

“When Things Don’t Make Sense”

Ecclesiastes 8:10-17

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Some things in life that just don’t seem to make sense. Why, for example, when someone drops a piece of toast covered with jam, why does it always seem to land face down on the carpet, but face up if it falls on tile? Why does the experienced hunter, who spent many, many hours patiently waiting in his stand, not even see a single deer, while a novice goes out and shoots a 10-point buck on opening morning? Or why does the man who smoked, drank, and ate too much his whole life, enjoy almost perfect health until age 90, while the fellow who has been super health conscience dies of a heart attack at age 42?

Sometimes things just don’t make sense. And often in these cases it seems totally unfair. Well, friends, it has been that way for *a long time*. Today as we continue our journey through the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, we come to chapter 8:10-17. Here Solomon, the wise king who ruled Israel in about 1000 B.C. shares his God inspired reflections on how to respond *when things don’t make sense*.

Friends, I believe there are important lessons for all of us in this passage today, so let’s pause and pray we would hear as the Lord speaks to us through His Word.

Solomon sums up some of his thoughts on life in verse **Ecclesiastes 8:14** **“There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say is meaningless.”**

That word “meaningless,” also translated “vanity” or “futility,” or in Hebrew, “hevel,” expresses both Solomon’s puzzlement and frustration. Things just don’t make sense. Why do good people often seem to go through such hard times, while bad people seem to have it made? It is not fair!

Solomon describes how he sees this happening around him. He starts with the bad folks who are getting what he thinks the good folks deserve. **Ecclesiastes 8:10** **In such circumstances, I saw the wicked buried. They came and went from**

the holy places, and they were praised in the city where they did those things. This too is futile. (Hevel) He is talking about a funeral and listening to people say wonderful things about someone, a leader of some type, who was not a nice man. He did nasty things right in front of the people who are now praising him. One commentator echoes Solomon’s frustration this way, *“It is one thing to observe the maxim to ‘say nothing evil about the dead,’ but quite another to canonize an utter reprobate as if he were pure as snow.”*

Yet, I’m afraid this happens quite often in our day. Pastors probably tell more lies at funerals than on any other occasion. No, it is not usually appropriate to speak the cold, naked truth about a not so nice person but we should certainly avoid saying things which are simply not true. Solomon’s main point, however, is the honor the wicked often receive when they die causes him to wonder if there is any justice in the universe at all.

Solomon muses, “If I were God, I would do things a bit differently, I would make the world more just.” In **Ecclesiastes 8:11** he notes **When a crime is not punished quickly, people feel it is safe to do wrong.** That is certainly true. Whether we are talking about speed limits that are not enforced or terrorists who are not caught, if perpetrators are not punished, others think, “If they can get a way with it, so can I.”

So, Solomon wonders, why doesn’t the Lord punish evil people right away? As soon as someone cheats God could zap that person with a lightning bolt. If He did that, it seems there would be a lot less cheating going on. Yet, for some reason God often doesn’t punish those who cheat, lie, steal, or kill right away. Frequently He lets these people enjoy long prosperous lives.

That, again, is the point in **Ecclesiastes 8:14** **there is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.** That still happens today. A drunk driver crosses the centerline, hits another car and

kills the woman driving that vehicle, but he walks away from the accident unharmed.

Or someone studies hard for a test and gets a “C,” while another student doesn’t and gets an “A.” There are wicked people who have lots of money and enjoy perfect health, and very good people who have little money and are struggling with serious health problems. Lots of unfair things are going on out there.

Still, Solomon realizes that **Ecclesiastes 8:12 Even though a person sins a hundred times and still lives a long time, I know that those who fear God will be better off.** And in the end, when the day of judgement comes **Ecclesiastes 8:13 The wicked will not prosper, for they do not fear God.**

In other words, Solomon has confidence in God’s ultimate justice. He just wonders why it takes so long. He echoes a cry that is heard throughout the Bible...How long oh Lord? How long are the righteous going to keep suffering? How long are the wicked going to keep prospering? How long is injustice going to continue to flourish? How long oh, Lord?

I don’t know about you, but I can certainly relate to Solomon’s thoughts. Yes, I too am confident of God’s ultimate justice. In the end I know there will be no complaints that God has not been fair. I believe there is a reason why He allows horrible evil to happen in this world and difficult things to occur in our lives. He will bring good out of these situations.

I am also confident that those who are rebelling against God are not getting away with a thing. Unless they repent and turn to the Lord they are in big time, eternal trouble.

