

Ecclesiastes 8, if you have your Bible, we are going to start there. There are two main ways to see the world. Here's what they are. The first way and the way the majority of people in the west view the world is problems that ail mankind are external to mankind. And so, the problems that ail us, the nightmares that we have, the issues that haunt us, they are external to us and can be solved with increased education or increased technology. And so, we believe that as we progressively get smarter, as we get more educated about the world around us, we will overcome all that haunts mankind. We will solve the diseases. We will get to the place where people don't do crazy things. If we can't talk you out of it, we can drug you out of it. So, if you can't sleep, oh we'll get you to sleep. If you're depressed, we'll get you undepressed. If you have a disease, we'll create a pill that will handle that disease. We will learn more about the human body. So, we will tell you eat leafy spinach that's not tainted by the E. coli bacteria and do pilates, and you will live longer and healthier and you will be stress free. We will learn all we can about the universe, about the cosmos, about the human body, and we will educate ourselves to overcome the great enemies that are external to mankind. And that is a wildly popular view that fired up in the Enlightenment, where you've seen kind of the eradication of the need for God because we are so smart. We don't pray like we should because we can just go take a Tylenol. "Yeah, I've got a headache" Well, what's the answer? "It's not asking for anything; it's taking Tylenol." And if we're sick, we go to the doctor. And if we're bored, we'll go to any one of nineteen movie theaters in the area or we'll rent or we'll pay-per-view or we'll flip through the 600 channels that we have. We can solve it, we can do it. The problems that ail humanity are external to him. Now, the biblical way and the biblical point of view, and what the Scriptures say are that the problems are not merely external but internal and that the problem that plagues humanity is not found outside of him alone, but inside of him. So much so that even if you solve the external ills, the inner man will still jack it all up. Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about, the internal vs. the external.

We'll use the example we used last week. Human ingenuity and the brain that God has given man has created wonder drugs, I mean literally wonder drugs, drugs so effective that they can curb the death rate of those infected with the HIV virus like 80-90%. It's almost a cure. So, we use the human ingenuity to solve an external issue to mankind, disease, but the majority of the world, particularly the third world, will die of those diseases because of greed, politics and corruption. Inner-man jacks it up. So externally, we can overcome some of what plagues the universe, but in our hearts, still being corrupted, still being broken, the problem will remain.

So, we said last week that we live in a post-Genesis 2 world. And that means that when the fall of man occurred, it fractured the DNA of the universe and from that moment on, all of us are broken. Evil and unrighteousness is not something we learn as we get older, it's in us from day one. Anyone who pays attention to their children won't argue here. We don't teach our children to bite, they just do it. We don't teach them to think that everything is theirs. That's not learned, it is in them. And so, we are born broken. And we talked last week how Jesus comes in and saves us from that and sets us back on the path to Genesis 1 and 2, but I want us to take a step farther than we went last week, because here's something I want you to think through. If everyone in this room and everybody outside of this room, if everyone is born broken and sinful and the world and the universe is fractured, the DNA of the universe is fractured so that we are all sinners, then not only are we all sinners but every institution on Earth is run by sinners, broken people. So, not only does this mess take place on an individual level, but now we pull them all together and organize them. Not only are individuals broken, but even institutions at large can be broken. And I mean all of them, whether you're talking government, whether you're talking school systems, whether you're talking church. And I know usually when messages

like this get preached, we like to leave the churches out of this, "Churches cannot be broken. We are the people of God." But if you've been in church enough, you know that even churches can have sinful things occurring within the walls. Does anyone disagree? No, okay good. So, this begs the question: how do we then live in a world and interact with a world where everything is tainted and the foundation of everything has been chewed away at by the brokenness of sin in the world? How do we do it? Because the truth is, we work for institutions, we work within institutions. How do we live in a world where individuals are broken as well as the institutions the individuals create? How do we do it?

