

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] All of us come from different places each Sunday morning. Some of you come into the house of the Lord depressed and desperate. The cares and sufferings of life weigh you down. Other's come in full of joy and excitement ready to sing at the top of your lungs. Some of us come distracted with a million things to do this week and this is just the first thing on the list. Some of us come hungry for the Word of God and others of us come just hoping the pastor isn't too boring or long today. I don't know why you came this morning. I don't know how you are feeling this morning. But the central question I have for you is this, Is your worship careful or careless? Are you coming to intentionally and deliberately worship Jesus Christ the only true God? Or are you just here because you are always here? Are you going to be careless and just go through the motions without thinking too much about it?
2. [Need] We come to worship in a dangerous place. This is the house of God. Wherever two or three gather God is among us. And His angels are presently watching our worship. But our worship is far too often careless and thoughtless. This should not be.
3. [Subject] Our passage this morning is going to warn us of the dangers of careless worship. And it is going to encourage us that we need to be careful when we come into God's house.
4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 5:1-7
5. [Preview] We will look at two areas we need to be careful about, and then we will look at the gospel.
6. [Reading and Prayer] Stand if you are able for the reading of God's Word.

We must be careful in our worship. We must worship carefully.

We are to be careful instead of careless.

We have to be intentional when we come to worship Jesus.

And by worship, I am not referring to the music portion of our service.

I mean every single moment that you spend inside the church.

We need to be careful during the entire worship service.

Verse 1 **"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God."**

One of the first things that we are told is to guard our steps.
It's the idea of being careful where you walk.
Watching your steps.

Like a shepherd watching over the sheep at night to keep them safe.
Like soldiers would guard the city gates to keep the village safe.

Watch your steps like when a newborn is sleeping in the room.
Watch your steps like when you are mountain climbing and want a secure
foothold.
Watch your steps like you are walking a tightrope above a canyon.

Do you watch your steps when you come to worship?
Not are you literally looking at your feet.
But are you careful in your worship?
Are you careful when you show up on Sunday morning?

Often instead of being careful in our worship, we are careless.

Some are careless because they come just to be entertained.
They want their ears tickled.
Sunday morning looks less like worship and more like a party

Some are careless because they come just to consume.
They come as customers instead of worshippers.
They want to sit back and be provided a product.
And afterwards, maybe they will leave a review if it was good enough.

Some are careless because they come just to see friends.
The church is a social gathering not a place to worship God.

Some are careless because they come as a critic.
There is nothing wrong with criticism,
Often there is plenty to criticize.
But some show up on Sunday with a rubric in their heads of all the boxes
that must be checked.
“Let me see if they say the right prayer, sing the right song,
Oh they better not sing that one!
Let me see if the pastor fits my theological tribe, Or make sure he talks
about my favorite greek word
They are careless because they are watching others’ steps instead of their
own.

The rest of 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.”**

There is a lot going on in this verse.
It begins by telling us that worshipping quietly is better.

In Israel, their worship was centered on the sacrificial system.
You would show up with your animal to make a sacrifice for your sins,
Or as an offering to show how much you loved and valued God.

The picture Solomon paints is that instead of showing up with your
animals,
You should just wait in the crowd and watch quietly.

Sit and listen to the priest proclaim the forgiveness of sins.
Listen to the confession from sinners.
Sit and observe what is happening in worship.
Listen to the sounds of the animals as they die.
The sound of the blood as it falls on the altar and ground.
Hear and meditate on the weight and cost of your sin.

It would be far better to listen like that.
Then to just show up and go through the motions of worship.
But this tells us that those sacrifices are the sacrifices of fools.
And it is possible to think you are worshipping, but you are doing evil.

One way that this happens is that we simply go on autopilot.
This has probably happened to you and maybe you didn't notice.
You are singing an old song you've sung before,
But your mind is wandering.

Even though your mouth is singing words,
Your mind is thinking about the worries and cares of the week.
We can be too careless and cavalier in our worship.

