

Politics, Justice, Striving After Wind

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 August 2016

Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 00] Well, part of the fun of studying God's Word, part of the fun of preaching God's Word is that you arrive at passages that wouldn't have been your choice to preach, right?

So it makes it a little bit hard for me to like, you know, camp on certain hobby horses of my own because I don't get to set the agenda. God's Word sets the agenda as we proceed forward through the book of Ecclesiastes.

So today, we're going to wade into rather dangerous territory here. And the dangerous territory, as you can see here, is the subject of politics, right?

One of the benefits of moving up to Canada from the United States about five years ago was that I got to escape most of the political mess that's down there.

You know, I've had people often ask me, would you ever think about returning to the States? And with each passing year, I'm pretty confident, no, no, I'd rather not. You know, I'd rather be up here where there's at least a degree of civility still left.

[1 : 02] And so, regardless of that, you know, we're going into it. We're going into the realm of politics, which from the pulpit is always a risky thing. One of the hallmarks of the Baptist tradition, really, is this belief, this affirming of the value of the separation of church and state.

And a lot of people think that's because, oh, the church is going to corrupt the state if you have an authorized religion or something like that. The church is going to gain power, it's going to control the state. Actually, the bigger danger is that the state is going to corrupt the church.

That is a much bigger danger than vice versa. In fact, I would argue that is not only a danger, but that is something that actually happens very often, both in the United States and in other countries throughout the world, that the emphasis and the value that we place on the state corrupts God's people, corrupts the church.

So Ecclesiastes chapter 8 is going to give us wisdom when it comes to the area of politics. Now, if you've got your Bible with you, turn to chapter 8 of Ecclesiastes.

If you're using one of the Bibles that our ushers provided to you, that's going to be on page 557. So Ecclesiastes chapter 8, about halfway through your Bible in the Old Testament.

[2 : 24] Now, as we've been studying the book of Ecclesiastes, keep in mind, most of these words of Ecclesiastes are written before the coming of Jesus Christ, several hundred years before.

They're written by a man who calls himself, depending on your translation, calls himself either the preacher or the teacher.

This man has been hard at work, and what he really seems to be doing is this. He's deconstructing. This book is a deconstructor. It's deconstructing all of the things that our culture encourages you and me to put our faith in, all the things that our culture encourages us to put our faith in.

So the preacher has been asking this question, a question that appears right at the beginning of chapter 1. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? So in other words, we filled our lives with busyness, with activity.

And is there any lasting gain that we can get out of all of that busyness and activity? Is there any lasting gain that we can get out of, that we can extract out of the created world that we live in, out of everything that we see around us?

Is there anything good that we can hold on to? Is there anything that can't be taken away from us? Is there anything that we can call the good life?

[3 : 35] Is there anything that really is the good life that can never be taken away, that can never let you down? And so far, we've found that every single thing in this created world fails.

There is nothing in this created world that can reliably and permanently deliver the good life that we are looking for. And that's why we read in chapter 1, vanity of vanities, says the preacher.

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. You know, everything is futility. Everything is fleeting, passing away. The preacher has determined that all of this busyness and activity that we fill our lives with, it has not succeeded and will never succeed in producing the good life. And this is true of all human effort and insight. This is true of all independence and achievement. This is true of all empty religious rituals and words. This is true of acquiring and consuming wealth. This is true of indulging in pleasure and scandal. This is true of extravagant piety and mastery of life. You know, many of those things are perfectly fine in and of themselves, but none of them, not a single one, reliably and infallibly delivers what we want from them, what we are trying to get out of them.

[4 : 51] And now we're going to find that the same is true for one of the great hopes that we often hold onto. And that is our hope in human government. Our hope in human government.

What we're going to find in Ecclesiastes chapter 8, first of all, is this. The good life is not gained by political scheming and seizing power. Sorry, in seizing justice. The good life is not gained by political scheming and seizing justice.

What we're going to find is that the preacher, first of all, he does see value in a wise approach to politics and to political activism. He does see value in that. He sees value in encouraging the governing authorities to embrace just and righteous policies. policies. But there are limits. There are limits on what the authorities, first of all, are willing to do. And second of all, what they are able to do.

And this is something that we seem to forget during election season, when the politicians go out there and they make all these grand promises about what they're going to do and what they're going to deliver.

[5 : 54] And we all pretend that they can actually do it. Right? Even if they're willing to. And let's give them the benefit of the doubt. They want to do it. Maybe they want to deliver on all of their promises.

