

Politics

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[0 : 0 0] from Ecclesiastes, and we're up to chapter 8. Ecclesiastes chapter 8. I found this book challenging as we've been reading it, challenging in life and reminding ourself of the futility of life without Jesus. And this passage is very much like this. So, let's read. We're going to read basically the whole chapter. We're going to look at this in one go this evening fairly quickly.

So, Ecclesiastes 8, and we're going to read from verse 2. The preacher, who's possibly Solomon, says, Obey the king's command. I say, because you took an oath before God, do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, What are you doing? Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a person may be weighed down by misery. Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? No one has power over the wind to contain it. So no one has power over the time of their death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it. All this I saw as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. Then, too, I saw the wicked buried, those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This, too, is meaningless. When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. Yet, because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth. The righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This, too, I say, is meaningless.

So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun. When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth, people getting no sleep day or night, then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.

[3 : 1 7] We'll end our reading at the end of chapter 8. Let's stand and we'll sing this chapter 8, and we'll look at this together. In the moments that remain to us, we'll see what the Lord would have us consider. Let's just ask for the Lord's help as we turn to His Word now. Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You, Lord, for even this difficult portion of Your Word, which in many ways seems very negative. Lord, as the preacher looks at life under the sun, even without Jesus, in many ways, Lord, help us to consider it, Lord, this side, Lord, of the Old Testament and to the New Testament, so many thousands of years since this was written. So, Father, we do just pray, Father, for Your leading and for Your guiding. Give us ears to hear what You would say to us. Give us understanding. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Politics, that's what I've called this sermon. I'm not a... Some of you are, I know, in every church, there's usually folk are right into politics. They know what it's... Politics is important, even if images like that kind of put you off your dinner and so forth. Slippery characters, really. And we're sending this war and various things. Tonight's news was very much about the girl who's jumped ship for the government. It just... And yet, politics is very important. How we have to engage with it one way or another because it's right and wrong, rules and regulations. We can't put our head in the sand. We, everybody, level or another. And that's what we're looking at tonight in the passage before is we're looking at how we are to relate to who has created the world in a particular way where certain people do have authority, mostly... Otherwise, the blind lead the blind. And somebody has to call

the shot. Somebody has to make decisions. You see this throughout life, not just in politics, not just ruling government. It's the way God has wired things. It makes sense.

And we need to know, it's good that we know how we are to relate to those. Also, we recognize in this passage that not everybody leads well. What happens to those who do not lead well? What happens to those who are wicked? We'll look at very briefly this evening how to submit to those in authority or how to relate to this. And what happens in the future? These are the things that... The two main things in this passage that Solomon or the... He's looking at life under the sun. And in many ways, not in many ways, in every way, the whole of the Bible is about Jesus. And the Old Testament is about Jesus, just waving for a Savior. The failures of man to... Of mankind to... If we are to be saved by our own efforts, we would fail. And we need a Savior. And all the way through, there's a promise that God is Savior. And if you look at Ecclesiastes in that light, that as he tries to make sense of... It doesn't make sense. You think, what is the point of all of this? You live, you die, there's aches and pains that aren't right. How do you make sense of this? And it's really only when you become a Christian, and you know for a fact there's a God. He saves us from sin, who brings us back to himself.

And we have a loving Heavenly Father who is with us throughout this life. That this life is not all there is. It's not just a wee planet, and folk are in fear of global war.

Destroy the earth and end of story. There is a sovereign God who's in control. There is heaven. There is hell. This is not all there is. And Ecclesiastes prepares us for Jesus in many ways.

[6 : 52] Jesus, it doesn't make sense. But when we consider the New Testament, when we consider the promises in the Old Testament, we're saying this, Mr. Preacher, but we have a fuller revelation, and we know there's more. And that's what we're looking at tonight. We're going to point, then, the first main thing in this. I've called this obedience to authority. Verses 2 to relate to authority figures. In his day, it wasn't the Labour government. It was the various rules people had to get with the program. But look at verse 2. Obey the king's command before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do for the supreme, who can say to him, what are you doing? Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm and devise.

