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May 22nd: Ecclesiastes 8 & Acts 1:15-26

May 21, 2021



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The vapour of unjust rule. The replacement of Judas.

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Transcript

Ecclesiastes chapter 8. 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. I say, keep the king's command because of God's oath to him. Be not hasty to go from his presence.

Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, What are you doing? Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. 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, but who can tell him how it will be? 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. All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when men had power over man to his hurt.

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.

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, yet I know it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. 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.

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. 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.

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, 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.

Much of Ecclesiastes chapter 8 concerns rule and the exercise of authority and judgment, and how these play into the vaporous character of life. The preacher also explores the temporary prosperity of the wicked. Wisdom transforms the wise.

It makes their faces to shine, and relieves the frustration, anger and tension that can harden a person's countenance. Here as elsewhere in the wisdom literature, wisdom is not merely mental intelligence, it is closer to mastery of the art of living well. Service to the king comes with an oath to God, so the servants of the king must be careful to obey the king, not merely out of obedience to a legitimate earthly ruler, but also out of their concern not to take the name of the Lord in vain, in swearing falsely.

The power of the king means that the wise subordinate must be very prudent in his actions and speech before the king. Michael Fox suggests that the meaning of verse 3 is that the subordinate should leave the king's presence when his anger is aroused, rather than in his rendering, tarrying in a dangerous situation. However he connects the counsel to that of chapter 10 verse 4, which makes a contrasting claim.

If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offences to rest. Fox argues that we need to take these alongside each other, and

follow the appropriate counsel in the appropriate situation. Daniel Fredericks, like the ESV, reads this as a warning not to leave the king's presence hastily, more in keeping with chapter 10 verse 4, suggesting that it might relate to leaving without being properly dismissed.

The authority of the king cannot be directly challenged. Questions such as, what are you doing? are also ruled out with respect to the Lord's authority in Isaiah chapter 45 verse 9. Obedience is the best defence a subordinate has in such a situation. The meaning of the end of verse 5 is not immediately clear given the multiple possible meanings of the Hebrew expression.

Fox observes that it could refer to a time of doom, the time when the king will die and his rule come to an end. It could refer to a time of judgement, the time when the Lord, as a higher judge, will call the king to account, a fact that means that the king's rule is not truly absolute. Or as Fox himself believes we should take it, to the time and right way.

The prudent subordinate appreciates that direct confrontation with the king is pointless and counterproductive. Rather shrewdness would support a more circumspect approach, which chooses the right time and the right way to approach and win over the king. This understanding of the expression might be supported by verse 6 which follows.

Verse 6 also might refer to the doom that awaits all the unrighteous, even kings, teaching subordinates to bide their time and wait for the Lord's judgement. We might perhaps think here of David, who while pursued by King Saul, stressed obedience to and honouring of the king who was trying to kill him, while also biding his time and not directly opposing Saul, confident that the Lord would act in his cause in time. The inability of anyone to avoid the day of doom is underlined in verses 7 and 8. None of us, not even the most powerful king, can evade our deaths or determine our futures.

No one can excuse themselves from the great mustering of death. No amount of wickedness, treachery, deceit and trickery can enable us to escape it. The preacher had considered all of this while closely observing a time during which a man in power used his power to harm others.

Frederick's remarks upon the way that this reveals the logic of the section. He writes, In a sense, verse 9b serves as the title for this section on wise administration, a time when one man rules tragically over another. It explains the reason for all of the topics discussed in chapter 8 verses 2-15.

Unjust leadership puts wise subordinates in tough positions of servile compliance. Believes itself invincible. Winks at cultic hypocrisy.

Allows the proliferation of evil. And strains any faith in justice. He writes later, A consolation comes in chapter 8 verse 10, however.

In such cases of injustice, even when any public holiness is feigned by these oppressive or lax leaders, they will be buried like everyone else. Their life will be temporary, as will any memory or any respect for their deeds. Those residents of the city whom these leaders oppressed, and who witnessed their leaders' hypocrisy and local cultic observances, will fortunately be able to forget the leaders and their foolish leading.