But can they really? Do they really have that ability? Or are there limits to their power? In addition to that, there are practical dangers.

Very real, very practical dangers, especially for the people of God, when we become entangled in political scheming and seizing justice. And so we're going to look at what those are. So when it comes to a wise approach to political involvement, we start Ecclesiastes chapter 8, verse 1. And here is what the preacher tells us in verse 1. Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.

Now, if you're reading that, you're like, okay, well, I don't see the politics there. Right? There's not a lot there. And we have to interpret this in the context of what follows. This is how the preacher has chosen to introduce the following verses.

[7 : 07] And much like the rest of the chapter, what he's saying, you know, it can be actually kind of difficult to understand, make this out. There's a lot in this chapter. This was probably out of all the sermons that I've preached in Ecclesiastes.

This is definitely far and away the most difficult one. Because there's a lot in here that's just kind of confusing. If you read several different translations, you'll discover that they handle different verses in different ways sometimes. The commentators, they don't come right out and say it, but I can tell that they're kind of confused by a lot of it, too.

What does he mean by this? The interpretation of a thing. How does wisdom make a man's face shine? And how does his face change? And I think there's a lot of value when we approach ambiguous verses like these.

There's incredible value because they challenge us to think. And that's the whole point of a proverb like this. It challenges you to stop and think, to mull over the benefits of wisdom. We're about to discuss the dangerous world of politics.

And the preacher is reminding us of how wisdom can help us understand how to behave in a political system that is often cutthroat and amoral. Wisdom helps you and me think through how to interpret the words of others, especially the words of politicians.

[8 : 27] And it also helps us consider how my words that I say may be interpreted or misinterpreted by others. So it gives us wisdom in exercising caution about the way that we speak.

Because whatever I just happen to blurt out might be misinterpreted by someone else. And I need to exercise great caution in the words that I choose, the words that I use, instead of just spewing out whatever is on my mind.

Wisdom gives us courage. It makes our face shine. It gives us confidence in a treacherous situation. Wisdom changes the attitudes and minds of people in positions of power.

So wisdom is a powerful ally when it comes to our involvement in the political scene. Here's how the preacher sees wisdom playing its role in the real world, beginning in verse 2.

I say, 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, for he does whatever he pleases.

[9 : 32] For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, what are you doing? Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing. And the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.

Now, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that this is a little bit of a different political situation than our own, right? The preacher is giving counsel.

He's giving advice to someone who has access to the royal court of a king. The government system is an absolute monarchy. The king has absolute power. So to learn from the preacher's counsel, we can't just take this and just immediately apply it directly into our own lives without thinking this through.

What we first have to do is to draw some general principles from it. And then what we can do is take those principles and reapply them to our current situation over 2,000 years later, at a different time in salvation history, and in a different system of government.

So here's the general principle of these verses. If we were to give a name or a label to the sort of political philosophy that the preacher encourages, we would probably name it this, cautious engagement.

[10 : 49] Cautious engagement. So on the one hand, the preacher warns us in verse 3. Be not hasty to go from his presence, the king's presence.

So in other words, don't try to run away from political involvement. Don't try to get out of that throne room as fast as you can, right? Don't be hasty. Don't rush away from it.

And this is something I have encountered quite a few Christians who their attitude towards politics is not my cup of tea, right? Don't want to deal with it. Don't want anything to do with it. Don't want to pay any attention to it.

I'm staying out of that. And what he's proposing is no. This is our responsibility as citizens of our country, as residents of British Columbia, as residents of our community, to be involved.

Don't rush away from the political scene. Don't rush away from wisdom and from thinking through the issues of politics. Instead, in verse 2, he says, keep the king's command because of God's oath to him.

[11 : 55] In other words, that we are bound by some sort of oath. Now, this is one of those tricky translation issues. Some translators, maybe your version, sees this as God's oath to the king.

You know, this is God's word to the king establishing the king's authority, that the king has authority given to him by God. And therefore, that you should follow the king's authority. There are other translators that think that this is your oath of loyalty to the king before God.

So this is an oath that you made. Either way, the good news is that it doesn't make a huge amount of difference for you and for me which is the correct interpretation.

Because either way, you and I are urged to submit to the governing authorities on the one hand. And on the other hand, we engage in the political process to the degree that we are able.

So submit to the governing authorities and engage in the political process when we are able. This is a consistent and clear teaching in scripture. Chris mentioned this earlier as we were studying, as we were looking at the memory verse today.

