



KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES

A Proper Time...

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

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The frustrations of the search to find faithful wisdom in God's time!

Obey the King? Authority and government in view

When I spoke about a time for everything from Ecclesiastes 3, we listened to the music of "Turn, Turn, Turn" from the Byrds recorded in 1965, which is based on the poem of verses 2-8.

In 1972 Gough Whitlam won the landslide Australian Government victory with the catch phrase, "It's time!"

Now we seek to capture the face of wisdom in our search for meaning from Ecclesiastes 8.

By 1975 there was a challenge as to the authority of our Queen. A financial constitutional crisis in our Federal Government on November 11 1975 instigated a crisis that caused the Governor General to sack the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, from authority and power. Those watching the news will remember his face as he voiced the famous expression, "Well may they say, 'God save the Queen' for nothing will save the Governor General!"

This led to the call for a referendum for the Australian nation to become a republic 24 years later on November 6, 1999. The call to relinquish our monarchy was expected to follow like 'a done deal'. In the ensuing referendum, 60% of people voted against the republic in a surprising landslide.

Is this a politically based message for today? By no means! It challenges us all to face our lives under the authority given in God's wisdom!

Just as the leader of a government's life was unpredictable, so the King's life in Ecclesiastes 8 was unpredictable. These famous leaders of authority cannot control their days. It is not meaningless ultimately. It depends on our measure. Ecclesiastes is pushing us to turn our faces to seek and search out God's wisdom regardless of the frustrations we feel as he speaks into our lives in his timing.

Ecclesiastes 8 asks two main questions...

Firstly, is there any order?

Yes, there is a proper season and time for everything.

Secondly, is anybody under the sun wise?

No, only God is orderly and wise. The Teacher wants the reader to be wise enough to see this pattern. To face towards God's intentions always. To seek to search into the wisdom God reveals.

V1 Face and faith

In chapter 8:1 the Teacher says, "Who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things? A person's wisdom brightens their face and changes its hard appearance." The Teacher is saying if you have this wisdom that is greater than the wisdom of a king, your face brightens.

These words make sense to this group of people. It is part of their heritage and culture. They have the Old Testament embedded into their thinking, especially the Law. In these words, they are hearing echoes from the early parts of Scripture. They are hearing echoes of Exodus 34 where the Israelites saw Moses' face radiant because he had been in the

presence of God and he had experienced God's grace in such a way that his face reflected God's glory.

They would also remember Numbers 6:24-26, *"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."*

The Teacher is saying that if someone could make sense of this life, their face would brighten, shine or be radiant. If someone could look at life with its uncertainties, blessedness and brokenness, triumphs and tragedies, frustrations and joy, and still find a peace that comes from the presence of God, this person's face would be radiant or bright. Isn't that what we all want?

We all want to look at our life and not be overwhelmed. We want to give up wrestling to figure it out. We want to look at our life and the lives of future generations and not worry. We would love to look at life with a radiant, bright, shining face because in it all we understand the presence of God and he gives us peace. Sometimes it all comes together and we do get these glimpses of God's peace but then it fades like the morning fog. Or the darkness that comes with the setting sun. This is what the Teacher is explaining in chapter 8.

V2-9 King and Authority

Even if the King is powerful and thinks he knows it all, he doesn't have the power to control it all. Verses 2-8 list examples of how little control people have. Decisions, causes, directions, emotional guidance, procedures, timings...The complete gamut of obedience, authority and monarchical or governmental

matters are on view in these verses. Isn't this true for us at all times?

Hasn't 2020 tested this for us? Bushfires, floods, COVID...!

I had a fascinating conversation with a visiting family at KAC just last Sunday! He is a pastor from the USA called to serve in the past four years in an independent multi-lingual church in Sydney. We talked about the very matter before us now...faith and governments, discussing how our Prime Minister has been deeply valued leading us through COVID in Australia. Yet the US President will struggle to win the coming election with the USA struggling under COVID.

