

You Are Here, pt. 13. Ecclesiastes 11 and 12

1. Today, we have much work to do! We will be wrapping up our series on Ecclesiastes. Next week – we start the Book of Job (although that can change).
2. I promised you last week that there was going to be a shift in meaning in this last section of Ecclesiastes that would make your take on the rest of the book change. Even though we've been in this book since January, you might want to go back and read it after today and see if you now read a different story.
3. The book ends with a song and then an epilogue penned by some unknown scribe from long ago. The song is both beautiful and confusing. Let's look at this section: **Ecc. 11:8-10**. It is heartbreaking, but true, that many religions seem to believe their primary function is to destroy pleasure and heap on guilt. The Teacher in this book strongly disagrees and so would Jesus. Remember: Jesus was criticized for going to parties and eating with people.
4. Note the balance in this passage: enjoy when you can, and understand that there will always be dark days and dark times, too. Hang on to this thought because we are going to need it later in this lesson.
5. One portion of this song that might make you scratch your head is the part that says "God will bring you to judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart." We usually think of the judgment of God as being a bad thing, a scary thing, a thing with which to scare other people...but God's judgment is a good thing because He loves us, created us, and understands us.
6. If I walked up to you and told you that I was going to judge you, you might understandably start bracing yourself for an unpleasant exchange. That is because we have taken a broad word and given it a very narrow meaning. I might be wanting to say "In my judgment, you are the best artist here! You are the smartest person in the room!"

7. Jesus refused to judge the woman caught in adultery. He said that the fallen woman who was crying over his feet had “done what she could.” His judgment was full of mercy and understanding – FAR more gracious than the judgment of anyone else in the room.
8. So – enjoy your life and remember that God loves you. He will bring you to judgment, not man or circumstance – God will.
9. Let’s read a long passage – the conclusion of the song: **Eccl. 12:1-8**. The message here is not new: enjoy what you can, when you can and acknowledge that our time on earth is not unlimited. Let us absorb as much of God as we can while we are young and then let that knowledge, that experience, and those memories carry us when our life begins to fade away.
10. [Dad and mom and their electronic Bible. Stroke victims who can no longer pray. When all that is left are the songs we learned when young]
11. The last 5 verses of the Book of Ecclesiastes are written by someone else, a guest epilogue, if you will. He starts by saying that the Teacher was really wise and collected proverbs and ideas to help everyone. Then, we find this lovely verse: **Eccl. 12:11-12**. We do, indeed have a Shepherd and to hear his title just beside the word “nails” gives me a bit of a shudder.
12. That Shepherd did, indeed, bring us Truth. More than that, He told us that he was THE way, THE truth, and THE life. And our shepherd will agree with the end of this book. **Eccl. 12:13,14**. Now, look at Jesus’s statement in **Luke 11:28**. Our job here on earth is to keep God’s commandments and behave in such a way as to enhance the reputation of God. Let’s make Him proud.
13. And now...for the twist at the end. Remember how we just discussed that the word “judgment” is used by us in a very narrow way that robs it of the positive aspects of judgment. We also need to look at that word that is sometimes translated “vanity” or “meaningless.” The book seems to be confusing because it says that eating and drinking are meaningless...and then tells us to eat and drink! More examples could be given here but let’s cut to the chase...

14. The only problem with all of the paths the Teacher took and discarded is that if we try to use them to establish our meaning, our value, they fail. Eating and drinking, loving your spouse, enjoying the sunshine of a beautiful day, and working your job with honor and joy...all are blessed by God and by the Teacher in this book several times. They are only called “meaningless” if you intend to get your meaning from your food, pleasures, work, etc.
15. Our lives here are a gift and God does not begrudge us a moment of our joy. However, He wants us to be very certain that our value, and His love for us, cannot be measured on a spreadsheet. Our meaning and His love cannot be determined by how happy we are, what we know, the person we love, or our job. All of those things can and should be lovely, but our value comes directly from God. He says we are valuable.
16. He says we are His children. He says we are worth the life of Jesus. He says He believes in us. (we have this treasure in earthen vessels). We speak of faith in God, but have we ever contemplated the faith God has in us? It is staggering.
17. So let’s stop trying to find our value by the good and bad in the world, our feelings, our bank accounts, or by how others value us in and out of our home. You are a child of God, a royal priesthood, a child of the King, dearly beloved and highly esteemed of God. And THAT is your meaning.