



Living with the End in Mind
5 – Occupied with Gladness of Heart
Pastor Jimmy Dodd

So, I was in Atlanta, and I had the chance to speak to a church. Afterwards I met with a group, and I was hearing their jobs in the church. This man said, "I just really, really love the youth, I work with the youth." This woman said, "I work with the kids; I get to help out there." This other woman said, "I work with lots of young adults."

There was this older man in the back. I always want to be careful when I say older; he was like 90, just to be a little bit safe here. He had a deep gray beard, and I could tell that he was anxious to talk. So, I said, "Sir, what's your job in the church?" He said, "I'll tell you what my job in the church is. Anybody messes with my pastor, I'll kill them." I thought *I love that guy, come on!* I don't think he would really actually kill them. It's not Branson; I was in Atlanta. But I loved that. He said, "I've got my pastor's back. Don't mess with my pastor." I love that.

Listen, I've had the chance to go all over the US and meet with a lot of different pastors. You are immensely blessed in this church with an incredible pastoral staff. Everybody on this staff are all sinners, they all have strengths and weaknesses. Here's my charge to you. Magnify their strength and help them in areas in which they might be weak. But you are blessed here with an amazing staff.

We're going to have some audience participation. Is that okay? That was very weak. We are going to have some audience participation. Is that okay? We're going to play a little game called *name that tune*. I want you to listen to this. Song plays: "I want it all, I want it all, I want it all, and I want it now." Okay, shout it out. Who's the band? Queen. Who's the lead singer? Freddie Mercury. I heard that really loud and clear back here. You just won a \$500.00 prize. See Ted next week. Alright, what commercial was that song featured in? Cheerios would be incorrect. In other words, you are the one that has to give the \$500.00 to that woman back there. It's featured in T-Mobile, Grub Hub, Dr. Pepper, Twix, and I could go on and on. It's the most common song in commercials. You hear it all the time. You hear it so often that you don't even think about it anymore because that's really the theme of our culture. I want it all and I want it right now.

So, we come to this series in Ecclesiastes, which is exactly the opposite of that, right? As you've heard from Ted over these past few weeks as we've talked about ambition and as we've talked about wealth and as we talk about power and all of these things, we have to be able to lay these things down because these things are not the things that are going to bring us ultimate fulfillment and joy in life. So, that whole theme of "I want this right now," that's the message of our world, of our culture.

Yet, we come to this series in which it just backs things up. We're going to talk about the need to be just a lot more still, a lot more quiet, and listen to the Lord and see what he has for us.

So, we come to this great, great chapter – Ecclesiastes 5. I wish we had time to dig deep into everything because this could be a series for about a year, there is so much. We're going to walk through really three big themes in this chapter. We're going to talk about the power of listening and stillness. We're going to talk about just the constant pull of wealth, the constant pull of money and wealth. And then we are going to talk about the promise of the gospel and how that ties it all together.

First of all, let's talk about the power of just listening and stillness. It's interesting because Ecclesiastes, as we learn in Chapter 1, was written by a man who calls himself The Preacher. This is Solomon. It's interesting because he just says so much in life is just meaningless. Why does he say this? Because he's writing this at the very end of his life. He's come to the very, very end, he's gone through all of these things in life, and as he contemplates life. He looks back over everything that he's tried to fill the void in his life with. He says so much has just been meaningless and, ultimately, it's going to come down to one thing. It's going to come down to God.

I know, because this is Branson, that there are a lot of people here who hunt. I know there are a lot of people who own rifles, I know there are a lot of people that you load with your own gun powder. A lot of you know the name Hodgdon Powder. Bob Hodgdon is one of my dearest friends in the world. I spent a part of this week and a good part of the day yesterday with Bob because he's about to enter into God's kingdom. He is right at the end of life. He might be there now for all I know. But it was interesting because Bob has had this really full life. You would just be amazed with everything that he's done. He talked on Friday about what really matters in life. When it comes to down to the very, very end and you look back, it's family and it's God. That's really it. I think that so often we have this mindset that we have to fill our lives with so many different things – ambition, power, success, on and on. Yet, ultimately, at the end of life, it's about very few things. We have to hold onto those things that really, really matter.

