

Refuge City Church — March 19, 2023 “Joy in Wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 8)

Introduction

- **LASTWEEK:** We reflected on something most of us try and avoid at all costs... adversity. But we found there is significance in it.
- **TODAY:** Simply put, we need to know our place under the authority of our King.

“Wisdom in knowing your place” [Verses 1-9]

“Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed. I say: Keep the king’s command, because of God’s oath to him. Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, “What are you doing?” Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. For there is a time and a way for everything, although man’s trouble lies heavy on him. For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.”

1. One interpretation: *earthly perspective*

- It takes wisdom to know our place under the authority God has placed over us “under the sun”, as well as under our supreme authority in King Jesus [Romans 13].
- In obedience, do we submit ourselves to those who are in authority because the law of the land says we should?
- Rather, it is God who has placed them in that position and calls us to submission.
 - Obedience to earthly rulers is our ultimate obedience to our heavenly King.

2. Another interpretation: *heavenly perspective* [vs. 1]

- The greatest wisdom revealed to us in the very word of God.
- When we *sit* with it, *abide* in it, *meditate* on it, it beckons us to **joy**.
 - **Nehemiah 8:10**, “...for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”
- God’s word & His wisdom produces a change of heart and outer expression of attitude and action [from the inside out]
 - **QUOTE:** “Holy joy will be the oil to the wheels of our obedience.” [Matthew Henry]
- Sit in the presence of the king. [vs. 3, “Be not hasty to go from his presence.”]
 - *Nehemiah 1-4*: his prayer and desire is to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that have been destroyed.
 - *Nehemiah 5-7*: he puts a stop to the oppression of the people within the walls, completes the project, and calls the people of Israel home.
 - *Nehemiah 8*: The people are gathered together, the word of God is opened and read.

- **Ezra 7:10**, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”
- At the Water Gate in Jerusalem, from sun up to mid-day, the law of God is read and taught, so all would understand. [5+ hours!]; Tradition states that in that day, people would stay standing as long as God’s word is read!
- **Nehemiah 8:9-12**, “And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, ‘Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. *And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*’ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, ‘Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.’ And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.”
- Why were they weeping??
 - God’s word reveals our sin. That’s the purpose of the law. Without it, we wouldn’t know right from wrong.
 - **Romans 7:7**, “...Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.”
 - Having our sin exposed, standing in the presence of a most Holy God, our human reaction is to be sorrowful.
- Yet, the same law that exposes our sin, we find salvation, peace, and joy when we repent of that sin and are obedient to our King!
 - **Romans 8:1-2**, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”
- **QUOTE:** “If he be a King, then it is a solemn hazard to your soul if you come short of the least of his commandments. Remember that one treason makes a traitor; one leak sinks a ship; one fly spoils the whole box of ointment. He that bought us with his blood deserves to be obeyed in all things with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.” [Charles Spurgeon]
- Let me remind us of Psalm 1: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; **but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.** He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

“Wisdom to see beyond the finite” [Verses 10-13]

“Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.”

- There will always be injustice in this world.
 - People will do things we don’t understand, evil we can’t comprehend.

- Wicked people will go on about their days as if there is no judgement.
- Wisdom is to see beyond the finite, and know that *everyone* will stand before God to give an account for how they lived.
 - **Verse 12:** “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.”
 - It is well for those who fear God, because we know His justice is true.
 - May our heart-perspective see those who don’t fear God as potential brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - **2 Peter 3:9,** “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
- But, come the ‘end of the line’, God will look upon the wicked and say, “depart from me, I never knew you.”

“Wisdom in not knowing” [Verses 14-17]

“There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun. When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one’s eyes see sleep, then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.”

- Wisdom is not in the excess of knowing more.
- Rather it is the application of what God has chosen to reveal to us in the days of our life.
 - Don’t lose sleep because you don’t know where your life is headed, or you simply can’t figure out why the world is the way it is.
 - You can’t control what you don’t know.
 - We can only trust in the One who does, be obedient to His Word, and allow His joy to overwhelm your life.
 - **Nehemiah 8:10,** “And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Conclusion

- Wisdom is knowing our submissive place under the authority of King Jesus.
- Wisdom is not running from His presence, but rather abiding in it.
- Wisdom is understanding that God is in control and there will be things that happen beyond our understanding.
- Wisdom is dedicating time to spend time in God’s Word on a daily basis.
 - **Jeremiah 17:7-8,** “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

- Wisdom is finding fulfillment in the joy of the Lord.
- Wisdom is applying God's Word to our life here and now, enjoying what He has given to us, and what He's given us to do.
 - **John 4:14**, "The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."