

Ecclesiastes 8

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[0:00] Ecclesiastes 8. Ecclesiastes 9.

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Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God because they fear before him. But it will not be well with the wicked.

Neither will he prolong his days like a shadow because he does not fear before God. There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked.

And there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. And I commend joy.

[2:06] For man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful. For this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.

However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. There was a time in Athens' ancient past when the populace was ruled by what they termed the rule of tyrants, a cabal of elites who dictated the destinies of the populace through their own self-interested decrees.

It's at that time that Plato's apology brings forth a figure by the name of Socrates and Socrates was a man not especially good-looking from what we know, nor relationally appealing.

[3:39] He was a difficult person. Which then surprised him when someone went into the temple at Delphi and received a word, the oracle of Delphi.

The question had been asked, who's the wisest person in the world? The response that came back through the temple doors was, well, that must be Socrates.

Well, he was the most shocked of all, so he went around and began to talk to both politicians and poets. He talked to rulers and writers.

He talked to anyone that he could, and he began to query them on matters of wisdom. And what he discovered was that they all thought more highly of themselves than they should.

So, Plato lets us know that Socrates' decision was this, I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing.

[4:42] The proverb, 8.1, seems to approximate the question that the oracle of Delphi had been asked.

There it is. Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? In fact, the bookend of chapter 8 closes on the limitations of our wisdom when we read, however much he may toil in seeking, that is verse 17, he will not find it out, even though a wise man claims to know he cannot find it out.

And so the question of the morning is, who is wise? Not just wisdom in the sense of knowledge, though.

Look at the latter half of the opening proverb, before which our three paragraphs of prose provide an answer. Who is like the wise, verse 1, and who knows the interpretation of a thing?

Here's the picture now, with the proverbial wisdom, A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.

[6:03] This is a kind of circumstantial wisdom. Who can have a shining face when the circumstances around them would call for something else?

A parent looks at a child and says, why do you look like that? Because a child, with their eyebrows alone, can express dissatisfaction concerning what was going to take place.

An adult, a man or a woman, can have what it talks here in verse 8, 1, a hardness of face toward things that are ungodly, toward things that are unjust, toward things that are unfair.

Evidently, there are times when our anger, even when warranted, can get in the way of wisdom. That's the subject matter of chapter 8.

We know this to be true. The countenance of an individual reveals often the inner condition of their soul.

[7:24] Who is wise? Who has a face that can shine when the circumstances would offer something to be recalcitrant against?

Well, the opening proverb is followed, as I mentioned, by three paragraphs of prose, which begin to describe this person.

What can we say about one who is wise in the face of things that are difficult? The first one, verses 2 to 9, according to that prose, it is the person who labors under ungodly authority with considerable patience.

That's the person that's wise. Look how it opens. I say, verse 2, keep the king's command because of God's oath to him. Be not hasty to go from his presence.

Do not take your stand in an evil cause. Or look at verse 9. All this observed, I did, while applying my heart when man has the power over man to his hurt.

[8:41] When those who are in authority, and in this sense, demonstrating a use of it in a very ungodly manner, who's the wise one? Well, it's the one who's laboring patiently under such a tyrannical rule.

There are four reasons given for this kind of wisdom. You can see it there. The first one in verse 3, for he does whatever he pleases. The person in charge is going to do whatever they're going to do. So don't, he says, take your stand in an evil cause. The second four is there in verse 4. For the word of the king is supreme.

And who's going to tell him what are you doing? Whoever keeps the command will know no evil thing and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.

You see, we live in a very angry day because of ungodliness, injustice, and unfairness. But, wise one, the one whose face shines rather than gets hardened is the one who learns to live under ungodly rule with patience.

[10:06] What would account for the patience? Well, look again. There's a 4 in verse 6 and a 4 in verse 7. Look at 7.

For he does not know what it will be for who can tell him what's going to happen. No man has the power to retain the spirit or power over the day of his death.

You can get so wrapped up that you really don't know the outcome of the actions that might happen. when your anger, even in a right cause, can get the best of you.

This is what the writer's claiming. The one who's wise is the one who labors under ungodly authority with considerable patience.

Not much patience today. Not much godliness either. We're fortunate to live in a place where eventually courts themselves can correct the overreach of others or the people and the populace can put pressure on things.

[11:16] But without this overturning of patient living under ungodly authority, we often can sacrifice wisdom.

It's not the only one who's wise. look at the second paragraph of prose. More can be said for poetry like that first verse often requires additional prose to clarify and capture its intention.

Who's truly wise? The wise person is not only marked by their ability to labor well under ungodly authority with patience, but also 10 to 13 their ability to look beyond the present injustices with a future hope.

They somehow have the ability to not just patiently endure but look beyond with a future hope. Let me explain. Look how verse 10 starts.

Then I saw the wicked buried. They were finally gone off the scene. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such thing.

[12:34] What do they mean by going in and out of the holy place? I think it probably comes from Nehemiah chapter 11 verse 1. When the people came back to the city in a sense, not everyone lived in the city.

Most people still dwelt in the surrounding areas and towns of Judah, but 1 in 10 was asked to live with the leaders inside the city in the holy place and that's where all the power was.

And yet all the power positioned in the city walls led to injustices created among the people.

