

An Eternal Perspective

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Ecclesiastes in chapter 5.

Ecclesiastes chapter 5, and if we read again at verse 4, where Solomon reminds us, 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 is better that you should not vow than that you should vow at not pay. And so on. Now it's safe to say that the world our children and grandchildren are growing up in is a very different world to the one many of us in here today grew up in.

And when I say that, I don't want to discredit everything that we have today, certainly not, because we have many good things and we have many supports that maybe weren't there 30 or 40 years ago.

We have more facilities for children. We have better health care. We have more help for parents who are struggling financially. We have all these helps. There are many positives in the world we live in today, maybe in comparison to the way some of us grew up.

[1 : 33] But of course there are also many negatives, because in the past 30 years, the society we live in has completely changed. And the society our children are growing up in is completely different to the society many of us grew up in.

And we can see that maybe by considering some of the laws our government is trying to pass. The named person scheme. The no smacking ban. The way we teach our children.

The way schools are being forced to teach our children. And our schools are to teach gender fluidity. Meaning that they can decide to be a boy one day and a girl the next.

Our schools are to promote homosexuality and transsexuality. In fact, our first minister recently said that she will make every effort to make LGBT compulsory in every school.

And what's closer to home is that they're trying to, we all know this, they're trying to remove the Lord's Prayer and they're trying to take away saying grace at mealtimes. And there's all this confusion.

[2 : 40] And it's leading to chaos. And it seems to me our government wants to parent the parents. But the society that's being created for us, for me personally, the society that our children are growing up in, it's frightening.

Because we're becoming a godless nation. And we're moving further and further away from the truth of the Bible. Now whatever we view, whatever view we have of the Bible in here today, there's no denying the Bible teaches morality.

The Bible teaches truth. And you know, who knows where and when or how this will all end. But politics is not our focus this morning. Our children are.

And our children are our focus because in this passage, Solomon is reminding us about the importance of the vows that we make before God. And I want to apply this passage particularly to our own situation.

As you know, two families are coming this morning for baptism. And I want to apply it to us because the vows we make at baptism, they are solemn vows.

- [3 : 51] These vows are said not only in the presence of witnesses, but they're said in the presence of God. And Solomon is reminding us about the importance of these vows.
- Because in his sermon called Ecclesiastes, Solomon the preacher, he's calling us to live our lives in light of eternity. We're to live our lives with an eternal perspective.
- We're not to be drawn in by the vanity of the world and swallow the lie that this world can satisfy all the pleasures of our heart. But what Solomon is saying to us, live your life with an eternal perspective.
- And what we can see in these verses is that in order to press upon us the need to live our lives with this eternal perspective, Solomon says that we need to have a greater view of God.
- We need to understand who God is in order for us to understand that the vows we take before him are solemn vows. And this morning, I just want us to consider those verses we were reading, verses 1 to 7.
- [5 : 00] I want us to consider these verses just under two headings. Standing before God and speaking before God. Standing before God and speaking before God.
- So first of all, standing before God. Look again at verse 1. Where Solomon says, And in these verses, these opening verses, Solomon, reminds us that in order to live our lives with an eternal perspective, we need to understand who God is.
- Because Solomon believes that if we fail to understand who God is, then we will not treat him with the reverence and the respect that he deserves. And that's why Solomon opens this chapter with this warning.
- He says, And for Solomon, the house of God was the temple. The house of God was where the Lord met with his people and dwelt amongst his people and revealed himself to his people when they came together to worship.
- And in a similar way, just like it is here today, the church is the house of God. This is where the Lord promises to presence himself among us.
- [6 : 41] This is where the Lord promises to meet with us and speak to us and reveal himself to us in his word, the Bible. But notice what Solomon says.
- He says, Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Solomon doesn't say, Guard your steps if you go to the house of God. He says, Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.
- And Solomon is saying this to us because He's saying, If you want to live your life with an eternal perspective, If you want to make sure that you are prepared for eternity when you leave this world, Then you need to make sure that you regularly come to church to meet with the God of eternity.
- You need to make sure that you're in a relationship with God through his son, Jesus Christ. If we want to be prepared for eternity, He's saying, You need to make sure that you're following Jesus Christ and trusting in him as your only Savior.
- My friend, you need to guard your steps when you go to the house of God. And this word, guard, It's the same word that we were actually just singing about in Psalm 121.
- [7 : 55] Because in Psalm 121, The psalmist was reminding us that the Lord is our keeper. And that's what the word guard means. It means to keep or to guard or to watch.
- And the psalmist in Psalm 121, He was reminding us that the Lord is our keeper. And that that word, keep, guard or watch, It gives to us the image of this watchman.
- Who's standing in his watchtower. He's on the corner of his city and he's in his watchtower and he's watching for the enemy coming. And his role as the watchman is to protect the city from attack.

