

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] Before we begin our sermon I just wanted to say thank you for all of your cards and gifts last Sunday. Many of you mentioned that you appreciate me all the time, but want to show it. I appreciate getting to be your pastor all the time. And today I want you to be sure you hear that. Now our passage this morning in Ecclesiastes 8 is all about obedience. And with two little ones we talk a lot about obedience in our house. There is a phrase that I often hear from 4-year-old Calvin. I usually hear it through exasperated tears when I ask him to clean up his toys and the mess he made. Usually, he cries "It's hard." Because it really is hard to obey when you're 4.
2. [Need] It might be hard when you are 4, but it's hard for us as adults to obey isn't it? Even as Christians who know and believe that we should obey at all times in all things out of love find it hard. It's hard because of the sin outside of us in our culture and environments. And it's hard because of the sin inside of us in our sinful natures. It is just plain hard to obey.
3. [Subject] Our passage this morning is here to give us wisdom and encouragement on how we can obey even when it's hard.
4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 8
5. [Preview] Our passage this morning is actually a sandwich passage where the meat is in the middle. So we will tackle the first 9 verses first, then jump to the end of the passage before going into the middle.

Point number 1 if you are taking notes. **Obey God even when you aren't in control. Obey God even when you aren't in control.**

Ultimately wisdom is about obedience.

It is not about knowing the answers to trivia questions,

It is about knowing the righteous and obedient action in each situation.

Verse 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."

The wise know how to interpret every situation.
Their face shines even when life is hard because they know what to do.

The problem is that sometimes it is not easy to obey God.
We might not be that wise.
And even if we know the right thing to do.
Even if we understand why we have to do it.
The circumstances make it difficult for us to follow through.

For example our present circumstances.
How are we supposed to obey God when the world seems to hate Him?
How can we obey when everyone is so angry and divided?
How can we obey when Christians want to pretend to be Christians, but aren't interested in actually following Jesus?
When Christians abandon doctrine for money and power?
How can we obey when it seems like those in power oppose the gospel?

What can we do when everything seems out of control?
Solomon tells us that we should obey.
When you aren't in control
When you are in charge
We should obey.

Specifically, he tells us here that we are to submit to the authorities above us.

Verse 2 **"I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him."**

The reference to God's oath is unclear at first.
I believe this is a reference to God's faithfulness to Israel's kings.
It is a reminder to Israel that God chose their kings.

God chose Saul
God chose David
The kings are under God's authority.
They will answer to him for their actions and decrees.
But Israel is under the king.
They obey the king not because he is the king,
 But because God is the King of Kings

Now the United States is not God's chosen nation or people.
We have no kings
And God has made no promises to our leader or our nation.

However, as Jesus told Herod
All leaders on earth are appointed by God.
We don't always know His reasons.
We often don't like His decisions.

We are completely out of control of most of our circumstances.
But God commands us to obey.
Submit to the authorities over us.
Whether it's our elected officials or courts whether local, state, or federal.

We don't obey because it's the law.
We don't obey because we don't have a choice.
We obey because we love Jesus.
We submit and follow the laws of the land
 as long as they don't cause us to sin out of obedience to Jesus.

But there are plenty of times we don't like those laws right?
But most of the time those laws are not causing us to sin we just don't like them.
But God tells us to submit, and obey the king, because of God.
The apostles often were imprisoned, beaten, and killed by evil rulers
But they often submitted without complaint and with joy

Not because they loved the rulers, but they obeyed God.

But what about when we don't like it?
What should we do?

Verse 3 is explicitly talking about when the king commands something you don't like.

When he passes a bad decree.

When he makes a bad law.

Verse 3 **"Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases."**

It tells us **"don't be hasty to go out from his presence."**

It means don't storm out of the room stomping your feet.

Don't run out crying like a toddler because you didn't get your way.

We might not act like a toddler,

but we might leave the room quickly

so we can go tell everyone else how bad what just happened was.

We get the phone so we can call somebody to let them know.

We're a little too hasty.

The second half of the verse can be a little more confusing.

An evil cause does not mean a morally or sinful cause.

The Hebrew word for evil throughout this chapter has a broader meaning.

Your translation may say "don't stand up for a bad cause" or "don't delay when the matter is unpleasant."

Contextually it seems like it's saying,

When the King has decided against your idea, don't keep arguing.

He's going to do what he wants to do.

Your voice isn't going to change it.

Verse 4 **"For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, 'What are you doing?'"**

Has anyone in here every changed a president's mind?
You posted something on facebook, or maybe even wrote a letter.
And you said "what are you doing?! I think this is dumb."
That ever worked?

No.
Because we aren't in control.
It frustrates us.
We are not supreme in the land.
We are not always the boss.
But we do control whether or not we obey.

Verse 5 **"Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way."**

If we obey anyway, then God sees it and will reward it.

It is also a reminder that obedience requires the right action at the right time in the right way.
Some of us can think that obedience is always about doing the right thing.
But wisdom understands it is more than that.
Doing the right thing in the wrong way is wrong.
Doing the right thing at the wrong time is wrong.
Obedience requires we obey at the right time in the right way.

