

Season 9: Ecclesiastes

Episode 9: Eternity Shapes our Limits (8:2-17)

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Felicity: Welcome to two sisters in a cup of tea. My name's Felicity and I'm in the States and I'm here with my sister Sarah. She's in the UK and we this episode are jumping back into Ecclesiastes and we're going to be doing the rest of chapter eight. Sarah, what's your tea thoughts today?

Sarah: Well, we're in a bit of a royal theme today, thinking about obedience to the king, and I just well, you've had Queen Elizabeth's favourites that I gave you a few months ago.

Felicity: I liked it a lot.

Sarah: Well, good. And I've been researching whether King Charles has a favourite one and can you guess what? It.

Felicity: Cornish tea. No. Welsh tea. No, it's not actually Welsh, but he's been a Prince of Wales for a long time, I feel know you should have some allegiance there. Okay, fair.

Sarah: It's a marketing field day, isn't it? I mean, it could be anything and you get to sell a lot of tea through it. His favorite tea is Darjeeling, apparently.

Felicity: Oh, Darjeeling. I think that's the one. That's a bit smoky. Is it? Have you ever tried it?

Sarah: I think it's the one that Karen Sill likes.

Felicity: Oh, yes, I think you're right. Well, Karen, royal connections.

Sarah: On the topic of stewing, though, nice segue here. I feel like this has been just the most stewing that we've done in a book before, in terms of having to really steep ourselves.

Felicity: Would you say these are good t words you're using? I like the idea of being steeped in Ecclesiastes. I agree. And I think it very much comes down to the fact that the form of the book kind of reflects what it's saying. Like, it's hard to grasp, isn't it? And as we have been sitting in it for a long time, gradually I feel like this word is taking a hold of my heart. It's a real testimony to time spent. And it's not that we've been sitting there over our books academically pondering forever, is it? It's literally I feel like this has been in the toing and froing of life and we've had numerous random texts of like, oh, I've just thought of this, that, and kind of like, in the thoroughfare of life, ecclesiastes has begun to take a hold. And it's a good thing. A good thing. Do you want to kick us back into it and read? We're going to be reading chapter eight, verses two through to 17.

Sarah: Let's go obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, what are you doing? Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm and the wise heart will know the proper time procedure for there is a proper time and procedure for every matter though a person may be weighed down by misery since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death as no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it. All this I saw as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. Then too, I saw the wicked buried those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless. When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I

know that it will go better with those who fear God who are reverent before him. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth the righteous who get what the wicked deserve and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. So I commend the enjoyment of life because there's nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun. When I applied my mind to no wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth people getting no sleep day or night then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun despite all their efforts to search it out no one can discover its meaning even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.

Felicity: Thank you, Sarah. So we seem to have, as you were saying in our chat, a kingly theme here, sort of sitting under authorities and what that looks like and whether it's wise or not. And I think the conclusion seems to be there is wisdom in obeying those in authority, as he says in verse two there.

Sarah: Yeah, it feels quite random, doesn't it?

Felicity: Yes. Let's just say it. Why are we suddenly talking about kings? I mean, I don't know.

Sarah: No, but I think you're right there. Seems to be wisdom that it's right to obey those in authority over us. And if we look back in Scripture, we see that in the way that David still honored Saul, even though Saul was not a good king. But even the king does not have authority to know the future, or have power over time or death, or has the power over the wind to contain it. The king's authority is limited, isn't it? And it's limited under God. I think that's what kind of these first few verses seem to be driving towards, would you say?

Felicity: I agree. Yes, I think that's right. And it's a comment on the nature of our life. Like there are boundaries, there are things, like there are people in authority, there are structures in this life under the sun. Just because there's a structure and just because there's someone in authority, that doesn't mean that they take the place of God and know everything. And that seems to be kind of where the push is going, isn't it? However wise you are, it's God alone who knows that, who knows it all. No one knows as much. No one is as wise as the Lord. But I liked in verses five and six, we have this idea that wisdom sort of knowing the proper time and procedure for there is a proper time and procedure for every matter. That kind of takes me back to the chapter three, there is a time for this, there is a time for that. That's quite a reassuring picture of this life under the sun. And even if life is weighed down by misery at that point, which is a sad, that's not obviously not a good thing, but that is still within the remit of this life, this life that we have before us.

