

Sunday, September 6, 2020 pm

STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES (27)

Rulers, and those who follow them

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

Tonight, we continue our study of the book of Ecclesiastes where we find Solomon's question for the meaning of life. Having determined that making the pursuit of anything worldly is vanity (and he looked everywhere), Solomon still has advice (wisdom) to impart. The second half of the book (chs. 7-12) talk about his wisdom. The past few lessons dealing with this addressed some principles associated with wisdom.

Our text this evening continues to address this wisdom, but it is directed toward leaders and their followers. Here Solomon (by experience) gives advice to leaders, about leaders and their subjects. Some of the advice can be apply to either one or both groups. We will try to notice some of these lessons in this lesson. Our text is Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

As we deal with our challenging times where our governing authorities are making rules that affect us as the Lord's church, this passage serves as a good reminder of what our responsibilities are as citizens within our community.

I. **Who is like a wise man? (1)**

- a. Godly leaders will be wise. Proverbs 28:2, *Because of the transgression of a land, many are its princes; But by a man of understanding and knowledge Right will be prolonged.*
A leader devoid of wisdom is trouble and will bring about trouble – Recall Ecclesiastes 4:13, *Better a poor and wise youth Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.*
- b. Subjects, in dealing with their leaders need to be wise – this is borne out in our context.
- c. **NOTE: Who is a leader?** Consider governing authorities, in the home, at work, and in the church. Principles of wisdom apply everywhere. AND most of us have some combination of being leaders (in the home, possibly at work, our Christian example, etc.) and subjects (we are ALL accountable to someone).
- d. **Wisdom makes his face shine and can change the sternness of one's face** – it can give you reason to smile and rejoice. It can give you peace, etc. BUT also, wisdom can cause others to look upon you with approval. Proverbs 14:35, *A king's favor is toward a wise servant, But his wrath is against him who causes shame.*

II. **Keep the king's commandment (2-3)**

- a. Consider Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. Much of what is found in our text in Ecclesiastes is echoed to us in the gospel.
- b. **I say, 'Keep the king's commandment...**
Wisdom says you do what your governing authorities tell you to do. This is just common sense. When you submit to the laws of the land it will be well for you.
NOTE: What is tragic is a government that allows anarchy and lawlessness to rule. It will NEVER make things better. NOTE: Eccl. 8:11 deals with the failure to execute judgment swiftly.
- c. **For the sake of your oath to God** – one thing we have emphasized is the need to submit to governing authorities. Romans 13:1-3, 1 Peter 2:13-14
- d. **Do not be hasty to go from his presence** – contextually, this could be descriptive of one who is quick to rebel against the king or reject his rulings. Romans 13:3 – Do what is good and you will be unafraid.
- e. **Do not take your stand for an evil thing** – God commands us to submit as best we can, but obviously we cannot participate in evil (cf. Acts 5:29 – which we need to be very careful and selective to invoke

it).

Remember that the NT was written during a time that was hostile to Christianity – yet we are still to respect our governing authorities. We are to pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-2) and honor them (Romans 13:7, 1 Peter 2:17)

- f. ***For he does what he pleases*** – a corrupt king, president, governor, mayor, congressman or judge will do what he wants to do anyways. And often those in power will abuse that power to get their way. BUT, so does a good ruler – he will do what is right and we can hope for that.
- g. ***Where the word of a king is, there is power*** – people in positions of authority have AUTHORITY! Respect that and TREAD LIGHTLY AND WISELY! But also understand that in the days of kings – they were often sovereign and did whatever they wanted to do. We read, both in history and in scripture of kings who acted wickedly – punishing or even killing those who dared to speak against them.
- h. ***And who may say to him, 'What are you doing?'*** – again, be careful in questioning the king. AGAIN, there is a difference between wicked and good kings. The wicked is not interested in truth, no matter who says it. The wise will take to heart warnings and rebukes.
Here is a thought: TODAY, are we pushing the line with the way we talk about our leaders today?
I realize the constitution protects our speech, but IS IT BECOMING of a Christian? Consider 1 Corinthians 10:23 – even lawful things may not be helpful or edify.
Titus 3:1-2, Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.
Again – both Romans 13:7 and 1 Peter 2:17 tells us to honor our kings and leaders.
- i. Are we second guessing their decisions (NOTE I am not saying we have to agree with them)? Do we read more into what is done than we ought to? Especially in this politically divided society? If someone is not on our side (e.g. our political party), does that mean we scrutinize and attack EVERYTHING they stand for and do? DO NOT misunderstand me – sin is sin! Evil is evil! I'm not talking about that which is clearly sinful and wicked. I'm talking about everything else!
BUT even then we continue to conduct ourselves honorably!