We quickly clarified (not seeking to berate any political stances) the challenges of authority, obedience to legislation and the wisdom always required in leadership. So tenuous when we seek to engage objectively in such a ripe discussion as COVID...!

V5-6 reinforces this - "the wise heart" and "the weight of misery" – there are real frustrations within the seeking and searching for wisdom for the "proper time and procedure for every matter".

We stopped to pray for one another. A blessing of fellowship! We had been starkly reminded we are not sovereign. We love to live under the delusion that we are in charge and in control - the global irony of COVID in God's time in the world as v8 reminds us, *"As no one has power over the wind to contain it."*

We can become filled with frustrations. Captured with an over-righteous impatience and upset when things don't go our way. Even if we were fortunate enough to know it all, we can't control it all! It is the smallest things that can throw us or set us

off balance... But this just pushes us back toward our need to control.

Wisdom says that if you knew it all and had the power to control it all, you would pervert that power. If you had all the power in the world would you use it for a good purpose? Drawn into the seduction of gain - unfortunately, power corrupts. Our minds are drawn to the famous quip, 'Absolute power corrupts absolutely'. No one can contain power and keep it from controlling them. (v9)

"All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun." The godly strength of authority is tested with virulence. To obey the King is to come under leadership and authority even *"when a man lords it over others to his own hurt"* (v9). Here is the gravity of anguish, suffering and humility. Who can you think of as the One who has been hurt like this in such a cost within complete sacrifice?

V10-13 Searching for truth

The contrast of V10-13 wherein. There is seemingly no cost for the King, government, the leadership and authority in the crimes against the fear of God. *"Although a wicked person who commits one hundred crimes may live a long time"* (v12). It may seem to be unpunished with hearts filled with wicked schemes. The Teacher is not a foolish cynic who celebrates doubt. Rather he is a faithful searcher who says it is unclear. I don't understand but I still believe and I still trust. That captures faithful truth in our search for God. The trust of a person's wisdom that brightens a face.

V14-17 Searching for truth

Wisdom lies in the searching. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, humanity cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise person claims to know, they cannot really comprehend it. Surely we don't give up; we don't just wait to see what turns up. No, we search and when we reach a dead end, we choose another tactic. Life is all about re-inventing, discovering, awakening to fresh possibility.

The search is the key to our discipleship and it is central to Jesus' command. Search that you may find.

If we get stuck on the fairness of life, *"the righteous who get what the wicked deserve and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve"* (v14), we become disillusioned. Disillusion leads to futility and emptiness, as we have heard throughout this series. Rather our faith in God's eternal plan drives our daily rhythms. It is our concern for others, our sense of justice, the energy that motivates us to be active disciples of Christ.

If "under the sun", meaning what is here on earth, is all there is, we cannot understand this world. But God has left us with a yearning to find meaning and so we must look beyond the sun.

In this way Ecclesiastes again points us to Jesus, who came with total power but did not pervert his power. He used his power to bring God's presence through peace. Jesus suffered what he didn't deserve, all that God's justice demands and, in the empty tomb, Jesus triumphs over death and guarantees the triumph of all who trust in him.

"Where your treasure is, there your heart is also." Matthew 6:21

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Colossians 3:1-2

Conclusion

We can believe it is up to God but we behave like it is all up to us. Don't look at your life from one close up perspective. It will be random, either blessed or broken. Take a step back. Get an eternal perspective. Trust God's sovereignty. Know his presence.

Accept his peace. Jesus' face will be radiant, brighten and shine on all who rest in him.

“I sought the LORD, and he answered me;

He delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to him are radiant with joy;

their faces shall never be ashamed.

Taste and see that the LORD is good;

blessed are the people who take refuge in him!”

Psalms 34: 4-5, 8

The frustrations of facing the search to find faithful wisdom in God's time? Obey Jesus as our King!