

Why Is Everything So Confusing Nowadays?

Ecclesiastes 8

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, November 8, 2021

If you would, open your Bibles with me to the book of Ecclesiastes. As you're doing that, I just want to let you know that we have the privilege this morning of studying one of the lesser known books of the Bible. It's not talked about a whole lot today. Very few people have probably read the book of Ecclesiastes, but you should because it has so much to teach us. And I think you'll see what I mean as we read it this morning. But if you would, read chapter one verse one with me. Solomon starts off: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem... 'Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!'" And then to give you a taste of that vanity, if you would look in chapter eight, this is our text for today. Solomon said,

Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam. I say, "Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases." Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?" He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man's trouble is heavy upon him. If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen? No Man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it. All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercise authority over another man to his hurt.

So then, I've seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility. Because a sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, and fear Him openly. But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

There is a futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.

If you look down in verse 16, he says,

When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done in the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.

We'll end the reading there. I don't have to tell you as you read that, that we're swimming in some deep waters this morning Solomon is writing about some really profound stuff here. And just to say a few words about this, if you're joining us for the first time today, we're halfway through a series in the book of Ecclesiastes, and I don't

think I've said this before, but the word Ecclesiastes is from a Latin word that means preacher. A lot of books in the Old Testament are like this: it's named after the first word in the Latin Vulgate, which says, "The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." That's how the book starts off. Because Solomon is writing this book to preach something to you. He's writing it to teach you a lesson. And the lesson is that everything is so vain to him now. His whole world seems so empty and futile, because verse two of chapter one says that he lived it under the sun. He didn't live it under heaven or under God, he lived it under the sun, under his own desires, which he deeply regretted later in life, because he said he thought it would make him happy, but it didn't. So many people today chase after sin in their early years, and they sow their wild oats when they're young thinking it's going to be so much fun until they find out later in life that it's not. Sin always comes with a price tag; it's often a very high one. That's what Solomon found out. And he says he chased after several sins in this book, like as we've talked about in previous weeks: pride, he tried to make a name for himself that was once in that he ran after he wanted to get everybody to like him, he wanted to get everybody to pat him on the back. But that doesn't work. No matter how hard you try, you can never make everybody like you. And so when that failed, he turned to something else like charity. He went to the protest after protest and rally after rally looking for a good cause to run after, which is not a sin per se. There's nothing wrong with that. Unless you do it to say, "Look at me, look at how wonderful I am." That's what he did as well.

I looked it up this week. And it's been estimated that Canadian businesses spent \$67 billion in the last 10 years trying to save the environment, which is more money than some of them probably spent on health care. And for many of them, it was probably just a PR stunt. They didn't care so much about the environment as much as their image. And that's what Solomon is doing in this book. It's another thing he chased after.

He ran after other things like money and sex and power and knowledge and wisdom and learning and it's all left him in the same place. So he says this in chapter eight, if you look in the first verse, this is what he says: "Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter?" In other words, who can figure all of this out? Who can find something worth living for in this crazy messed up world? Solomon says, "I can't. I've tried and tried and failed. So I need to trust in God." After seven long chapters, he finally says something good in the book. And that is that this world is empty to me now, it's so confusing, so I need to look to God instead for hope. I'll say a few words about this in a moment, but if you notice the phrase "wise man", it's an important one in here because it's the Hebrew word *chakam*, which refers to wisdom or knowledge in general, but the way it's used it refers to life knowledge, or the kind you need to navigate through the challenges of life. And Solomon says, "Who has that? Because I don't. Obviously, a man who lives the way I did is lacking some wisdom and knowledge. So I need to find and turn to the Lord for hope."

In fact, to highlight this, if you want to look in verses 16 through 17. At the end of the chapter, you can see that as Solomon ends this the word "discover" is found three times in that passage. He is saying, "I can't discover everything, I can't know it all." Verse 16 says, "When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), [it still eluded me, and still couldn't find truth]". In verse 17, it says that though man should seek laboriously or endlessly, he will not discover, because some things will always elude you. Some things are too big for your tiny brain to understand. So you need to leave them in the hands of God. That's what he's saying in chapter eight. It seems strange after what you've read so far in the book of Ecclesiastes, but Solomon puts this in here because he's making a shift in the book. Now he's making a transition from talking about the problem of vanity to talking about the solution. And the solution is that you can't know everything. Some things are too much for you. You can't unwrap every secret.