I know these things are up here in my head. But when I look and see people who have no use for God having just a great time, while people who love the Lord, people in this church, go through cancer, struggle with finances, and get hit by a lot of yucky things, ultimate justice, heaven and hell, kind of don’t seem to be enough.

Oh, I can grasp how it all works in my mind, but in my heart, it just doesn’t make sense. Why Lord, do you let your children experience so much pain?

How long oh Lord, will you let those who love you suffer?

Solomon then describes how he copes with the seeming injustice which is woven through the trials and tragedies of life. **Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I recommend having fun, because there is nothing better for people in this world than to eat, drink, and enjoy life. That way they will experience some happiness along with all the hard work God gives them under the sun.** Does that make sense? Solomon has been complaining about how life often seems so unfair, and now his answer is: Have fun. That seems kind of ridiculous, doesn’t it?

No, I think it makes a lot of sense. Now, we need to keep the Biblical teaching in perspective. When we encounter injustice, we should not just ignore it. **Jeremiah 22:3 Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed.** Even when we are the person who has been treated unfairly, there is nothing wrong with seeking justice.

The Bible tells us however, that there are worse things than being treated unfairly. In 1 Corinthians 6, the Apostle Paul scolds the Christians in that church for bringing lawsuits against each other. He says if you are having a dispute with another believer, if you think someone has harmed or taken advantage of you in some way, it is okay to seek justice by going to the church leaders and asking them to appoint an arbitrator to settle the dispute.

But, Paul says, a Christian has no business taking his/her case into the secular courtroom. And if you think that the leaders in the church are not treating you fairly, if you are not getting all you deserve, Paul’s advice is “just let it go.” Or as he asks in **1 Corinthians 6:7 “Why not rather be wronged?”**

Rather than trying to always fix things and make them right, we sometimes just need to go on with life, instead of focusing on what we think we rightly should have been, we simply need to be grateful for what we do have. And then rather than feeling sorry for ourselves, we need to enjoy what God has given us.

Friends, sometime things have happened to me that seemed unfair. When I don't think I am being treated in the right way, it can bother me. I sometimes find myself a bit wound up emotionally. When I am in that situation, it is good to read the last half of Ecclesiastes 8. When I do, Solomon's advice seems to be addressed directly to me, Dan Erickson, Chisholm, MN.

The message is clear: Let it go. In many cases there is really nothing to do about a supposed injustice, so let it go. Get on with your day. Have some fun. Instead of focusing on something you wish you had, enjoy all the things which God has given you.

Reading this passage will probably not transform my thoughts and feelings immediately, but if I ponder these words, I believe they will help me forget about the supposed injustice I may have suffered and just move on with life.

Folks, the Lord inspired Solomon to write these words 3000 years ago, partly to help me and you deal with tough things that we cannot really do anything about.

Solomon goes on to explain two reasons why it is sometimes best to just let it go when we encounter injustice. For one, trying to make everything right, putting every piece of life in the right place, can be very exhausting. **Ecclesiastes 8:16 In my search for wisdom and in my observation of people's burdens here on earth, I discovered that there is ceaseless activity, day and night.**

Friends, I suspect you have known someone like this, maybe you are that someone. When something is wrong, they will work all day and night trying to fix it. They don't want to eat or sleep until they think the problem has been solved. They'll make 100 phone calls trying to get things straightened out. Are those efforts worthwhile? Sometimes, but often, they just lead to exhaustion. The person would have been much better, much happier, if he/she would have just let it go and gone to bed and gotten a good night's sleep.

#2 Solomon says, sometimes it is better to just let some things go because life is a lot more complicated than we might think. **Ecclesiastes 8:17 I realized that no one can discover**

everything God is doing under the sun. Not even the wisest people discover everything, no matter what they claim.

Oh, friends, that is good to remember. When things don't make sense to us, when it seems that God is somehow failing to do what He is supposed to do, most likely the problem is our perception. We don't see things as they really are. No matter how smart we are, or how much experience we have, or how spiritually minded and mature we are, we still have a very limited perspective.

We don't see things as God sees them, even if we say we do. Now, I want to be careful that I don't confuse anyone on this point. Listen to what the Lord tells us in **Deuteronomy 29:29** This is a very important verse. **The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we follow all the words of the law.** "The things that are revealed belong to us." We are not blind when it comes to moral and spiritual matters. Through His Word, the Bible, God has told us certain truths that we can comprehend and know. There is no reason to be ignorant or skeptical or wishy-washy when God has clearly spoken.

