



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Not Fair

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Ecclesiastes 8:10-15

Clint Pressley

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. 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. 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. 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.

(Pastor prays)

The theme of this section ought to be: life is not fair. Teenagers are killed in car wrecks and good cops are shot while fighting evil. Young mothers get cancer. It's frustrating and painful and really confusing. Godly young couples want to have children and can't, while those who couldn't care less have plenty of kids, or worse, get pregnant and then have an abortion. Some kids raised in an apathetic home grow up to be godly while others raised in a loving Christian home by a godly mother and a God-fearing dad come off the rails.

Why do some Christian parents have such deep scars while others have Instagram lives? It's not fair. And it's so frustrating because we actually believe in fairness. We try to love our children equally, do our jobs squarely and treat our friends honestly. Then why don't we receive a fair

deal in return? I think, at least in part, that's what the preacher is addressing in Ecclesiastes 8:10-15. When you read it, you can actually feel the frustration! Because some of you actually live with this frustration, you know it when you see it. This time you actually did all the right things and you still got the short end of the stick! The question is, how do you live with joy and contentment and happiness when all you keep getting is a raw deal? I think the preacher gets us there in this passage. I think Solomon is telling us...

Fear God and Forget Fairness

To get at this I'd like to offer five short phrases that come right from the passage.

Don't panic

You can't go through life taking everything at face value. There is an infinitely involved and sovereign God working all things together. But it certainly doesn't feel like it! You sense that in verse 10. Listen to his frustration at the moral perversity in verse 10. Let's read it and then I'll uncover a few things. 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.* How can it be? This is *Havil*, vanity. It is spitting into the wind. The wicked are honored in a funeral, respected at church and praised by friends. And it just doesn't seem right. You see the injustice he's talking about? For instance, the first scenario. I saw the wicked buried. A proper burial was part of an honorable treatment in ancient Israel. Not to have a proper burial was considered the final dishonor. It's hard to go to the funeral of this terrible person and have everyone act like he is a saint! Or the second phrase, to see them go in and out of the holy place. That is possibly the temple or a religious gathering. It's to be there and know that they are such hypocrites. Or the third phrase, "they were praised in the city where they had done such things." I thought about Ravi Zacharias. I thought about all the people who trusted and learned and looked up to him and all the abuse and lies and what hurt he caused.

There's a rottenness to it. And the preacher knows that and he's taking us somewhere. Sometimes the wicked are honored. Sometimes the hypocrites get ahead, and sometimes friends are liars and here in verse 10 Solomon is paving the way for the only true wisdom there is and that is to fear God. That is to turn your thoughts of fairness and bitterness and frustrations to God. Now the preacher doesn't get us there yet but he's going to. The first step is, don't panic. Let's look at some more bad news in verse 11.

Don't doubt

A delay in justice is not an absence of justice. Look at this delay in verse 11. The preacher steps back from what he said in verse 10 and says look, this is what happens! When justice is delayed, people think they got away with it and it just gets worse. There are two interesting things in verse 11 and then a bonus. This verse shows us the source and severity of sin.

The source of sin

The source of sin is the heart of the children of man. That's us. Men and women are the source of your problems and my problems. It is a heart issue. Jeremiah 17:9 says, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* We need to consider that when we tell a lost person to follow their heart or when we talk about conversion, "give your heart to Jesus." Jesus doesn't want your heart. He wants to give you a *new* heart. Isn't that what God says in Ezekiel 36:26? *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.* We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. That's the source of sin. Let's look really quickly at

The severity of sin

The heart is fully set to do evil. Fully set is total depravity. All of who we are is affected by sin. Sin has seeped into every crevice in our brains, showing our desperate condition and need for Christ. One other thing about delayed justice, we should be thankful. If the wages of sin is death and you didn't die instantly after you sinned, then justice delayed for you is a good thing. It is mercy if you are a Christian. This turns us to the full justice of God poured out on Christ at the cross. The justice of God and the mercy of God is the only hope for any sinner who will look to Christ. This brings me to the third point. Don't panic. Don't doubt.

Trust God

You have to take verses 12 and 13 together to get this point. Let's read it. 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.* Here is the answer of

faith. It's trusting that although it looks bad and sin is tremendous against you and the one sinning looks like he is flourishing, the eyes of faith trust that the vindication of the righteous is only a matter of time. There is a day when God will put all things right and every person will give an account for his or her life.

Martin Luther King says that the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. I would just offer that the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward the throne of God where all things are made right. So the preacher is content, waiting patiently for the Lord's justice, trusting that God is sovereign. He knows what He's doing. He loves His children and in Christ has redeemed them, and the real answer for Christian people is right there in verse 12: *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.* The way of safety, satisfaction, wellness and strength is to fear God.

Look closer at verse 12. The fear of God is the awe of God. It is the holy caution that arises from realizing the greatness of God. Look even closer at verse 12 to the end. It will be well with those who fear God, why? Because they fear before Him. Face to face. Because they worship Him, because they run to Him, because they see His holiness and their own sinfulness and run to the cross of Jesus! Because they love Him above all.

I'm asking you to trust Him, to see God for who he is and run to Him. Don't panic. Don't doubt. Trust God.

Remember grace

I say remember grace, but here's what I mean. One of the most leveling things in my life is to think on grace. Specifically the grace of God that's in Christ. This strengthens and equips me. Think on how God saved you, sustains you, purchased you and loves you. Now keep that in mind as you reflect on verse 14. As the preacher points out another vanity. Let's read the vanity in verse 14. *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.*

Now the preacher didn't mean to do this, in fact he's frustrated here because it doesn't seem right that righteous people are punished and sinful people are rewarded. But without knowing it, the preacher has given us the framework of the Gospel. The great frustration is in verse 14 and should remind us of the great exchange at the cross. The only person who's ever been truly righteous was crucified like a terrible sinner. The exchange is that any terrible sinner who believes will be treated like he is fully righteous, covered with Christ. The great frustrations in life should remind us of the great exchange at the cross. Remember grace.

Live Simple

The preacher offers some advice on how to live as believers here in this confusing and frustrating world. Here, under the sun, seek joy in the Lord. Find contentment in the small things. Develop gratitude. And get perspective. Paul said that this "light momentary affliction" is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond compare. For believers, fear God, forget fairness, don't panic, don't doubt, trust God, remember grace, and live simple.

For you who are not believers, I'm not asking you to give your heart to Jesus. I'm asking you to *come* to Jesus. Look to Jesus and he will *give* you a new heart.

(Pastor prays)