III. **When we keep the king's commandment (5)**

- a. ***We will experience nothing harmful*** – again see Romans 13:3-4 and 1 Peter 2:14 which both state governments punish evil doers and praise those who do good.
As a rule (sadly, we know there are exceptions), rulers protect those who obey the law.
- b. ***A wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment*** – recall Ecclesiastes 3:1 – there is a time for everything.
The wise man thinks and weighs what has happened and his response. Ephesians 5:15-16 calls for us to walk circumspectly (cautiously). Matthew 10:16 - be wise as serpents, harmless as doves...
He considers WHEN and HOW to address his concerns.
NOTE: A wise leader wants to be corrected when he is wrong! But there is a right and wrong way to do that!

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STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES (28)

Rulers, and those who follow them - 2

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

Today we want to continue our study in Ecclesiastes. We are currently addressing a section that deals with rulers and those who follow them. In our last lesson we noted the blessedness of wisdom for both rulers and subjects. We also noted how what is said here relates to what we read about our responsibilities as Christians toward our government (Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17). We also discussed a little about what it means to “honor the king” and how that applies regardless of whether they are godly or not. The only caveat is if we are compelled to do evil, in which case “we ought obey God rather than men” (Acts 4:29). But we must be care not to abuse that as well. We concluded our lesson by noting how the wise man choses the right time and place to speak, especially with concerns.

Tonight, we will conclude the rest of this section by noting how there are things we cannot control, even kings. This is a familiar theme in the book of Ecclesiastes.

IV. **For every matter there is a time and a judgment (6-8)**

- a. In the previous verse we noted how the wise is timely in judgments and reactions. The Bible challenges us to think before we speak (James 1:19).

In vs. 6, we find out why.

Because, for everything that happens there is a time and judgment.

Life has a way of running its course and in time all will work out, one way or another. Let us consider this right now. Crisis have a tendency to pass in time (whether fires, storms or viruses), though sometimes it takes longer than we like.

Evil (and good) rulers come and go.

BUT also consider that God weighs everything - judgment - (Proverbs 21:2 – He “weighs the heart”).

Romans 12:19-20 – vengeance belongs to God – He will repay!

Consider that Israel is our history lesson – God dealt with both corrupt and good leaders. Typically, when evil leaders perished there was little sorrow as that often led to relief.

- b. ***Though the misery of man increases greatly –***

When we are facing difficult and unpleasant times, we want them to change and we want it NOW!

Sadly that doesn’t always happen. In many instances, before you see the sunlight, you have to weather the storm. And it can last awhile.

CONSIDER this in the context of ungodly leaders – they often make the life of the godly miserable.

They oppress and at times they exploit for selfish reasons.

BUT God knows what we go through in this life. And He knows who is doing what.

AGAIN, consider Israel and Judah - A reading of the prophets finds ungodly leaders who oppressed and overly burdened their subjects and the wrath of God that awaited them. Often the righteous were persecuted, exploited or left behind. BUT in those same prophets you find warnings of judgment and a time of hope was coming.

Even with very wicked leaders, know that God is in control. 1 John 4:4 – *He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world* (NOTE: If God is greater than Satan, is He not also greater than his servants, even in positions of worldly power?) And in time, even their rule will end!