Your intelligence only goes so far. So you need to learn how to be okay with that. That's one way you solve the problem of vanity. You need to see your place in the universe. And be humble. Realize you can't know it all.

If you remember, Solomon has dealt with some deep stuff in this book. I mean, he's wrestling with some really big issues, like, why do bad things happen to good people? You ever wonder that? That's what Ecclesiastes is wrestling with. Or, where did evil come from in the first place? I mean, where did the thing even begin? Why do wicked people drive Ferraris and righteous people drive Pintos? And the answer to it all is: I don't know. God hasn't told me that. So I need to be content with that and leave it up to Him. One pastor I know calls this the theology of sleep because he says, I can lay my head down on the pillow and sleep at night if I remember the fact that God is sovereign. He's running the universe, I'm not. So I don't have to stay up all night worrying about it. Amen? Isn't that encouraging? That's not up to you; you don't run the universe, which is important to remember, because this is something that we all struggle with today. Our knowledge is so limited about everything. And it can be overwhelming at times. I just did some research on it this week and from what I could find, I discovered that there are more stars, scientists have said, there's more stars in the universe, than there are grains of sand on the earth. Now, just think about that for a minute. When you look at the night sky, you're just seeing a fraction of what's actually there. And just to put that in perspective, our current star the sun takes up 99.8% Of all the mass in our solar system, which means the sun is more than nine times larger than all the planets in its orbit and all the space in between them. If the Sun were a beach ball, then Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system would be the size of a golf ball and the Earth would be the size of a pea. Because 109 Earths can fit across the sun surface if you still stack them up, and 1.3 billion Earths could fit inside the Sun if you crushed them. To add to that every second, the sun burns off 5 million tons of material. And in order to do that it's constantly creating atom bombs, one right after the other, to such an extent that if you if you took all the Earth's resources and burn them up, it would only keep the sun shining for three days. If you put all the gas, oil and coal in the planet in a pile and lit it on fire, it wouldn't keep the sun burning for a week. It's so powerful that if you stare at it for a few seconds, you go blind. If our planet were a few inches or feet closer to the sun, it would burn up. But the point is that we know so little about this thing. We're so ignorant about the one thing that keeps life going on this planet and yet we're fine, aren't we? We're okay. Did you wake up this morning and say, "Oh man, I hope the sun's going to shine today"? Of course not. That's not in your department. You're not in the sun keeping business. That's God's business so you can let Him have it and go to sleep at night.

By the way, it's not just the sun that we're we know so little about as Richard was saying, we know so little about other things like plants and animals in the sea and bugs. I had a really fun time this week studying caterpillars. Maybe that's the nerdiest thing that you've heard today. But caterpillars have 228 separate muscles in their head. And they eat 27,000 times their body size in their lifetime. It's fascinating because the caterpillar's first thing he does is eat its shell that it comes in, so talk about eating yourself out of house and home. Our knowledge is so limited. So you shouldn't be surprised when you struggle with bigger things like death, right? When you know so little about a caterpillar, you shouldn't be so amazed when you struggle with larger problems like evil and sin and suffering and pain. If you can't figure out all the things in the natural world, how are you going to figure out all the things in the spiritual world? You've got to be humble about this. Solomon's point in the whole book is that he started his life proud, but by the time he got to the end of it, he was as humble as a mouse.

