

*Worldly Kings & the King of the World*

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-17

Bethany Baptist Church

July 21, 2019

May 6, 2012

**We are already following another presidential election year (and its still a year away!).**

But certainly, it is a **blessing** to live in a land & time of **representative government & great personal freedom**.

Yet we have plunged into a season of unprecedented societal change. Will Christ's followers always enjoy the **civil liberties** we openly *gather under* this *Lord's Day*?

(Remember: freedom is like a *garden* – it must be *tended* if we are to enjoy its *fruits*!)

Meanwhile, **spin the globe & put your finger** almost anywhere else on the planet, and the Church is **not** enjoying nearly so much **civil & cultural favor**...

**How will you walk your faith** in the context of the **civil & cultural times** in which **God has** placed you?

**Join me today in Ecclesiastes 8:1-17 (today: 1-11; next week: 12-17)**

Wisdom for **how to live** under fallible *human authority* (**king...supervisor**).

Ecclesiastes' Preacher was Israel's King! The wisest man of his day and keenly interested in leadership, power, and civil authority.

The king's pursuit of wisdom and fulfillment provide...

**Five principles for living wisely under an earthly king.**

**(Today)**

- 1. You can't ignore the king's *authority* (vv.2-6).**
- 2. You must understand the king's *limits* (vv.7-8).**
- 3. You might suffer under the king's *evil* (vv.9-11).**

**(Next week - Lord willing)**

- 4. You can rejoice in the King of kings (vv. 12-15)**
- 5. You should consider to a wise king's *conclusions* (v.1; vv.16-17).**

**...pray...**



## You can't ignore the king's authority (vv.2-6).

1. ??? *A boss is like a belly-button!* → Everyone has **one** (or **more**)! *King, governor, DI, supervisors, husband, parent, teacher, coach, elders...*
  - **...God (more later)!**
  
2. Solomon says the wise man must know **how to live** under authority! *Good & bad.* → Starts w/ **four tips** for *respecting* the king's **authority**.
  - a. *Obey the rules.*
  - b. *Live in loyalty.*
  - c. *Don't complain.*
  - d. *Don't buck the system (no shortcuts).*
  
3. **Tip # 1: Obey the rules.** **V.2** – King Solomon says, “*Keep the command of the king*”! Be a *law-abiding citizen*.
  - a. We commonly say that ordered societies **live under the rule of law**. Man has been guided by *directions & restrictions* since the Garden! Civil law provides *justice, direction, consistency, protection*.
    - i. Solomon encourages obedience by **appealing to conscience**. His first readers had taken a *solemn oath*. In **1 Chr 29:24** – *All the officials, the mighty men, & also all the sons of King David pledged allegiance to King Solomon.*
    - ii. The real **teeth** in Israel's oath was *the fear of God (v.2b – because)*. **NT:** All authority is est. by God (Rm 13; 1 Pt 2)!
      - 
      - iii. A *God-fearing* citizen is a *law-abiding* citizen. *Obey the rules!*

4. **Tip # 2: Live in loyalty. Read v.3.** See the *two “do not’s...”* Solomon’s is really pressing **one doubled-dipped directive**: *When your king makes you mad, don’t rush out to plan a revolution!*
- Loyalty is crucial in good relationships w/ leadership. Joshua was loyal to Moses**; Jonathon → David; David → KSaul! Timothy → Paul.
  - Solomon offers a pragmatic *motive* for loyalty: the king’s **power**. He has the power to *decree* & the power to *enforce*! Paul: *the king doesn’t bear the sword for nothing! Live in loyalty.*
5. **Tip # 3: Don’t complain.** In v.4, Solomon puts the *reason* first & the *tip* last. **Read v.4.**
- Isn’t it *amazing* how much the Bible has to say about *tongue control*! **Here is wisdom**: Don’t look the king in the eye & say: **“What are you doing?”**
  - Where does an 800 lb guerilla sit?** That kind of **sums up** Solomon’s logic here (v.4): the king’s word carries **a lot of weight**! *Don’t complain!*
6. **Tip # 4 (respecting authority): Don’t buck the system (avoid shortcuts). Read vv. 5-6.**
- Is this you!?!: *when all else fails, read the directions?* There is an *expression repeated* in these vs.: *the proper time & procedure* (2x). A wise man **follows appropriate procedures**.
  - Solomon has some *extra advice* here: *don’t buck the system*, even when **trouble** presses heavy on you. *Pressure* pushes people to take *shortcuts*, to *fudge*, to *bend*, to *cheat*. Don’t *cut corners*. Don’t *give in*. Even in *days of trouble*, do it right!
  - The **reward** is clear & Solomon puts it right *up front*: **(5) stick to the commands & avoid trouble; (6) follow process & reap the delights!**
  - One of the **delights** of *doing it right* is a **clear conscience**. Turn w/ me to **Rm 13: 5-7**.