Well, this is what our boy, Solomon, wants to help us with today. Ecclesiastes 8. He's going to use government as the institution, but I think you can slide in here anything that you want in terms of institutions or even relationships. 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." So, how do we walk in a fallen world? He starts out like this, "The light of Christ shines in the hearts of men, and we are transformed, we are changed, we become believers in Christ." So what now? Verse 2, he's going to use government, "I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him." Now, Solomon says we have our heart awakened to the reality of Jesus Christ, here's the first rule, the first kind of idea of living in a fallen, broken world. Here's what he says. Number 1; be careful who you submit to. Now, there is an element of submission in everyone's life, I don't care who you are. You submit to your boss. If you are married, there is an element of mutual submission that occurs in marriage. Even friendship at a deep level requires that there be risk-oriented submission for that friendship to thrive. You have to let yourself be known and take the risk of either being betrayed, pummeled or syncing up.

So, be careful who you submit to. Be careful who you give power to. Be careful who you give influence to. Be careful who you, to use a Texas phrase, hitch your wagon to. He's going to say, "Be careful who you pair up with. Be careful who you join your life with. Be careful who you marry. Be careful who you're friends with. Be careful who you work for. Pay attention to who you're giving influence to in your life. Pay attention to this." Why? Why is it such a big deal to be careful who you're submitting to, giving influence to, giving power to? Well, he'll tell you right out of the gate. Look at the next two verses, "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?"" Here's what he says, "Be careful who you submit to, because once you've submitted to it, you're a part of it, and it might be out of your control. And if you're not careful, you could get wooed away from what is right if not outright be a part of something God calls evil." Be careful who you submit to, be careful who you give power to, be careful who you give influence to, because in the end, you might find yourself a part of God calls evil, wicked, what displeases Him. Be careful who you submit to, because once you submit to them, you're a part of an institution or an organization that you don't sit at the top of. It means that when I first came to the Village Church not only did they have questions for me, but I had question for them. I mean, the question was, in the end, is this a place I can submit my life to? Is this a place that faithfully wants to be a biblically functioning, Holy Spirit filled, community. Because if the answer is "yes," then I'm in. But if the answer's "No, that's not what we're after. We're after this or we're after this or this is our goal," like if I came here and the goal was numerics, "We want to be a church of 5,000, we want to build a building that can be seen from the moon. We don't want to do overseas missions. What we want to do is mission over here in the states by spending our money here, spending our money here, spending our money here. We want to reach the affluent by building a sanctuary with chairs with seat warmers and a volume control on the pastor. That's what we want to spend our money on." So, if I walk in and that's the place, I'm out, because I don't feel I can join my life up with that. I don't feel like I can be faithful to what Christ has asked of me and join myself up to that. I don't think I could. In fact, I know I couldn't.

So, what he's saying is be careful who you submit to, be careful who you hitch your wagon to, be careful lest you be part of something that God calls evil, lest you get wooed away and sucked into a way of life that's not biblical or right before God, which leads us to the next piece. This is so important, and I'm kind of nervous because I know the lack of the role

of the Bible in so many of our lives. But I want you to look at what's next here. He's going to say, "Be cautious of who you hitch yourself up with, be cautious of who you link up with and submit to and give influence to, lest you find yourself being all that you never wanted to be.

So look in verse 5, "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." Okay, so let's chat. The Scriptures are going to say that you need to know who you are and know what Christ has asked of you before you ever get started. So that by knowing in the beginning what Christ has asked of you, the path of right and wrong and what you'll be involved in and what you won't be involved in are set before they ever come up. Know who you are, know what Jesus has asked of you, know what the gospel means in your life so that as you walk through life, the right direction, the right time, the right thing will be known by you. As you walk with the Christian community, as you ask for advice, as you pray with one another, as you submit to the things of God, right and wrong and the direction of life are set because you knew who you were before the alarm clock went off that morning. I'll give you another example. We do five services here right now. There is a sixth service scheduled for January 6th and 7th. From day one, when we came here four years ago, my wife was seven and a half months pregnant with Audrey. And so, we didn't have babies, so we just started adding services. We didn't want to go build, we just wanted to suck the life out of this building. And so, we just started adding services, adding services, adding services. To this point, this has had no bearing on my family because the church gives me Thursday afternoons and Fridays off, since we work Saturday and Sunday.