Because of the grandeur of God, RC sprawl once said that God has power over the world, but the world has no power over Him. Because God has a majesty that puts an infinite distance between Him and every other creature on the planet, He is a cut above all else. And this is a doctrine that every Christian has to wrap his mind around in

order to have an adequate understanding of Him. We have to stop bringing God down to our level so we can make sense of Him and stop dumbing Him down so our minds can take Him in. Instead, we should learn how to put Him back up in heaven where He belongs, and leave the rest of us down on Earth. We've all done that before. We've all tried to dumb God down. And RC sprawl says you shouldn't do that. It is blasphemous. He is God and we're not. Psalm 45:3 says, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised and His greatness is unsearchable." That means try as hard as you can. You will never get your mind around how awesome our God is. Jeremiah chapter 10 says that there is none like God and all the wise men in all the nations are stupid compared to God. Isaiah 40 says that the nations are like a drop in the bucket and they're like dust on the scales, because nobody gets on a scale and says, "Hey, who put this dust here?" And that's what we're like compared to Him. But you get the idea: our God is bigger than everything. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at three mysteries of life in this passage.

If you're taking notes in Ecclesiastes eight, and we always encourage you to do that, just so you can go home and think about these things. In fact, this may be a sermon you want to listen to again because this is some profound stuff. But we're going to look at three mysteries of life that Solomon is wrestling with here, and they all go back to God. They all go back to your understanding of Him. You can't really understand what Solomon is wrestling with here, until you realize that God is up here, and you're down here. He is high and lofty and seated on the throne, and you're small and tiny and down on the ground beneath Him. Which is why life is so hard for us at times. That's why it does feel so vain: because you don't see things up there. You see Him from the ground which gives you a very limited perspective. You know, when I was in high school, a friend of mine had a t-shirt that said this: "There are two things I've learned in my journey through life. One is that there is a God in number two is that I'm not Him." That's true. And that explains why you're so confused when you wrestle with some big issues. Because you're not God. And you don't have access to the stuff that He does. Some people forget that, don't they? They ignore that it's why they're so mad and angry and bitter all the time and anxious and afraid and confused, because they want to be God. They don't want to submit to Him, they want to take His place. But Solomon says that's foolish. You have to learn how to be humble and bow your knee before His throne. And that's what we're going to talk about.

We are looking at three mysteries of life that Solomon is wrestling with here as it relates to God. And the first one is a mystery of human authority. The first mystery that he wrestles with here is the mystery of human authority, which refers to the mystery of government and how that all works. He begins with one of the greatest problems that we face in this world, and that is, why does the government do what it does? And I'm not just talking about our government. I'm talking about his government as well, thousands of years ago, it's just always been a question mark. And if you read in chapter eight, Solomon says, "Who is like the wise man, and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam. I say, 'Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases.' Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'"

Now, to be honest, when you first read that it's a little hard to understand. But if you remember, Solomon is dealing with mysteries here. He's talking about issues that he can't quite get his mind around. And the first one he mentions is the government. Because Solomon says, "Even though I'm a king, and even though I'm head of the government, I can't interpret the matter. I can't figure out why my kingdom is doing some of the things that it's doing." Even the king said that. He says in verse three, "The king will do whatever he pleases", and that means

he'll do whatever he pleases with you. He'll treat you however he wants. And Solomon says, I don't get that. It doesn't seem right that a man should have that much power. Isn't it fascinating that he's writing this as the head of the nation. And then verse four says that no one can say to him, "What are you doing?" In other words, you can't question the king and talk back to him; his word is final. Then down in verse eight he says that no man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, which means you can't stop a king and restrain him. This results in a couple things. If you look in verse eight, it results in a tremendous amount of evil. It says there that it causes an enormous amount of pain and hurt and in verse nine one man hurts another. And the question Solomon's wrestling with here in this whole passage is why does one man get to do that to another? Why does one king get to cause all this mischief? If you read between the lines here, you can imagine Solomon might have been writing this about himself because he was the king. And so he might have been wondering, "Why does God let me do this to other people? I've made so many mistakes in my reign. Why didn't God stop me?"

But either way, he starts off with this because this is one of the most perplexing things that we deal with in this world down here. And that is, why does the government do what it does sometimes? Why does it seem so backwards? And this one is so common that I don't have to give it too many examples of this. But in fact, before I talk about some examples, let me just say it's interesting that Solomon puts this here, because he's writing this in the 10th century BC, which means that he's writing this 1000s of years ago to show you that this is not a new problem. The things we're wrestling with regarding the government is not a 21st century problem. It's a human problem. It showed up long before we got here. Let me also point out that he's writing this under a different political system from ours, because Solomon lived in the midst of a theocracy; he lived in a country where it was governed by God Himself, or it was supposed to be, which means it was the best political system there was. And yet he still dealt with the problem, because it's not a political problem. It's a spiritual one. This is an issue that can't be fixed just by changing the system of government.

