

Daily Bible Study

“Living When Life Seems Unfair”

Ecclesiastes 8:9-17

September 8 – September 14, 2013

MONDAY –After a long time away we return this week to our study in **Ecclesiastes** and finish looking at **Chapter 8** of **Ecclesiastes**, specifically at **8:9-17**. Solomon speaks to us in this passage about *Living When Life Seems Unfair*. Many things are mysterious to us in life and we do not always understand and often misunderstand the things we observe. It seems as if God turns a deaf ear and blind eye to so much that goes on and we even see the wicked apparently getting away with things. That which appears outwardly to be true, may indeed, not be true at all. How are we to think and act when we can't make sense of life? This is what Solomon addresses here through the inspiration of The Holy Spirit. We are reminded again that God's ways are above ours and He is the final authority and we need to live with the understanding that we will all appear before The Lord Jesus Christ one day to give an account of our lives. **Ecclesiastes 8:9-17**: *“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. Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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, 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.”*

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father God, help me learn to trust and follow Your Word & Your instruction concerning how I think and react to the situations of life. Teach me this week from Sacred Scripture that I am responsible to obey You and then leave the rest to Your wise care.*

TUESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 8:9-11**: *“(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, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity. (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.”* If you remember the context of **chapter 8** concerns *Living before the King*. Solomon has been talking about the King or those who rule over us politically and now he continues talking about all the injustices in life that have to do with abuses of power and or failure to make Godly and righteous decisions and actions in ruling. He cites his own observations (*All this I have seen*) and says that *there is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt*. Although we know that ultimately this ruler will be brought to judgment and wrongs done will actually be *to his own hurt* this text seems to be more likely referring to the fact a tyrant or unjust ruler often brings hurt and pain to those he rules over and people suffer under this “unfairness”. **Verse 10** is difficult to interpret in the original language (we will comment more this Lord's Day) but in context it appears to speak to the fact the wicked do not appear to get what they deserve even in death. Scripture gives examples of wicked men and criminals receiving honorable burial (**Deuteronomy 21:22–23, 2 Samuel 17:23, Joshua 8:29**). The NIV translates this verse: *“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.”* Solomon says he has observed the funeral services of wicked and people came and attended the funeral, and the wicked were praised in the city where they had behaved wickedly; He says this too is absurd, vanity, meaningless. A practical point for us to learn here is to be careful as we see and hear funerals of wicked rulers or others. Most of us have attended funerals where the eulogy has seemed to give Sainthood to the deceased. We are not to pass judgment, but instead hope that, unknown to us, the person has come to peace with God through Jesus. **Verse 11** reminds us sinful man lives in the moment; he is a creature of the moment and does not often consider tomorrow. He can dismiss the consequences of his actions simply because the consequences are not imminent. We often do not obey God's law and those He has established over us for the right reason and with the right motive (to glorify God); but we obey because of the threat of punishment. If punishment is not meted out quickly, the law is of little effect. The delay in punishment encourages the sinful heart in its rebellion. People often assume that God also allows the wicked to prosper and won't punish them because the punishment isn't instantaneous. God's common grace to people delays their judgment with the intent that they should repent and believe the gospel, for one day, in His sovereign plan, that judgment will come (**2 Peter 3:9-10**).

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father, help me not to attempt to be the judge of the wicked but instead to pray for their salvation. May I also be patient with Your timing & leave all judgment to You.*