[12 : 59] The words of Jesus Christ and how he said, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. And that's one of those sentences that when you unpack that, when you tease apart what that means and think through it, it's enormous, has an enormous number of implications for the way that we live.

One of the authors in the New Testament who really teases out a lot of the implications of that is the Apostle Paul. In Romans chapter 13, he talks a great length about this subject, expanding on what Jesus says.

And he says this in Romans chapter 13, Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. Pay to all what is owed to them. Taxes to whom taxes are owed.

Revenue to whom revenue is owed. Respect to whom respect is owed. Honor to whom honor is owed. And I think this is a valuable thing to remember in our political climate.

[14:11] Because I've noticed a lot of Christians, maybe not so much here, but maybe back in Indiana where I came from, there's a lot of Christians who seem to really promote and buy into this sort of a libertarian suspicion of government that basically views government as an inherently evil thing, a necessary evil.

That government is more or less a legitimized mafia that extorts money from you in exchange for services poorly rendered. I'm not exaggerating.

That is the way that I've seen a few Christian friends explain their political views. The preacher does not see it that way. Jesus did not see it that way. Paul did not see it that way.

God does not see it that way. The preacher sees the hand of God working in human government.

He urges you, he urges me, not only to pay, Paul urges you and me, not only to pay taxes and revenue, but in addition to that, honor and respect to those who are in power.

What that means is that your elected political leaders, you owe them honor, you owe them respect.

That's something that I've had to face firsthand as I'm looking at the U.S. presidential election.

[15:29] And personally, I'm not a huge fan of what's going on down there. But the reality is, whoever wins the presidency, because I'm an American citizen, I will need to pay them respect and honor.

In other words, even when I disagree with them, even when I criticize their policies, I'm not going to insult them. I'm not going to falsely accuse them of things. I'm not going to falsely label them.

I'm going to pay them respect and honor. That is the way that we must approach our politicians, even if we feel that we don't deserve them, that they don't deserve it. So on the one hand, you and I are called to political engagement.

On the other hand, we are warned that this must be a cautious engagement. This must be a cautious engagement. We see in verses 2 through 5 that we are to take care, first of all, do not take your stand in an evil cause.

There's a danger of taking a stand on something that is a wrong thing. We can become stubborn, get caught up in a political cause that we think is good, but in reality, might be evil.

[16:40] Let's talk about how that actually plays out in the real world. Because this is a pattern that I've noticed. Here's how we might end up taking a stand in an evil cause. See, the problem with politics is that you and I see an injustice in our society, in our culture, or in our community.

We see that there's a wrong that should be righted. And so, rightly, we take up a political cause. We want the government to resolve this issue.

What happens is that we start to identify ourselves with that political cause. And then we start to identify ourselves with the political party that promises to resolve this problem in the way that we want.

And then the problem is that we identify ourselves with that political party, what happens is that we start to gradually conform to the rest of the party platform.

So, for example, in the U.S. I've noticed many evangelical Christians rightly, they rightly champion the rights of the unborn. That's a very good thing.

[17:47] And then what happens though is that they start to, because the Republican party also claims to champion the rights of the unborn, they start to uncritically adopt every single Republican party platform position.

They identify with the party, they gain political allies within it, they absorb the political ideology not only in this area, but in every single other area of the party platform, even ones that run contrary to the compassion and justice that God's people value.

I think one strong indicator that we have placed our political party and our political allegiance above our allegiance to God and to Jesus Christ is this. Are there any positions and beliefs in the political party that you support that you disagree with?

I've noticed a lot of Christians who have been kind of like, their political beliefs seem to line up almost perfectly with the Republican party platform, and I'm concerned about that. I'd be just as

concerned about that if the Christian, if their beliefs line up with the Democratic party platform, or with the liberals in Canada, or with the conservatives.

Be very, very careful. That's a strong indication, if that's the case for you, that you might be putting allegiance to a political party and a political ideology above your allegiance to Jesus Christ.

[19 : 13] Keep close guard, close watch over your soul. Politics can corrupt you. And there's not only a danger that you and I may be corrupted in the political process. In verses 2 and 2 through 5, we also see there's a danger that comes not only from the corrupting power of government, but also from the governing authorities themselves.

Now, we're not under a king at present. I suppose technically we're under a queen, but it's a queen that doesn't really have this great and grand authority that you would have found in the monarchies of those days.

But the people that the preacher is writing to are under the man who had tremendous ability to harm them. We also are under the power of individuals who do have some ability to bring harm to us and to bring harm to our church if they chose to do so.

