

Submission to the King of Kings

Ecclesiastes 8:6-8; Job 14:5

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Godly submission is a conspicuous evidence to the work of God's grace in the life of the Christian. Without the grace of godly submission, you will live in misery constantly, banging your head against God's revealed will and against God's good providence in our lives. Dear ones, godly submission is being able to say from a faith that is clinging to Christ, "Not my will, but thine be done." There may even be times in your life in which you must wipe away the tears from your eyes as you pray to your all wise God, "Not my will, but thine be done." You will recall the godly submission that was evident in the life of your beloved Savior as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane ("Not my will, but thine be done."), with sweat like great drops of blood coming from the pores of His skin at the horrors of God's wrath that He was about to endure.

Dear ones, submission to God is not a mere resignation on your part to stop fighting against God because you realize you cannot win in a fight against Him ("If you can't beat Him, join Him"). Godly submission is not merely falling down upon your knees and declaring to God, "You win. I can't fight anymore. You are mightier than I." Dear ones, godly submission submits to God in all the circumstances of life because it is right, just, holy, and good to do so. Godly submission is an act of faith knowing that God does not make any mistakes in what He brings into your life. Godly submission is an expression of your love for God, who did not even withhold His only begotten Son from His most fierce wrath in order to rescue guilty undeserving sinners like you and me.

Godly submission is not simply a grace for which women or children ought to seek and to pray, but a grace that ought to adorn the character of every man as well. The reason some men are tyrants and abuse their authority is because they have not learned godly submission to the King of kings and Lord of lords. There will be no submission to those who rule on behalf of God, if you do not first learn to cheerfully submit to the Triune God in all of His mysterious ways that are past finding out. There is nothing that is more contrary to the corrupt nature you have inherited from Adam than to cheerfully submit to the Lord, even when you must walk through the valley of the shadow of death. For by nature, we all want to be in control. Man wants to call the shots. But that event which illustrates more than anything else that you are not in control is your powerlessness to prevent your own ultimate appointment with death.

Dear ones, let us consider today the grace of godly submission and your desperate need of it as related to the following main points from our text: (1) Man Is Miserable Because He Is Powerless (Ecclesiastes 8:6); (2) Man Is Miserable Because He Is Ignorant (Ecclesiastes 8:7); (3) Man Is Miserable Because He Is Mortal (Ecclesiastes 8:8).

I. Man Is Miserable Because He Is Powerless (Ecclesiastes 8:6).

A. In Ecclesiastes 8:2-5 Solomon speaks of one bright and shining stone in the crown of heavenly wisdom: godly submission to all lawful authority here upon the earth. He now continues in the same vein, but seems to broaden the application to include the beauty of godly submission to your supreme authority, the Lord God Himself, who orders every event that occurs in your life. Carefully note how Ecclesiastes 8:5 brings one aspect of godly submission to a close, while Ecclesiastes 8:6 seems to open another realm in which godly submission will be severely tested in your life. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 8:5: "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment." The commandment in view here in Ecclesiastes 8:5 is no doubt "the king's commandment" (Ecclesiastes 8:2). The person that has heavenly wisdom discerns that there is a "time" to submit according to God's righteous law to

human authority (that is, when it is lawful), and there is a time not to submit (that is, when that authority is not lawful). There is also a “judgment”, a decision, or a commandment to which to submit according to God’s law (that is, when it is agreeable to God’s Word and is reasonable), and there is a “judgment”, decision, or commandment received from a human authority to which we are not to submit (that is, when it is not agreeable to God’s Word or is not reasonable). These distinctions are more fully developed and illustrated in the two previous sermons on Ecclesiastes 8:1-5. But today we note how Solomon moves from submission to human authority to submission ultimately to heavenly authority (as is seen in Ecclesiastes 8:6 where the “time” and “judgment” of Ecclesiastes 8:5 is no longer applied to human authority, but the “time” and “judgment” of Ecclesiastes 8:6 is applied to heavenly authority). We move from discerning a “time” and “judgment” to the king’s commandment in Ecclesiastes 8:5 to a Divine “time” and “judgment” to “every purpose” in Ecclesiastes 8:6.

B. One area in which godly submission will be severely tested and tried is in the area of God’s absolute control over all His creation—over “every purpose” under heaven. Solomon states, “Because to every purpose there is time and judgment.” This statement reminds us of what Solomon had said earlier in Ecclesiastes 3:1: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Dear ones, every purpose, decision, event, movement, and act that occurs in this universe has its own appointed time and judgment not by a mere earthly king, but by the King of kings and Lord of lords. Everything happens on time (nothing too soon or too late) and according to God’s most righteous judgment or decision (“The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” Psalm 145:17).

