

Ecclesiastes 8-10 Look Up! True North, Part 8

Tonight we are going to study 3 chapters in Ecclesiastes, chapters 8, 9 and 10. Here Solomon as an old man, looking back on life, trying to make sense of what one sees “UNDER THE SUN” and with just MAN’S WISDOM. Frankly it is pretty depressing! When you ONLY look horizontally, as most people do, then life looks like a mess.

Basically Solomon will tell us in many different ways 3 things:

Death is UNAVOIDABLE
Life is UNPREDICTABLE
Life is UNFAIR

Of course he is ONLY looking at the horizontal with just HUMAN wisdom. And others who do this end up with a “mid life crisis” or commit suicide, or resign to fatalistic approach to do the best you can and hope it all works out in the end, or some just party and figure might as well get all the fun I can before I die, go on that cruise, try that drug, buy a red sports car.

The week after Thanksgiving, Rob will conclude Ecclesiastes with chapters 11 and 12 where Solomon looks at the things above the earth,

but here, in a poetical way, the focus is just on the earth.

Like all Bible study we will

See what it **SAYS** by reading the verses. Secondly as the Spirit has led in preparing this message, I will pause at times to explain what it **MEANS**, cause the poetic and cultural things he uses may not make sense to us.

Then finally, after we are through all 3 chapters, we will look at how this all **APPLIES** to our lives. OK everyone open to Ecclesiastes chapter 8, here we go.....

Ecclesiastes 8

8:1

Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed.

When we understand something, we don't look perplexed anymore. Or face changes.

2 I say, "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. 3 Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."

4 Where the word of a king is, there is power;
And who may say to him, "What are you
doing?" 5 He who keeps his command will
experience nothing harmful; And a wise man's
heart discerns both time and judgment,
When you obey the rulers, things go better than
when you break the law. Romans 13 God
wants us to obey.

6 Because for every matter there is a time and
judgment, Though the misery of man increases
greatly. 7 For he does not know what will
happen; So who can tell him when it will occur?
8 No one has power over the spirit to retain the
spirit, And no one has power in the day of
death. There is no release from that war, And
wickedness will not deliver those who are given
to it. 9 All this I have seen, and applied my
heart to every work that is done **under the sun**:
There is a time in which one man rules over
another to his own hurt.

10 Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come
and gone from the place of holiness, (funeral)
and they were forgotten in the city where they
had so done. This also is vanity.

I cannot control when I will die, or not let my
spirit leave me. **The unavailability of death.**
And when it is over, it is over.

I remember a few days after my wife died and
the casket lowered into the ground and the

memorial service and then I watched the next
morning, kids going to school, neighbors driving
off to work, some going shopping and I wanted
to scream out. No one realized MY LIFE was
so impacted, everything changed for me, my
dear Linda was not here anymore, and yet the
world was going on like nothing happened!
Solomon is capturing those feelings in Hebrew
poetry here.

11 Because the sentence against an evil work is
not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the
sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

And some assume because God is slow to
anger, is patient not wishing any to perish, that
He is weak, or will not punish. The day IS
coming when there will be judgment! Same is
true when parents do not discipline right away,
the child becomes incorrigible, they get worse
and worse.

12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times,
and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know
that it will be well with those who fear God, who
fear before Him. 13 But it will not be well with
the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which
are as a shadow, because he does not fear
before God.

Here Solomon takes a rare moment to reflect on
the fact that God WILL judge. This glimmer of

truth soon gets covered over with his “under the sun” observations and conclusions.

14 There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

Life is unfair! Things do not go on the way I think they should. When we limit ourselves to our own smartness, or even ANY human’s smartness, we will not be able to figure it out. But God IS smarter than me, but at times I do not live like that. When my wife died I was convinced I was smarter than God and simply walked away from God for a time. He was faithful to discipline me and draw me back to Himself until I realized He DOES know more than me, so I can stop fighting Him and just rest in His love for me, and the fact that HE KNOWS and I do not have to!

15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better **under the sun** than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him **under the sun**.

One reaction to the unfairness that life looks like is to party, run to fun. Might be dune buggies, parties, sports, exercise, it can even be ministry

or family! If we are running to anything or anyone other than God, we are in trouble.

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done **under the sun**. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

There were no chapter breaks in the original!

9:1 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them. 2 All things come alike to all:

One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.

3 This is an evil in all that is done **under the sun**: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil;

madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Wow, life is sure a mess when we try to have all the answers! See the “under the sun” repeated. This seems evil to Solomon, that we all face death. It is UNAVOIDABLE.