Sometimes the vaporous character of life is a comfort, and considering the vaporous character of oppressors and unjust rulers is one such occasion. Those who are mindful of the fact that injustice is also a vapor can exercise patience and maintain their righteousness in difficult times. One of the hallmarks of periods of injustice is the slowness of the execution of justice, which has an emboldening effect on the wicked.

The wicked tend to be people given to immediate gratification, and one of the most effective deterrents for them is the speediness of punishment. However, in times of unjust rule, justice, if it comes at all, may only be wrung out of authorities through long and painful procedure, with incredible and indeed prohibitive expense, and the most stubborn and insistent petitioning. In such societies where, if justice shows up at all, it is very tardy, evil persons can start to believe that they are able to act with impunity.

The preacher is confident that justice will finally be done, yet like much in the book of Ecclesiastes, this confidence requires living by faith in divine justice in a vaporous situation where justice is most apparent in its absence. His statement about the towering of justice also raises unsettling questions about the towering of God's own justice, questions that are taken up elsewhere in the scriptures. The wicked will finally be judged, but the cause of righteousness suffers the longer we have to wait for this to happen.

The cries of the righteous and oppressed for God's vengeance fill the time of waiting. Besides the existence of wicked people who do not seem to get their comeuppance and appear to prosper, there are righteous people who seem to suffer the fate of the wicked. We might think of someone like Job.

The psalmist describes the struggle that he experienced in understanding the vaporous character of the seeming fortunes of the righteous and the wicked in Psalm 73 verses 12-18. Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease. They increase in riches.

All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task. Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places, you make them fall to ruin.

Recognizing the vaporous character of existence helps to keep these things in perspective. Recognizing the limitations of human wisdom and understanding under the sun, and the short-lived and swiftly reversible nature of our fortunes here, will help us not to surrender to despair. Injustice can be felt very keenly, but it too will pass, disappearing like the vapor that it is.

Once again the preacher returns to his now familiar encouragement to his hearers. Recognizing the vaporous character of life, and even of great injustice, we should practice joy in our toil, learning to find what delight we can in the lot appointed to us. God's ways and works are mysterious and above our understanding.

They can never be fathomed, even by a most wise and understanding person who would devote himself tirelessly night and day to seeking out their truth. Once again the hearer might think of the experience of Job, who could not figure out the meaning and purpose of his sufferings. A question to consider, how might the preacher's counsel concerning the vaporousness of injustice help to explain aspects of the scriptural instruction concerning how we ought to relate to rulers and those in authority? Acts chapter 1 verses 15 to 26 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers, the company of persons was in all about one hundred and twenty, and said, Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language, Akaldama, that is, Field of Blood.

For it is written in the book of Psalms, May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it, and let another take his office. So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, until the day when he was taken up from us, one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection. And they put forward two, Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.

And they prayed and said, You Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry, and apostleship, from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place. And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Luke's account of the replacement of Judas in the number of the apostles at the end of Acts chapter 1 is an interplay of light and shadow.

In the ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost, the upper room is a site charged with expectancy, awaiting the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, Peter's

recounting of the gruesome manner of Judas' death presents a grim image of the fate of those who oppose Christ's kingdom. The upper room is a staging ground for the coming phase of Christ's mission through his church.

In addition to intense communal devotion to prayer, the choice of Matthias to replace Judas within the twelve was a necessary part of the preparation that needed to occur. The need for a replacement for Judas is one of several reasons to believe that the number of the twelve was not arbitrary. The twelve represented the twelve tribes of a renewed Israel, giving the numbering of the disciples at this point as 120, ten times twelve, is also likely significant.

