

Intro: Garrison. Pastor. Ecclesiastes 8. Hopping around to explore the big themes. **Pray.**

I became a Christian 3 weeks before I moved into my college dorm. I didn't grow up in the church. I was basically a blank slate in terms of my beliefs and theology. I got plugged into a really healthy church that helped me to grow to love Jesus more in a thriving community. It was life changing. But I had issues. And one of those issues was a lingering question that can still haunt me to this day:

Why is my life so hard if I'm a Christian?

Like, why aren't things just better for me as a believer? And I would and still do compare myself to others. Why am I struggling with depression and my non Christian friends are just having a great time? Why am I so lonely and feel like my relationships are so hard and it seems like non believers are having no trouble? Even now, I'm a Christian businessman--why do I at times struggle so much while non Christians who I work with are 10x more successful than me? Like literally. Why are people that aren't following Jesus happier, more blessed than me? It sort of feels like God is holding out on me. As a Christian, I thought the way that I'm living is the right way to live. So why is it that when I do everything right it seems like I get no reward? But other people are doing it wrong and they are getting a reward?

Do you connect with that? If you let yourself be honest, and don't just do the mental gymnastics- 'I shouldn't think that way'--but then still think that way. Shouldn't my life be better since I'm a Christian? Why isn't God blessing me like He is other people? Shouldn't it at least be more fair?

If you resonate with that, you're not alone. This is one of the biggest roadblocks to people following Jesus. And it's actually what the Preacher is going to address for us.

If you've ever felt or asked, Why is my life so hard if I'm a Christian?---The Preacher actually has an answer for you:

Because life isn't fair under the sun.

Yes, we're getting more depressing as we go. But I think our text has some really good, although hard truths for us this morning. And my hope for this morning is that we'll answer 3 questions from Ecclesiastes 8:

- How is life not fair?
- How do we tend to handle life not being fair?
- How should we handle life not being fair?

Go Ecclesiastes 8:14. **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.**

So the Preacher yet again is observing something he labels as 'vanity'. And he boils it down to this:

Righteous people being rewarded as if they are bad people. Bad people being rewarded as if they were righteous people.

Now something we've got to be on the same page on is who the Preacher is calling 'the righteous'.

This isn't just an Ecclesiastes question. All throughout the OT and specifically in wisdom literature + the Psalms, oftentimes you'll see the dichotomy between the righteous and the wicked talked about.

for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. ~Psalms 1:6

The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse. Proverbs 10:32

So who is who? **The righteous are and have always been God's people living by God's design.** The righteous are God's people. And the wicked are not.

Now something the Bible is clear about is that every person is actually wicked—and we'll get to that in a little bit. So the righteous are those that have been made righteous by God through faith in Him. This is how it works both now and in the OT. See how Paul writes about it in Romans:

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness

His logic is that Abraham is the archetype for how 'becoming righteous' works. It's not by works or human effort. You can't please God by your behavior. It's only, and always has been, by faith. Faith in God is counted as righteousness. And because we've become righteous by faith, that allows us to become God's people. And further, it allows us to follow Him and live by His design.

Theologian Alan P Ross puts it this way: **The righteous are people who have entered into covenant with God by faith and seek to live according to his word. The covenant that they have makes them the people of God.**

So the Preacher is saying, I'm looking out in the world and the righteous-God's people— are being treated as the wicked. And the wicked are being treated as God's people. How does that make sense? How is that fair?

Now most good wisdom would say 'you reap what you sow'. And that is true, we've got verses that say it. But Ecclesiastes is telling us something we don't like to hear but is so deeply true-It's often more complicated than that.

And part of the reason it can be so hard for us is we all functionally believe in karma-some of us actually profess it. We believe that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.

And it's not as clear as something like 'I've opened my Bible 5 days this week. So I'm really doing well. I've been very good this week. So I should get something good. I should feel good. I should be put in some favorable position at work.'

It's more like, 'I'm trying.' I really am. Am I perfect? No. But I'm showing up to church when I don't want to. I'm pretty quick to anger with my kids and spouse, but I apologize. I confessed my sin when I didn't feel like it. I'm trying. So shouldn't my life just be better?

- Maybe you're like. I bought this house in this neighborhood to try to host people and be on mission for you God. Why does it feel like I keep finding issues? Why'd my HVAC go out? This shouldn't be as hard.
- Me and my spouse have been praying and meeting with others, seeking counsel on how to be a healthier couple. We're trying. Why do we keep struggling? Why haven't we grown? Shouldn't this be easier? It's not like we don't care.
- I'm praying for coworkers. I'm working hard. Why aren't they treating me well? Why don't I feel like I'm 'in'? Why aren't they interested in coming to church? Why aren't I thriving? I'm putting in the effort, why are there all these roadblocks?