This is true. And this has always been true. This is not a recent development. Someone who is in a position of power is always going to be in a position to bring trouble to you and to bring trouble to God's church.

So we would do well, and this is a counsel that I think is, you know, I think would have been given safely 30, 40, 50 years ago, just as surely as now.

[20 : 32] We would do well to be cautious and to be circumspect in the way that you and I speak and the way that you and I write to our government officials. The preacher reminds us in verse 5 that the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.

This is why we need wisdom. This is why we need the guidance and wisdom that God's word gives us. How to communicate well. When is the right time to push a cause and promote a cause?

When is it time to lay low? It takes a lot of wisdom. Wisdom proves its usefulness here. It guides you and me in a cautious engagement with the political process.

But this wisdom has its limits, and we encounter them in verse 6. Verse 6. For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him.

For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? No man has power to retain the spirit or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.

[21 : 43] All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt. In other words, you and I, we can be as tactful, as careful, as wise as possible in our political dealings, in our support for certain politicians, in our interaction with opposing politicians, but our wisdom may not be enough to protect us.

All that wisdom may not be enough to protect you. All that wisdom may not be enough to promote justice. We don't know what will happen when we become involved in politics.

You don't know how government authorities might respond to you. You don't know which way the winds of culture might start blowing. And you don't know, even if you bring a policy to pass, it might have unintended consequences that you could not have foreseen.

Politics might bring some good, but it might also bring harm to us, no matter how wise we are. None of us knows what the future will bring. And it means little.

Really, it doesn't mean a lot that we have control of our choices because we don't know what consequences those choices are going to bring. That's the struggle with politics, right? Is that you could have this great program that really seems to solve all this problem, but you don't know what the ripple effects of that are going to be.

[23 : 10] Our culture, our world, is such a complex, difficult place and thing to understand. And our politicians try to make it so simple and to make it look like sound bites.

It's not simple. It's extraordinarily difficult. But we don't know what the consequences are going to be. The preacher warns his readers that when they approach this king, this monarch may end up destroying them.

He may end up becoming displeased with them. They have no way of knowing for sure which action, if any, will preserve their lives or the lives of their people or promote the good of their people. So the good life is not gained by political scheming and seizing justice.

It is not a reliable way to the good life. This was a situation that we see crop up all over in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Esther. And there we have the queen, the Jewish queen of a Persian king.

And in Esther chapter 4, this Queen Esther, she is confronted with a choice. Her people are under threat of genocide.

[24 : 19] But the king has not spoken to her in a long time. And there's a Persian law that if she enters without being called, if she enters into the throne room, she is to be put to death unless the king decides to show mercy to her.

By default, that will mean her death. So either she can, on the one hand, risk her neck by entering the king's throne room illegally to plead for the protection of her people.

Or on the other hand, she can play it safe. Wait for the king. Hopefully he'll summon her at some point. But maybe he won't. And maybe genocide will take place. Maybe her people will all be put to death.

She has no way of knowing what the outcome will be. Because if she goes in there and the king has her killed, that won't help her people either. She admits to her uncle Mordecai when she tells him in Esther chapter 4, I will go to the king though it is against the law and if I perish, I perish.

She doesn't know. She doesn't know. In today's political climate, many people feel helpless and powerless.

[25 : 29] They don't know what's going to happen. They feel like they're at the mercy of corrupt politicians, of foreign powers, of multinational corporations, powerful lobbyists, special interest groups.

and there's a degree of truth in that because the reality is, you know, we often try to encourage each other by saying that you and I can make a huge difference politically.

You know what the reality is? You and I, we just don't have as much control as we would like to think that we do. As individuals, we just don't have a lot of control and a lot of influence. We rarely have the ability to enact genuine, lasting political change on a systematic level.

We rarely have the ability to bring justice and righteousness to our culture by political means. Our powers are very limited. And we can certainly find exceptions to that rule, but the very fact that we note them and praise them are because they are the exceptions.

the preacher laments in verse 9. He sees that man had power over man to his hurt. What we find is this good institution of human government has been corrupted by human beings to bring harm and to bring ruin to one another.

[26 : 50] We saw a couple of, we saw a couple weeks back that human beings are, you know, some people ask the question, are they basically good? Or are they basically evil? And the answer to that question that we see in Ecclesiastes and throughout Scripture is that human beings are basically good but thoroughly corrupted.