And just to explain what he's saying, here, if you notice how he writes this, he paints a picture of a man who has to carry out orders from the King. Now, he might have been a messenger or a court official of some kind, but whatever he was, the king gives him a command. And verse one says that he has to interpret it because it doesn't make sense to him. He doesn't get what the king is asking him to do. So he chews on it for a minute, and he realizes he has a couple of options because he could disobey in verse two; he could reject the order. Then Solomon says you shouldn't do that, you need to keep the command. Verse three says he could run away or leave in a hurry, head for the hills. But that's a bad idea, because the king will catch you. He has more horses and man power than you do. Verse three says that you could rebel or join in an evil manner, but that's not a good idea. So instead, Solomon says the man should show some wisdom, he needs to display some discretion in the matter. Because if you look in verse five, he says, "He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure." That means a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure to carry out the command. He knows the correct way to do it. Because even though this command seems strange to this guy, and he doesn't get it, a wise man doesn't just sit around doing nothing and biting his nails and saying, "Oh, no." Instead, he acts in a proper way because he trusts in God. He does it because of his faith in him.

This leads to several applications here. There are several ways we can apply this to our lives. For one thing, this means that when you don't understand the commands of a king, you can still navigate through the halls of government. As a believer, when you don't understand what the government's telling you to do, you can still work it out like this man did. If you have wisdom, it may take some time to do it, and you may have to step back for a minute and pause, but the good news is you don't have to do nothing. And I mentioned that because we're at a

time when I think a lot of people are feeling like this guy did. I mean, you can just read the passage and tell this feels like you're sitting in the year 2021. Because they're being given orders from a king that they don't understand either. What I'm referring to is a recent decision by our leaders to require all government employees to take the COVID-19 vaccine or else they'll lose their jobs. And I know that's a controversial subject today. And I can't talk about everything related to it because this is not a sermon on the government. But it is discussed here, this type of issue. And let me just say a lot of people don't feel comfortable with that. They don't like the idea of putting a foreign substance into their body. And as a result, it's putting them in a difficult place with the government. And the question is, what do you do about it? When you're in a place like that, how do you respond? Well, if you look at the passage here, Solomon says you need to have wisdom. That's the point. You need to show discernment and be smart in how you act. Don't be anxious. Don't be afraid. Don't throw your hands up in the air and say, "Oh, no, it's all over." Instead, you need to figure out the top proper time and procedure in order to make a response. See how relevant this is? This is an old book. Now I'm not a lawyer, so I can't give you legal advice on how to do that. But we do have lawyers in this country: legal counsel is available. So you can take advantage of that. And we have politicians as well. We have leaders in the government, not just one leader, but several, so you can find one to talk to him about your concerns. And if he doesn't listen, talk to him again. And if he doesn't listen, talk to him again. In fact, as an elder board, we met with several members of our congregation a few weeks ago who are wrestling with this issue in order to pray with them and encourage them. And I told them that when the churches were told to close several months ago, you guys remember that every church I know of sent letters to the government, no matter what their response was, at the time, they all send letters to them, to the point that our leaders must have received 1000s of them. I would hate to be their secretary. So this time around, when they decided to close things down, they left us alone. They didn't even touch the churches, because they got the message that we don't like it when you do that. We didn't send them hate mail because that wouldn't be right. And we didn't write vulgar things. There's no point in that. We just told him what was on our mind. And that's something to consider today. You know, I told her, I told the people when we were meeting with him, I said, Look, guys, if the country of Canada goes in a bad direction, and it never turns around, I don't want your Christian faith to be so caught up in that, that you lose it all. But on the flip side, if you love your country, and you should, then when things happen that you don't agree with, and you have concerns with, you should do something.