*Beloved, a wise man respects civil authority:*

- a. *Obeys the rules.*
- b. *Lives in loyalty.*
- c. *Doesn't complain.*
- d. *Doesn't take shortcuts!*

**You must understand the king's limits (vv.7-8).**

1. The king might be an **800 guerilla**, but *even he* can't **do everything!**  
(Read vv. 7-8)
2. No king can *predict the future* (7)! Solomon has already stressed this *several times* (6:12): **Who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?**
  - a. A significant part of *leader's responsibility* is to **set direction**. But no man has a *crystal ball*.
  - b. Only **God** knows the **future!** He *declares the end from the beginning*. He knows *the hour & the day*.
  - c. So Solomon's principle of "*leadership limitations*" should teach kings to be *careful* (seek *counsel*; seek **God**) ... & subjects to be *patient*.
3. No king has *authority* over **God' creation**. **Reread v.8.**
  - a. **Heb ruach = spirit, wind**. No man can *harness the wind* to *tame* the wind!
    - i. **King Jesus** commanded *winds & waves*, but neither Solomon nor any other king can *match that!* We love the term, but *believe me* – there was only **one Water Walker!**
  - b. No man has the *authority* to set the *day of death*. God *numbers* our days (e.g. **Psa 139**). Even when *civil justice* demands **capital punishment**, it only wields the sword w/ **God's permission**.

4. Every ruler is *limited* by **other practical constraints** (read v.8.b).
- a. *Discharge* ( →Aramaic) = *to liberate; to let go*. **War restrains everyone!** *King & subject; general & footsoldier!* The ultimate restraint is that you can't **stop a war on a dime**, and you can't **walk out on war** (= *desertion*)!
    - i. Do you recall that Jesus said smart kings *count the cost* before they **wage war**? If their resources/power is **limited**, they *sue for peace....*
  - b. A fourth restraint: *Evil won't deliver those who practice it*. Not even a king!
    - i. On **June 17, 1972**, five men were apprehended at 2:30 a.m. in the **Democratic National Committee HQ** in an office complex named **Watergate**. The burglars were planting electronic surveillance.
      1. The **five men** & their scheme were soon traced back to the **Committee to Reelect the President (R. Nixon)**.
      2. The next **2 yrs** were marked by uncovered slush funds, CIA connections, **edited tape recording**, criminal indictments, resignations, congressional investigations, & an impeachment process.
      3. **Aug 9, 74 Pres R.Nixon** *resigned* from office.
      4. The key word for the **Watergate Scandal** has always been **cover-up**. A seeming attempt to deliver *evil w/ further evil*.
    - ii. In a society that abides by the **rule of law**, **no one**, from the *palace to the street-corner*, can prosper by **covering evil w/ evil**.

***Even a king has his limitations.***

**But...you *still* might suffer under the king's evil (vv.9-11).**

1. That last *limitation* in **v.8** moves us directly from the *authority & character* of a **typical ruler**, to the reign of an **ugly tyrant**. → “*Absolute power corrupts absolutely.*”

• **Read vv. 9-11.**

2. **V.9** - King Solomon **pauses**. He reminds us that he is still **pursuing wisdom**, & he is now still focused on **kings** (→ *civil authority*).
  - a. **Thread:** **v.9** *exercise of authority*; **v.11** *judicial sentencing*.
  - b. Same limit to wisdom: ***under the sun*** (life lived w/o regard to God & His principles).
  - c. But his examination of *authority* now **narrows**: *the abuse of power; the rule of evil men!* **V.9**: those deeds...*wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt*. → The **man in power** *abuses* his power to *hurt* his **subjects**.
  - d. **Civil corruption** is a *familiar theme* in Eccl. Wonder why? → Solomon was a *powerful king*. At times he ruled with a *heavy hand*. Perhaps in his old age his **conscience** *troubled him*.
  - e. Here he examines **two** examples of *power gone bad*: **legacy** of a wicked leader (**v.10**); **weakness** of a slow court (**v.11**).