4 But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

5 For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done **under the sun**.

Yes, under the sun, they know nothing, but after we die we DO know many things. Remember what Jesus said about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. You see Solomon is not telling things that are true, just how things appear to one who limits himself to looking “under the sun.”

Folks, without the truth God has given us in the Bible, we come to all kind of weird and incorrect conclusions.

7 Go, eat your bread with joy, And drink your wine with a merry heart; For God has already

accepted your works. 8 Let your garments always be white, And let your head lack no oil. 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you **under the sun**, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform **under the sun**.

Enjoy life. Get all the gusto you can, cause nothing makes sense. That is what Solomon is saying, when you look ONLY “under the sun.” But this will lead to depression because it does NOT satisfy. We are made for more than this!

10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

11 I returned and saw **under the sun** that — The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all. 12 For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men are snared in an evil time, When it falls suddenly upon them.

Again, under the sun life seems so UNPREDICTABLE and then death comes, it is UNAVOIDABLE.

13 This wisdom I have also seen **under the sun**, and it seemed great to me: 14 There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. 15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.

16 Then I said:

"Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, And his words are not heard. 17 Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war; But one sinner destroys much good."

A loud mouth ruler gets heard and remembered, even if he is stupid, but the wise man whose wisdom can save a whole city, is forgotten. And yes, it takes only a single sinner to destroy much good. I think of Adolf Hitler and all the evil he brought. But even in a group of high school students, one bad egg, a person bent on sin, can lead many astray and cause all kinds of harm that impacts many others for their whole life! Hebrews 12:15 says a root of bitterness can defile many!

10:1 Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor; So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor. 2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand, But a fool's heart at his left. 3 Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, And he shows everyone that he is a fool.

Foolishness stinks. A person who is a fool can even be seen by how they walk! Solomon uses an example from the persons making perfume that seems a bit gross to us, but the point is that just a little of foolish behavior can mess up lots of good things. Sort of like he just said about one sinner wrecking much havoc.

4 If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, Do not leave your post; For conciliation pacifies great offenses.

When you are at work and the boss has a bad hair day, explodes, whatever, don't quit right away, give some grace, this is wisdom. I remember when I was not given the raise and it was because someone else had made mistakes. I was ready to quit, and the Lord, through my wife, encouraged me to trust Him for the long haul, and let this go. It was 25 years later when I retired, that I saw the wisdom in that, but it took most of that 25 years before I saw any wisdom in staying.

5 There is an evil I have seen **under the sun**,
As an error proceeding from the ruler: 6 Folly is
set in great dignity, While the rich sit in a lowly
place. 7 I have seen servants on horses, While
princes walk on the ground like servants.

Solomon laments that things don't work out the
way he thinks they should.

8 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And whoever
breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them,
And he who splits wood may be endangered by
it. 10 If the ax is dull, And one does not sharpen
the edge, Then he must use more strength; But
wisdom brings success.

11 A serpent may bite when it is not charmed;
The babbler is no different. 12 The words of a
wise man's mouth are gracious, But the lips of a
fool shall swallow him up; 13 The words of his
mouth begin with foolishness, And the end of
his talk is raving madness. 14 A fool also
multiplies words. No man knows what is to be;
Who can tell him what will be after him? 15 The
labor of fools wearies them, For they do not
even know how to go to the city!

How foolish is foolishness! Even trying to do
good works can lead to problems for the one
doing it. Solomon really is depressed here
about life. It looks like the whole world is a
mess!

16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a
child, And your princes feast in the morning! 17
Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the
son of nobles, And your princes feast at the
proper time — For strength and not for
drunkenness!

The idea is they were too drunk to eat at night
so they ate in the morning. And it is better if
they eat at the proper time because they are not
drunk all the time. Basically what he is saying is
having a self absorbed drunkard for a king is not
good!

18 **Because of laziness the building decays,
And through idleness of hands the house leaks.**

Actually this can be true, but it is also true that
things break and wear out. We work very hard
to keep this place from leaking, but it still
happens. If you own a house you know the
problem, the never ending list of things to
repair!

19 **A feast is made for laughter, And wine
makes merry; But money answers everything.**

This is obviously not true, the Bible tells us the
love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and
we see many millionaires commit suicide
because they are so desperately depressed and
unhappy. No money does NOT solve
everything, but to those who do not have it, and

only look “under the sun” it sure seems that way.

20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought;
Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom;
For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a
bird in flight may tell the matter.

This is where the expression, “A little bird told me” came from. Again Solomon is saying that you better be careful what you think and say, as it will end up being used against you, even for your harm!