And the same is true of human government. Basically good and thoroughly corrupted. So the good life is not gained by political scheming and seizing justice.

And the preacher sees futility not only in the presence of political power, not only in the presence of the king but also in the presence of wickedness that is never, that is not resolved, that justice is not done.

Beginning in verse 10 he writes, then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things.

This also is vanity. Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. So here the preacher sees human government failing to do what it is meant to do.

[28 : 04] He sees wicked people who have enjoyed a long life, who have enjoyed a life of influence, of power, unhindered by the governing authorities who should have been punishing them.

Depending on your translation, verse 10 indicates either their evil behavior is completely forgotten, in which case they get away with it, or it's not forgotten, it's praised.

In which case, not only do they get away with it, but they're celebrated for doing what's wrong.

Either one is bad. The government has failed to enact, the government has failed to enforce laws that punish the corrupt and cruel behavior of these powerful and wicked people.

And so their evil flourishes, and their evil doesn't just cause harm to the people around them, it corrupts everybody around them. People look at their lives and they want to emulate them. They want to emulate their greed, they want to emulate their immorality, they want to emulate their corruption.

They see that it seems to get them ahead. If the preacher is going to find any consolation, he does not look for it in the world of government and politics.

[29 : 23] He says, in verse 12, 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. This is just a really interesting statement because there's this statement of hope that's sandwiched in between these observations of injustice.

And this is an area where I feel like the commentators just don't really know what to do with it because he says right there in verse 12, it talks about a sinner doing evil a hundred times and prolonging his life and then right after that saying, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, like how a shadow stretches out in the evening.

That's not going to happen. I think what we're seeing here is that this preacher, this is where we really get to the heart and I think this is probably the first time in the book that we really see his faith come through.

That despite the fact that he is completely disillusioned with all the things that our culture puts their hope in, he is not a cynic. He is not a cynic. He is not cast aside any sort of hope whatsoever.

[30 : 44] That deep down he is a man of faith. Deep down he believes. He's a man who believes that God will affirm, that God will execute justice on behalf of his people, on behalf of those who fear him.

He executes justice on behalf of those who have such a clear understanding of the Lord God that they are filled with awe and wonder at him, that their lives are centered on him.

that they trust in his goodness and his power. And the preacher trusts that when the government fails in its role to punish evildoers, in its role to protect and promote what is good, that even then God will bring all these things into judgment.

And the preacher even believes this as he admits in verse 14, 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. He's not a man with his head stuck in the sand. He's not like Job's friends who have this really rigid idea that if something bad happens to you it must be because you're an evil person and have done wrong because good things would never happen to righteous people.

[32 : 05] Right? That's not his attitude. That's not his mindset. He knows. He sees people who are behaving rightly towards one another and still bad things happening to them.

He sees people who are trying to do the right thing and corrupt government policies are still beating them down. He sees people who are doing the wrong thing and cheating and being corrupt and greedy and the government turning a blind eye.

to their evil. And yet he still maintains faith. That God is on the side of those who fear him. That God is the one who will bring all these things into justice.

He still entrusts himself to the justice of God. The preacher believes that this is the only way this entrusting yourself to the justice of God it is the only way to find the good life in the middle of a ruined world.

in the middle of a world that cannot be repaired. That cannot be restored to glory by human effort and political will. And the preacher is counseling you and me this that the good life is found in affirming the good things God has given us.

[33 : 22] The good life is found in affirming the good things God has given us. And we see this in his response to all of this injustice. In his response to the fact that things aren't the way they're supposed to be.

Here's the way he encourages us to respond in 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 the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

It's really easy to get caught up in the chaos and the outrage of an unstable political climate. It is easy to be consumed with fear to be consumed with anger against people in positions of power or against people who have different political beliefs than you do.

It's easy to be consumed by this when we see foolish corrupt evil politicians gaining power gaining influence in our country in the United States throughout the rest of the world. But the preacher encourages you and me don't keep your eyes fixed do not obsess on these realities.

You probably need to do a lot less reading political news stories and raging and stewing on them and a lot more looking at the good things that God has given us.

[34 : 52] Looking how your father has faithfully provided for you. each and every day. The preacher encourages us enjoy. Enjoy the food enjoy the drink that God has given to us.

Trust that your father in heaven is going to provide and continue to provide exactly what we need even when we can't trust the government to do it. The preacher encourages us to take this mindset along with us.

He encourages us to take it with us in our toil as we engage in this frustrating toil of political involvement. Not to get so absorbed in it and absorbed in all the anger and outrage and hatred and fear and frustration but to take with us this trust in our father this trust in his provision and care and this joy in what we have been given.