To alert people if there is an enemy coming. And he's to protect the people from the enemy. And that's what the psalmist was saying to us. The Lord is our watchman. The Lord is our keeper.

He's the one who keeps us from evil. He's the one who guards our life when we entrust ourselves to him. He's the one who watches over us. And as the psalmist says, The Lord promises to keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

[9 : 04] And it's because the Lord keeps us and guards us and watches over us. That Solomon says here, That we should keep guard and watch our steps when we go into the house of God.

Meaning that, Yes, the Lord is our watchman. But we also have to watch over our life too. We're not to be careless. We're to be careful.

We're to be careful how we walk. Careful where we walk. Careful how we live. Careful how we stand before God. And what Solomon is saying is that, When you live your life with an eternal perspective, You will watch over your life.

You'll watch how you live. You'll watch how you speak. You'll watch how you conduct yourself. And you'll watch how you influence others. When you live your life with an eternal perspective, He's saying you'll watch over your life.

You'll guard your steps. You'll keep your foot. Because you'll know that you have to go to the house of God. To stand before God. Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.

[10 : 14] To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools. For they do not know that they are doing evil. And what Solomon says in the second half of that verse, Is that we need to listen to what God is saying to us.

We need to take on board what God is saying to us in the Bible. And that this book, the Bible, This book is a book of truth. And it tells us how to prepare for eternity.

It tells us that whosoever believes in Jesus Christ will not perish. But have eternal life. And you know for many of you, You hear that.

Many of you hear it week in, week out. You may even understand what that means. And the consequences it will have in your life. But it seems to me that you do nothing about it.

You hear what's being said. But you're not listening. Because to listen is to respond in obedience. To listen is to live your life with this eternal perspective. And respond in commitment to the Lord.

[11 : 24] And that's why Solomon says to draw near to listen. It's better than to offer the sacrifice of fools. For they do not know that they're doing evil.

Because we can all come before God. And offer the sacrifice of fools. We can all come before God and look the part. And do what we're asked. And say what we're going to say.

But you know Solomon is reminding us here. We can't fool God. We might be able to fool others. We might be able to pull the wool over their eyes. We might be able to shrug off what other people are saying to us.

And just ignore them. But Solomon says. He goes on to say in verse 2. God is in heaven. And you are on earth. Therefore you need to listen to what God is saying to you.

Don't do what you think. And live according to your opinions. Or what others say. You need to listen to what God is saying to you. You need to guard your steps when you come into the house of God.

[12 : 27] Because God is in heaven. And you are on earth. And we were reminded of that fact in our opening psalm. Psalm 139. That the God of heaven.

He's all powerful. All knowing. And all seeing. He's. He's. He's has searched us. And he knows us. He knows everything. About us. He knows when we get up in the morning. He knows when we go to sleep at night.

He knows where we go. He knows our thoughts. He knows what's in our heart. He knows what we say. Oh Lord. Thou hast me searched unknown. Thou know'st my sitting down and rising up.

Yea all my thoughts afar to thee are known. And even though as I said. It was a great comfort for David. To know that the God of heaven was. Watching over his entire life.

It was also a solemn reminder that. He was continually living in the presence of God. And that's what Solomon is saying to us here. God is in heaven.

[13 : 23] You are on earth. God is in heaven. And Solomon reminds us of this. Because he believes that. If we fail to understand. Who God is. Then we will not treat him with the reverence.

And the respect that he deserves. And so we must live our lives with this. Eternal perspective. Living with eternity in our heart. Because when we live our lives with this.

Eternal perspective. We will watch over our life. We will guard our life. We will live our lives in the presence of God. We will remember. Who we are dealing with.

Because you and I. We will not only have to stand before God. In his house. We'll also have to stand before him. On the day of judgment.

And you know this is the solemn thing about this. Solomon is calling us to live our lives. With this eternal perspective. Because when we enter eternity. We have to stand before God.