So, for example, is homosexual behavior wrong the answer to that question is clearly "Yes, it is wrong." How do I know what? Well, it is not because I am so smart, or well educated, or anything like that, but because God has told u in the Bible that homosexual acts are immoral. That is something that has been revealed.

Or is it my responsibility as a Christian to help those who are poor? The answer is clearly, "Yes, it is my responsibility." How do I know that? Again, not because I am so smart, well-educated or anything like that, but because God has told u in the bible that we should help those in need. **Ephesians 4:28 he must work doing something useful with his own hands so that he may have something to share with those in need.**

So, if I am asked, "Who are you to say that homosexual behavior is wrong? Or that Christians need to help the poor? Or that God created the universe? Or that Jesus is the only way to salvation? My answer is, "I'm not someone who has the authority to make those kinds of absolute

statements. But God is. He has that authority and these are statements He has made to us in His Word. These are things that have been revealed and thus belong to us.

What are the secret things, the things that belong to God, the things we cannot discover or understand no matter how smart we are? A lot of them have to do with the “why” questions.” Why did the Lord allow this to happen? He knows the answer to the question. Often, we don’t., Frequently God alone knows whether something that occurs is good or bad.

Over the years I have become convinced that usually all I can say is that something has happened. I don’t know whether it is a good thing or not whether it will be a blessing or curse in my life, but God knows.

For example , let’s say someone gives me a lottery ticket and I end up winning \$5 million . I don’t think this is likely to happen, but assume that I do, and all of the sudden I have \$5 million. Is that a good thing for me? I would kind of assume so, but honestly, I don’t know.

It is certainly possible that five years from now, I might say that the \$5 million are the worst things that ever happened to me. The money could result in changes in me and in the people around me that would make me much less happy today. God alone knows whether \$5 million would be a good thing for me or not.

On other occasions something may occur which seems to be anything but good, which may even seem tragic, such as the birth of a child with Down’s syndrome. 19 years ago, I said this in a sermon.

“As many of you know little Ellie Forsline was born a few weeks ago with down’s syndrome. On the surface that clearly doesn’t seem to be a good thing. No doubt there will be many challenges for Kent, Kin and their family as they raise this little girl. Yet just because it may not be easy, doesn’t mean it won’t be good. Now, if I could, I would wave a magic wand and give not only Ellie, but every child, every person with down’s syndrome, what we would call a “normal brain.” I believe in heaven that is what God is going to do.

But I also believe, I am convinced, that God is going to take little Ellie just as she is and make her a great blessing to her family, and to this church. And to other folks as well. How? I’m not exactly sure. That is one of the secret things God knows, and you and I don’t. But in His wisdom, He has a reason for allowing Ellie to be born with Down’s syndrome, and He has a plan for her and her family, and for everyone around her. It is a plan that includes His glory, and in the end, great blessings, for those of us who are His children. “

That is what I said 19 years ago. I am not a prophet, but I was right on the money. That is exactly what happened. Ellie, now 19 years old, has been a wonderful blessing to her family, to this congregation, and NorthStar Hibbing, the church she and her family now attend.

Of course, sometimes it takes much longer than 19 years for us to see how God’s plan comes together. In fact, there are many things in life that don’t make sense, and from our vantage point we cannot see how they will ever make sense. But we see just a few pieces of the puzzle of life.

And no matter how much education we have, or how hard we study, we still will not understand what God is doing Yet, some things are God’s business, not ours. Our business is to live each day, yes, doing what we can to make this world a better and more fair place, but trusting God to work out His plan, and make things right in His time.

Friends, when things don’t make sense, when life just doesn’t seem fair, when we wonder why God doesn’t do things differently, when we are tempted to just give up, we need to remember what the Lord is saying. “My child, my beloved child, my child whom Jesus has purchased with His own blood: don’t panic. Just trust me. Enjoy what I have given you. Have some fun. And believe that I have a plan which I guarantee you, will come together.”

If one day in heaven the Lord says, “Okay Dan, think about all the things that happened in your life. The joys, sorrows, times you felt discouraged. Is there anything you think I should have done differently? Any way I could have improved how I did things? At that point I am confident I will respond, “No Lord, You have done all things well.

It was all good. I have no complaints.” Oh. I’m not sure that even then it will all make sense to me, but I will be content knowing it makes sense to God.

Folks, that is a contentment we all should seek to cultivate in our lives. Even when things don’t make sense to you, be content knowing they make sense to the Lord. No, you don’t want to be complacent, but you do want to be content. Because **1 Timothy 6:6 Godliness with contentment is great gain.** May that contentment be growing in each of our lives today.