

You Are Here, pt.6 Eccl. 4:13

1. In more movies and TV shows than I can count, we come upon a scene. It's a highly charged scene, a scene of decision. On one side, there are wise advisors. On the other, the king, general, police chief, whatever. Sometimes there's an evil advisor by him/her (Women can be villains, too. I've seen 101 Dalmatians).
2. And the decider...chooses the wrong course. They just can't be swayed. They will not listen to reason. Their mind is made up. And it ends in disaster.
3. To be fair, I have no idea how this plays out in real life. What percentage of the time was the hard...nosed dictator correct? Regardless, that is where we find ourselves in the first verse of our reading today. **Eccl. 4:13**.
4. Are you teachable? If you are not teachable, not reachable, then you are a problem. How many things have you changed your mind about over the last...time period? Anything major? There is no need to change your mind just to change it; that doesn't make sense or help anyone. You don't have to come along and change everything just to change it. However...you must remain open to being taught, even if what you learn changes your very identity. [political parties, churches, theology, issues]
5. To examine a situation and learn how to take in advice and warning, you have to be aware and live a wide awake life. Falsehoods come at us constantly [Olive Garden question on human vs cat brains]. Even if we agree with the findings, have we considered how we/they arrived at those findings [Meme on science fair exhibit on washed hands and white bread]? If you read something that makes you say "That's exactly what I thought!" You should become a little uncomfortable and read a few other things.
6. A very long time after this book was written, the Holy Spirit spoke through James and said this about wisdom: **James 3:13-18**. Note that this is a person who listens. They don't pontificate or hold sway at the end of the bar – they listen. Look at **James 3:17** and ask if the way

you measure wisdom is the way God measures wisdom. Then go back to **Eccl. 4:13**. See it?

7. Here is a particularly difficult passage: **Eccl. 4:14-16**. We could spend an hour giving the Semitic roots to this reasoning and why it is phrased the way it is but, if you will allow me to do so, let me just cut to the chase. There is no particular blessing in being poor or in being rich. There is nothing wrong with being born into a powerful family or in being born into a weak, impoverished family. We like to create mythic tales of how our heroes suffered and overcame adversity (Washington and the cherry tree, Abraham Lincoln) or how they were born into power because God needed a hero to right some wrongs (Charlemagne, FDR). The Teacher tells us that heroes and kings have always come from the rich and the poor. We are NOT to assign meaning to that.
8. Humility is what the Teacher is going for. Be very careful who you elevate. Don't rush to grab the foam hand with the index finger raised declaring that you are #1 or the greatest of all time. Time has been around for a long...time. We don't even know most of the civilizations that went before us. For example, on islands north of Scotland in the dark, stormy, North Atlantic (or just North Sea), like the Orkney Islands. The Ness of Brodgar was uncovered in part back in 2003. It is now known that a civilization was here, far superior to anything found around Stonehenge, and they created an entire city given to worship back in 3200BC. **[There are 5 slides here. I will call for them one at a time]**
9. We need to be humble. We are part of the story but not its author and not its point. And our lesson on humility continues here – **Eccl. 5:1-7**. Wow. A lot to unpack here.
10. God takes vows very, very seriously. Before we go further, while I want to impress upon you the seriousness of vows, I also want to remind you of the grace of God given to us through His Son, Jesus. If this passage makes you realize that you have offended God, and IF you are a baptized believer, then go to Him and repent. If you are not a baptized believer, become one.

11. There is an expression that goes “his mouth wrote a check that his body couldn’t cash.” Now that no one under 40 uses checks on a regular basis, we need to retranslate that. It just means that you need to watch what you say. James speaks to that, as well. **James 3:3-12**. The tongue is dangerous because it reveals our heart, who we really are.
12. The Bible has scores of commands concerning speech – over a hundred just in Proverbs. They can be boiled down to a) don’t talk too much, b) be careful what you say, c) say only what you mean and, d) remember that the words you say will be the measuring stick used against you on the Last Day. This is serious stuff.
13. And, oh, this includes what is said on any social media platform. We are not here to advance our cause, but His. And we should not, must not, confuse the two.
14. A final word here before we stop and continue this discussion next week: remember the Gibeonites and Joshua 9. They made a vow when they’d been told not to. They made a vow under false pretenses. And God held them to it. When we made our vow in baptism, it was a solemn, serious act of obedience and submission to God. We have relinquished our lives and handed them to Him. The Teacher in Ecclesiastes and James, the brother of Christ, remind us to make our vows...and keep our vows.
15. We are the people of God. We are the people of promise. We were secured with a vow. Keep your vow.