[14 : 25] And give an account of our lives. And you know this is why our nation is in chaos and confusion today. Because people don't fear God. They don't live life acknowledging God.

They don't live life with an eternal perspective. And they would rather swallow the lie that God doesn't exist. And think that they're not accountable to anyone. Just themselves. But the truth of the Bible.

Not only that God exists. The Bible never ever says. Or even argues for the existence of God. It just says in the beginning God. Doesn't argue for it.

And then the Bible reminds us that God has put eternity into our heart. And he's called us to live our lives with this eternal perspective. He's calling us to make us realize that time is short.

Life is short. Our days are numbered. We have to prepare for eternity. And when we live our lives with an eternal perspective. Solomon is saying. We'll watch over our life.

[15 : 28] We'll guard our steps. We'll keep our foot. Because we know that when God is in heaven. We are on earth. And one day soon we must stand before him. And give an account.

And you know that's how Solomon actually finishes his sermon. He brings it to its conclusion. And he says. The conclusion of the matter is this. Fear God.

Keep his commandments. This is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment. With every secret thing. Whether it's good or evil.

And so if we live our lives with an eternal perspective. If we live our lives with eternity upon our minds. We will watch over our lives. We'll guard our steps. We'll guard our hearts.

We'll keep our feet. And if we sin. Which we all do. I do. I'm not saying this to you today.

[16 : 26] To get at you. I am saying this as someone who has preached this to himself first. And if we sin. The Bible says. We have an advocate with the Father.

Jesus Christ the righteous. If we confess our sin. The Bible says. If we confess our sin. He is faithful and just. To forgive us our sin. And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Only because the blood of Jesus Christ. Cleanses us from all sin. And so my friend. In light of eternity. Solomon is calling us to live our lives.

For God's glory. Because that's the way we were created to live. That's our chief end. That's the point to life. That's why we exist.

We don't exist for ourselves. And for our own glory. We exist for the glory. Honor and praise of God. Man's chief end. Is to glorify God. And to enjoy him forever.

[17 : 25] But you know Solomon. He doesn't leave it there. Because having reminded us. About the solemnity of standing. Before a holy God. Solomon goes on to emphasize to us.

The solemnity of speaking. Before a holy God. Speaking before. A holy God. And if you look at verse 4. He says.

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 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. And Solomon. He's already highlighted in verse 2.

[18 : 22] The importance of watching. Of watching what we say to God. He says. Be not rash with your mouth. But then. Having expressed the importance. Of watching what we say to God. Solomon.

Goes on to speak specifically. About the vows. That we make before God. But when Solomon says. Pay what you vow. He's not talking about money.

He's talking about fulfilling your vow. He's talking about. And he's stressing the need for honesty. And integrity. Which fulfilling the vow.

And fulfilling the vow that you have made. In the presence of God. And. In ancient Israel. That's who this book was preached to. The Israelites.

And just like it is today. A vow was a promise before God. God. And there were three types of vow. That an Israelite would make. And I believe that these vows. They still exist today.

[19 : 20] Because the first vow. That an Israelite would make. Is their allegiance to the Lord. In which a sinner. Vowed to follow the Lord. And live their life. In commitment to him. And we would describe that.

Vow of allegiance to the Lord. We would describe it. As a profession of faith. Because that's what a profession of faith is. You're vowing to the Lord.

That you desire to follow him. Publicly. And live your life. As a committed Christian. And when someone sits. At the Lord's table. Not only for the first time. But every time.

They're vowing their commitment. To the Lord. They're fulfilling the words of. Psalm 116. I'll of salvation take the cup. On God's name will I call.

I'll pay my vows. Now to the Lord. Before his people all. And in fact. In recent years. We as a Kirk session.

[20 : 16] We have put vows. To everyone. Who has professed their faith. In Christ. Because vows. They not only encourage. Integrity. They also emphasize.

Accountability. And discipleship. Both on the part of the individual. And also the Kirk session. And the vows. To profess your faith. In Jesus Christ. They're very very straightforward.

I'll just read them to you. Do you acknowledge the Bible. To be the word of God. And your only guide. In all matters of faith. And conduct. Do you confess God.

The Father. The Son. The Holy Spirit. As revealed in scripture. To be your God. Do you profess faith. In Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ. As the only saviour. Of sinners. And as your saviour.