Do you come to the house of God as someone who loves God?
Some come because they like the ideas of God.
Maybe a particular doctrine is fascinating,
Maybe they enjoy a particular cultural expression of Christianity.
But we should come because we love God and we just want to worship
Him.

We should come because we want **"to draw near."**
We want to hear Him.
To sing to Him.
To be with His bride.

Each Sunday is a Wedding Rehearsal.
It is a rehearsal for the final day when Christ will return.
Do you take this seriously?
Or when that wedding day comes, will you not know what to do?

Practically speaking how can we be careful in our worship?
There are a number of concrete ways that we can do this.
One is that we can prepare to come.

I do not just mean planning on attending
or setting aside our outfits in the morning.
I mean preparing our hearts.

One way we do this as a church is by standing for the reading of God's
Word.

I've always loved that practice.

It is a reminder physically that what we do matters.

We are hearing the very words of God.

But the important thing is our hearts not our bodies.

We can go through the motions without proper carefulness.

You can remain sitting because you can't stand and still be careful in your
hearing.

But what are some other ways we can prepare?

Have you read the sermon passage ahead of time?

It isn't hard to figure out because we just go through books.

Read the next chapter and meditate on it.

Ask questions,

Wrestle with it.

Pray over it.

Then you will come already prepared for the sermon.

The soil of your heart is already tilled and ready.

We can worship carefully by doing an inventory of our hearts.

Have you come repenting of your sin?

If you haven't repented of your sin in awhile,

Sunday is a great time to do so.

I often find myself at some point of the service quietly asking for
forgiveness.

Are you ready to sing no matter the song?

Have you come deciding that you will sing even if you don't know the songs, or even if they aren't your favorite?

Are you going to sing carefully with your mind fully engaged and worshipping God?

We can worship carefully by not just talking to our favorite people.
By looking for the lonely, the visitors, those who are hurting.
By caring for those Jesus values instead of just the people that we like.

One of my favorite professors at DTS was named Lanier Burns.
I loved him because he exuded godliness and you could smell Jesus being around him.

DTS had chapel three times a week and he was always there.

As you can imagine he heard plenty of sermons and more than a fair share of mediocre to bad ones.

Sometimes there would be a particularly bad speaker and students would shuffle into class complaining about this or that part.

And one day he stopped us and mentioned that he was always at chapel and heard plenty of sermons and more than a fair share of mediocre to bad ones.

And then he opened his Bible and shared something beautiful and profound that he had learned from the terrible sermon we were whining about.

And he told us that he always learned and gained something from sermons.

Not because the sermons were good because he came ready to hear from God and God always spoke.

Dr. Burns always came carefully in his worship.

And God always met him.

We need to come carefully to our worship.

[transition] We must be careful in all of our worship. But there is another area we need to be careful in. Specifically in point number 2

We must be careful in our speech. We must speak carefully.

Again this is not just general wisdom for how we talk.
The Proverbs are filled with verses about watching the tongue.
The book of James warns us of the danger of our tongues.

But Ecclesiastes is not just talking about all the time.
The context here is specifically our speech when we enter into church.
We should always be careful in what we say.
But we should especially speak carefully in God's house.

Verse 2 **"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."**

He repeats a refrain twice.
Don't be rash with our mouths.
Don't be hasty in our hearts.

Both of these words have the idea of speed.
We must be **"slow to speak"** James 1:19
Not just slow in the words that come out of our mouths,
But the words that come in our hearts should be slow.

We should be slow to speak.
Why?
Because we are uttering **"a word before God."**
When you talk in God's house, He hears.
I don't mean that He can only hear inside the walls of a church building.
He always hears.
But we should be especially aware that He is listening inside church.

"For God is in heaven and you are on earth."

This is not just a quick geography lesson.
This is not the Preacher telling us where God's true house is.
This is a reminder of the wide chasm between us and God.

He is a heavenly being while we are made from dust.
With a word He said **"let there be light"** and the cosmos were formed.
With our words we often say what we don't mean.
God is in heaven is a reminder of His transcendence.