There's a balance in there, which leads to another lesson Solomon gives us here, and that is that when you don't understand the command of a king, you can navigate through the halls of government with confidence. You can do it boldly; you don't have to be cowardly about it. Being a Christian doesn't mean you become a pushover. And on the flip side, it doesn't mean you become violent. There's a balance in between the two. Which is what this man understood, because he didn't like what the king said to him here. At least he didn't agree with it. He had concerns. But that didn't prevent him from doing something. He acted in a God-honoring way. And that's something that we can do as well. Now, if you remember when Paul was on trial before Festus, and he felt like he was not being heard, what did he do? He said, "I appealed to Caesar." Why did he do that? Well, because he wasn't being heard. So he went up the food chain. And then later, right before that, when he was about to be flogged by a Roman soldier, he said to him, "You can't do this to me, because it's illegal." And he's right. Soldiers were not supposed to flog a Roman citizen, it was against the law. So Paul reminded him of that in a firm and gracious way. And there's a time to do that in the Christian life. But you have to be smart about it. You know, the story is told of the time in the Roman Empire when it was about to fall in the fourth century. And as it did, two leading figures of the church had a debate about it. Isn't that interesting? The empire is about to fall, and they started debating. Sound familiar? Christian thing, we've always done that. And the first one was a guy named Jerome, who said that we should let it fall and go flee to the desert where it's safe. The other one was a guy named

Augustine who said no, the Empire needs us. So we're here to be salt and light. He said, "We want Christians in positions of government, we want them to lead. Now, we don't want them living in caves or holes in the ground, because they need to take a stand for Christ." That's something to remember today.

And it leads us to another mystery that Solomon mentions here. And again, this is not a sermon just on politics. So we need to move on because the passage does. A second mystery is the mystery of divine authority. So the first mystery that Solomon goes into in the passage here is a mystery of human authority, because he can't figure out why people treat each other the way they do in government. He's really wrestling with the question of why is man so cruel sometimes? I mean, even in our time, we've seen governments all around the world do terrible things to their citizens, like slaughter them, or pass laws to murder babies. We've seen them approve of homosexual marriage and allow teenagers to get a sex change without the consent of their parents. Our children today, some of them can't go on a field trip to the pumpkin patch without their parents signature, but they can go down to a health clinic and mutilate their bodies in an irreparable way because of the government. And it makes you wonder why. Well, that's what Solomon's asking. That's not something that just happens in our time.

And that brings us to another mystery that he wrestles with in this passage, and that is a mystery of divine authority, which refers to the mystery of God and how He works. Because Solomon takes his gaze off the earth for a second and he puts it up in heaven. If you think the stuff that he was asking before was pretty deep and heavy, now he gets it, he gets into even some even harder stuff to understand. And he says in verse 10, he says,

So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility. Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. Although a sinner does evil 100 times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say this too his futility.

You can tell by just going over this passage that a key theme in here is the word "evil" which appears seven times here, more than once per verse. Verse 10 says that there's a wicked man who was buried and forgotten he just tossed in the ground and ignored yet verse 11 says that the evil that he lived for continued anyway and didn't stop because it wasn't punished. They got so bad that verse 14 says eventually the people on the earth started treating the righteous people like they were evil and evil people like they were righteous. And Solomon says the same thing that he said earlier...he says, I can't understand that either. I don't get why the world works that way. Talk about backwards. And just to elaborate on this one that the picture Solomon paints here is of another man who dies and at his funeral he's forgotten in verse 10. Nobody remembers him, but Oh, what a funeral he had. Because down in verse 14, the implication is the guy got treated like he was righteous before he was forgotten. For one brief moment, at the funeral, everybody showed up and talked about how great he was and how he was a prince, when he wasn't a prince, that guy was a creep. We've all been at funerals before when everybody talks so highly about the dead person, and we say, "That guy?"

At the same time, right around the corner, Solomon says there was another guy who died and he was buried and nobody came, even though he was righteous. Even though he loved the Lord and stayed faithful to him and took care of his family. They didn't even bother to show up, he says, which was disgusting to him. He said, "I hated it." One commentator says that the first mark of a true believer is to feel keenly the pain of an unfair world. Because when you get saved, you understand that God is a God of justice. And he knows within his heart, how to treat people fairly. But then as you go on as a Christian, you look at the world around you, and what do you see? You see the opposite taking place. Here Solomon sees wicked men being remembered in death for virtues they did not have and he sees righteous men being ignored for the good things that they did have. Which means that Solomon like the rest of us must put his hand over his mouth and confess his own ignorance and things too lofty for him to explain.