And Lord. Do you promise. That depending upon God's. Promised help. You will faithfully obey. And serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And to love his people. Within the fellowship.

[21 : 10] Of the church. Do you promise. To submit in the Lord. To the government. Of his church. To participate. Faithfully. In its worship. Ministry. And support. And to heed. Its discipline.

And you know. There are some of you here. Who would. And could say yes. To all of these vows. And yet. You refuse. To come out.

On the side of Christ. And publicly. Profess your faith. In him. My question. To you is. Why? What's holding you back?

In light of eternity. This is what Solomon's. Talking about. In light of eternity. What's keeping you. From. Saying that you want. To be a Christian. And follow Jesus Christ.

As your Lord and Savior. What's keeping you back? But then. There was also another vow. There's not only the vow. Of allegiance. The second type of vow.

[22 : 06] That an Israelite would make. Was called a free will vow. And this free will vow. Was a vow. That you'd make. To another party. In the presence of God. And this would. Include.

Marriage vows. Or. A contract. With workers. Marriage. And of course. I need not. Tell you the importance. Of marriage vows. And the need. To keep them. Because these vows.

They're said. In the presence of God. And before witnesses. And. I will put my hands up. And I'll say. I'm not. The best husband. In the world. Most husbands.

Would probably say the same. I don't get it right. But you know. Every time I put vows. To a couple. Who are getting married. Or. Every time I witness. A marriage. I'm reminded that.

Although it's a joyous occasion. Just like today. It's a joyous occasion. But. When two people. Come together. As husband and wife. It's also a very solemn occasion. Because they're standing before God.

[23 : 03] And they're speaking before God. And they're speaking with vows. And they're saying to one another. That they will be a loving. Faithful. Dutiful. Husband. Or wife. For richer. For poorer.

For better. For worse. In sickness. And in health. Until God shall separate them by death. Now I know that. Families are complicated. And all these things.

And I'm not going to go into that. But. I'm just emphasizing. Solomon's point. Here. Of the importance. Of vows. But the free will vow.

It not only included. The contract of marriage. It also included. The contract of work. And you know. We see that all the time. In workplaces. We all sign contracts too. In our jobs.

And all these things. But you know. When I think of the vows. Of vows before God. I think of the vows. That I made. In order to become a minister.

[23 : 56] In order to become. A minister. And also. Your minister. Here in Barvis. I had to make ten vows. Before God.

And. There are. There were many. But there are two in particular. That challenge me. Every time I read them. The first is. Do you engage. In the strength. And grace. Of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord. And Master. To rule well. Your own family. To live a holy. And circumspect life. And faithfully. Diligently. And cheerfully. To discharge. All the parts.

Of the ministerial. Ministerial work. To the edification. Of the body of Christ. And the second question. That challenges me. Is do you accept. Off and close.

With a call. To be pastor. Of this congregation. And promise. Through grace. To perform. All the duties. Of a faithful. Minister. Of the gospel. And those.

[24 : 53] Vows challenge me. They challenge me. Every time I read them. And they remind me. About the solemn. Responsibility. I have as a minister. That I am not.

To give you a lie. And say. That everything is okay. I am to present. To you the truth. That you need. To be saved. You need.

To be in Christ. That you need. To follow Jesus. And I have to. Live according. To my vows. And I have to be faithful.

Not only to God. But also to you. To present to you. The truth. And I present it to you. Out of love. Love for you. And a desire.

To see you saved. But for an Israelite. Their vows. They not only. Included a vow. Of allegiance. And this free will.

[25 : 48] Vow to the Lord. But the third type of vow. An Israelite would make. Is a vow. In which. A child would be dedicated. To the Lord. And this vow. Was a vow.