It is right and just to remind other Christians of the truths of Scripture.
But when someone loses a loved one.
It probably isn't time to say "God is in control."
It's time to weep.
Because obedience isn't just doing the right thing, it's doing it at the right time in the right way.

Verse 6 **"For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be?"**

But it's hard for us to do that always.
And often doing the right thing in the right way might not end well.
We might be punished or mocked.
But obedience obeys even when we don't control the outcome.

Verse 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."**

He moves on from the example of submitting to authority.
He shows us that our lack of control is not just over political policy.
We don't have control over the wind.
We don't have control over when people die.
We don't have control over when wars begin and end.
We don't have control over stopping people from being wicked.

We are completely powerless over much of life.
And so much of our sin is an attempt to gain back power.

We mistreat and abuse others out of attempts to control them.
We chase idols because we think they will give us control.

Verse 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."**

This is what true obedience is.
It is a way we express our trust and belief in God's providence.
We obey even when our world and our lives are out of control.

[Transition] We obey God even when we aren't in control as an act of faith. And this is especially difficult not just because we are out of control but because we often don't know what God is doing.

Point number 2 **Obey God even when you don't understand. Obey God even when you don't understand.**

There is so much about God that we don't understand.
Mostly we don't understand what He is doing here and now.
We don't understand His plan for the world.
And our greatest frustration is this:

Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?

Verse 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."**

This is something that we do not understand.
And we know it because our eyes see it.
We don't just read about it in news articles or stories.
We have seen it in our own families.
We have felt it with our bodies.

We see wicked things happen to righteous people.
We see children abused and murdered.
We see the godly get cancer.
We see the righteous and honest lose their businesses.

That's hard for us to stomach.
It's hard for us to experience.
But not just do bad things happen to good people,
Because if bad things happened to everybody
Then we could understand that this is just life.

But very often good things happen to bad people.

The lazy employee whom politics and backstabs gets promoted and climbs the company ladder.

The team that cheats and breaks the rules wins the game.

The person who never exercises, never watches what they eat, does drugs, and abuses their body with whatever they want lives to be 100 with no health problems.

We could spend hours just going around the room sharing stories.

All of us have seen good things happen to people who did not deserve it.

And we scratched our heads.

We screamed into the void.

We've complained and lamented to God.

Because we do not understand

Solomon didn't understand this either.

So he applied all of his brainpower to try and figure it out.

Verse 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,"**

He devotes himself to getting more wisdom.

He is trying to understand why God allows this to happen.

It seems like he stays up all night trying to work on this.

Like a college student studying for an exam.

And what is the result?

What is the result of the wisest person who ever lived

putting all of their effort day and night

into trying to understand why God does what he does,

or allows what he allows?

Crushing disappointment.

Verse 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."**

He realizes that man can't figure this out.
We are all incapable of understanding.

No matter how much we toil and work at it you won't find it.
Remember, this is Solomon the wisest man who ever lived telling us that he couldn't figure it out either.

It doesn't stop us from trying.
Because there are a lot of good explanations.
Every human being including every Christian since the days of Ecclesiastes has wrestled with this question.
And they're plenty of theologians and pastors on Christian writers go to their best to give us answers

but the reality is even if we get an answer that helps us sleep at night and still trust that God is good and powerful we still don't fully understand.

A wise man might claim to know but he can't find it out.
You find somebody who tells you they solve the problem they understand at all
they know exactly why God allows what he allows
they're lying.
They don't really know.

Every time there is some national tragedy in the world wise men will pop up to tell you that they know exactly why God allowed it.
Where when you are suffering and find evil on your doors some well-meaning Christian might come and tell you why they think God won't

allow you to conceive, or why you have cancer, why you were abused, or why they think God let your loved one die.

A wise man claims to know but he cannot find out.

We can't understand.

If thinking of wrestling with these things bothers you because you can't get it,

then you are in good company come and join the rest of us.

So how do we respond?

What are we supposed to do?

We obey God.

We obey him even when we don't understand.

We don't decide the following Jesus isn't worth it because bad things might happen to me.

We say God I don't understand anything that's happening in my life right now.

I don't understand why you're not fixing this

I don't understand why you were allowing this

I just don't understand.

But I love you

I'm going to obey you anyway.

Verse 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."**

This is why he gives us the repeated command in verse 15.

The command to enjoy the days that we have.

In fact here he commends joy.

We are to obey even when we do not understand with joy.

We are to obey every single day.

Not just the days that we understand.
Not just the days that are easy
but to obey on the days that are hard

I see this with my young children.
Grant just turn two
and he is entered the why stage.

The stage where every time I ask him to do something he looks at me with
his very serious face
His furrowed eyebrows
and says why Daddy?

Because he does not understand.
Why would I tell him that he can't run away from me in busy a parking lot?
Why can't he put his fingers in the electrical outlet?
Why can't I eat The Rock that he found in the dirt?