WEDNESDAY – Ecclesiastes 8:12-14: “(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. (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.*” We must remember that when our thinking is limited to an earthly perspective there seems to be no justice and life receives the ever so popular phrase, “life’s not fair”. Now as we continue we will find what answers come with an eternal perspective. When we see injustice all around us, we must remember the promise that God has triumphed sin and death through his Son, and that evil will be punished in the end. Solomon had noted that wickedness doesn’t always get punished in this life and now in **verse 12** says that *a sinner* could sin 100 times and still live long. These verses are one long sentence in the Hebrew and **Verse 14** is the main clause of a subordinate clause consisting of verses **12b–13**. The section starts with *yet I surely know*. Solomon believed in the doctrine of retribution as well as the fact *that it will be well with those who fear God* yet he had observed apparent contradictions. Solomon ends by saying such an apparent contradiction in the distributing of divine justice is *vanity*, meaningless. We see again the “unfairness” of life here but there is hope here in these verses that comes to full view and beauty in the gospel. He had seen *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*. He is saying that wicked men seem to get what the righteous deserve and vice-versa. The truth we need to see is that even acts of justice and mercy will not spare us from eternal punishment if we reject Christ. Justice and good deeds can never make a man righteous before God. Yes God enables us to perform them but deeds alone will not change the inherent unrighteousness of our hearts (**Romans 3:10, 20, Isaiah 64:6**). The beauty of the Gospel is the fact that the repentant sinner will be treated as a righteous person (Jesus, The righteous **2 Corinthians 5:21**). We are saved not because of our own righteousness, but that of Jesus Christ (**Romans 4:13–25**). This glorious Gospel itself is absurd with earthly thinking but is the essence of God’s justice and mercy.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me fear, love and obey You. Keep my mind and thinking on heavenly things and save me from a mere earthly perspective. Thank You for the beauty of the gospel which points me to Jesus and away from myself. Thank You God for Your boundless goodness, grace, mercy, and love given to me in Jesus.

THURSDAY – Ecclesiastes 8:15: “*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.*” In light of the seeming “unfairness” of life’s situations we can be tempted to be cynical and despair. Solomon now expresses a thought he has used before; *enjoyment...eat, drink, and be merry*. This phrase is

used in the Bible in a different context. Isaiah pictures it as a sign of rebellion against the commands of God (**Isaiah 22:13**), and the irresponsibility of leaders (**Isaiah 56:12**). Jesus used it to describe a man who is self-centered, self-absorbed, and self-satisfied and has given no thought for his eternal destiny (**Luke 12:19**). Paul uses the phrase in describing a man who has no hope in the resurrection and attempts to suppress his futility (**1 Corinthians 15:32**). Solomon here uses the phrase in a positive, good way. In light of the injustices of life, don’t despair but recognize the good gifts from God. The pleasures we derive from even the simplest things are *from the hand of God (2:24–26)*. Even the profit from “our” labor is to be seen as *the gift of God (3:12–13)*. Peter makes this point in a way when he tells us “*What God has cleansed you must not call common*” (**Acts 10:15**), and Paul reminds us that “*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*” (**1 Corinthians 10:31**). Bottom line; Understand that although things may appear to be unfair or unjust, God is in control, have faith in Him, and calmly and joyfully enjoy your work and the gifts He gives.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, teach me to trust You and to be joyful and content with what You have blessed me with. Save me from despair and keep me from being critical & sarcastic.

FRIDAY – Ecclesiastes 8:16-17: “(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.*” Solomon has said some things that without faith in God are impossible to understand in this life, especially with an earthly “*under the sun*” perspective. Thankfully, he does not leave us in despair. After searching diligently *to know wisdom* he concluded that man is ignorant *the work of God...the work that is done under the sun*. In emphatic terms, he repeats a negative three times in **verse 17**; *a man cannot find out the work...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*. The answer to a man’s frustration is trust and faith in what God has revealed; His divine revelation. God told us His ways are far beyond us (**Isaiah 55:8–9**), and tells us to forsake pointless and needless speculation and to turn to Him (**Isaiah 55:6–7**). As Matthew Henry so wonderfully sums this up; ‘Leaving the Lord to clear up all the difficulties in his own time, we may cheerfully enjoy the comforts, and bear up under the trials of life; while peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost will abide in us through all outward changes, and when flesh and heart shall fail.’ Finally, as Solomon learned, it is not being wise which God primarily desires from us; it is to believe in Him; have faith in Him and look to His Son Jesus for salvation, peace and contentment. As Jesus said, “*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.*”

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me trust Jesus and believe in Him and look to Him always.