Sarah: Yeah. And I think verse twelve kind of builds on that and helps us, doesn't it? So although a wicked person who commits 100 crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God who are reverent before him. And just that kind of coming back to the chapter five, isn't it? Like the reverence and fear of the Lord actually, that is wise, and therefore to seek to live wisely in light of the Lord, that is a good thing to do. And whether the king is good or evil, we can still seek to live wisely under that authority. So, okay, you might not have a king in your country, but whatever that authority looks like, there is a kind of common sense thing here that says living wisely and seeking to do good is the wise path. But there's also this totally mind boggling and very real reality that in verses 13 that the righteous get what the wicked deserve and the wicked get what the righteous deserve. And it just seems just awful, doesn't it, that sometimes this is the reality of our world.

Felicity: Yeah. And I think it's helpful to see that and for the teacher to acknowledge that that things will look like they are going just the opposite to how we might expect them to go. But that doesn't change the fact that it goes better for those who seek to live wisely in this world. Because I think that's a real temptation for me, that circumstances might then shift my strategy on life. So it didn't go well last time I tried to be wise. So maybe I'll just follow the fools this time around. And actually I think the big sort of push at this point in it is no, it does go better for those who fear the Lord, who seek to live wisely, because ultimately God is God and the circumstances are actually under his control. He is lord over all. And I feel like it's a good reminder of that. It's so helpful then to get to verse 15 here,

isn't it? I commend then I will do anything. The teacher commends at this point because I feel like he is wise, he.

Sarah: Knows the Lord, but it's the So, isn't it? The so, that's the linking word. It's like so in response to this. Enjoy life. Yeah, bring the joy, like enjoy it.

Felicity: And this would be a classic one if you took this verse out of context. It looks a bit like it's just like eat, drink and be merry and just that's it, that's all that life is about. But as it's kind of sandwiched between a whole lot of reality of our world and the fact that God is control, is in control, then actually okay, what does it look like, knowing that the Lord is Lord, knowing that the world is frustratingly, mind bogglingly, doesn't go quite to plan or quite to our plan. What does it look like then to enjoy life, to eat and drink and be glad takes us back to that gladness of heart we've had previously. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun. I love that the joy that accompanies the toil like toil is a reality of living this life. But that toil, as our eyes fixed, are fixed on the Lord, can be accompanied by joy because we know that this is a gift given by God and it comes back around, I think, to that same thing. Gift over gain. The toil is not there to strive to gain the next thing. The toil is just the nature of the world that we live in and then we are there to enjoy that gift.

Sarah: Yeah, no, I think that's really helpful, which doesn't negate the stark reality of injustice and oppression that's going on, does it? And I think what I find helpful here that he is acknowledging that injustices exist and it's really hard to get your head round why that happens and yet there's a kind of contentment with, okay, I don't know the answer right now, but I trust the Lord of justice, as we've been seeing through ecclesiastes. And so I choose intentionally to grab hold of joy in this moment today. And I can trust that one day justice will be done for all those who've been wronged through time immoral. And I think that's a big thing to hold in your head, isn't it? But that is really helpful that he is intentionally choosing the enjoyment of life rather than getting so bogged down and way down with the reality of these stark questions that he's put forward. He's kind of acknowledging them that he's not kind of living under them. So that not to be able to enjoy life.

Felicity: And I think I'm reassured by the fact that as we look at numerous parts of the Bible, we see that God's heart is for those who suffer injustice, for the marginalized, the oppressed. So we can trust the God of the Bible with what the world looks like and his timing on those things. And while it might not seem like it's the proper time and procedure for all these things, now we can actually give over control. Well, we don't have control. It's not that we're giving over control, but we can trust the Lord with that control, with His Sovereign, which we.

Sarah: Need to by the end of this chapter, don't we? Because again, he comes back round to the fact that we're so limited and we cannot comprehend, we cannot understand everything that goes on under the sun. And that ultimately, again, as we're keeping and seeing the thread running through this book, is that that is good news for us, it's good news for our hearts that we cannot understand it all, but we can trust the one who does and who knows it all. But on that note, sister, take us to Jesus in this. How do we get there? How are we seeing him? How have you seen Him in this?