***Read v.10...***

3. **Read v.10.** This king (**9.b**) was not only *wicked*, he was a *hypocrite*! He could often be seen prominently *entering & leaving the holy place* (Temple).

- a. **Be careful, beloved! Evil men** are not necessarily adverse to *using* religion to further their plans! **Adolf Hitler** *bewitched* to State Church in Germany in the 1930's, then *emasculated* it, then *bullied* it, then *silenced* it. For those few who dared to stand firm on the *Gospel* (Martin Niemoller, D. Bonhoffer), there was prison & even **death**.
- b. Wicked rulers **come & eventually go**. (*It is appointed unto men to die*.) But that doesn't always **fix** the power problem!
- c. Because men **fail to learn**! Perhaps, for some wicked rulers, history manages to *sanitize* their memory. Swindoll comments: *It's remarkable what an honorable burial can do for a dishonorable life*. Even for those *closest* to the abuses of a *tyrant* ( → *in the city*).
- d. But often, men *don't forget*, they are simply either *powerless* or *afraid of unwilling* to effect meaningful change in the *wake of evil*.
- e. **Futility!** Evil leaders *come & go*, & we don't seem to *learn*...

4. **Read v.11.** Here is a 2<sup>nd</sup> *evil* when authority is abused: **justice moves slowly**. Solomon warns that when *justice moves slowly*, its power as a **deterrent** to further evil is *eroded*.

- a. **Eroded** because *no one fears* any penalty for sinfulness.
- b. Solomon's vocab pictures the *hearts* of men like a **cauldron**, filled to the brim w/ *evil thoughts & schemes*, boiling & bubbling & ready to *spill over* into **evil actions**. Nothing (*no one*) to put out the fire!
- c. Who's to *stop* us!?! What is the chance of *meaningful retribution*? It seems worth the *risk*... **Justice moves slowly, if it ever moves at all**.
- d. **We live w/ this problem!** Our *founding fathers* realized the importance of a just & expeditious legal process. The **6th Amendment (etc)** to our constitution address Solomon's complaint. "**Due process**" is right for the *accused*; it is right for the *people*. **PAUSE...**

**But Solomon's warning remains: there are times in history when good men must live under ineffective & evil authority.**

**You & I** look around us & wonder if Solomon's **axiom** might prove itself true in *our lifetime* → ***Nothing new under the sun...***

1. What will we do if our authorities become increasing *inept* & even *evil*?
2. The **Lord instructed** *oppressed, early believers* to respond to worldly regimes w/ ***submission***.
3. **Jesus** taught (Mt 22:21): “*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s (e.g., taxes), and to God the things that are God’s.*” → Your whole-hearted *devotion*.
4. **Paul** wrote (Rm 13:1f): *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is not authority except for God, and those which exist are established by God.*” → Civil *obedience* is rooted in recognizing God’s *sovereignty* over rulers & regimes (next Sunday, the ***king’s King!***)
5. **Peter** taught (1 Pt 2:18): *Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution. It wasn’t easy! So why bother?* → **Testimony! Conscience! Pleases God!**
6. ***Civil submission*** ( → NT) does **not** guarantee a *happy ending, in this life* (Jesus, Paul, Peter → **execution**). So *biblical submission* requires a lot of *wisdom* & a lot of *faith*.
7. We’ll close today with one final NT *lesson* on ***good citizenship***, from the pen of a man who *perished under Nero’s sword*:

*First of all* (Apostle Paul), *I urge that entreaties & prayers, petitions & thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings & all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil & quiet life in all godliness & dignity. This is good & acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved & come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim 2:1-4).

**Pray beloved!** Pray for *our nation!* Pray for the ***salvation*** of our leaders! Pray for ***God’s will*** in our land.

Please ***bow w/ me...*** (THE TEXT FROM 1 Tm 2)