So, one thing that really matters is just the power to listen and just to be still. The Preacher writes about this in Ecclesiastes 5: 1-3. It says, ***Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. 2 Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. 3 A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool.***

It's interesting because often times, we see there is a positive, there's a negative, and then there's a proverb. That's exactly what this is. That's kind of like the format. But it's just saying, "Listen, don't be hasty with your words. Learn the power of being quiet, learn the power of being still. ***4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. 5 It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it.***

In Job: 2, Job is suffering greatly, and his three friends come to him and they have the greatest counseling session in the history of the world. Because it says that they come to him and they saw how

great his pain was, how deep his pain was, and they sat down and they wept with him and for seven days, they did not say one word. Then after seven days, they blew it, right? Because they have all of this advice in the world. But it is so important to know that there can be times where just being still, just the ministry of presence is so critical.

I was at Wheaton College many, many years ago. I lived with a great family. They are the Martins. There was one day which there was this phone call. Mrs. Martin breaks down in tears and she said, "One of my very best friends, her spouse just died very, very suddenly." She rushed over to be with all of her friends. She was gone for about an hour and a half and she came back. Then she was really sobbing. She said, "I feel like such a fool. I was over there, and I could not think of one thing to say. All my friends had Bible verses and helpful things to say. They just had the right words and I just sat there and wept. I could not think of one word. I did not say one single thing. I am so embarrassed, I'm so humiliated. I don't know if I could ever face that group again." About an hour later, the phone rang again and it was that grieving widow. She said, "Would you come back over to my house because I felt like you were the only one that really entered into my pain." She hadn't said one word. I think sometimes we need to just understand the ministry of presence could be some of the greatest ministry we could every do.

"Gosh, I don't want to go to the hospital because I don't know what to say." You don't have to say anything. Just go to the hospital and be there. Just be present with those who are suffering. As I sat with Bob, I didn't need to say things to Bob. I just wanted to be there, just to be with him. At times, the most important thing we can do is learn to simply stand still and just be quiet.

James 1: 19 – ***Be slow to speak, be quick to listen.*** It's a theme we're going to hear all throughout the scriptures. At time God says, "Stop trying to do things. Stop trying to orchestrate everything and learn to be quiet.

In Exodus, they're on the way out of Egypt and they come to the Red Sea. The people think, *We need to do something. This is a tragic situation. We need to find some way that we're going to do things.* And it says this in Exodus 13 - 14 - ***Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*** Don't say anything, don't do anything, just stand and see the presence of the Lord, stand and see the work in the mighty work of the Lord.

I think there are so many times where we've just got to learn to slow down. We've got to learn to practice active listening more and more. What exactly does that mean? It means we learn to ask questions, it means we ask a lot more questions than we have answers. Jesus asked a lot of questions, didn't he? And this is especially for men. Men, it's so good if we don't always start every question with Why or How. That can easily put people on the defense. It's great to start question with, "Hey, can you just help me understand a little bit more of what might have been going on in a situation?" We need to learn to just respond with our body language and with our eyes and just really focus in. Sometimes we have to just summarize a little bit and say, "I just want to be really clear on what you just said." We need to learn to practice active listening.

And listening isn't always with our mouth. I think we need to learn to practice listening more and more with social media. I think there's such this crazy need that we feel... Every time I see something in the news, I feel like I have to comment. I've got to Tweet, I've got to TikTok, I've got to Facebook or Instagram or whatever it might be.