See we tie these expectations to our efforts. We do the right thing, so we should get the right result.

But then life happens and shows us how wrong we are. We read our bibles but we still struggle with depression. And we don't get any favor at work. And we don't get what we prayed for. And our kids aren't getting it. And we work hard and someone else gets promoted. Or someone else gets the deal.

Now it's not that we necessarily want bad things for non Christians. Or for quote unquote 'bad people.' But if we were honest, that would be easier for us to process. Would it not? Wouldn't it just make more sense?

Because underneath the karma and the questions is an even bigger question:

Why is God letting these unfair things happen?

Which is an even harder question to grapple with. The Preacher himself struggles with it. Look at how the Preacher deals with this. Skip v 15 we'll come back to it. V 16:

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

Very similar to a couple weeks ago when we talked about the experiment. The Preacher says that he's tried to decode this randomness. He himself ponders the unfairness of life. Why does this happen? He says that he's losing sleep over it.

His conclusion is that man cannot find out why life is unfair and that actually, God has made it so that we cannot find out.

Very similar to chapter 3-God has put eternity in our hearts yet we can't figure out His plans or ways. Same deal. We all can sense and feel that this is unfair-yet God has made it so we can't figure out what is actually going on.

So why does God let these seemingly unfair things happen? We don't know. And we won't always know either. Which adds to the feeling of unfairness.

That's the vanity. You're going to stay up all night trying to figure it out. You're going to rack your mind wondering what is happening. You might even look at Bible verses wondering what you're missing. But it's vanity. This is how the world is. The people of God don't get the rewards. And the wicked do. The people of God seemingly receive what the wicked deserve. And the wicked don't receive what they deserve.

So how is life unfair? 1. The righteous don't get rewarded and the wicked do. 2. We can't find out why this happens because God has made it that way.

Now timeout. What we are talking about might be one of the most difficult things about the Christian life. It's painful and really challenging. In fact I think it can be a really common reason that people would walk away from Jesus altogether. Which is why we've got to talk about the next question:

How do we tend to handle life being unfair?

I actually think most people have the same response. We just sort of give up following Jesus. Now that can look different ways.

For some of us I mean we give up on what he's invited us into. Maybe that just looks like just compromise. Life isn't fair. So do what you want. It's sort of taking life into your own hands. If Gods not rewarding me or treating me like I think He should, well what's the point?

- Other people are getting married and I'm being left out. So I'll compromise. I won't be overly bad. Not gonna go sleep around or anything. But maybe I don't need to worry as much about their character. Can't be too picky anyways.
- Other people are much better off financially than me. Not fair. I'll compromise. I'll give less. Not completely cut it off. But God's not really coming through so I've got to take some of my money that I'm generous with to catch up.

Maybe it looks like a sort of mediocre Christianity. Where we're just sort of 'meh'. I'm here. But that's just about it. I've pretty much given up so I'm not leaning in and trying to serve others. I'm not praying for them. I'm not trying to get to know anyone or let them into my life. It's mediocre.

Some of us give up on what God has for us by completely surrendering to sadness and bitterness. We totally give up on joy and just walk around with a simmering anger.

We grow cynical. You doubt the goodness of God and other people in your life. And ultimately that lands us in this seemingly inescapable place of self pity. We just think life hasn't worked out the way we want just one too many times. God hasn't come through on His end of the deal and now it's like I have a lens that I view everything through.

And for some of us we just outright give up on following Jesus. I know some of you have felt that personally or seen it in others:

- I tried the whole Jesus thing, and then my parents got divorced.
- I tried the whole Jesus thing, and then my brother died in a car crash.
- I tried the whole Jesus thing, and then my wife left me.
- I tried the whole Jesus thing, but I'm still single.
- I tried the whole Jesus thing, but we had a miscarriage.
- I tried the whole Jesus thing, but I lost my job.

Some of us are there today. I just want to say, I trust the Spirit's work and 100% believe that God keeps those he saves but it still needs to be said:

Your undealt bitterness and doubts about why life is unfair can and will turn into you walking away from Jesus. It is one of the biggest reasons this happens. You become a Christian, life isn't fair, it's not getting better. And you walk away.