Felicity: I think even just that last verse is a really good sort of leveler in the sense even if the wise claim they know they cannot really comprehend it, we cannot comprehend it. I don't know. I'm not in control. But I do know that God is the one who is perfectly wise. He perfectly knows everything. He is control. We see it in Jesus. He controls the wind and the waves. He has power over creation. He is the one who determines the time and the procedure and how everything is going about. And we see that in Jesus. Ultimately. We see it as Jesus goes to the cross and is resurrected. That is all in God's, right and good timing. And as I see that, I think that helps me then to trust Him. Now, how would you take it there? Is that kind of along the same lines that you were going?

Sarah: Yeah, I think that's really helpful. Yeah, I was really reminded of the mark four passage. It might be just because we're going through Mark in church at the moment, but he does have the power of the wind in that, doesn't he, to contain it. And then we see in the Gospels that he does have the power over death, both his own but others as well. And just seeing that, and then I don't know whether this is too far to go and say, well, he is the true

king, he's the king to obey, isn't he? He's the king of kings. And I don't know how far we can kind of stretch that in terms of this is calling us to obey authorities and live wisely, but ultimately we look to the King of kings and obey Him. So that's what I've been running on. But also do you remember back in when we were doing Psalm 119 and the phrase to run in the path of his commands brings joy. And actually as we think about living wisely and we think about fearing God and obeying his commands, well, the outbox seems to be that that is going to bring joy to live his way, to live wisely. He then commends joy to worship Him. Rightly. We've been seeing in the last couple of chapters is to find joy in the simple things of life because we're not in control. And I think that's just been really cool to kind of see that all wrapped together.

Felicity: Yeah, that brings a big smile to my face. That is a great and wonderful thing, isn't it? That as we seek to follow Jesus, he promises joy like this joy that is spoken of here is all the more so as we trust Jesus and follow run at his commands, as you say. And I think that is one of the big outboxes for me, a kind of ongoing outbox for Ecclesiastes, is that as I see the wisdom as it's presented here, and I'm more persuaded that this is wise and that this is God's wisdom. Christ's wisdom, ultimately, that I would long for that, that I would want to run in these commands, that I would trust that joy does come through this and not through anything else. And I think that's a big prayer, isn't it? I think that's something that's really been kind of doing a work in my heart, for sure.

Sarah: Yeah, and holding it all together, isn't it? Because what we're seeing in Ecclesiastes is that things come round, come round and go round and what we're getting here is some stark reality about injustice, but also commendation to enjoy life. Back in chapter four, we get lament, like really lament for the injustice. It's not one after the other, there's no system or order in this, it's all together, isn't it? Yeah, I just think I'm struck with that actually. There will be days where we really will lament and we really will kind of grieve the injustices around us and there will be other days where we get up and go, lord, I need to lift this to you. But I really want to enjoy this day without feeling the weight of this today. Lord, help me. Give me the ability and capacity to enjoy the gift of today. I know there's hard stuff going on and I give that to you and just holding all of that intention with one another, but that again, is just keeping praying, isn't it? Keeping praying to the Lord and giving it to Him, the one who is wise and the One who does hold it all in his want to.

Felicity: Why don't you pray for us, Sarah, as we talk about praying for these? Let's do the praying.

Sarah: Let's do that. Let's pray. Father God, we just thank you so much that you really are the one who holds everything in Your hands. We thank you that you are the one who knows the future. We thank you that you have the power over the wind. You have the power over death. You are the one who is Lord over all. And so we bring our hearts to you and we pray. Help us to trust you with the stark injustices in this world, knowing that there will be justice one day. And we just thank you so much that that justice will be meted out by the Lord Jesus. And we thank you that ultimately our joy comes from knowing Him and living in light of Him. And we just pray. Would you help us to really take these words to heart and enjoy life under the sun? Because it's under your good hand. And we pray in your name, Lord. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Thank you, Sarah. Well, here's the challenge as ever. Who can you tell about two sisters in a cup of tea? Who could you invite to listen along with you? Bless them with a way of getting into the word. Have a think right now in your head. Who is the person that you could tell about this? We would love for that to be happening as people are listening to this, but otherwise we will see you next time as we get into chapter nine.

Sarah: Look forward to seeing you then. Bye bye.

Felicity: Bye bye.

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