Maybe we need to have a time where we just fast a little bit from talking so much on social media. You don't have to comment on everything. Sometimes it's best to say, "God, let me just be silent. There are a lot of arguments out there right now. Let me just slow down." I think that too often we speak before we have heard from God. I have a friend that has this great little saying, which I love. He always says, "Go to the throne before you go to the phone." I like that. So often it's like, "Man, I want to tell everybody what's going on." I want to give them all of these things that I heard. Sometimes it's best to just to slow down a little bit and say, "God, help me to really understand what you have in this situation before I start to say anything on social media. before I make phone calls. Before I start talking about this."

This passage also talked about dreams. It's not wrong to have dreams. It's a great thing to have dreams that you hold onto, that you pray for, but here's the most important thing. The prayer that I'm praying, especially this year, for myself is this: "Rescue me O' Lord from those dreams that don't include you." We want to have dreams and we want to have dreams that include the Lord, that include what he is doing.

Then the text goes on and it talks a lot more about the pull of wealth, the pull of money. I realize this can make people, at times, very, very uncomfortable. You know what? If you're here and you're just actually visiting, it's great to hear this because you need to know what Christians actually believe about wealth and money. Sixty-Seven years ago today, there were five young men that felt called to go to work in South America. They go down and they serve for this tribe in Ecuador, and they are Martyred 67 years ago today. It's an amazing story about Jim Elliot and these young men.

Before he went, Jim Elliott wrote these amazing words. He said, "*He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.*" There is tremendous wisdom in that. If you don't know that story about Jim Elliot and those young men, there are scores of books about that story. It's such a powerful story that just speaks to us deeply about wealth and how we need to learn to just be able to let things go.

Let's go to Ecclesiastes 5: 10 -12 – it says this. **10 Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. 11 As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them? 12 The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.** I love the fact it's just saying, "Listen, if you are pursuing wealth, it's vanity. If that's what you're after, it's absolutely vanity because it won't fulfill you. These are things in life that are absolutely leave you empty.

Now, here's what's fascinating about wealth. There are all sorts of research and surveys. Ninety percent of the people in the USA agreed. Money will not solve your problems. People absolutely agree

with that. Ninety percent believe that they are the exception to that rule. Right? “Oh, money is not going to solve your problem, however, in my case, it’s very different. Money would solve it. Therefore, that’s why I’m going to spend everything I have on Mega Millions this week because it could help me out a lot because I believe God wants me to have a little bit more, so that’s what I’m going to do.” That’s just the mindset we have, I think, so often as Americans.

Let’s skip down now to Verse 18. **18 This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. 19 Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. 20 They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.**

So, people often times just tune out there because they say, “Wait a second, that passage is speaking to people that have wealth. This is kind of rich people and I understand that there are rich people passages and that doesn’t apply to me.”

I would say it does apply to you. I would say that you are rich. You’re thinking, *I know what you’re saying. You’re saying I have spiritual riches.*

If you know Jesus, I do believe you have spiritual riches, but that’s not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about money, possessions, wealth. I believe that probably... maybe not, but probably, everybody here is rich, and not just rich, but filthy rich. When you think about being rich and wealth, it’s always in terms of what everybody else has. That’s always a phrase that we use and it’s always comparative, right? “Well, that person is rich because they have a staggering amount more than me.” We think about the Branson area and those people that have the very, very most. “Well, they are rich and the people that don’t have as much as them, they aren’t rich.”

Let’s take a few steps back and let’s look at the world. Let’s understand that if you have three basic things, you are rich. I mean you are absolutely rich because the vast majority of this world does not have these three things.

1. Choice – If you have choice, you are rich. Think about the choices you have every day. You wake up and it’s “What am I going to wear today? What am I going to have for breakfast today?” If you stop off at Starbucks, there are about 50,000 choices right there. If you stop off at a grocery store, that’s over 100,000 choices. If you stop off at a restaurant, you have a menu with all of these choices. You might think about which car you are going to drive today. “Do I even have to go to work today?” We have so many choices throughout the day that we don’t even think about it anymore. The vast majority of the world doesn’t have choice. They eat the same thing every day. It’s going to be rice and beans for one meal every day. Maybe on Friday, you’ll get some fish powder sprinkled on because you might want to have some protein at least once a week. You’re probably going to wear the same thing every day. You don’t have any choices in life. I know so many people that I’ve worked with around the world that have zero choices. If you have choice, you are rich.