Like this, a wee bit. We are to obey the king's command. And it talks about an oath. And basically, this exists between God and governments. And basically, no government that's generally popular with the majority of its subjects. It's not just the youth. And then you look at the numbers, probably about 25 percent, boom, they're in there of those voting and so forth. Always problem with the government. And certainly, the citizens are not always the best pleased. But here's a clear statement that the governments or the king or whatever form of structure is in place, God, or God allows them to be there. And we easily forget this. The Bible is how we are to relate to those in authority. Paul teaches on this, doesn't he, in Romans 13, let me remember, let everyone be subject to the governing authorities. Bearing in mind, this is the Romans a lot of the time, because there was heavy taxes and so forth. But he says, let everyone be subject to governing authorities. There is that which God establishes. In other words, it's not just a ballot box that determines. It's not down to who. The duties that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. And it says, for one in authority is God's servant for your good.

God places them there. And the idea is that we are supposed to be blessed as a result of this. If you do wrong, be afraid, he says. They are God's servant, agents of wrath, to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also as a matter of consciences. That is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them. If you owe taxes, pay taxes, revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honor, then honor. Could not be clearer, could not be clearer how we are to relate not to a king as such, but to those in authority.

Peter says the same thing. Submit yourself, for the Lord's sake, to every human authority, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority, or to the governors who were under them, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God.

Honor the emperor. So, Peter says the same thing as Paul. Recognize those who are in authority. Jesus, you remember, said something similar. Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God. And therefore, this is how we are to function in the world, to

recognize that governments and structures are put in place with God. Now, you can apply that principle down through not just to governments, but any authority figure. It might be between children, and parents, where parents are to be honored by their children. Ephesians 6, children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. So, we see that there is an order there as well, parents towards their children, husbands and wives. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so the wives should submit to their husbands in everything. That's always a hot potato, that, isn't it? If you showed this to people today, wives submit to your husbands and everything, they'd think, you are joking. It says this in the Bible, really. And yet, it is a great thing. And before women go, well, you know, I'm not supposed to submit to him. He's a waste of space. Well, the husband, as Christ loved the church, the husband is to love his wife in the same way. Christ died for the church. The husband gets a harder deal.

[11 : 57] Somebody said to me, you can either submit or you can die. I think I'll submit, thank you. But to die, and when you've got a husband prepared to die for his wife, who would not want to submit to that person?

It's where people fight and squabble and you get this. It's humans that ruin those rules. But it is good. Husband, die for your wife. And wife, submit to your husband who prepares to die for you. But where you get problems, and that's what makes a mess. It's the same in the church, between members and elders. Have confidence in your leaders, and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. It's one of the signs of a healthy church, where a church respect their elders. They might not need to know everything that's happening, but they trust their elders.

Usually, when I go to a church for the first time, and I'm taking on a new pastorate, I do two things. I was sharing this with elders recently. I do two main things. I encourage the flock, and establish the eldership within the church, that the church look and think, these are our elders, and we should honor and respect them. And they need to grow into that role as well, and to take that function, to lead as they are supposed to lead in the local church. So, we see that. So, authority figures are important, and this is what this reminds us. And look at what he says in verse 3. We're not to throw the toys out the pram when they behave in a way that we do not like. Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. It's a very real picture. The king says something, and you're going, I'm out of here. I'm not listening to this. I'm away. And it's basically this. We are not to insist on our own way if we don't get our own way. We don't like it. And you imagine a world where God puts authority figures, and we just don't like it, and we do a runner. And that's what he's saying. Recognize those in authority, respect them, and do not be quick to, as it says, throw the toys out the pram. And then it says in verse 3, for he will do whatever he pleases. And recognize that they have authority, and sometimes you're just wasting time. You're continuing in a cause, it says, verse 3. Don't stand up for a bad cause, because you'll just fail. You'll fail miserably.

Recognize that we are not always right as well. So, he says, he ends his teaching in verse 5, whoever obeys his commands will come to no harm. So, that is basically, ultimately, our loyalty is to God. Daniel did not always obey the authorities. There comes a time when you have to stand against this. It's not blind recognition. And that is why the preacher now begins to get things in balance.

He says this. This is the principle, and we must adhere to that principle. But there comes a time when things are wrong. Daniel worshipped this golden image and so forth, when countries, when governments can get things badly wrong. But the wise person will know when to respond to those times. Look at verse 5 and 6. The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure, for there is a proper time and procedure for every matter. In other words, there's a right time and the right way to go about things. And we will know when enough is enough, and we need to take a stand. But the wise will know this. And we, the wise person has their heart attuned to God. Lord, this is against your word.