He is the eternal perfect being. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, never
changing, always faithful, incomprehensible, all mighty King.
To see His face would mean death.
He holds the armies of angels in His hands.
Creatures that we cannot imagine gather around to worship Him.
With a twirl of a finger He can bring hurricanes and tornadoes.
With a thought you could wipe you out of existence.

"Therefore let your words be few."

Don't just be careful in your speech.
Maybe don't talk very much.
Say as little as possible.
Understand and recognize who you are talking to.

Verse 3 **"For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words."**

This verse seems like a proverb that he is using to prove his point.
The first part describes how those who work too much have dreams.
I think it means that those who are working a lot and hard start to dream
about what their work could mean, or what to do with all the money or
fame they will get from their work.

And as naturally as dreaming comes to those who work,
Those who talk too much are fools.

It is again a call to watch how much we speak when we come to church.

Sunday is not just a day for us to talk.

Maybe some of us need to try spending a Sunday morning in silence.

To carefully weight our words and speak as little as possible.

I wonder how different our worship might be?

The lesson is not just that we should never speak, but that we should be careful.

Sometimes carefulness means not speaking.

Other times speaking carefully means when we finally do speak,
we need to be sure that we do what we say.

What are some ways that we are careless in our speech?

Or ways that we are too hasty and longwinded?

I think that we are often careless in our prayers.

Our tradition prides itself on original prayers.

We want to pray what comes from our hearts in the moment.

And this is not a bad thing.

But the problem is that what comes to our mouths is not always careful.

Nor is it always reverent.

If you had a few moments to speak to someone important you would plan your pitch and speech ahead of time!

I think that we should be more careful in our prayers.

Maybe we should think and write our prayers down ahead of time.

Maybe we should find written ancient prayers and pray those a few times.

This does not mean that original speech is evil or unwise.

But it does point out that often we are not reverent or careful.

It would be better to pray a short careful prayer,

Than a longwinded careless one.

I think we can also be careless in our preaching and teaching.

Personally I am convicted by this.

There are pulpits all over the world that do not carefully consider their words.

Who have far too many words and speak rashly.

Who just preach their latest idea, the latest news headline or controversy.

One of the reasons I began to manuscript and write my sermons out is because preaching is holy work.

I need to be careful and guarded in all of the words that leave my mouth.

I am convicted that the work of preaching is too significant to leave up to just saying whatever comes to mind.

Because what comes to mind is not always careful.

It isn't always from the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes it is just foolish.

I don't say that to mean that all pastors must manuscript, or preach like I do.

But anyone who opens their mouth from behind a pulpit had better be careful with their words.

Verse 4 **"When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow."**

These next few verses center on vows, or oaths made to God.

This would be a promise someone makes to God.

Like Jephthah's foolish vow, that if God gave him victory over his enemies that he would sacrifice the first thing that left his home.

Or Hannah's vow that if God gave her a son she would dedicate him to the Lord and let him become a priest.

These vows were immensely popular in ancient times but still happen today.

A soldier vows that if God gets him out of war alive, he will become a preacher.

A poor woman vows that if God let's her win the lottery she will give half of it to the church.

An athlete promises that if God lets them win, they will give Him glory.

This verse is telling us that if you dare to make one of these vows, or deals with God you had better keep up your end.

Verse 5 **"It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."**

It is better to never promise God anything, than to not do what you say.

Verse 6 **"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?"**

There is some debate on who the messenger Solomon has in mind is.

Most likely it is a messenger from the temple.

Remember the context is worship in God's house, like the temple.

Often in the temple someone might make a vow to give a certain amount of money to God.

So the temple messenger shows up to collect what they vowed.

Then the individual who vowed is forced to say "Oh I didn't mean it."

Or it could be an angel.

After all Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11 that angels are present in our worship.

Perhaps an angel may show up to ask us to fulfill our promises made to God.

Whichever messenger you think is in mind, the point is the same.

"Let not your mouth lead you into sin."

Be careful in your speech.
Don't say things that you do not mean.

Now maybe you have not tried to make deals like that with God in a long time.

I don't think that gets us off the hook.

The point here is not to regulate our vow-making, but our speech.

