

## Eat, drink and be merry! Ecclesiastes ch.8



In this chapter the writer addresses three principal apparently disconnected thoughts, with which he is struggling;

the evidence of wisdom in a person,

the relationship with authority,

and one of the biggest philosophical questions of life, why do bad things happen to good people?

*This is a chapter that deals with some big issues for a person of faith.*

It is also one of the chapters of Ecclesiastes with all sorts of well-known phrases and ideas used in common English, as Robin pointed out a few days ago.

- In the opening verses of the chapter the writer ponders the idea of wisdom, not for the first time; this time saying that a person's wisdom gives them the outward appearance of what their inner feelings are. In other words, what we are on the inside can be seen on the outside!
- Then, in the next few verses, we move on to a discussion about obedience to human authorities, as in Romans 13.1-7. The king is supposed to uphold good and punish bad. Whilst he also may fall short of that standard, we must recognise his "supreme" authority. The power of an earthly king is pale before the Lord of Glory; He will do whatever He pleases, and His word is truly supreme.
- Next the writer turns to ponder the age-old puzzle of why it appears that bad things happen to good people and vice versa. The righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve.

Having puzzled for a while the writer concludes with the oft used phrase "This too is

meaningless”!



“So,” he says, “I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad.”

As we have seen then, life is not about obedience to the king, or civil authority (though that’s a good thing), the writer seems to think.

Bad things happening to good people is just a puzzle with no easy answers.

Is the writer of Ecclesiastes just full of despair then, commending a constant series of drunken orgies? No, for it seems to me that it’s not in the early verses of the chapter that the primary wisdom of the chapter is to be found, but in the last few verses:

“<sup>16</sup> When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labour that is done on earth— people getting no sleep day or night— <sup>17</sup> then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.”

When he applies his mind to these things, he sees not the problems and difficulties, though they are very real, but what God has done!

No-one can understand that. No-one can understand the awesomeness of God, but to quote the hymn writer, Joseph Hart:

*This, this is the God we adore,  
Our faithful, unchangeable friend,  
Whose love is as great as His power,  
And knows neither measure nor end.*

*‘Tis Jesus, the first and the last,*

*Whose Spirit shall guide us safe Home;  
We'll praise Him for all that is past,  
And trust Him for all that's to come.*

*I guess this is why I love Ecclesiastes (and Job). The writer wrestles with all sorts of really big questions, as I do often, and can find no answer to them except God! That not a bad place to come to though!*

*© Rod Hill  
Methodist Minister  
February 2021*