

“KEEP THE KING’S COMMAND.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

Who is like the wise? Vs. 1.

Two weeks ago we read:

Ecclesiastes 7:25 I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.

Two weeks ago we looked at Solomon’s searching out folly, now we come to his searching out wisdom. Who is like the wise? This is a comparative statement, “Who can compare with the wise man?”

The implication is there is no comparison, no one like the wise man. You can be rich, good looking, smart, strong, but without wisdom it doesn’t matter.

Wisdom is the first thing, the best thing, nothing compares to it. Pursue it, pray for it, start young and never stop. It is worth everything you invest in it. Wisdom makes us useful to others, a true benefit and blessing to those around us.

Verse one is a general statement regarding the wisdom of wisdom, the benefit and blessing of wisdom, the joy and peace of wisdom.

By interpretation he means one who rightly understands the times and what to do and how direct others in the right way. By interpretation he means that person who can explain the words, ways, works of God.

Like Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams.

Like Daniel interpreting the handwriting on the wall.

Wisdom changes a person, they are less anxious, more at peace, settled, slow to anger, slow to speak, courage in the face of trouble.

It makes the face shine brighter as one who has been in touch with a brighter, higher world. Like Moses’ face when he came down from the holy mountain after meeting with God, and the face of Stephen with he saw the Lord as he was being stoned to death.

Make the book of Proverbs your close companion. It is filled with wisdom personified as Lady Wisdom

Proverbs 3:15-18 She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.

16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.

Chapter 8 is a bit of a shift. Solomon begins applying practical wisdom to a variety of situations. Wisdom is not just heavenly minded, but also practical, daily, real.

Wisdom for relating to those in authority, vss. 2-9.

Vss. 2-9 give us wisdom about how to relate to authority, and if necessary, how to wisely challenge those in authority. Solomon is focusing on how best or most wisely to deal with kings.

The last sentence in our passage makes clear why you should heed this wisdom, because if you don't the king has great power to do much harm, to hurt you (vs. 9).

Solomon has spent a life-time walking in the corridors of power. He grew up in his father, King David's palace, and then reigned in that same palace 40 years. Here he is reflecting on the wisdom he has gain there. Things you would learn if you spent a bunch of time in the White House or halls of congress.

We will not be helped if we think of this passage in terms of our own political system in 21st century America. When Solomon wrote this the king's power was absolute, they had power over life and death. They were not elected, and while some were benevolent dictators, history shows most were tyrannical despots, along the lines of Kim Jong-un of North Korea.

For all the complaining people do about our government, we are exceedingly blessed and if we lived in many of the countries of the world, we would soon be wishing we were here.

Keep the king's commands, vss. 2-4

Solomon the king now turns to giving wise counsel, instruction to those who are under authority on how to influence those who are in authority.

A wise man in the presence of a king can have huge influence, and give much insight, interpretation to the king, so as to make his face to shine.

We have numerous examples of this in Scripture.

Joseph before Pharoah.

Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar.

David before Saul.
Abigail before David.
Nehemiah before Artaxerxes.
Esther before Ahasuerus.

First, is the oath of allegiance, be loyal, vs. 2

All of us are under several different kinds of authority and all of us have chafed from time to time over those in authority. All of us have a natural inclination to resist submitting to authority.

This should be our default position, be loyal to and give respectful submission to those in any position of authority, to the king and to his commands, his laws. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

This is the general admonition of Scripture. Submit to those placed over us in authority. Those in authority are to be obeyed even when we disagree with them, or thing they are wrong, whether kings, presidents, governors, rulers, elders, husbands, parents, teachers, employers, police, school boards, city council, etc.

This is the general principle for a well order life, free from division, strife, chaos, anarchy.

Romans 13:1-2 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

This principle has a religious basis, it is grounded in God, who He is and His authority delegated to those He has ordained to be in authority.

If you want to obey God, you will obey those He has placed over you. God is acting through them. They are God's ministers (Rom 13:1).

Second, don't be quick to find fault with those in authority.

Don't take issue with everything that is not according to your way of thinking, or rush to be discontent, critical or complaining.

Proverbs 30:32 If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth.

Acts 23:2-5 The high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?"

4 Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God's high priest?” 5 And Paul said, “***I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest***, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

Put your hand to your mouth when you find yourself complaining and being critical of leaders.

Third, one is wise to exercise flexibility and prudence, and to avoid evil causes, vs. 3-4.