The twelve will represent the heads of the restored tribes at Pentecost, so it is important that a full complement be present. The gory manner of Judas' death and Peter's application of imprecatory psalms to him sits uneasily with many modern Christian sensibilities. Yet, unsettling as such themes may be to our ears, it is difficult adequately to understand Luke's vision of Christ's mission without an appreciation of the deathly shadow that Christ casts over his opponents.

Whether in Judas' prophetically foretold suicide, in the Holy Spirit slaying Ananias and Sapphira for their attempted deception, in Peter's cursing of Simon the sorcerer, or the angel striking Herod and condemning him to a gruesome demise, or even Paul's blinding of Elimas the sorcerer, Luke repeatedly presents the Spirit's mission as one that can have devastating and even fatal consequences for those who oppose it, for those who wrongly seek to claim God's power for themselves like the seven sons of Sceva, or for those who attack his people. Christ will place all his enemies under his feet, he will overcome the nations that rage against him, and he will judge his wicked servants. While Christ is good, he is far from safe.

Not only Christ's salvation, but also the actions and the fate of those who oppose him are foretold in prophecy. The destruction that Christ's reign brings to his enemies is an important aspect of his kingdom. The Gospel writer's accounts of Christ's enemies are often designed to recall the great adversaries of God's people in history and their fates.

For instance, the Herods are depicted in a manner recalling the Pharaohs and Ahab, while Ananias and Sapphira are like Achan. The account of Judas' actions and his death also stirs various scriptural memories, especially those concerning the treacheries and attempted coups experienced by King David in the latter years of his reign. Peter's declaration that the Holy Spirit spoke about Judas through David treats David's words concerning his own life as typologically revelatory of what will befall his greater son.

In the Gospels we also see narrative parallels being drawn between David and Jesus. Judas is the trusted familiar friend. He sits with Jesus at the table, yet he betrays him, as we see in Psalm 41 verse 9, which is quoted in John 13 verse 18.

David is betrayed by Ahithophel, his close friend and advisor, in 2 Samuel chapter 15. David leaves Jerusalem, he crosses the brook Kidron, and he weeps as he ascends the Mount of Olives in 2 Samuel 15. This is paralleled with the ministry of Christ in John chapter 18 verse 1. David is ministered to by a messenger, as Christ is ministered to by an angel.

David is assaulted by Shimei with violence and cursing, as the mob come out to take Jesus. His right hand man, Abishai, like Peter, wants to strike the king's enemy down, but David prevents him, much as Jesus restores the ear of the high priest's servant after Peter has struck him. In Matthew's Gospel we are told that, like Ahithophel, a regretful Judas parted ways with the conspiracy that he had initially assisted, and hanged himself, in Matthew chapter 27 verses 3-10.

In 2 Samuel, both the betrayer Ahithophel and the unfaithful son of David Absalom end up hung from trees. In Matthew, both the betrayer Judas and the faithful son of David suffer a similar fate, although here it is the contrast that the juxtaposition of the invite that attract our attention. Many have struggled to reconcile Luke's account of Judas' suicide with Matthew's, and solutions with various degrees of plausibility have been proposed.

It seems most likely to me that Luke is foregrounding another connection between Judas and David typology here. Judas is playing the role of Joab. Joab was the treacherous and Machiavellian commander of David's army, who was a man who was twice involved in coups, the first a successful internal coup, wresting control of David's army back from Amasa during the rebellion of Sheba in 2 Samuel chapter 20, Joab had been deposed in chapter 19 verse 13, and the second his support of the pretender Adonijah in 1 Kings chapter 1. In 2 Samuel chapter 20 verse 8-12 we read the story of Joab's treachery towards Amasa.

When they were at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier's garment, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened on his thigh, and as he went forward it fell out. And Joab said to Amasa, Is it well with you, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.

But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand, so Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri, and one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said, Whoever favours Joab and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab. And Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the highway, and anyone who came by seeing him stopped.

And when the man saw that all the people stopped, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field and threw a garment over him. Joab then is the one who betrays with a

kiss. He cuts Amasa's stomach open with his sword so that his entrails pour out.