1. This truth is for your comfort not for your discouragement. As Christians, to know that you have been in the loving thoughts of God from all eternity, to know that every atom of your being, every trial, heartache, or affliction has been well planned by a God who loves you with an everlasting love, to know that the most trivial details in life as well as the most significant matters of life are intimately connected by God’s most wise purpose for you, is a knowledge so precious that none surely deserves it in the least. Nothing happens by accident—absolutely nothing. There is dignity attached to everything in your life (whether it is great or small) because it is ordained by God. The only reason you have hope in this world when everything seems to be falling apart at the seams is because there is a Divine purpose and a most holy and wise plan for everything. Take that truth away and all that is left is hopelessness and despair. The very source of joy in your life is your most glorious God who controls your life and mine.

2. Although many things in this life are entirely out of your control, nothing is outside of God’s control (Psalm 33:6-11; Isaiah 46:9-10). Dear ones, here is where godly submission must begin if it is to have a place in your life at all. You must willingly and cheerfully submit to God’s absolute sovereignty over every area of your life, over every area of the lives of your loved ones, over the nations, and over all His creation. The Lord is King over His universe, and nothing happens apart from His command or ordination.

3. Man views himself as so important, but man is but dust—you were made from dust and to dust shall you return (Job 34:15; Isaiah 40:15). You are the clay and God is the Heavenly Potter who molds and shapes your life according to His most holy and wise plan (Romans 9:20-21).

C. Solomon next addresses man’s misery in Ecclesiastes 8:6: “therefore the misery of man is great upon him.” Solomon implies here that man’s misery is great when man does not see or submit to God’s absolute control over every purpose in this world. Just as a man will avoid misery in submitting to the lawful authority and lawful commands of the king (Ecclesiastes 8:5), so will you avoid misery in submitting to your loving Heavenly Father, for whom there is a time and a judgment to every purpose under heaven. Man is powerless and not in control. He rebels against this good and lawful submission to God and His plan. Inevitably, misery is the result you all will experience if you take this path.

1. Dear ones, is your life miserable and filled with fear, worry, and anxiety today? Is that

misery perhaps due to your resisting God and the events He has ordained for your life?

2. Is your life miserable and filled with anger, hatred toward others, bitterness and resentment? Is that misery perhaps due to your fighting against God and the people He has ordained to be in your life?

3. Is your life miserable and filled with discontentment, complaining, and ingratitude? Is that misery perhaps due to your unwillingness to bow the knee to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? It is necessary to receive Christ as Savior from the just condemnation of hell which you deserve, if you would know forgiveness and eternal life. It is, however, also necessary to submit to Christ as Lord, if you would know the power of His resurrection. If Christ is not your Lord, He cannot be your Savior. He is your Prophet, Priest, and King. An evidence of your faith in Jesus Christ is your loving submission to His supreme Lordship in your life. "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say (Luke 6:46)?" You can call Him "Lord" with your mouth, dear ones, but do you desire to submit to Him, to bow the knee to His revealed will in Scripture, to trust that His plan for your life is most good, most holy, and most wise, when you are powerless to change circumstances or people? This is where your submission is always tested the most: when you find the circumstances you are in to be unbearable. You want to run like Jonah rather than submit like your Savior. When you do so, you only increase your misery and pain. Dear ones, find that place of rest and joy in humble and believing submission to a God who can do you, His children, no wrong.

4. Dear ones, there is an appointed time of mercy and an appointed time of judgment. Once God closes the door to that time of mercy wherein the gospel is preached unto you and you are invited to come to Christ and receive by faith the free gift of forgiveness and life, there remains only a time of everlasting judgment in the fires of hell. Do not despise the appointed times of mercy that are now available to you. Do not ignore these times. Do not become so wrapped up in the pleasures of this world or the business of this world that you fail to see and receive the mercy of God offered to you in Christ Jesus.

II. Man Is Miserable Because He Is Ignorant (Ecclesiastes 8:7).

A. A second misery that comes to man is due to his ignorance about what will happen in the future. Again this is a fruit of man wanting to be in total control of his own life. However, the omniscient (all knowing) God, who declares the end from the beginning, leaves man (apart from Divine revelation) in a state of ignorance about the future, in order to remind man that he is not God and that God alone ordains all things for His own glory and for the good of His people. Man knows not what shall be or when it shall be. All such things are hidden in the eternal purpose and counsel of the everlasting God. "Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way" (Proverbs 20:24)? Now the Lord does not teach you to be lazy in making godly plans for the future. To the contrary, you are not to be lazy sluggards, but are to be like the ant: Read Proverbs 6:6-8. What you are not to do in regard to the future is to boast in your plans as if what you have planned will certainly occur or to live your life for what you have planned, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). Here is wisdom. You make godly plans for the future and work toward those godly goals, but you realize that only God orders the future, and so you always humbly submit your plans to Him praying, "Not my will, but thine be done."

