

Part 8 - The Unsearchable Things Of God

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning, everybody. How's everyone doing today? Good, good, good. You guys looking forward to Thanksgiving coming up? I know I am. I'm doing Friendsgiving tonight. I'm bringing some creamy mashed potatoes and making it for the youth.

It's got bacon. It's got cheese. It's got, yeah, I might just stay and double dip a little bit myself. Yeah, yeah. Got to get to that ecumenical service, though. Anyways, I'm glad that you're here with us if you're new.

So glad that you're here. Those of you that are following us online and maybe you're traveling and getting to where family is at for you, we miss you. Look forward to having you back here.

But yeah, thanks for keeping up with us online. We've been in this amazing series, Ecclesiastes.

We're in week eight. It's been a lot of fun. And it's a lot of fun, a little bit dangerous, too.

It's been a good eight weeks. So Ecclesiastes kind of deals with life, just tells us how it is, not how it ought to be. It's like, hey, it's giving it to us honest like we talked about last week.

[1 : 02] And so I want to start out asking us this question. Like we've all had things, right, that happen in our lives that leave us confused, leave us searching for answers, right? At one point or another, we've all asked, like, why is this happening?

What is going on? And I want you to think about this, right? No other living creature does that, right? A raccoon doesn't do that. So you can tell your neighbor next to you, hey, guess what?

I'm smarter than a raccoon. I've got more intelligence than a raccoon. You think a little bit deeper than they do. We think a little bit deeper than they do. And you know why that is, right? Is it some evolutionary thing that happened to us?

Well, you know, that's one view that science gives us. Christianity has a reason. And it says we're made in God's image, okay? We're made in God's image. And so in a sense, we have that intelligence.

There's a sense of, like, wanting to make sense of life. And there needing to be reason and meaning for it. But then we've fallen from that grace because of sin. And now bad things happen. And in the wake of that, we're left searching for answers to life's bigger problems.

[2 : 08] And so in Ecclesiastes verse 1, we're going to pick up and find out how this works and how wisdom can best serve us in these moments. It says this, 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. Now, we look at that, and we see, okay, and we think the wise, they have these faces that shine.

And it doesn't literally mean, like, they're glowing. It's this sense of lightness and peace. And, you know, even when hard times come, it's not causing them to be downcast or hardened. And it's really not because they know why everything happens, even though we might think that's what it is. The wise people, they must have all the answers. But a wise person actually would be the first to tell you that's not true. Wisdom isn't having the right answers all the time. Wisdom is actually okay with not having all the answers all the time.

It's comfortable in the mystery. It's comfortable in the things that are yet to be understandable.

There's this old Chinese proverb that kind of gets to the heart of what we're talking about today.

[3 : 13] It says this, once upon a time, there was an old farmer. This old farmer had worked his crops for many years, and one day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit and said, oh, such bad luck. They said to him sympathetically, you must be so sad.

The farmer said, we'll see. The next morning, the horse returned, bringing with it two other wild horses. And the neighbors came back exclaiming, how wonderful. Not only did your horse return, but you received two more.

What great fortune you have. And the farmer answered, we'll see. The following day, his son tried to ride one of those untamed horses and was thrown from the horse and broke his leg. The neighbors came again to offer their sympathy this time because of the misfortune.

Now your son cannot help you with your farming. What terrible luck you have, the farmer replied.

The following week, military officials came to the village to conscript young men into the army.

Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out. Such great news. You must be so happy. The man smiled to himself and said once again, see, here's the thing.

[4 : 20] There is an interpretation that can be made for everything that happens. There's an easy interpretation. If it looks good, it must be good. Or conversely, if it looks bad, it must be bad.

But the wise, they learn to interpret things differently. They learn to take things as they come a little bit differently. They don't rush into quick decisions, quick assumptions. And more importantly than that, the wise are not easily swayed.

Verse 2, it says, And so the argument begins this way.

Keep the king's command, right? It's a good idea. Or to make it more relevant today, obey and submit to authority. And if there's people in authority over you, obey and submit to them. Now, I want to say there are two types of obedience.

There's the kind of blind obedience that says, you know what? It doesn't matter what my king says or does. He's right. I'm on his side. And there's another type of obedience. It's wise obedience that says, I will submit to the king, but I won't turn a blind eye to evil.