In other words, they were self-preserving in their activity. Look at verse 11. Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

And as evil increases, notice verse 12, though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know, wow, what a statement by the writer, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God because they fear before him, but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow because he does not fear before God.

[13:50] What the writer is trying to say, who's the wise one in the midst of a world of injustice? It's the one who has a faith filled hope in a future righteousness.

Reminded me this week of Psalm 1, this great contrast between the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked.

wicked. The wicked, according to the scriptures, will not stand in the day of judgment. There's going to be a day when it all gets cut down.

And so the wise one now is the one who has a faith filled hope for the future righteousness and judgment that will take full accord for those who are manipulating the system to their own ends.

And so he or she is able to walk through the world with a face that shines, with a countenance that reveals the inner condition of a soul that says, not only am I committed to living well and patiently in an ungodly world, I am committed to being faith filled and hopeful because future tense, there will be a day when these things are set.

[15:12] straight. I'm thinking in this regard about anger management. You know, we live in an angry world.

Yeah, a lot to be angry at. And the question is, what do you do with it? People will tell you rightly, take a few deep breaths, take a beat, slow down, repeat to yourself over and over, take it easy, take it easy, take it easy.

And all these strategies to control the internal turmoil that wants to erupt on the injustices are true, but the strategy that's in this second paragraph is simply this, have a faith-filled hope that in the future they won't stand and the righteous will.

That enables us to look beyond, at least that's what the writer has said. So who is the wise person? One, they labor under ungodly authority with patience.

two, they look beyond present injustices to a future hope. However, even more must be said.

There's a third paragraph of prose.

[16:42] The truly wise person also lives in a very nonsensical world with joy. It seems hard to come by, given especially what we read of in verses 14.

Because in verse 14, we just see things don't work as they ought to work. Let me read it for you.

There's a vanity that takes place on earth. There are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous.

That is nonsensical. Bad things are happening to very good people, and good things are happening to very bad people.

There's an unfairness to it. That's the motion of the third paragraph. There's not only an injustice at play, an ungodliness at play, but it's just downright unfair.

Why does this work the way it does? It reminded me this week of that prophet prophet by the name of Jonah who got really angry because God intended good things for very bad people.

[18:03] God shows up and says, now, can you just tell me again why you're so angry? What if I, who dwell in the heavens, determine that out of my mercy, I want to do something very good for someone very bad?

What is that to you? You ought to just rejoice under the vine of my cover. It's so hard to do, though, isn't it?

It was hard for Jonah. It's hard for you. It's hard for me, too. This joy, then, in the present, is what's commended, given all the unfairness that we see in the world.

Verse 15, I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through his days that God has given him under the sun. Somehow, then, the question which opened, who's the wise person? circumstantially, who's the wise person whose face is still shining though the circumstances would make another hard?

[19:28] It's the person of patience. It's the person of faith. It's the person with hope. It's the person who sits at a dinner table with joy.

How you doing? In the way of wisdom. Let me put it differently. Where do we turn to learn how to become that kind of person?

If you're like me, there are often times you'll go through the day and the foment of your inner life is just percolating.

But at least you and I both know that there are times when anger, even when warranted, can get the best of us. How do we become patient when we're not?

Faith filled when I'm just a realist. well, I don't think Socrates will take you far enough.

[20:46] He certainly will bring you to humility. That's good. I don't even think this chapter takes you far enough. Centuries later, there is a figure who walks onto the scene, who answers the question in a different way.

I'm referring to Jesus, who was also a teacher of wisdom. And he said, if you want to know the wise person, let me tell you how you can tell the difference.

The wise person builds their house on a rock. The foolish person puts it on the sand. And so when the winds come and the storms blow and the circumstances of life are hardening against it, the one that's on the sand, well, it's just going to wash away.

But the one that's built on the rock, well, they're going to be there. So then the question to me is, okay, then what's the rock? Well, that little vignette of proverbial wisdom taught by Jesus opened like this, whoever listens to my words and does them is like the wise man who built his house on the rock.

rock. That's where I'm going. That's where this church is pointing you. We want to be wise in an ungodly world.

[22:13] I want to be hope-filled in an unjust world. I want to be joyful when things are unfair.

I want to be on the rock and be left standing. I need to listen to the words of Jesus and do them. Because, as Paul later says, he is the power and the wisdom of God. I don't know how long you've been coming along to Christ Church Chicago, but this is our pursuit to hear the word of Christ and to live under it.

Didn't he stand before ungodly rulers, either of the government like Pilate or religious like Herod? And didn't his face nevertheless enable him to walk through with patience until God rewarded him in righteousness? Yes, he did.

[23:23] isn't he the one that the scriptures say will one day come and self-correct, hold accountable the people that we want accountable?

Isn't he the one to whom the Father has given all authority and that he will judge? Can I not leave judgment to him? I can.

isn't he the one that lived day by day eating his daily bread and taking joy at the table with friends, leaving all the other stuff to his Father in good time?

Who's wise? Who's wise in an ungodly, unjust, unfair world? Jesus, build your life on his word and he will reward you, not only then, but now too.

Our heavenly Father, we give ourselves to the tumultuous upturnings of our inner soul and we want to be men and women who live well.

[24:55] We want to be people of wisdom. Give us that, even today, in Christ's name.