It's also worth noting that this is the reason your coworker won't come to church with you. It's why your neighbor isn't interested in having spiritual conversations. They feel like they tried and it didn't work out for them. You have to see that and have incredible amounts of empathy as you love on them. This is an incredibly common story for why people walk away or deconstruct their faith.

Here's a look behind the curtain. This is why we preach on this so much. We preach on suffering a lot. We get complaints about how much we preach on suffering. I'd actually like to say you're welcome. We preach on this so much because if you don't get this, it is going to wreck your walk with Jesus. Suffering, doubts, unfairness are coming. You have to be theologically prepared for it. You cannot be unaware of what life is like under the sun.

And you have to know how to actually handle it. Which is where we'll end.

So how should we handle life not being fair? Same invitations.

1. Sacred Honesty

Ecclesiastes calls us to sacred honesty. And as God's people, Christians following Jesus, we see Jesus get very honest with his disciples about what following him actually looks like. Matthew 16:24

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Why do our lives not get better when we become Christians?

Because that's never been part of the deal. God isn't a vending machine. It's not like you can follow Him, live by whatever principle and then expect your Blessing Soda to pop out. That's not how it works.

Jesus' call to us as His people is to come and die. For many of His followers across the world, that's been a literal, physical reality. Come follow me and potentially have the wicked put you to death. That's the call for us. To follow Him no matter what, no matter He gives us.

And we begin by being honest about where we haven't believed that way. Instead of being bogged down with resentment over what God has not given us, we see that as an invitation to confess and repent. God I've actually seen marriage as more precious than you. I've seen success and financial blessing as more precious than you. That's not what you promised. You promised Yourself in the midst of trial and difficulty on earth. Help me believe that You're better.

2. Sacred Mundanity.

Look back at v16

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

We attempt to deal with suffering and unfairness by finding answers. And that can be okay. Track down answers to your theological questions. We'd love to help you with that. But often we strive and strive to figure out the why. And the Preacher is so clear. We are very likely not to get those answers.

And that is actually okay. We may not feel like God is being kind to us and He is being kind to others. And that is okay. Because we aren't God and we don't know what He is ultimately doing around us right now.

We don't need more answers, we need more faith and trust in Him. Which is where we find joy.

3. Sacred Joy.

How do we actually start to trust God?

10 Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised[e] in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.[f] 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.

This is actually the resolution for our questions. The Preacher repeats the same observation. It seems to go really well for the wicked. Life is often incredibly unfair.

YET, I know it will be well for those who fear God. And it will not be well with the wicked. Why?

Future Judgement.

There will be a day when everyone gets what they deserve. There will be a day when God balances the scales. When He makes all wrongs right.

So we know the answer to the Preacher's questions now. Why don't the righteous get what they deserve? Why don't the wicked get punished? They will be one day. And if we're still asking 'how is that fair now'? We don't know the exact answers.

But we do know there was actually a moment in history where unfairness peaked. Jesus, the God of heaven, came and lived life under the sun. He was truly the only righteous person to have ever lived. He was sinless. He lived a perfect life. And was betrayed and given over to the authorities under false charges. And as He stood before Pilate, a man was brought out. His name was Barabbas and he was a dangerous criminal. A murderer who led an insurrection.

They stood the two side by side and Pilate asked the crowd who he should release. And the crowd demanded for the wicked criminal, murderer, Barabbas to be released. Mark 15 tells us what happens:

5 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged[a] Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

The Preacher tells us:

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.

But we know that truly happened one time. In all of human history. The day Jesus went to the cross, trading places with the wicked Barabbas, and wicked sinners like you and me.

What we deserved was what Jesus got. God has actually unfairly given us everything. All the good in your life, that's actually what's unfair. We don't deserve any of it. But Jesus is so gracious and kind that not only would He die in our place and secure us eternal life with Him—He also gives us good things now and the promise that He'll deal with all the unfairness that has you've experienced in this life.

Which leads us to live a life with joy. Look at v 15 of ch 8:

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.

We get an eternal hope that allows us to have joy in the mundane now. Life is unfair. But Jesus experienced the most unfair treatment of any person, so that one day all suffering and unfairness would be put away.

So yes, there will still be really difficult times in your life. But look at what God has done and what He's going to do. This is all temporary. So we enjoy what God has given us to enjoy and trust Him with what is painful and unfair.

We joyfully follow Him now, fearing Him as our God who balances the scales of justice without completely destroying us in the process as we deserve. There will be a day when you see it come to fruition.

Pray.