Only in this way will our faces continue to shine with the wisdom of contentment. He gives us the alternative. Here's what the alternative is.

The alternative response in verses 16 and 17 is that our faces are going to be contorted with the misery of worry and confusion. He tells us about his experience of this in verse 16.

[36 : 12] 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.

You can watch CNN all day long you can watch Fox News 24-7 you can read all the pundits you can read all the prognosticators read all the polls you can listen to political analysts drone on and on and on and on about what is going to happen next and what this politician said and what they predict for the future but nobody really knows nobody really knows what's going to happen next you and I have zero control over it you can read about Donald Trump all day long and it will not change a single thing in this world and in your life it will do nothing for you except make you lose sleep so don't worry about it alright stay informed but keep it in perspective the right perspective to have is a perspective of trust and dependence on your heavenly father if you are his child he loves you he cares for you the good life is found in affirming the good things that God has given us several hundred years after the book of

Ecclesiastes was written Jesus Christ was about to begin his ministry on earth and he was God's chosen king and he too had a herald someone who came before him he had a man named John who prepared the people to hear that God's king was about to enter the world several government officials asked John what they should do how should they prepare for the coming of God's king how should they prepare for the coming of God's kingdom in the gospel of Luke chapter 3 we read John's response tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him teacher what shall we do and he said to them collect no more than you are authorized to do soldiers also asked him and we what shall we do and he said to them do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation and be content with your wages in other words pursue justice in your positions in power as the people were in expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John whether he might be the Christ John answered them all saying I baptize you with water but he who is mightier than I is coming the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire his winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire that last sentence is what Jesus Christ is going to do when he returns fully and finally to this earth using this agricultural metaphor this winnowing fork is in his hand all this wheat has been piled up and it's time to separate out the seed the good part of the wheat from the chaff from all the dust and when it's separated out the wheat is gathered in and is welcomed the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire that's good news for those of us who have embraced

Jesus Christ and his kingdom who have repented turned away from our life of sin it's bad news for those of us who have strapped ourselves to the sinking ship of this world and its political systems

and structures and have put our hope in our government and have put our hope in all human efforts and endeavors because the fate of all those who do so is to be burned with unquenchable fire when Jesus Christ returns this is the Christ this is God's chosen king this is the son of God he will set all things right his justice is tremendous news for those who have embraced him it is terrible news for those who have embraced the ruin of our present world and want to perpetuate that ruin forever and ever this king will be the one who finally brings the justice that you and I long for that the preacher longed for that the preacher was looking forward to because

[41 : 11] God had promised his king in Isaiah chapter 9 and it's written in Isaiah 9 the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them has light shone you have multiplied the nation you have increased its joy they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest as they are glad when they divide the spoil for the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder the rod of his oppressor you have broken as on the day of Midian for every boot of the tramping warrior and battle tumult every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire for to us a child is born to us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called wonderful counselor mighty God everlasting father prince of peace of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore the zeal of the

Lord of hosts will do this all of our political activity all of our efforts for justice they may be good but I think we use them in the wrong way they're not meant to straighten out and fix a crooked world we've already seen the book of Ecclesiastes that's impossible it can't be done they're not meant to usher in this utopia based on humanistic principles can't be done what they are meant to do is to all of our political effort all of our activities all of our promotion of justice here's what it's meant to do instead it's meant to offer people a glimpse of a better world it's meant to offer people a glimpse of the world as it will be when Jesus Christ rules with justice and with righteousness it's meant to introduce a longing in their hearts a longing for the kingdom of God so they too can join us in praying to God our Father your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven in the meantime while we still wait for that prayer to be answered you and

I can accept and you and I can enjoy what good things we have been given because those good things the food that you eat the drink that you have the natural world that you enjoy the benefits of the government they've been given as it's almost like the light of the moon at night it seems like such a bright light I noticed this watching the meteor showers the other night the moon was incredibly bright it was only a half moon but the moon's light is not its own source it is a reflection of a far greater glory that in a few hours was going to rise in the east there's a great light coming to this world all of our political activity and our involvement our promotion of justice is meant to reflect that great light and to show people this coming glory and encourage them to embrace it there's a great light coming to rise and to shine on this world the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light you have multiplied the nation you have increased its joy that is the good life the good life is not gained by political scheming and seizing justice the good life is found in affirming the good things God has given us