You know, I remember growing up in a small town in Tennessee, where they had the 10 commandments on the walls. I don't know if you guys did that here. There was some kind of moral virtue in the country in some way. In my lifetime, I've seen it totally turn around to where now people are celebrating the most evil things you can think of. You know, you want to win the political position, you want to move up in the company, just sin, right?

And they applaud it. And you wonder why Solomon says, sometimes you don't know why. Why are the righteous treated so poorly? We have no idea. Why isn't God more gracious to His own? Well, we don't know. I heard one person say, "If God were more kind to His people then He would have more followers." I don't know. I don't think that's true, but it does make you scratch your head. As many of you know, we do a lot of discipleship here at Grace. In fact, several of our people have been trained up with ACBC, the Association Certified Biblical Counselors, and many of them will tell you that when you help people, one question they often have is, "Why is life so hard for me? And Solomon would reply here that there's no definite answer to that. There may be some answers to think about, but there's no one slam dunk answer. They also want to know, "Why is life so confusing? Well, it's always been confusing to some degree. Nothing's changed. In fact, if you look in verse 15, Solomon tells you how to deal with this. When he says this, he says, "So I commended pleasure, for there's nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and drink and be merry. And this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life, which God has given him under the sun." That passage has been misinterpreted before to say that Solomon is just saying, "Go wild and go crazy." But that's not what he's saying. He's saying you should eat and drink and be merry and remember God as you do; keep Him in mind. Because you're not going to answer every question in this life, you're not going to figure out every mystery. So you need to learn how to calm down and relax every once in a while. Don't be so uptight all the time. He says to try to appreciate the good things that God has given you. When he says to eat and drink here, he's talking about the basic things. Enjoy simple pleasures, like sharing a meal with someone or going out for coffee. When he tells you to be merry, he says to do it with a smile on your face. Don't be like the Christian that was saved everywhere but on their face. You can be saved in your face too. It doesn't do you any good to be anxious about this all every day, which leads to several applications.

The first application is to remember your place in the universe. So what he's saying here, remember your position in all this: you're down here, not up here. Like we said earlier. You're on the earth, you're not in heaven. So what that means is that God has given you this much information; he hasn't given you this much. He's only told you so many facts in his word, he hasn't told you all of them. And so you're going to have to learn how to accept it. Or you'll never enjoy life. You'll never be at peace, you'll always be miserable.

I studied philosophy in university, I'll tell you, that was a pretty miserable classroom at times, everybody wore black, they all came in late. They all stayed up all night, solving the mysteries of the universe. They were all jobless as well, by the way. But just take the issue of death for a minute. There's so much you don't know about death. It's such a mystery. I've sat in the hospital beside hospital beds and talked with people who are dying. And the one thing that they want to know is the same question. They want to know "Why? Why is God doing this to me? Why am I dying? So soon? Why is the pain so bad? And I told him that's a great question. But again, there's no final answer. There are so many things you have to take into consideration, like the fact that you're not the only person dying today. I don't say that to be callous. I'm just pointing out that there are millions of other people who are dying all across the world, and God has to take all of them into account. And I might add that He has to do it in a fallen world, which means that He has to do it in a place that's not what it's supposed to be. This world has plummeted from its original greatness, it's been ruined because of sin. So He's dealing with a broken system. Every time I look at someone dying, I think this is not supposed to be. If man never sinned, I wouldn't be looking at this. You also have to remember that this has to do with your own choices in life. To be healthy or unhealthy. Some of it has to do with your DNA or the genes that you inherited from your parents. But the point is, there's no quick answer to death. It's a deep thing. And it requires deep thought before addressing it, which is why a book like Ecclesiastes is so long, by the way. That's why there's so many pages in this book, because it takes a long time to work through stuff like this. Some theological problems can't be solved in a microwave, you have to put them in the oven and let them bake for a while.