Amasa's bloody body is placed in a field, and everyone who passes it by is arrested by the sight of it. First Kings begins in the final days of David's reign, as he instructs his son Solomon concerning the kingdom and establishes him on the throne. The opening chapter of the Book of Acts is comparably resumptive in its narrative character.

It begins at a similar point. Jesus is about to ascend into heaven, and he instructs the disciples in preparation for the new administration. At the start of his reign, shortly before his Pentecostal receipt of the gift of the Spirit of Wisdom from the Lord, in chapter 3, Solomon has to lay the foundations of his reign by exiling or executing unfaithful members of his father's administration and other rebels, Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab and Shimei, and replacing them in their offices.

In First Kings chapter 2 verses 28 to 35, Joab is killed by his replacement, Benaniah, the son of Jehoiada. He is buried in his house in the wilderness. We should carefully observe the close applicability of the imprecatory psalm cited by Peter in Acts chapter 1 to Joab's situation.

May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it, and let another take his office. These verses are from Psalms 69 verse 25 and 109 verse 8 respectively. Judas here suffers a death strikingly similar to that of the man Joab betrayed with a kiss, an instance of the law of retribution.

Like Joab, he has a desolate habitation. In the dawning stages of the glorious new administration of David's glorious son, soon to be heralded by the gift of the spirit of wisdom, his office is given to another. Judas is a tragic figure and one who understandably leaves many modern people feeling uneasy.

In characters such as Judas, we see the glorious light of the kingdom of Christ can cast some very dark shadows. Playing the part of Ahithophel and Joab to David's greater son, Luke presents Judas as one of several cautionary examples of the fate of those who oppose the kingdom of Christ. We are squeamish about death, destruction and judgment being brought upon or foretold for the enemies of Christ.

This could be an obstacle for our understanding and acceptance of his kingdom. We want a Christ who is safe, not the king of kings and lord of lords who comes on a white horse against tyrants and rebels, striking the nations and ruling them with a rod of iron. We want the Christ of the nativity narratives, some imagined wrathless lamb, rather than reckoning with the prominent presence of themes of vengeance and judgment in the full New Testament portrait of Christ.

The replacement for Judas has to fit a number of qualifications. He has to be someone who has witnessed the entirety of Christ's ministry, beginning at the ministry of John the

Baptist and going all the way to the resurrection. It is especially important that an apostle have witnessed the resurrected Christ.

The candidates have to be among those who traveled with Christ. It is important that the candidates have had extensive experience of interaction with Christ, hearing him teach, being alongside him and seeing the way that he lives, having been formed under his instruction. They are also more particularly choosing one of the men.

Although there were many women who had accompanied Christ for the entirety of his mission, the office of the twelve was restricted to men. Even though figures like Mary Magdalene or Mary and Martha or Bethany would have been closer to Christ than certain of the apostles, for the ministry appointed to the apostles it was important that they were males. They were supposed to be the guardians and the founders of the new church.

They were supposed to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel in a restored nation. The fact that they had witnessed the ministry of John the Baptist was also a matter of great importance. John the Baptist was the last great prophet before the advent of the son, and so it was important that the apostolic witness would take the baton from John the Baptist and bring it forward and pass it on to the rest of the church.

The ministry of the apostles would include elements of proclamation, they would be the chief witnesses of the resurrection, and also elements of pastoral oversight. They would have a special responsibility for overseeing the life of the church, acting as pastors and as guardians. Of the two suitable candidates put forward by the apostles, we don't know a great deal.

Joseph called Barsabas, also called Justice, and Matthias. Of these two men, Matthias is the one who's chosen. After a prayer that the Lord who knows the hearts of all would judge in the matter, Matthias is chosen by lot.

The twelve now being complete, the ground is prepared for the day of Pentecost. A question to consider, what are some of the other places in the New Testament where we see a special emphasis upon the ministry and the witness borne by John the Baptist?