[15 : 53] This is wrong. And we take a stand in that. And what the preacher's saying here is timing is essential. It's one of the, I had the privilege of working with students at Oak Hill. I had about half a dozen and then from London Seminary as well. It's one of the best privileges I've had in pastoral ministry.

I used to enjoy trying to prepare them for their role in what they were doing. And I think they always thought they have this, I'm left college, I'm going to be preaching, I'm going to be teaching, I'm going

to be choosing a series, I'm going to be leading meetings, I'm going to be spilling out into the community. And they have this picture of what the ministry is all about. And I used to, I always said to them, the hardest thing you will discover in ministry is knowing when to pick your battles. You will come across many things that just aren't right. And if you pick up and fight every battle, the minute it comes, you will weary your people and you will weary yourself. There comes a time when you just need to let it go. Now is not the time to address that particular thing.

And if you can learn that and pick your battles, you will do well. You'll survive longer. But if you go into full riot gear every single time, you will just, if you know anything of the Old Testament, God's people gave every leader hard time. Look at Paul, the churches, Jesus even from his own disciples, Daniel, Elijah, Moses, David, without exception, God's people were hard to work with.

It's the same in the churches. And a leader needs to know the right time. When is the proper time to deal with us? When is it right to leave? Pastors, leaders very much need wisdom. Timing is everything.

And then he says that there are times even kings, verse 7, don't know the future, so we cannot tell what will come. And he mentions four areas, and very quickly, where we're powerless. Verse 8, over the wind. We can't control the wind. Some commentators say this is the Spirit of God.

[18:02] John 3, we'll look at this next Sunday. John chapter 3, Jesus says, the wind blows where it pleases. You hear it sounds, you cannot tell where it comes from, where it's going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. We can't control things, not everything. We certainly cannot control what God does, and the Holy Spirit. Verse 8, we also have no power over the time of our death, and there's no release from war. You don't just say, well, I've been fighting for two days. I think I'll go back home.

It doesn't work. Wickedness will not deliver those who practice it, this continual battle with sin. So in other words, we are to submit to authority figures. Pick your battles very carefully. Otherwise, we are the ones who often get hurt. A bit like David. I really like David. Remember when Saul was acting so wrongly, and he had the opportunity. His men were saying, God's put them in your hands, and he cut a bit off his garment, and he felt really convicted. And he says, the Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him, for he is the anointed of the Lord. And it's just reminding ourselves of that, that God puts authority figures in place. We need to know how to relate to them. Secondly, he asked the other question, maybe following on, right? There are governments who are bad, and we're told to submit, and we need to pick our battles, knowing the right time.

What about those who are wicked? What will happen to them? So that's the second thing. Are the wicked really punished? What will happen to them? And he noticed that the wicked are unworthy. He notices this in verse 10. I saw this, that I saw the wicked buried, those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. The commentators are telling me a wee bit of saying, what's actually happening here? The wicked are buried, but they used to do such and such. In other words, this is, the commentators have said that this is the wickedhood, an appearance of righteousness, being praised when it's undeserved. It's a bit like sometimes when you go to a Christian funeral, when the person's there, you knew they didn't like God, no time for God, wouldn't call himself religious. It's not for me. And the funeral service takes place. But they're presented in such a way that they are Christians, and they were okay, and they believed in God, and they're off to heaven and off to glory. And you wonder if you've come into the right funeral. And you think, really? I don't recognize that guy. He never lived like that at all. If you asked him, he would have said, it's not for me. But suddenly, he's, it's okay, it's well with his soul. And it isn't the case. And this is what's happening here. The wicked are buried when they used to do certain things, but there was, there was no consistency. They were wicked in their deeds, though they had disappearance or whatever. We sit at such funerals. We try not to pass judgment. We say, well, Lord, the Lord knows those who are his, and maybe on their deathbed, like the thief on the cross, they repented and believed. We cling to those things.

These things we leave in the hands of God. And then you have this verse about the wicked, who are undeserving, but unrestrained. Verse 11. When a sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. Man is a creature of the moment. Tomorrow never comes. If I can get away with it today, that's fine. There's an advert on the telly, which is, is actually very powerful. I don't, I can't remember, it must just be advertising how to drive, but the guy who's driving, he goes, I always drive here, 60 mile an hour, it's fine. I've always got away with it.