So, I take off Thursday afternoon and we do picnic at the park and I kick balls at my children's faces and we play in the park and do a picnic and hang out, and that's what we do Thursday. Friday is our Saturday, so once again, we play, we go eat. That's what we do. That's our weekend. But when Audrey, in year and a half, two years from now, starts school, I will no longer be able to do that. And the elders have known this from day one here at the Village. Because you can give me Thursday and Friday off all you want, but if my daughter's in school, then that literally gives me no time with my family, not one day with them. I'm not willing to pay the price. Don't understand that that's my role biblically, first as a father and husband according to the Scriptures.

So then, we've got to figure out some of this space deal in the next two years. And we're working on that and brainstorming on that and drawing a lot of diagrams that aren't going to work on that, but in the end, this is something from day one, walking in, understanding what God has required of me, not getting caught up in the hubbub of all this growth and all this. I'm saying, solve it or we'll shrink the church. I'll do a 10 week series on limited atonement and just clean everyone out and start all over. How many of you have seen the great flick, "Ferris Bueller's Day Off?" At the end of that film, Cameron, the sickly boy, begins to kick his father's Ferrari's hood in. Remember what he said as he kicked it? "I hate this car. I hate this car. You love this car. I hate this car. You love the car..." And he just kicked it until it fell off the blocks and fell into the ravine. For whatever reason, that scene just terrifies me. I don't ever want Audrey or Reid on the side of this building, kicking the side of it. So, this is knowing the beginning as you start. So, what's required of me? According to the Scriptures, husband, father, pastor. That's biblically my understanding of my role. So, this is what he's saying, "You've got to know who you are and what Christ has asked of you and what it means to be redeemed and what it means to be a believer in Jesus. You need to know that before you get started, lest you get in a situation that you don't know what to do with. He says, "Those who follow the commands of God know no evil deed."

And then, that's going to lead us into this second idea that such an important thing to know, both inside the church as well as outside the church. We'll start with outside the church. Starting in verse 7, "For he does not know what is to be, for 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." So, be careful who you submit to, be careful who you give power to, lest you get sucked into what is called evil before God. And know who you are when you get

started. And here's what he's going to say, here's what I love about Solomon. He's always going to take it right back down to the grittiest level possible. He says this, "Even if you're careful who you submit to and you know exactly who God's commanded you to be, sometimes it's still going to go bad." I'm so grateful that he does this. This is the exact opposite of most of what we hear in church, isn't it? He's like, "Listen, do what you know is right, submit and be obedient to Christ, be careful who you hitch your wagon to, but in the end, it's a lot like war." And here's what he means. If you've ever watched anything on television where they're training soldiers to go fight, they'll say, "Okay, you need to get your head down. You need to swing your gun around like this. You need to enter a room like this. You need to do this. You need to watch this..." And they'll train them, and if that soldier follows every piece of training, do they all make it home alive? Is it possible that a young man could do everything he was trained to do and still get killed? Absolutely. And this is what he's talking about when he says, "Hey man, no man controls the power of life and death. No man can decide to retain his own spirit. In the end, be obedient to Christ and trust that God is in control."

And then, he moves on to this next idea that I want to spend some time chatting with you about. 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. 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." Here's what he's saying here. And just as quick as I can hit this one, he says this, "Don't be naïve. Your heroes are sinful men too." On my refrigerator at home, I have a picture of me with my arms around Dr. John Piper and J.I. Packer. Lauren's like, "You look happier in that than you do in our wedding photo." I'm like, "No I don't, baby. But I do love those dudes." I have heroes, heroes in the faith, men that I look at and go, "I'd like to be like that." I don't want to be those guys, I want to be like those guys. When I first got saved, I didn't know any other believers, so in south of Houston, on 105.7 9:00-9:30 was Chuck Swindoll and 9:30-10:00 was Dr. Tony Evans of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship. So, I had a little journal/Bible time every morning for about a year down in La Marque, Texas, listening to 105.7. The first real preaching, I mean God-saturated, Christ-exalting preaching I'd ever heard. Now, those guys are unreal. I mean, they are brilliant, unreal men who are heroes of mine, but in the end, the things that they have accomplished and the people that they are are due to the gracious power and work of Christ in them. And they are due no praise in and of themselves, maybe an occasional, "Good game. Great to have ya." But any man who would touch such glory himself blasphemes. We have to get into the habit of praising God for what He does in men instead of praising men. Because we've created this kind of quasi-Christian Hollywood that's built around large church pastors who are dynamic communicators. And so, we build this ideology around them and exalt them up on pedestals, and they are doomed to disappoint us. Okay, so take Dr. John Piper. Since he was in high school, he wanted to be in a room by himself, reading C.S. Lewis and breaking down the collective works of Jonathan Edwards.