Which brings us to another way to apply this to our lives. And that is you have to remember that God has a place in the universe; he has a physician as well. And it's up here, which means that he knows everything that's going on in the world. He has an answer for it all even when you don't, so you can trust him. Solomon actually says this in the passage here. If you look in verse 12, he says, "Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly."

Why will it be well for those who fear God? Why is it good for those who love God even when this world is so bad and so messed up and so crazy? The answer is because we know God will solve the problem of evil once and for all. He's going to deal with it. He won't let the wickedness in this world go unchecked. One day he's going to punish it and the reason and things like death and suffering are so far hard for us is that we often think they're going to go untouched and they won't. We often think God's not going to deal with it, so I have to do it, I have to seek vengeance. And the Bible says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." I'll never forget the time someone asked a pastor friend of mine, "Why doesn't God deal with all the evil in the world?" To which he replied, "What do you think hell is for? Hell is a place where God deals with all the evil in the world, and He does it forever." Even when you would be done dealing with it, He's still doing it. Even when it would be off your mind because you said, Okay, they've had enough, He doesn't ever say that. And you have to keep it in mind when you're wrestling with things like this God is not going to let sin go unchecked. This should give you confidence in at least one more mystery that Solomon gives us here.

I'll go through this one, quickly. But just to review these other ones. The first mystery in the passage is the mystery of human authority. And the second one is a mystery of divine authority, which refers to the mystery of God and the way He runs the universe. I think if we were all honest about it, we've all wondered about this one before we've questioned the way God governs the world. Because we think we could do a better job than He can. We think if we were God for the day, we could clean up all this mess. But the fact is, you can't clean up the mess in your own heart. So how are you going to clean up the mess out here and do that. Which brings us to one more

mystery of life that Solomon brings up here, and that's the mystery of faith. The third mystery of life as Solomon mentions in Ecclesiastes eight is the mystery of faith, which refers to the mystery of putting your trust in God and letting Him deal with these things like we're talking about. And if you look in verses 16 and 17, Solomon says it this way...he says, "When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, 'I know,' he cannot discover."

As Solomon is wrapping up his thoughts here, he explains what led him to look into all this in the first place. And he says when I gave my heart to know wisdom, if you remember, that refers to life wisdom, or the kind of knowledge that helps you navigate through life. Solomon says, "I gave my heart to know that and here's the conclusion I came to verse 17 which says, "I saw every work of God. And I concluded that man cannot discover the work." When he says that "I saw," he means he laid it all on the table and looked at it. When he says "every work," he means that he looked through everything; he was very thorough. But the conclusion that he came to is that try as hard as you might you can't know everything. Even though man should seek laboriously he will not discover and although the wise man should say "I know," he cannot discover that again. The word "discover" here is the key word. Solomon says that even though you labor and try and sweat and wear yourself out night after night, you'll still come up empty. Because God keeps His mysteries, what you need to do is learn how to put your faith in Him. That's the point of the chapter. He kind of leaves it open ended in verse 17. But the point is kind of all throughout the chapter here. And that is that you can get through the mysteries of life if you understand that he is sovereign and in control of it. That's the only way to deal with all these problems. That's the only answer to the secrets by remembering that whether I figure it all out or not, it doesn't matter because God is working on things for my good. He's for me, not against me. His grace is sufficient. That's all I need to know.

One day, he'll tell me everything. One day he'll explain the mysteries but until then, I'll be okay. And to make this personal for a moment, you know, when you watch people suffering, through things like death and trips to the hospital, and sudden catastrophes, you often see them go in two different directions. Because some people do trust in God in the midst of a trial. They do leave it in his hands, and they worship Him. And I've talked to some people that told me the closest they ever felt to God was when they were hurting, and other people go the other way. Because they lash out and they get mad, they get spiteful, they try to punish God by sinning because they do drugs and they take painkillers and so forth. But what Solomon says here is that's a foolish thing to do. Because when you're done with all that sin, one thing will still remain and that is a God will still be God. And you'll still be in that hospital bed. Your behavior won't change that, so you have to be content with this. You have to learn how to accept who He is, and how great He is.