Brianna and I try to have patience.
And often we try to explain to him.
We try to do our best to explain it in a way that he might be able to
understand.
Well son I don't want you to get hurt and have to go to the hospital.
I don't want you to get hit by a car.

But often despite our best efforts,
 he still doesn't understand and he wants to know why?
It is a natural human question.
There's nothing wrong with him wanting to understand.

Sometimes tell him, "son you don't need to understand right now,
 but you do need to obey me."

He doesn't need to understand the intricacies of danger and death.

He doesn't need to know how precarious his fate in the world is.
He just needs to know that I'm his dad.
And I asked him to obey me not because I'm trying to ruin his life but
because I love him.
He doesn't understand me now but one day he will.

Christian just like a toddler we don't understand.
We don't understand why God does what he does.
And it's okay that we don't understand
it's okay that we really wish that we could understand
so you can okay to look up at God and say why?

We don't need to understand, but we do need to obey.
Because one day when our father invites us home we will understand.

[Transition] So we should obey even when we're not in control
we obey even when we do not understand
but why?
Why should we obey?

Point number 3 **Obey God because it will be worth it. Obey God
because it will be worth it.**

It doesn't always feel worth it though does it?

Verse 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."**

It often doesn't feel worth it because evil people get praised.
Even before they die they experience praise.
The cities they have done wickedness instead celebrate them.
They hold moments of silence and write glowing obituaries in their honor.

Verse 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. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life,"**

Even when their hearts are fully set to evil and wickedness
even when people want nothing to do with God
were they boldly blaspheme against our Lord
and they mocked him
they spit in his face like a Roman soldiers.
Even then sometimes God withhold his judgment
and we wonder if it's really worth it.

But it is worth it.

Obeying Jesus and following Jesus is worth it.

Why?

It will be well with those who fear God

Verse 13 is the warning

Verse 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."**

it might seem like it's not worth it right now.

It might seem like it is worth it to lie and cheat and steal and engage in
whatever kind of wickedness you want
but it will not be well with the wicked.

Jesus is coming back.

Jesus will return and set up his kingdom.

Revelation 20 tells us that all the living and all the dead will March in front
of the white Throne of God.

And then just judgments will come.

Then those who blasphemed against God will hear him speak.

Those who spit in his face and said prophesy will hear their future foretold.
Those who said that they did not think that God was real will Behold Him
and all of his glory

it will not be well with the wicked.

Disobedience is not worth it.

Those who do not fear God now

are going to fear Him when they stand before the throne.

Verse 12 **"yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God,
because they fear before him"**

But the good news is it will be well for those who fear God.

Those who obey God will be rewarded.

Those who put their hope and their faith in Jesus Christ.

It will be well with their souls.

No I don't want you to get it twisted.

We're talking a lot about obedience this morning.

I don't want you to think that obedience is what gets us into heaven.

Obedience alone is not what gives us salvation.

The gospel is not obey God enough and you will be saved.

The gospel is believing in Jesus.

Salvation only comes through faith.

And so we obey not to earn salvation but as an expression of our faith.

It reveals it.

Every Act of obedience is not a dreary Duty,
but an act of Hope

an extra face the Jesus is real

and that following him is worth it.

You see our hope is in the resurrection of Christ.

We talked a lot about Jesse's last few weeks I don't know if I've talked enough about Resurrection.

Christian your obedience to Jesus in faith will be worth it because you were going to live again.

This life is not all there is.

There are other worlds than these.

There is a world to come when Jesus returns.

And the dust of your body will be reknit and Remade.

And Every Act of obedience is it a positive Resurrection life in the life to come.

And what we do here now matters not just because we will die one day but because we will live again.

So obey beloved because it will be worth it
give your life to Jesus Christian because it will be worth it.

And maybe you would say Pastor I I want to have hope but my faith is so weak.

My obedience is so wishy-washy.

Listen you are not saved by the greatness of your faith but by the greatness of the one you put your Faith and Hope in.

The least of all believers with the smallest faith and at least radiant's will get the same Resurrection.

Our hope is in Jesus.

Beloved, please do not look to this life to evaluate the following Jesus is worth it.

Don't look to your circumstances.

Don't be discouraged even when suffering and death come knocking on your door.

Place your hope in the resurrection of Christ.

This is our great hope as followers of Jesus.
That all of our obedience.
All of our faith.
Every moment of repentance
And every single prayer.
Each moment we obey even when it's hard
each moment we obey even though we do not understand what God is
doing
even when it feels like our faith is hanging on by a thread,
but we hold on with every fiber of our being

Our hope
Is that following Jesus will be worth it
we don't obey cuz we think it'll give us our best life now.
We give our lives to Jesus alongside all of our brothers and sisters in the
faith throughout the centuries
some of whom shed their blood and gave their lives for the cause of Christ
we follow in their footsteps
obeying God because we hope it will be worth it.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] [Main points to be reviewed here.]
2. [Challenge] We are closer to resurrection today than we have ever been. And tomorrow we will get one day closer. Put your hope in the day to come not the days of the past.