

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17 Discussion Questions

Outline of Pastor Mike's Sermon

Intro

- Prayer for short-term missions team (Saturday only)
 - Colossians 3.3-4
- *Love and Marriage* by Frank Sinatra
- There are cultural institutions that we deem inseparable including authority and justice
 - The Preacher is struggling with the conflict of what he has observed vs the truth he has believed
 - *Those who have the privilege of authority also carry the responsibility of justice, but it seems wickedness has not been confronted and those who are in authority cannot be questioned.*
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 - Survival instincts (v.1-9)
 - Confessing confusion (v.10-17)

Survival Instincts (v.1-9)

- Opening proverb rhetorically asking if the evidence of wisdom can be seen by how one operates in an imperfect world (v.1)
 - Hardness of face points to stubbornness or brashness
- A description of how the wise deals with authority- 2 admonitions (v.2-4)
 - Keep the commands of the King because of God's placement of him
 - Oath- debated whether that means the Lord's oath to him or the audience's oath to the Lord
 - Respond appropriately to the king
 - Do not be so terrified that you run from his presence
 - Do not align yourself in disagreement with the king
 - Ultimately the king has unchecked power

Confessing Confusion

- The contradiction of v.10-11 against v.12-13
 - v.10- I saw . . .
 - v.12- yet I know . . .
- v. 14- double expression of enigma and absurdity
 - The Preacher often equates the presence of wickedness, evil and oppression with the passivity of the powerful

- Ecclesiastes 4.1
- Ecclesiastes 5.8
- *As will become apparent later in Qohelet's journey, there are works of God such as creation and redemption to which an autonomous epistemology can never do justice, but they are crucial to resolving the enigmas Qohelet keeps encountering. There is hubris in his epistemology that leads him to think that he has observed every work of God*
 - Bartholomew, C. G. (2009). Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Ecclesiastes. (T. Longman III, Ed.) (pp. 292–293). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Implications

- We need a king whose authority can be trusted to ensure justice
 - Matthew 25.31-33; 34; 41- Jesus is just king and he will not fail to judge the righteous and wicked
 - What are the marks of the righteous?
 - What are the marks of the wicked?
- We are not called to passively wait for those with authority to create justice, we engage both individual brokenness and systemic oppression
 - Regarding systemic oppression, we are called to oppose any unjust law or system that exalts itself against Christ and attacks the image of God.
 - Phoenix Jones in Seattle
 - Lisa Sharon Harper podcast- "You cannot offer the Gospel without addressing the systems that perpetuate the brokenness the Gospel is attempting to address."

Discussion Questions

Read Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

1. The Preacher begins this passage by laying out some principles on how to navigate living under human authority. The bottom line is that he seems to say that since kings have absolute power and you are at their mercy, you just need to do what they say and stay out of their way.

- a. What has been your experience of navigating the challenges of being under human authorities? Do you agree with the Preacher's advice? Is that how you tend to operate?

b. What does the NT teach about how to navigate human authority relationships?
How did Jesus do it?

2. In vv. 10-13 the Preacher struggles with the tension between the apparent flourishing of the wicked and his conviction that in the end the righteous will be blessed and the wicked will not.

a. Do you struggle with this same tension? If so, how do you resolve it? Are there any Scriptures that help you work through this?

b. What do you think about v. 11? Can you think of any biblical reasons why doesn't God execute his justice against the wicked quicker?

3. The Preacher ends the passage by advocating enjoyment of whatever you happen to have in the movement, because ultimately you have no way of controlling or even predicting what will happen tomorrow.

a. While there is certainly wisdom to this approach, it is not the full picture of biblical advice on how to live well in our fallen world. What do the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46), the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27ff), and command to love our neighbor as ourselves reveal about how Jesus' disciples are to respond to the needs created by the unjust systems of the world?

b. In what ways have you seen God use you to oppose corrupt systems and stand up and serve those in need in Jesus' name?

c. What areas of society has the church failed to love in this way? How can you—as a member of the body of Christ—address this?

d. In what new ways is God calling you to enter in and push back evil and injustice in Jesus' name?