals with what comes after. The lack of punctuation in the Hebrew and difficult syntax (composition) will sometimes lead to issues like this one.
* It’s notable to me that the lose of wealth in 5:14-20 is not specified. It could have been a tragedy; it could have been mishandling. The details don’t matter. The point is the that fleeting nature of wealth should awaken us to its inability to satisfy us.
* 6:1-2 raise some questions about what God is doing here in giving this man abundance but not allowing him to enjoy it. In one sense, the meaning is clear – God is giving this man a life of frustration. But it is clear from the wider context that this is a man who is seeking “gain” and “profit” in life – he is one who is constantly chasing wealth and is endlessly unsatiated. Because of this, he neglects the blessings and missing the only place of joy in life. The truth is, that the man will never find what he’s looking for if he seeks it in wealth. But the fact that God does not allow him to enjoy it, given his mindset, is actually a sign of grace to him. How dangerous would it be for the man to be satisfied apart from God!
* A proper burial was highly important for ancient peoples. It was an occasion of sending off the dead to be with the community of the dead. The proper burial in 6:3 accents the loneliness of a man who has not lived life with the proper mindset.
* The portion about the stillborn child is startling. The point is not to minimize the tragedy of a stillborn child; rather, it is the accent the emptiness of the man pursuing wealth as his gain. His life is one of darkness and is not really life at all, at least not how God intended it.