

You Are Here, pt.7 – Eccl. 5:8-20

1. If he hasn't gotten so personal as to make you uncomfortable, the Teacher is about to cross that line in our lesson today. (Eccl. 5:8)
2. Justice for those denied it should be a passion of ours. In our highly politicized world, even saying that you care about justice makes people assume various things about you – different causes, leaders, movements, parties. In the Old Testament, we don't see that "run to the leaders of the movement" phenomenon very often. And in the NT, we see exactly zero calls to the government to remedy this or that social injustice (though we DO see Jesus telling soldiers to be faithful to their duty, tax collectors to be honest, and Paul calls upon an armed guard to protect him against a band of religious zealots who swore to kill him, and he appealed his case to Caesar).
3. In short, we see appeals to government on a very local basis and we are told that the government has a job to do and that we may be obligated to support it via taxes. What we don't see is a call for government to take care of all matters of justice, morality, and righteousness. In scripture, response to evil is the job of the individual and the faith community in which that individual lives.
4. Have a look at Matthew 25:34-36. In our very modern, protected, and coddled world we have a hard time understanding what is going on here. To us, it seems WAY too simple – just feed, clothe, and visit the less fortunate and we're good with God? This would be a good time to hit your knees and thank God that you did not live in the era in which Jesus and the apostles lived for every single one of these actions was placing your life at risk.
5. Food was not abundant nor was it always around when you needed it. You saved food and ate rugged, plain food most days (grain, oats, rough bread, bits of fish, herbs). To share food was to tell another person that they were valued SO MUCH that you would risk your own future for them or, at the very least, come to their level and share their hard situation.
6. The same with clothes – most had very few and people protected them (apostles fishing on a boat, soldiers gambling over bits of cloth).

We still say that someone would “give you the shirt off their back” but, to us, it is just an expression and, besides, if they did, they have other shirts back home. These people did not; to give another person clothes meant doing without clothes yourself.

7. To visit someone in prison, you were bringing food, hope, and medicine but you were also putting yourself firmly in the gunsights of the authorities, local and regional. You risked your job, life, and freedom as well as giving away some of your food and goods.
8. So Matthew 25 isn't simple at all. God asks for us to respond to injustice by sharing what we have with those who have been treated unfairly by the world, joining them, not being afraid of being associated with them (and look at how Jesus acted that out! A rabbi touching a leper? A prostitute? A tax collector?) And remember – it got him killed.
9. God did not call for us to take this burden and hand it over to the government. This is a personal matter. I am not opposed to lobbying and fighting for laws that would protect the poor, minorities, and the broken but if you do that and do not spend your own money, time, reputation, and lives...you are not answering the call. This isn't an either/or world – you can do both.
10. The best way to stand up against evil is by expecting it to appear. Do not be surprised. Be ready.
11. **Eccl. 5:9-12**. Allow me to offend everyone in the room: I remember when President Obama told America that, sometime, you just have to accept that you've made enough money. And then he left office and bought a \$15 million mansion right by the ocean which, we are told, will rise and flood that area. And have you seen any property owned by or, especially, lived in by President Trump and his family? Way, way, way over the top. And for what? Just to look at?
12. I do not begrudge either of those gentlemen a single dollar they've earned or spent. That is not my point. My point is that the universe is not neutral and owning stuff is not entirely a good thing.

13. Beauty is, well, beautiful...but there is a line where beauty crosses over into gaudy. We need to learn the word “no” and we need to learn, as individuals, that it’s a really bad idea to let stuff, the getting of stuff, the wanting of stuff, and the storage of stuff to run our lives. The laborer in 5:12 knew all they had to worry about was working tomorrow like they worked today. The rich guy? They had worries (the rate of suicide and drug abuse among the rich).
14. Besides, we aren’t going to keep our stuff anyway **Eccl. 5:13-17**. I have been in the homes of many people who are in abject poverty and I can assure you I do not fall for the myth of the happy, simple, poor people. They need help and Kami and I do all we can – and so does Fourth Avenue. The amount of money, time and resources shared by members of this church is astounding. I couldn’t be more proud.
15. That said, the rich aren’t nearly as happy as we think they are (and we are talking “rich in comparison to us” as we know we are rich in comparison to most of the world). They need Jesus, too.
16. **Eccl. 5:18-20**. So take whatever God gives you and be happy with it. Share it lavishly with others. Love others and enter their stories. Place yourself at risk for the ones God loves – the rich and the poor. And live your lives so busy doing good and loving others that you have no time to sit around, getting bitter about what you do not have. Read this together: **Eccl. 5:19,20**