Solomon wants us to make sure that we are people who do what we say.

Verse 7 **"For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear."**

So how can we practically be careful?

We can do so by doing what we say.

And what do we call someone who does not do what they say?

Someone who does not mean what they say?

We call them a liar.

We are commanded to not lie.

We especially are commanded not to lie in the house of God.

Here is the reality. The truthfulness of your speech is not determined by the sincerity of your heart, but by the reality of your life.

Let me say that again.

The truthfulness of your speech is not determined by the sincerity of your heart, but by the reality of your life.

Just because you really believe something in the moment

Does not make it true.

When you sing songs on Sunday of how much you love Jesus.

Of how you profess that He is the only way to eternal life.

When you partake of communion and proclaim that you believe the gospel.

When you listen to the preached Word and take notes,
Or say that something was convicting.

Then you need to act on Monday like Sunday was true.
You need to live all week like you truly mean what you did in this room.
Otherwise, we are all just lying and wasting our time.
And what makes what we sing, preach, and say in this space true,
Is how we live the rest of the week.

And if you have been living a lie all week long,
Then don't come into God's house and pretend.
Come into His house and repent.

[Transition] And if that's you. If you have been careless in your worship, in your speech, and in your life this morning and this week. If you are convicted of your sin, I have good news for you. I have the good news of the gospel and of Jesus Christ.

Our last point is this. **There is grace for the careless. There is grace for the careless.**

There is grace for you.
There is forgiveness for you.
No one has been so careless.
No one has been too sinful that they cannot find grace and salvation.

These verses are so strange in the book of Ecclesiastes.
So much of the book lingers in the shadow of death.
So why does he take a moment to speak to seriously about worship?
The answer is because of death.
All of us are going to die one day.

And we should worship as if we will have to stand before God one day.
And we will answer for every single idle word.
Everything that you said in passing.
Each moment that you said things which "you didn't really mean."
All of our words will be heard and judged by God.

This is scary!

This is why verse 7 ends with **"But God is the one you must fear."**

And it should be scary.

The reality of the judgment seat of God should
rightly fill us with the fear of God.

But there is good news for those who have put their faith in Jesus.

Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us how we can approach that day when we stand before the throne of God. **"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 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."**

We can approach with confidence.

Not because we have been so careful and holy.

But because Jesus is our High Priest.

Because Jesus spilled His blood in order to atone for our sins.

He has satisfied the wrath and justice of God.

So we should fear and respect God.

But we can remember that He is gracious to us.

He sympathizes with our careless weakness.

But grace is not a license for your carelessness.

Grace is not permission to do whatever you want,
but a promise that your carelessness does not have to lead to your ex-communication.

You can come as you are,
but you should not stay that way.

Your encounter with grace leads you to carefulness.
Not out of fear, or obligation but in love.

Sin separates us from God.
It not only condemns us to death, but it fractures our relationship with God
In order to be restored, we need a High Priest.
We need a mediator who can make things right.

And Christ's work on the cross restores us into a right relationship with God.
It remakes what was lost.

Now how should we act after being reconciled to God?
After knowing that our sin hurt and offended Him?
Should we go sin some more because who cares?
NO!
Because we have been reconciled we should avoid sin.
It shows we value the relationship.

Our receiving grace should make us live in light of that grace.

Let us say that hypothetically my wife and I had been arguing about me leaving wet towels on the bedroom floor.
This is hypothetic because I don't do this.
I do other things, but not this one.
Let's say it really blows up into a big argument.
But we come back and I ask for forgiveness and she forgives me.
So we are reconciled and filled with love

Everything is good.

What if I immediately just threw a towel in the sink,
soaked it in water and then threw it on the floor in front of her.

What would that say about my love for her?

What would that say about how much I valued her forgiveness?

There is grace for the careless.

But that grace should make us want to be careful.

It shouldn't make us think we can be as careless as we want.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] We should be careful with our worship. We should be careful with our speech. But even when we are not, there is grace for the careless.
2. [Challenge] I am going to close us in prayer. After I pray let us carefully worship our savior through our prayers and songs.