2. Privacy – If you have privacy, you are rich. If you have a place where you can go to be alone. If you have a room in your house, in your apartment, if you have a place where you can go just to be away from everybody, if you have a car and you know you can drive to this park or this walking trail and just be alone, you're rich. That's because the majority of the world does not have anywhere where they can go to simply be alone. I spent a lot of time with my friends in Haiti and I take business friends there and they always say, "Why are the streets always packed in Haiti?" Well, it's because four out of five people there don't have jobs. And the average home might have five beds, but you might have 15 people that live there, which means they have to sleep in shifts. And if it's not your turn to sleep, there's nothing to do but just go walk the streets. That's why the streets are always packed in Haiti. That's the way it is around the world. If you have a chance for privacy just to be alone, you're rich because the majority of the world doesn't have that.

3. Basic opportunity – I hope that you're not so naive that you say, "You know what? I have what I have because I worked really hard in life, and I paid my way through college, and I worked hard my entire life and I have what I have because I've worked hard. I hope you are not that naive. Because as I said, I take these friends to Haiti and they meet really smart business leaders who have worked crazy hard and they are dirt poor. Why? Because they live in Haiti. You were born in this country at this time with these opportunities and you have what you have because of the grace of God. That's why you have what you have. I wish we understood that a little bit more. I'd love to hear a sports figure... I'd love to hear some type of an interview where it's like, "Hey, Dustin Johnson, what's it like to be the greatest golfer in the world?" I'd love to hear him say, "Well, you know what? Let me just put a little spin on that. Actually, I'm not the greatest golfer in the world. I'm the greatest golfer of those who have had the opportunity to learn how to play golf, which is less than 1/10 of 1%. And the odds are crazy high that if everybody in the world had the same opportunity that I've had, I wouldn't even be in the top 1,000. So, I realize that everything I have is just because I've been blessed with this incredible opportunity. I wish we had that perspective.

By the way, that's why you say Bolt is the best athlete in the world, ever. Because the 100-yard dash is one of the few sports in the world that is equal opportunity. That and the World Cup are the most important sporting events in the world because they are the closest we have... even though they are not quite there, they are the closest we have to equal opportunity. We have to understand we have what we have by God's incredible, amazing grace.

That basically brings us to we've got to come back to the promise of the gospel. Because The Preacher is just saying, "Hey, you know what? We better get back to the fact that what we need is to learn how to worship God with reverence and awe, not with just empty promises because wealth will not satisfy. Empty words will not fill a void. We need to come back over and over again to a place of grace. And grace does not excuse us from godliness, grace drives us into obedience, but it makes a massive difference. We don't obey so that God will love us. We obey because God loves us. You see, that's what makes Christianity so different from everything else in the world. Grace drives us to that place that we can say, "You know what? Everything I have is not because I worked hard; it's because of His amazing, gracious hand.

Freddy Mercury says, "I don't just want to be a rockstar. I want to be a rock legend. I want to go down in history and I think that song, *I want it all*, is a song that's going to make me a rock legend. Freddy Mercury never performed that song live, ever. He died at age 45 from his rockstar lifestyle. He never got to sing that song live. You see, we hold onto these things so tightly and so we just have this mindset of *Okay, I want to be able find peace with God, but I don't want to feel guilt and shame because those things just constantly overwhelm me and I don't want to feel condemned*. So, you've got all of these religions around the world and basically the message you are going to hear from them is, "I am not guilty, therefore, I am not condemned." That's it. You're going to hear that over and over again.

Christianity says, "You know what? Listen, because of sin, we are guilty, but because of Jesus, we are not condemned. And that makes all of the difference in the world.