What a depressing section of Scripture!
When all you have is the “under the sun” wisdom you are in BIG trouble! Life looks like a waste, what’s the use in trying, OR let’s just party and go out in style. And there are a number of other responses to the fact that Death is UNAVOIDABLE
Life is UNPREDICTABLE
LIFE is UNFAIR

Why is this, because we do NOT know everything! I am not OMNISCIENT.

Look at it this way, when you try to tell a little child that it IS better for them to eat a well balanced meal than just candy all the time, they think you are being unfair and unloving. If you REALLY loved them you would do WHAT THEY

THINK IS THE BEST FOR THEM. You see God is our parent, He DOES know what is best, that is why He tells us NOT to live ONLY under the sun!

Turn to Colossians 3 verse 1

What are we COMMANDED to do?

Col 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, **not on things on the earth.** 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Solomon, in his old age, in the chapters we just read, was setting his mind on things on the earth, under the sun. EXACTLY the opposite of what God commands us to do.

You see what it says in verse 4 **When Christ WHO IS YOUR LIFE appears....**

Get it. Our life is hidden in Christ, not on the wisdom of men.

What we see around us and what we can figure out in our own mind, or even the smartest people around is NOT THE ANSWER!

Remember what Paul said to Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5

4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

You see Gods ways and thoughts are way beyond what we can ask or think. We are not as smart as God, NO HUMAN IS! In fact in Deuteronomy 29:29 God even tells us that there are secret things!

So now we have seen

WHAT IT SAYS

WHAT IT MEANS

So what is the PRACTICAL APPLICATION?

Look up, look to Him, fix your eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, as the writer to the Hebrews says.

HOW do you do this?

FIRST get in the Bible, meet Him every day.

Don't say you do not have time, you do always have time for what you value. Maybe only 2 minutes, or 5 minutes. Make HIM first priority in your life. Learn to trust Him, that He really

DOES love you and have the best plan for you. HE DOES, you do not! Your plan is flawed because you are not as smart as God, and He loves you so much He died for you, so He

KNOWS what is best

Has the POWER to MAKE the best happen
Is WAY SMARTER than you
AND HE never sleeps, get tired, or misses ANYTHING

Your choice-

Trust HIM

Or trust YOU

I recommend what the Bible says

Set your mind on the things above, on Jesus, on what the Bible says, not on human wisdom, yours or even the wisest man who ever lived, because the wisdom of God is greater than ANY human wisdom.

Turn with me to Mark chapter 5 and verse 18. Let's set the scene here. This guy was demon possessed, cutting himself, living among the

tombs, unconstrained, tormented by demons. Talk about a depressed and fearful life! But Jesus came and cast out the demons and now this man was free! The townspeople did not want Jesus to stay around because this man's healing had cost them their unclean swine that had received the demons cast out of this man, so Jesus is going to leave. Think of the parallel in your life. You were bound in this "under the sun" life before Jesus came and set you free. Now there are people who are still in the "under the sun" life who do not want anything to do with Jesus. They see it might cost them their unclean life to be put away and they are afraid and want Jesus stuff to be out of their face!

So Jesus leaves, He does not force Himself on anyone, now let's pick up in verse 18

Mark 5:18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. 19 However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." 20 And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

We are like that man, we long to be with Jesus, physically, but He is asking us to go to our friends and tell them how He delivered us from the "under the sun" life they are all trapped in, to a new life, we are seated in the heavenlies, we look forward to His appearing, we have a crown of righteousness awaiting us, and we KNOW that all things work together for good! WOW WHAT A GREAT THING HE HAS DONE, IN HIS COMPASSION TOWARD US!!

SO TWO practical applications

1. GROW IN HIM-get in His word every morning and ask Him to reveal more and more of Himself to you and pray for others.
2. Tell your friends of the great things He has done for you and how He has had compassion on you.

As we close here, I have asked the worship team to play a couple quiet meditative songs so you have a chance to reflect on those things in your life that puzzle you, strike fear in your heart, that cause sorrow and pain, and turn your eyes upon Jesus, look in His face, read His word, pray and ask Him to settle your troubled heart and give you the assurance of His presence and His love so you can

Trust and obey, because there just is no other way to live a life of meaning, purpose, joy, peace, self control.

I will read a passage from Isaiah as a summary of what we have said tonight, and a springboard for our prayers:

Isa 40:28-41:1

8 Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the LORD,

The Creator of the ends of the earth,

Neither faints nor is weary.

His understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the weak,

And to those who have no might He increases strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall,

31 But those who wait on the LORD

Shall renew their strength;

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary,

They shall walk and not faint.