

## You Are Here, pt.10. (Eccl. 7:29-8:17)

1. It takes a lot longer to get through a chapter when they are made up of many, somewhat connected but somewhat disconnected thoughts. Remember, chapters 7 and 8 in Ecclesiastes are rather like the Book of Proverbs so we have to take things one verse or one idea at a time. They are all flowing in the same direction but that is not always obvious at first glance.
2. We left off in Ecclesiastes 7:18 where we were warned that **"The man who fears God will avoid all extremes."** That said, you are about to discover that the Teacher, the voice of Ecclesiastes, doesn't always practice what he preaches.
3. **Ecclesiastes 7:19-22.** Every day, we face a series of choices. We can choose many, many different paths, different words, different facial expressions...every single day. Sometimes those choices reveal a great deal about our own heart (the word choice of the man about his wife in Morgantown). The Teacher says here in verse 19 that, if you have a choice, it is much better to be smart than to be ruler. (not sure if those are mutually exclusive but...)
4. Wisdom does not make you better than anyone else, however. The Teacher is going to call for some humility here. In verse 20, he reminds us that we are ridden with faults; we are all sinners. Here, God will chime in and let us know that He agrees with that (**1<sup>st</sup> John 1:8-10**). We often believe, even if only in secret, that our sins aren't as bad as the sins of those around us. To be fair, if I am going to be sinned against, I'd rather you be jealous than murderous when you think of me...but, regardless, we all have sins. We're all having a bad day.
5. The writer in Proverbs famously advises his sons to "make level paths for your feet." That just means, don't make things harder than they have to be. I cannot think of anything that will break your heart faster than seeking out what other people think of you. If you live for Likes or for the approval of others, you will be a slave to the moment, never okay, never settled, never at peace. One of the Rules of the Internet is: don't read the comments. So we have Twitter which is really just all of the comment sections shoved together randomly.

6. And if you find out that someone has told an untruth about you, remind yourself of the times you were not truthful or the times you sinned in other ways. Again – humility comes from recognizing our humanity, our common state with all other humans.
7. **Ecclesiastes 7:23-25** is yet another admonition to keep our eyes open and our minds engaged. (I can't enjoy many TV programs because of the errors made with guns, law, physics, etc.) And while you are searching out wisdom, remind yourself that you will never know it all and it is best to be wise AND humble.
8. There is nothing pleasant about the next passage so, before we read it, let us remember that this was a man writing to men about 900yrs before the birth of Jesus. You've heard that men are from Mars and women are from Venus – well, this guy is from the Horsehead Nebula. Hold on while we read what he has to say and then we will respond. Deep breath. **Eccles. 7:26-29**. Yikes.
9. Here is where we have to remind ourselves what the Bible is. When I was growing up, I was told that every word in here came directly from God. In fact, the men who wrote it were virtual secretaries (Balaam's donkey was used as an illustration). That just isn't true. God does not think it is hard to find a good, upright woman; that is the Teacher and he must have had some bad experiences down the line. Don't put that on God. If this idea troubles you, take a quick look at Paul's phrasing in **1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 1:14-16**. See? That isn't verbatim from God; it is from Paul. We still call of this inspired, as we should, but we should also then remind ourselves of the command of God that we study and rightly divide the Word of Truth.
10. Women have been subjugated, undervalued and mistreated for much of the history of life on earth. Men's greater physical strength, their simpler egos and thought processes, and their inability to bear children gave them advantages in every power grab possible. God was the first to give women rights – even the right to divorce, in the Old Testament. When Jesus came along, women were his truest companions. On the first Easter, it was women who spoke of the risen Lord time and again. The Samaritan woman at the well was the

first missionary to the Samaritans. Jesus would disagree with the Teacher here...but...

11. This may not just be the haughty, unwise judgment of the Teacher – it might be his experience. I've met people who would not buy a Japanese car because of Pearl Harbor. It might seem silly until you realize that a father or son was lost that changed the family forever. We all have our prejudices, many of which we are blind to and others, sad to say, that we are proud of (thinking our opinion to be a virtue rather than a sin).
12. I think we can agree with verse 29 that God is upright and He made us upright. It is we who have corrupted ourselves and others. The Teacher is almost to a breaking point here, wondering if there is any wisdom out there at all. **Eccle.8:1**.
13. Ecclesiastes 8:2-10 can be summarized this way: understand what you can change and what you cannot. Understand with what you can control and what you cannot. Again, this is a call for humility and to remind us that we are not God and we cannot stop every bad idea nor can we correct a leader who is set and determined to do something we think is foolish. This is not to say that we are to become passive but, rather, we should be wise enough to pick our battles carefully. We should understand the inevitable. **Ecccl.8:8**.
14. This call for humility continues through the rest of Ecclesiastes. He warns us that we cannot judge God's take on our lives by how long we live or by how much we have. As citizens in a prosperous nation (even now, with this crisis), we need to remember that the woman who is watching her children starve to death in Sudan is as beloved of God as are we. This is when our response to the world in which we live should be one of obedience to God and humility toward all. **Ecccl. 8:12-13**.
15. **Ecccl. 8:15-17**. Want what you have. Like what you've got. We are not God. God is God. Let's be at peace with that.