That parents would make. And the clearest. example of this is in 1 Samuel where Hannah she prays to the Lord for a child and she vows that she will dedicate Samuel to the Lord and in one sense that's what baptism is because as we said to the children baptism it has no power to save a child it has no power to wash away any sins baptism is a sign and a seal it's a sign and a seal that a child is being brought into the visible church and they're going to be prayed for and taught from the Bible and encouraged to know Jesus as their Savior and the reason we put vows to parents who come for baptism is because the parents are promising to bring up their children to know Jesus as their Savior to walk with Jesus and to live in humble submission before him and you know that's why we stand that's why we'll stand in a short while as the fathers take their vows we're standing before God in reverence and in holy fear as we witness looking on what's happening and as we're looking on we're also participating in the vows because we too are promising as a congregation to help and provide support in any way that we can and you know friends the solemn thing about baptism and this is what Solomon is reminding us here the solemn thing about baptism is that as parents we included me included as parents we're promising to do everything we can to prepare our children for eternity that's what baptism is about we're promising to do everything we can to prepare our children for eternity we're promising to teach our children to live with an eternal perspective and I know that as parents we want the best for our children we want to give them everything we can and we want them to have the best start in life but what Solomon is reminding me today is that the best thing I can do for my children is make sure that they are prepared for eternity and I know that it's only the Holy Spirit that can change their heart

I know it's only the Holy Spirit that can work in their experience but as a parent I have to try and do everything in my power to bring up my children in the midst of a godless nation to know Jesus as the only savior of sinners and as I said before I'm not the best parent I don't speak to you as someone who is perfect and who has it all together because I know it's hard and there are so many demands on our lives and there are so many voices competing for our attention but when I listen to what Solomon is saying about living our life with an eternal perspective it makes me see that everything else I could teach my children it pales into insignificance in comparison to teach them teaching them about how to be prepared for eternity and I have to say to you as a parent our children cannot prepare for eternity by just sending them to Sunday school for an hour a week we have to do more as they get older we have to train our children to sit in church to sit under the word of God we have to do more at home by reading the Bible and speaking about the Bible and I know it's hard to find time and I know we get tired and I know at the end of the day we don't want to do it but I'm encouraging you to do it to read the Bible with your children to pray with and for your children we have to live our lives as an example to our children this is what our baptism is all about and please be assured again I'm preaching to myself when I say this to you

I preach to you as a father not only as a minister because I know it's not easy but as parents this is what we have vowed to do before God and this is what we are accountable for now when I say all this I don't want to come across as heavy or judgmental in any way because we all fail I fail I get it wrong I'm not perfect but what I believe Solomon is reminding us today about the importance of vows and that in baptism we are vowing our utmost to prepare our children for eternity we are vowing to do what we can by God's grace and God's help and the support and the encouragement of the congregation that we are part of we are vowing to do all we can for the good of our children and the glory and the honour of God's name may that be so as we witness another baptism in the congregation this morning may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray

O Lord our gracious God we realise that thou art one who is and who has always been a God who sees everything who knows everything and we realise that the vows that we make before thee are so solemn but help us by thy grace to honour these vows help us to live in accordance with thy word help us Lord to be faithful not only to the vows that we make but to the God whom we make them to and Lord that thou wouldst bless us help us as parents to ought to renew our vows to thee we realise that we faint and fail but we give thanks that the God who watches over us he never fails us help us then to be faithful to thee help us all to keep going we know it is so difficult but we give thanks that by thy grace and by thy help and by the encouragement and bearing one another's burdens that we will so fulfil the vows that we have made before thee all bless us together then we ask continue with us as we as we witness the sacrament of baptism that everything that is said and done that it would be to thy glory and to the furtherance of thy kingdom go before us then we ask for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake

[32 : 46] Amen we're going to sing again this time in Psalm 22 Psalm 22 in the Scottish Psalter that's page 228 if you're using if you're using the blue psalm book Psalm 22 and Psalm 22 it's very familiar because the opening words of the psalm they were quoted by Jesus when he was on the cross and you could say that Psalm 22 is all about the cross it's a psalm of the crucifixion but I find it remarkable that near the end of the psalm after Psalm 22 is described so vividly the crucifixion of Jesus it speaks about the next generation it speaks about children in the next generation and it highlights to us that the crucifixion of Jesus it was for our generation and for the next generation and for the next generation it's for every generation that they would praise the Lord and follow Jesus so we're singing

Psalm 22 from verse 25 down to the verse marked 28 within the congregation great my praise shall be of thee my vows before them that in fear shall be performed by me the meek shall eat and shall be filled they also pray shall give unto the Lord that do him seek your heart shall ever live down to the verse mark 28 of Psalm 22 to God's praise within the congregation great my praise shall be of thee my vows before them and that in the air shall be heard for my need the meek shall be touch shall be filled they all so great shall be shall give unto their god who who

Remember, shall, and turn the Lord unto All candidates of the nations overeat chaud