B. The fool is miserable because he does not submit to the Lordship of Christ in ordering all things for His own glory and for the good of His people. The fool would rather pretend he is in control of the future than humbly submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who ordains and controls the past, present, and future. This is the stubbornness of our corrupt nature, dear ones. When something so obvious is the case (namely, that man does not know or control the future), and yet you act as though you do control the future because you do not commit all your ways to the Lord, seeking His direction, you forget Him—you neglect Him—you ignore Him—you disbelieve Him. Ultimately, your sin in so acting is that of unbelief. You really do not believe that God's way (whether it be through financial distress, through family problems, through physical affliction,

through spiritual struggles) is the best way for you, because God's way often involves pain, heartache, struggles, and stretching you beyond your comfort zone. Your sin in so doing is also that of idolatry. Thinking or acting as though you were wiser or more loving than He whose wisdom and love knows no boundaries. Dear ones, you must learn to rest in the power of God to supply all of your needs, to rest in the wisdom of God to know what is best for you, to rest in the love of God to know that He can do you no wrong and only gives to you what is good for you; otherwise you will either fear the future or act as though you control the future (in either case you will be miserable). Here is your promise to which to cling with all of your heart: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

III. Man Is Miserable Because He Is Mortal (Ecclesiastes 8:8).

A. The third and final misery that befalls the foolish man in this portion of Scripture is his own mortality and his inability to hold back the hand of death. Here is the place where the greatest resistance to God's sovereign control will likely be experienced: death.

1. Solomon declares that mere mortal man is powerless in himself to prevent or to overcome death: "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of his death" (Ecclesiastes 8:8). When God has ordered and decreed that it is time for the spirit within man to leave this mortal body, none of you has the power to grab hold of your spirit and keep it longer than God so wills it.

2. We read in Job 14:5 how the length of your life to the very day is determined by God: "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." For the foolish man, woman, or child, this is not a thought he allows himself/herself to dwell upon. By nature we seek to exercise our sovereignty over our own lives by avoiding the subject of death or by acting as though we can hold off death until we are ready.

B. Solomon continues in Ecclesiastes 8:8 to describe the inevitable appointment all mortals have with death in this way: "and there is no discharge in that war." In other words, death is a battle you will all endure, and it is the fool who thinks there is no battle at all because he/she will out-manuever death, or out-smart death, or control death in some way by his/her own power. Solomon says in effect, there is neither discharge nor exemption from this war of death.

1. We read that God allowed certain exemptions from war on the part of Israelite men in Deuteronomy 20:5-8. But in this battle with death, God says there are none who are sent home and who do not have to go to war to face death. None of you knows when that battle with death will begin in your own life or in the lives of loved ones until the appointed time arrives. All of the wicked plots and schemes that man may devise cannot deliver him/her from death: "neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it (that is, given to death)" Ecclesiastes 8:8. "It is appointed unto men once to die" Hebrews 9:27. The mightiest warrior or soldier, the smartest scholar, the most gifted musician, athlete, or artist, the most powerful leader in the world, the richest among men, the one living to be the oldest (even Methuselah eventually died after living 969 years)—none can avoid going to battle against death. None of you can compel someone else to go to battle for you or to walk that road for you. What a sobering thought. If you do not know what godly submission is at that point in your life, what a war that struggle with death will be. If you have not learned godly submission in life (in all that God has brought into your life, whether trials or blessings), how will you humbly submit to the Lord in facing death?

2. Dear ones, God is absolutely sovereign, even in the matter of your greatest enemy: death. Man can act so independent of God all his/her life, but where do one's thoughts so often turn at the point of death, but to God, heaven, and hell. You ought to live your life with a view to your own mortality, so that you do not forget that you are not sovereign, you are not ultimately in control, and you are not your own

Savior. The good news of Jesus Christ is that Christ faced the terrors of death and judgment from God for those who trust alone in Christ alone, so that the sting of death might be removed. Christ's empty tomb assures you, who trust in Him as your only hope of eternal salvation, that death is not the end, but simply the means to everlasting life in heaven. Yes, none of you can be discharged from facing death, but you do not have to face death alone. Your glorious Conqueror (Jesus Christ) takes you up to ride with him upon His white horse as you face death. He comes to you as your beloved Savior and caresses you with the promises of His eternal inheritance purchased and paid for in His blood. Dear ones, don't wait until the time of your death, thinking you can at that time submit in faith to Christ—submit to Him now. You may not have the opportunity to do so at a later time of your own choosing. Learn the joy of humble and cheerful submission to Christ's Lordship now over every area of your life, so that you will be well prepared to submit to Him at the time of your death and will be able to pray as did the Lord Jesus, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" Luke 23:46; "Not my will, but thine, be done" Luke 22:42.

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