Anybody know any other high schoolers like that? "What are you doing this Friday, John?" "I think I'm going to read 'Religious Affections.' It's several hundred years old, but I'm into it." Here's my question. Who did that to him? Who made a seventeen year old say, "I want to think, and I want to write?" Who created this man with 80% brain and 20% body? God did. God created him like that. God gifted him like that. So who's due the glory? God is. It's not his, it's God's. You've got to be monumentally careful here, lest we become blasphemers, lest we become Shaquille O'Neil celebrating a dunked basketball at 7'1". Oh, what an accomplishment there, buddy. Ooh, that was great. I'm sure you trained all year for that. The rim's like right there. So then, what you have here...and I always want to attack our culture, and not our culture as in westernized American culture. I'm talking Christian culture that's off. What you end up getting then is a plethora of "how-to" books built off of man's experiences rather than the preeminence of Christ and the sufficiency of the Scriptures. And church is boiled down into a "let me tell you how it works" process built off of men's personalities rather than the shed blood of Jesus Christ. It's a train wreck out there. It's a train wreck in here.

Okay, so hear me. I'm planning on being here about 40 more years. In fact, I might retire earlier and just make life miserable for the 30 year old that we turn it over to. I'm going to disappoint you. I mean, I don't want to. I'm going to

disappoint you on an individual level. I mean, you're going to want to get a hold of me and you're not going to be able to. You're going to have expectations of me that are impossible to fill. I'm going to disappoint you. And eventually, I'm going to mess up in some way that maybe we didn't prepare for this or we didn't plan enough for this. Now, we are very busy building accountability stations and authority over me. Like, do you want to know who I submit to? I submit to a group of elders that has absolute authority over me, from limiting how much I can preach. I have to take 12 weekends off next year. Since I went down sick in September of last year, the elders were like, "You will be out 12 weekends a year." And I was like, "I don't wanna be." They were like, "Aw, we don't care." And so, here I'm out, 12 weeks next year. I've got to be out 12 weekends next year, not my decision. I'd preach every weekend if I could, but I'm full of pride. The elders recognize it and go, "It ain't about you, it's about the preeminence of Christ. Remember? You're out 12 weekends a year." This is who I submit to. We're building parameters to protect you from me, but in the end, I will fail you. The world's got one messiah, just one, one who is good, one who is always right, one who will not fail. Build yourselves around preachers and programs, and you will eventually find yourselves heartbroken. Build it around a living relationship with Christ and Him alone, and find pleasure in Him when you're around gifted men. That's the healthy place. Learn to praise God for men, for what He's done in them and through them, not men themselves. This is Solomon's advice to us.

Let's keep going. How do we live? How do we function in a fallen world? Go to verse 11, "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 that 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." Okay have you noticed this? Because he's saying that there's this thing that happens here that you absolutely should see. He says that there are some things that seem to be meant for the wicked that the righteous endure. And then, the gifts that should come to the righteous, the wicked people gain. Have you noticed any of these things? And so here's what he says. He says, "Sometimes, wickedness will happen 100 times before before God ever gets involved. Be careful how you see the world." Here's his advice. He says, "You're going to see someone at work, at home, at play, you're going to see someone do something unrighteous, and do you know what's going to happen? Nothing. In fact, they're going to gain from it. They're going to get some money, they're going to get more friends, because friends accompany money. They're going to do something else that the Scriptures call wicked, that God would call wicked, and they're going to get money, they're going to get new cars, they're going to get a bigger house, they're going to get friends, they're going to get this membership at this golf club. They're going to do something wicked, and they're going to continually do wickedness. And as they do, you'll only see what appears to be good things occur. And you will see a righteous man do what is right before God, and maybe he goes broke. Like, I know that's not the popular church story. The popular church story is, "I only had \$81.00 in my bank account and I needed to tithe, but I couldn't tithe so I wrote the \$81.00 check two weeks later. Right when we needed that \$81.00, my aunt Sally died and left me \$81.00 and it came in the bank, \$81.00 exactly." And that's the urban myth. Nobody ever gets up and goes, "I actually wrote the tithe check, and we didn't eat." Nobody ever wants to get that honest. So, he's saying, "Be careful how you see the world. Learn to see it eternally and not in the temporary. Because in the end, God will judge." So, don't be deceived. Don't buy into this, "Oh, wickedness doesn't cost." Don't buy into what you see and what you judge as success. Once again, this is why I find the prosperity gospel so disturbing on so many levels.