Revelation 6:9-10 records the 5th of 7 seals being opened by the Lord and we find souls that had been martyred crying out, “*How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*” They were comforted and told that it is coming.

c. **There are things we simply do not know**

i. **For he does not know what will happen, Who can tell him when it will occur? (7) –**

Life has a way of being filled with twists – consider where we are today compared to January 2020. Who would have thought? But life happens and we have to adapt – and be prepared to adapt.

This also applies to God’s judgment against the ungodly (cf. 2 Peter 3:10)

And His judgment of king, rulers and their subjects.

ii. **No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit (8) –**

This could have reference to the spirit of man and speak of how we cannot indefinitely preserve ourselves (see the next phrase). You are NOT going to keep yourself from standing before judgment (cf. Romans 14:10-12)

- OR the NASB says, “No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind...”

A good case can be made for this reading. 1) If it is about death, that is repeated in the next phrase (but then again all 4 phrases here could refer to that); 2) It is a true statement! We CANNOT control the weather! Man cannot stop the heat, or hurricanes, fires or earthquakes, etc. 3) The same word is found in Ecclesiastes 11:4-5 where we read, *He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.* Consider also John 3:8 where Jesus compares the work of the Spirit to that of wind.

NOTE: Even a rich and powerful king cannot stop such.

iii. **No one has power in the day of death (8)–** how often Solomon has alluded to this –

EVERYONE will die! God and wicked alike.

Hebrews 9:27 tells us we are appointed to this.

Man may try to prolong life – but even if he succeeds, he will still die. NO amount of power or money will change that!

iv. **There is no release from war (8)–** This could be the fact that in war, you stay till it is over and regardless of the outcome. OR, think of the draft in times of war – you go whether you want to or not (few are released); OR for some, war is their end. OR think of one captive in war – you remain such until the war is over, and often treated very cruelly.

OR this could be the battle to stay alive – which you will lose eventually!

Regardless, the point is the same – no matter how rich or powerful OR SMART you are, there are things you cannot ultimately control! (NOTE: But heed everything we have said about wisdom as it can prolong your days and prevent SOME wars).

v. **Wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it (8)–**

HEED this warning! Powerful and wicked leaders may prosper in this life (cf. Psalm 2:1-3) but know that God “who sits in the heavens shall laugh” (Psa. 2:4). You cannot resist God.

And wickedness does NOT buy peace. It might buy protection, but it will not give you true peace. Think of master criminals – leaders of cartels and gangs and terrorists. They may have material prosperity, but they are always in hiding! Is that a way to live?

Furthermore, they cannot control: 1) The weather, 2) the day of their death; 3) release from wars.

Godly rulers – at least they can live with the peace of mind that they have done what is right and they have tried their best toward that end. And no matter what happens, God knows!

V. **All This I have Seen and applied...**

a. Such is a typical statement of Solomon in this letter. He is observing life, with its good and evil.

b. There is a time in which a man rules over another to his own hurt.

Solomon had likely seen rulers who acted wickedly and noted how it:

- i. Hurt others – how often do the scriptures condemn corrupt leaders who are selfish and evil
- ii. Hurt himself – scriptures show that wicked leaders will face the wrath of God, as will all. As previously noted, we will all give an accounting of ourselves for what we have done (Romans 14:10-12), whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Typically evil rulers do not prosper. Are there exceptions? Absolutely – at least in this life. But know that before God there are NO exceptions! He will judge fairly and justly. That is our hope. Incidentally, the remainder of this chapter deals with wicked rulers and their followers.

WE have been addressing leaders and have noted that God knows what is happening, both good and bad. We ought to take consolation in that. I conclude with this admonition: DON'T forget where your TRUE citizenship is – Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Peter 2:11 – we are sojourners and pilgrims on this earth...

We cannot control who is in a position of leadership (at least completely), but we can act with wisdom as we deal with our rulers. We do that by following God's instructions as we have noted. We may live in a wicked world, but we don't have to live LIKE it! Have you submitted to God? Think about it!