Biblical Soul Care
Lesson 10 - Wisdom under Authority
Ecclesiastes 8

Introduction:
Chapman University does an annual fear survey. They are trying to track what Americans are most afraid of. And in 2026, Political corruption was the number 1 fear for the 11th straight year. Add to that the midterm elections this week, and we have a terrible recipe for the kind of conversations that Solomon will warn us about in Ecclesiastes 8.

What are some ways the world talks about governing authorities today?

How do we talk about governing authorities? Is it different from the world?

How should it be?

This morning we are going to consider Solomon's wisdom for those under authority. The likely audience he has in mind are counselors to the king - his "cabinet" so to speak. These men were to give counsel to the king, make recommendations, and help him make wise decisions for the nation.

So what happens when you disagree with what the king says or does? That can be a precarious situation! Solomon writes to help those men, and in so doing he helps us be wise as we interact with our leaders.

Think about your last conversation about politics. How would you characterize your words, tone? If the leader you were talking about was in the room, how would he/she respond?

I. Wisdom in the King's Presence

Ecclesiastes 8 (ESV) —
1 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.

Ecclesiastes 8:1 (NET) — 1 Who is a wise person? Who knows the solution to a problem? A person's wisdom brightens his appearance and softens his harsh countenance.

What is Solomon saying about the wise here?

Why would this be important in the presence of the king?

Ecclesiastes 8:2 (ESV) – I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him.

Ecclesiastes 8:2 (NET) — Obey the king's command, because you took an oath before God to be loyal to him.

This verse references a kind of oath that these advisors made to the king and by extension to God, since the king is chosen and installed by God. This is no small matter as we learned from chapter 5 (it's better not to vow than to vow and not pay, destruction could result!).

When you think about loyalty to leaders, what does it look like in your experience?

How common is loyalty today? Why do you think that is?

3 Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. **4** For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?"

Solomon reminds his people of the importance of wisdom when questioning the king. Why should they be careful in expressing disagreement?

Consider David's prayer to God in Psalm 55:12-15. How did David respond to this betrayal?

II. The Wise Way to Question a King

5 Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. **6** For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. **7** For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? **8** 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.

Solomon gives some insight on the difficulty of being a king's advisor. "A man's trouble lies heavy on him" indicates that the one who has sworn loyalty to the king and before God, is wrestling with how to express disagreement with the king's choice of action.

Some leaders demand what we might call blind loyalty. Is this what Solomon is advocating?

How does Solomon advise this man to interact or disagree with the king?

III. The Effect of Leadership

9 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. **10** 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.

What is Solomon observing about leaders and authority in these two verses?

How does this add to the anxiety and fear people have about leadership and authority?

What is the warning that wise leaders should take from these verses?

11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. **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. **13** 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.

What do bad leaders fail to do in v 11, and what is the effect of this practice?

In verse 12 and verse 13 we see the paradox of men who do evil. What is it?

What is Solomon saying about these evil men?

See Psalm 73

14 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.

What is the vanity that Solomon speaks of here?

Solomon's Conclusion:
15 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. **16** 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, **17** 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.

What is Solomon's commendation to the vanity of verse 14? Is it what you expected?

What does the world want to hear in response to verse 14?

In verses 16-17 Solomon describes a hopeless task - what is it?

How does his conclusion in verse 15 give us peace and joy?

Summary:
Our response to leaders and authorities is crucial to our joy, and our witness to the world. What are your takeaways from today's text in Ecclesiastes 8?

What do we learn about God from this chapter (His character, what He loves, hates)?

Are there changes you need to make in the way you relate to authorities in your life?

What leaders are particularly difficult for you to follow and honor?