One more bit of advice he has for us, and it's going to be good for us to hear it. Verse 15, "And I commend joy, for man has no good thing 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." This is a great text. It's hard, but it's a great text. Here's what he says. Once you have been careful who you submit to, have learned from the beginning what God has commanded of us in the gospels, we have not created anyone as preeminent but Christ alone and we have done all that Christ has asked of us. We have forgiven, we have asked for forgiveness, we have prayed, we have laid it down at the feet of Christ, we have fought off the root of bitterness, we have done all that Christ has asked of us." He says, "Call your friends, go to dinner, eat, drink, laugh and trust God and go to bed. Because what else can you do?" So, how do you live in a fallen world? He sums it up in these last five verses. Submit to the truths of God and the gospel of Christ, be obedient to His commands and when you've done all that He's asked, eat, drink and laugh, because the rest is in His hands.

I want to ask you just some questions here, because it doesn't do any good for us to hear Scripture but not know how it applies to us. It doesn't do any good to cognitively grasp some concepts from the Bible. We need the Lord to speak to us and speak to our hearts. So, I want to take this out of the abstract and make it personal. Are you and do you have an area of your life right now that you feel is weighty and hard, it's keeping you up at night, maybe a situation at work, maybe a situation at home, maybe a situation with some friends? Do you have a relationship that's fractured? Do you have decisions that are being made that are pulling against what you know is right? Do you have some weight, some pressure, something on your heart, on your mind right now? Okay, let me ask you a set of questions. Have you done all that Christ has asked of you? Have you been obedient to all that Christ has asked of you? Have you asked for forgiveness? Have you owned what you're responsible for? Have you fought off a root of bitterness? Have you prayed? Have you laid it at His feet? Have you done what is required of you, biblically, spiritually? Have you done what Christ has asked of You? And listen, right now you need to block out of your head the "yeah, but they..." You need to get that out of your head, because that's not what we're talking about here today. We're not assessing blame or putting blame on anyone, we're asking the question "Have I...?" Have I what Christ has asked of me? Now, if the answer is "No, I haven't done this, I haven't done what Christ wants me to. No, I haven't done this, and I know Christ wants me to," well then we know what the rest of the day looks like then. Or some point this week, we have to make that right, we have to be obedient to the commands of Christ. The ones who know them and follow them are those who know no evil. So, we know what this week looks like to some regard, that forgiveness needs to be asked, bitterness needs to be confessed, contact needs to be made to own our part. And if you're in here this morning and the answer is, "Yes, I have done everything that the Scriptures have asked of me, that Christ has asked of me," then the Scriptures say, "Call your friends today. Call your friends and head out to eat. And today, don't eat healthy. Eat Mexican food. Get a giant glass of Coke or something that you love the taste of and laugh and tell stories and enjoy the meal, because the rest is in Christ's merciful loving hands, and there's nothing more you can do except trust Him."

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I know we've talked some about institutions, I thank You for the United States of America and the government of the United States of America. I praise You for the fact that I'm standing on a stage, opening Scriptures and preaching the word with no fear of any consequences for it. And I know I have friends throughout the world who are not as lucky. And so, I thank You. I pray that You would cure us of our own self-inflicted diseases and that You would stir man's heart back to You. I pray that You would open ears and open eyes, because it's not just up to how well we preach or how much we pray. You're going to have to open eyes and ears, and we need You to do it. Help, help, help. And I pray for those men and women in here this morning who these ideas are not abstract for; they are personal and they are timely and they are speaking to the heart this morning. Give us the courage to be obedient, and grant us the peace that passes understanding. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."