Be wise, be circumspect, don't be too quick to speak, to judge. Be patient, wait and see how things play out. Don't be one who is quick to fly off the handle, to be hot headed quickly.

I have a friend who is dealing with the consequences of a terrible decision made by another, and then one week later, matters took a significant turn in another direction.

Those who serve the king should not make haste, but listen to all the king has to say, and not stop listening before the king stops speaking.

As for the matter of evil, this may be simply saying don't get in the king's way, since he will have his way regardless.

There may be a time when you must speak, must resist, but as a general rule, keep quiet obedience. One can exercise prudence without cowardice or compromise.

Remember Queen Esther's very wise and shrewd way of handling King Xerxes and his right hand man, Haman.

I Kings 18:3-4 Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, 4 and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.)

There may be just reasons for departing from the king, the point is use discernment, take time to deliberate on the matter, and then act wisely, not hastily. Have sober judgment, have second thoughts. Seek wise counsel.

How often have we wished we had taken time before acting?

How often having slept on something have we come to a more clearheaded decision?

Fourth, when considering challenging the authority of the king, be careful, and make sure your cause is just, vs. 3-4.

Remember he does whatever he pleases and says whatever he pleases, his word is law.

So are there exceptions? Of course, but be wise and weigh the possibilities because there will be consequences for taking exception to the authority of the king. Because all are sinners the

pledge of loyalty is never absolute. Our obedience to man is secondary to our obedience to God. God is supreme.

Fifth, when challenging authority, do it is the right way, vss. 5-6.

There is a season, a time and a place. You may see ten problems, but you have to weigh how many to address and when. The wise man is careful in picking and choosing his battles, and not being one to die on every hill.

One must learn the valuable trait of knowing when to speak and when to be silent.

In our previous church in OKC we had a large staff with many different personalities. We had a church administrator who took time to figure out how each of us worked best and how to approach each of us with various issues. She was discerning, wise. She knew I didn't like surprises and I responded best if she gave me time to think about an issue.

We tried to instruct our children in this. If they came after us with anger, rebellion, argumentative, resistance, they got nowhere. We urged reason, respect, wise timing.

The wise man knows the right words and the right time to apply them

Sixth, remember and take into account the limitations of all human authorities, vss. 7-8.

The wise man must know his limitations, he can't know all possible outcomes, no one knows the future. He learns to give grace, to not expect perfection.

What has Solomon been saying all along about life under the sun?

It is all vanity, it is all a vapor and a mist, we are all but fleeting shadows. This is true of the courtier, the servant as well as of the king. Both are in a battle with death, a losing battle I might add.

We have no power over our souls departure. When our souls is required of us, it must in that moment be surrendered. The most momentous event in all our lives and it is not in our control, but God's, He numbers our days.

The king is no different than the poor beggar. Rulers and subjects are wise to consider their limitations and that all are fallen, and err and sin. We don't know the future and we don't know what God is doing in the midst of this evil world of ours. Wisdom causes us to think about and know our limitations. We should all be tempered with wisdom, humility, patience, grace.

There is an encouragement toward hope here. No king, no matter how evil will last forever. Mortal power will pass away and wicked powers will face judgment.

All this I observed. Vs. 9.

Solomon says he has studied all things. One particular thing he has observed and mediated on is how one man can have power to do evil against those under him. Oppression is a natural part of our fallen world, it always has been.

Why does Solomon mention this here in a practical discussion of wisdom? Because wisdom reminds us that oppression is a natural, normal part of our fallen world, we should not be surprised by it, nor should we think it will get better or go away.

There is much evil in the world and much evil in the hearts of all men, especially in the hearts of the powerful who have less restraint. While the king is appointed for good, Solomon has observed much evil, much abuse, much tyranny, much hurt.

Indeed God raises up the wicked that their judgment might be great.

Exodus 9:14 For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.

Exodus 9:16 But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

Exodus 10:1-2 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, 2 and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.”

Conclusion and application.

Christians should excel at submitting first to God and then to those in authority. Christians should excel in doing good. It should be so recognizable as to be praised by a watching world.

May our conduct toward authorities be a clear contrast to unbelievers that they have to take notice and glorify God. Perhaps they will even say, “They have been with Jesus.”

There is one rule that is utterly absolute and utterly good. We can rejoice and worship so great a king as our God.

I Timothy 6:15-16 ... he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion.

May we bear witness to the truth, to declare who is the true King. May we “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9) and keep your “conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (2:12).