And then you see the car sliding, and he's going, I'll never do it again. I'm really sorry. I've always done it. I've got away with it. And now he doesn't get away with this.

And that's what sin is like, isn't it? The more you keep getting away with it, the more you keep doing it. People are like this today. They were like this in Jesus' day. They were like this in the early church. Remember 2 Peter 3. You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, and they will say, where is his coming? You keep talking about the Lord's coming. Ever since our ancestor died, everything goes on just as it has since the beginning of creation.

[22 : 45] In other words, there is no second coming. Everything is just the same. People today, they will presume in tomorrow, next week, this week will be the same as last week, which was the same as the week before. Nothing changes. Christians go on about death, resurrection, Jesus, God. There is none of these things. And because they're not punished, they just keep going on and on. That is the human condition. If you know your scriptures, you know why this is, why the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise. Peter says he is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. And if only people could realize that, that God is giving them an opportunity to repent. But there will be a day, and it will come like a thief in the night. And the heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be dissolved by fire. The earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. That day is surely coming. And we go to the New Testament to understand this. There is coming a time when evil will be looked at. Acts 17, in the past, God overlooked ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere. That is such encompassing. All people everywhere to repent. He set a day whereby he's raised a man, proof that the grave is not the end. In Hebrews 9, 27. I used to, I'll share John 3, 16, and Hebrews 9, 27. Those were my two favorite verses as a young Christian. You know, God so loved the world. He gave his only Son. Whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. Isn't that good news? I don't really know. Well, here's something else you need to know. That just as people are destined to die once, and after this to face judgment, there is a judgment coming. You need to embrace John 3, 16. You need to kiss the Son, lest he is angry with you. And no one will escape judgment. Every one of us will suffer. And the preacher's looking at this. He doesn't get a lot of this. So, he's saying, the wicked seem to get what the righteous deserve, and the righteous seem to get, verse 14, what the wicked deserve. It seems to be that it's been meted out wrong. The rewards have been meted out wrong. Those of us who know better, and indeed the preacher knows this, he catches himself on in verse 13, yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them. This is his conclusion. Their days will not lengthen.

The wicked will be punished. We don't have time to look at the verses, but let me read to you Isaiah 66, a couple of verses. All mankind will come and bow down before me, says the Lord. They will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me. The worms that eat them will not die.

The fire that burns them will not be quenched. Jesus said the same thing, talking about this eternal aspect of it, eternal aspect of punishment. And in Revelation, you're better to enter life with one eye than two eyes and to be thrown into the fire of hell. Revelation 20. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose names are not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. There will be a righting of wrongs. The righteous will shine like stars. Those who have rejected God, rejected the gospel, who think we are getting away with this, there will be consequences. In many ways, verse 13 is an understatement. It will not go well with them. While you are not joking, serious words indeed. So repentance is needed. Let the thief on the cross, we are getting what we deserve, he says. Don't you fear God? Remember me when you come into your kingdom. Everybody needs to say that, Lord, I've not lived a life worthy of you. And the righteous will be rewarded. There's a righteousness that's ours by faith. When we trust in Jesus, trust in the gospel, we are those who are dressed in white robes. Who are they? The writer in Revelation says, these are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They will be in the blood of the Lamb. The gospel is our only hope. It's our only hope.

We look forward to that time when there will be no more hunger. We were talking about starvation. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne, lead them to springs of water. And God will wipe away every tear from justice. There's a righting of every wrong. So verse 15, the fourth time now in this book, the preacher says, basically, eat, drink, and be glad. When you know it's well with your soul, you can

eat, drink, and be glad. You can go on holiday. You can thank the Lord for all the things that he gives you, as we were thinking this morning. There's no guilt with these things. God has been good. We can enjoy life here as we look forward to the life to come in every wrong righted. So here are the preacher's thoughts. Obey those in authority. Submit to them. But there are times when you need to stand up. You'll know the right time, the right procedure, he says, when to do this. And the wicked will be punished. There is a righting and a wrong. All the wrongs will be righted. The righteous will get what they deserve, and the wicked will get what they deserve as well. This is the teaching of

[28 : 56] Ecclesiastes chapter 8. Serious words, but words to rejoice in if you know that it's well with your soul. Let's stand and we'll sing together. How great is our God.