Some of you have heard of the serendipity prayer before. But it was a prayer that was written in the mid 1900s, by a man who had experienced a lot of suffering. And it went like this and said, "God, grant me the peace, to accept the things I can't change and the courage to change the things that I can't accept, and the wisdom to know the difference." And that was a good prayer, because there are things that you cannot change in this life, no matter what you do, and it doesn't do you any good to beat your head against the wall about it and get mad and get angry and shake your fist at the heavens. just a waste of time. But there are other things that you can change. There are plenty of things you can do something about, and you need the power or the prayer to know the difference. You need the wisdom of God to see which one is which.

I think there's a great misunderstanding when it comes to this issue of faith. Because some people think that if you have faith in God, it will make life easier for you. But I'm not going to ask the Christians in this room to raise their hand and tell me if they think that's not true. Doesn't work like that. But that comes from the word of faith movement, which says if you speak a word of faith to God, He'll do whatever you say. But that's not God. God doesn't do what you say. He does what He says. I remember the time I was coaching PE on a playground in California, and some kid got hit in the head by the dodgeball and this lady who was a word of faith person came up and said, "Lord Jesus" over his head, and I thought, "well, his ears are still ringing lady, he still got hit." That's not what faith does. Doesn't stop the dodgeball. What it does is it helps you to hold your hand in the fire when it comes. That's what faith does. It helps you trust in God in the midst of the pain. And friends, let me just say that I hope none of you are suffering this morning. Because I hate to see people in our church going through things like this, I want you to be happy. I want you to be at peace. But I do pray that if suffering brings you closer to Christ, that we continue to pray that if the pain draws you nearer to Him, it would last longer because it's worth it. Anything that draws you closer to God is good. It's been said that Jonah never knew how much you needed God until he was stuck in a whale. And Daniel never knew how much you needed him until he was in a lion's den. Because sometimes God works that way. Sometimes He puts us in places that are uncomfortable in order to increase our faith. We have to remember that.

The story is told at the time that the great Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards died of a smallpox vaccine. He was only 54 years old, and he didn't need it. He was just taking it to show the students of Princeton University that it was safe. It's kind of an ironic thing that happened. It was a shocking catastrophe for his family because he had 11 children. And money was always tight. But when his wife received the news that he died, she got the letter, she sat all of her kids down and she said these words, "We kiss the hand that bears the rod." Because this is from God. And it's for our good. Friends, can you say that today? Can you kiss the hand that bears the rod? It takes faith to do that.

It's not easy, but you can do it by the power of God, let me pray that you would and that we would grow in these deep and wonderful things. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I feel like if You're talking about something like this, maybe the greatest thing to do is just to be silent in Your presence. Because words can't get to the bottom of what we've talked about this morning. If we were to stand up here and talk about the things that we don't know, as we learned earlier, we just be talking all day. We're so small in this great big world. And sometimes we feel like we can make a difference. But Father, thank You for the words of Solomon that reminds us that our difference is not found in us. It's found in you. You are a God that is bigger than all of this. And you're a God who does know all of it. And our way through this crazy life is to throw ourselves at Your mercy. Lord, I do pray this morning for those who were here and listening to the words of this sermon. I know everyone in here has asked these questions before, but I'm sure some of them are handling it in a way that honors you. They're trusting You as You grow them even through suffering. They're growing closer to you day by day and I rejoice in that. I pray that You would be glorified in it and it would continue. But for others who are becoming bitter or sour over the crazy stuff that we're seeing in the world, Lord, I pray that they would remember that this stuff is supposed to draw them to You, not farther away. For those who are without Christ, Father, there's no hope in any of This, they have no access to you. So I pray that maybe some of these things would draw them closer to the Savior that they would be saved this morning. And as we take the Lord's Supper, we remember that the only way we can come to you is through what Christ has done on the cross. There's no way, there's no mystery greater than the fact that the Son of God became a son of man. And He died for sinners. You can't figure that one out. And yet that's where our

salvation is found. And as we celebrate that this morning, I pray the depth and majesty of our Savior would be burned in every brain. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.