

- ii. Walk humbly (Micah 6:8)

To walk with Him is to carry a cross, to bear the injustices of the world on behalf of others.

IV. A Time for Setting Things Right (12-13)

- A. God marches on in the world carrying a cross. He carries it as disciples carry it, as His image bearers carry it.

- B. The world looks at the problem of evil and has determined that God is dead. The Preacher has looked upon it and determined that we must act shrewdly, wait patiently, humbly enjoy what God has given us, and know that there is a time coming when God will set things right (Rev. 21:4).

LIVE THE STORY

The Gospel is intended to be learned and lived in community.

The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.

- What are some ways in which it appears that “Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross”? Can you think of ways in which the arc of the moral universe does not appear to bend toward justice?
- Why is it essential for us to know that that arc not only bends toward justice but will surely arrive there one day?
- What setting(s) might prompt the Preacher to write a section that can have double meaning and function subversively?
- What does it mean to live as foreigners and strangers in this world? How does Hebrews 11 help us in this? How might Ecclesiastes 8 help us learn how to live in a world in which we are not in power?
- How might the Preacher also be telling us that “the whirligig of time brings in his revenges”?
- How does our enjoyment of God’s gifts in a broken world point to the future reign of God and allow us to participate in it now? What might this impact *how* we enjoy the gifts of God?

When Life Gets Twisted: Understanding the Absurdity of Life

Understanding the Times

Jerry Cisar — July 5, 2020

Text: Ecclesiastes 8

Keyword: *Time*

Introduction

- A. “Who is like the wise person?” The expected answer is “No one!”

Edmund Burke opined, “To complain of the age [or *times*] we live in, to murmur at the present possessors of power, to lament the past, to conceive extravagant hopes of the future, are the common dispositions of the greater part of mankind.... [And] Such complaints... have existed in all times.”

- B. Two Perspectives

“Evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross, but that same Christ arose and split history into A.D. and B.C., so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name. Yes, ‘the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.’” (MLK Jr.)

- i. The arc of the moral universe *rarely* appears to bend toward justice.
- ii. The arc of the moral universe is truly long... and that in time it will not just bend *toward* justice but *arrive at* justice.

In order not to succumb to evil in this world, or accept defeat by evil, we must recognize that there is a time to act shrewdly, a time to wait patiently, a time for humble enjoyment, for there will be a time of setting things right.

I. A Time to Act Shrewdly (1b-7)

- A. The subversive sense of this chapter is so strong that:
 - i. One commentator suggested that this chapter is the strongest argument against Solomon’s authorship.

- a) "There is no single 'biblical view' of the appropriate relation of people of faith to political authority."
- b) "Ecclesiastes aims for a practical ethic adequate for *repressive and uncertain times*."
- c) The Preacher "only pretends to advocate loyalty, when in reality he subverts it."

B. How do I act when in the presence of a wicked and powerful king? How do I act when I vehemently disagree with him?

- i. A wise person will brighten his countenance and not let his disapproval show! (1b)
- ii. Obey the king's command!
 - a) Matt. 10:16
 - b) There is a proper time and a just way to act (vv5-6).
- iii. V6 might be read: ""For to every matter there is a right and just way, nonetheless the evil of the man (mankind) weighs upon him."

B. We are strangers, foreigners in this world. Exiles.

- i. Adam Gustine: "An exilic community is forced to live out its foreign way of life in the midst of a world that rejects it..."
- ii. MLK Jr.'s 4-step process for peaceful protest:
 - a) Collection of facts: are there real injustices occurring?
 - b) Negotiation: Try other means of resolution.
 - c) Self-purification: This is where they prayerfully prepared themselves to receive injustices, beatings, jailings, etc. and determined that they would not in any way retaliate or return evil for evil.
 - d) Direct Action: the actual protest or boycott.

II. A Time to Wait Patiently (8-11, 14)

Shakespeare: "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges."

- i. Vv8: One can't get away from the just desserts of their wickedness anymore than a soldier can take leave in the middle of a battle.
- ii. The wicked ruler will get his comeuppance.
 - a) They receive "in themselves the due penalty for their sin" (Rm. 1:27).
 - b) Another burial scene, but this time something is off.

B. The wicked live long, get praised in life, and praised in death.

Tyndale Commentary: "the problem of politically sanctioned injustice and persistent evil is universal and timeless."

III. A Time for Humble Enjoyment (15-17)

- A. The Preacher again defaults to his instruction to enjoy life (15).
 - i. *By our enjoyment of God's gifts in a broken world we point to the future reign of God and participate in it now. We live in anticipation of it.*
 - ii. This is not a participation and anticipation of what God *will* do one day, but of what God is *already* at work *doing* in Jesus Christ... which began in His death, burial and resurrection.
- B. Who is the wise person? Who knows the interpretation of a matter? His answer is no one.
 - i. This should give us a sense of humility as we engage the difficulties of wickedness perpetrated by one human against another.