Romans 8: *1 therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of Life has set me free from the law of sin and death.*

We can absolutely be free because of Jesus, we can be at home because of Jesus in real life. Everything we have is from him. He's the only one that gives purpose to life. That's the message of Ecclesiastes. It's going to come back over and over again to God. The very, very last verse is speaking about obeying those commandments. "So, yes, God I want to obey these commandments." And you might think, *Yeah, but that leaves me lost because I can't obey those commandments. I've been trying to obey those commandments, I just can't get it right*. And we try and we try and we try. And we think, *because I think I've failed so often as a believer to do what God wants me to do, I don't know if God loves me, I don't know if God accepts me. As a matter of fact, if I were completely honest, the place where I start almost every morning is I think that God is mad at me*.

I've very blessed to have five amazing kids. We spread our kids out. I've got one wife and I've got kids that are age 37, 33, 27, 20, 18 years old. I saw U2 and the Wiggles in concert in the same week. I'm probably the only person in America.

I have an 18 year old girl now who is amazing. When she was five years old, she sent me a card. I want to show you the card that she sent to me. It's this beautiful card where she draws this picture. "This is my daddy, this is allie." It's a great picture. I mean come on, for a five-year-old, it's pretty amazing, right? I've got the Zombie eyes, but that's going to happen. Then inside, she writes me this incredible note. She says, "To Dad, from Allie. I love you so much. And I will never stop loving you, and I love you with my whole heart.

Now, I want to give you kind of two pictures here. I want to give you story A and story B. We're going to vote after I'm done. I want you to vote on what was my reaction to Allie? You have to listen because we're going to vote. Here's Story A – I said, "Allie, you know the picture was pretty good, but let me honest. On the inside, wow, a lot of mistakes, baby. I mean, first of all, you 've kind of got this downward hill slant thing going and you crossed stuff out all over; I don't know those mistakes. I love you so much – you forgot the "e" in love. I could hardly read the "so much" because it goes off the page. And I don't even know if that's an "h" or an "n." Then I don't know if you've heard of spaces in between words. You obviously didn't do it here. "I will never stop loving you." Sweetheart, there's no

“e” in that. And I will love you with my whole heart. I mean love... I don't even know what happened there. With my hole heard... come on sweetheart, go back, correct this and come back and let's get this right. That's Story A

Story B – I just melted. I had tears running down my face. I'm like *I will save this the rest of my life. This is one of the greatest treasures I will ever have.* That's Story B

Okay, let's vote. How many of you think I responded with Story A? There's always a smart aleck in the crowd, right?

How many of you think Story B? Come on!

When you think about what God thinks about you, why do you think it's Story A? Wow. I know I feel that way a lot. I know I feel like God's saying, “Hey, get this right. I can't accept this. these are tainted love gifts...” Why do I think I'm a better father than God the Father is to me. Why do I think I love my children more than God the Father loves me. Why do I think it's story A? Why do I think he's mad at me? Listen, the message of Ecclesiastes is going to come back over and over. Our only hope is God, and the great news is he loves you with all the failings with all the tainted love gifts, he loves you. And you melt his heart. Do you believe that? God loves you that much. We need to come back to that over and over again because in the “I want it now” world, we miss it. We miss the most basic gift that God has given us, his Son Jesus Christ. Our sin did not magically melt away. It was paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ upon the cross. And that is the greatest love gift you will ever know.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this group. Father, I pray that these people would know that when you think about us, it's Story B. Your heart melts, you love us, you care for us, you will never leave us. Those are promises. So, Father, may we hold tight to your promises. Father, help us to guard our words. Help us to be careful. Father, help us to use our wealth for your glory. Help us to know that we are rich. We have so incredibly much. Help us to be the very best stewards of what you have graciously poured out upon us.

So, now father, for these people, may they go into the world in peace, may they have courage, may they hold onto those things that are true, right, and good. May they honor all people because all people have been created in the image of God. May they help the suffering, may they help the weak, may they share the gospel, and may they love and serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And may the grace, mercy, and peace of Jesus be with them this day and forevermore. Shalom Amen.