[5 : 33] God never calls us to live in blind obedience, guys. He only calls us to live in wise obedience. And wise obedience, what it does, it submits to God's authority. Over everything else.

But the wise also recognize that God created authority for our good, right? Everyone has authority in their lives, and that's a good thing. He calls us to live under authority. And too often, we look at people that live in blind obedience, or there might be even a time in our lives where we were living in blind obedience and got burned by it.

And instead of learning wise obedience, we might have rejected authority altogether. But guys, I want to say, man, that's the easy and simple solution to how to respond to those moments.

But it says here, don't be so hasty. Don't be quick to change your convictions and allegiances. Don't so easily adopt every new idea or cultural norm or the next fancy guy that comes through and says, hey, follow me.

I've got some better ideas. It's tempting to do that because often it's the path of least resistance. And sometimes it's even the path of easiest acceptance if we're honest with ourselves.

[6 : 45] In verse 5, the first part of it says, whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, right? Now, this doesn't give us an out for following bad authority and following bad things, right?

Nazis, they kept Hitler's commands. But they did some evil, evil things. And the Bible doesn't say, like, good job, Gestapo. That's not what it's saying here.

What it means is that following orders is a good way to avoid punishment. But obedience at the expense of what's right isn't really being commended here. That's not what it's saying.

It goes on to say this in the second part of verse 5. And the wise in heart will know the proper time and the just way. The wise in 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.

And this is what it's getting at. The wise are courageously patient. The wise are courageously patient. Sometimes people in charge do evil, right?

[7 : 45] We know that to be true. They call us to do evil with them. Bosses, they can be wrong. Superiors can be wrong. Spouses can be dangerous. Friends can be misguided. And they need accountability just like the rest of us.

So here's what we are being encouraged to do. Look for the opportunity to be that accountability. Take that opportunity. Take the opportunities that you're in to be that accountability to people.

The wise in heart, it says, will know the proper time and the just way. You, in your situation, where you're at, and the relationships that you have, you might be the one wise voice left to speak truth and call people to repentance.

But that won't happen if we jump ship at the first leak we find, at the first problem we find.

Sometimes, sometimes God calls us into unsafe places.

And he does that so we could be his voice of wisdom. And when I ask you, do you have room for that in your belief system? Consider the prophets in the Bible.

[8 : 53] They were hated in their days. We think like, man, they must have had a cool... No, they were... They typically were like very unpopular. Most of them were running for their lives, right?

You look at the prophet Elijah. He did some cool things, but he lived on the run from King Ahab for a long time because he was obeying God. He was calling truth, truth. And he was calling sinners to repentance, which meant that he wasn't a big fan.

The king wasn't a big fan of his. King Ahab was not a big fan of his, to say the least. Was trying to kill him all the time. Wise obedience doesn't promise safety from persecution.

It doesn't. But it does prepare us to hold up underneath it. Wisdom prepares us to hold true despite the outcome. Verse 7, it says, 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. All this I have observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.

[10 : 01] You and I don't have power to predict the future. We don't have power to stay alive forever. We don't have power to avoid our appointed day of death. And that's where wisdom begins.

Wisdom embraces that. Wisdom doesn't say, No, no, I don't want that to be true. Wisdom says like, No, that's true. Can't do anything about that. It embraces our weakness. It embraces our limitations. So that we don't live and act as if we are invincible.

See, the wise in heart are able to endure because it knows the trial's inevitable. And Jesus, think about this. He used a parable to teach us how this works.

He says, A wise man, he builds his house on a rock. He builds his house, he builds his life on the place that is hard to build foundations into. It takes time and effort to put foundations into granite.

But in the end, that foundation is strong. It's assuring. And its roots run deep. It is a life prepared for the expected storms.

[11 : 03] And by contrast, Jesus says there's another man in this parable. He is a fool and he builds his house on the sand. It's a lot easier to dig into sand than it is into granite, right? The house goes up quick because the fool lives for today and doesn't think about what may come.

But then the storms do come. And it hits the house of the wise man and it hits the house of the fool. And whose house gets ruined? The fool. The fool. See, guys, it's so tempting.

Friends, it's so tempting to build our lives on sand. It's so tempting to take the easy route. We get the house up quick and we get to enjoy all the benefits, right? The instant gratification of life, it's so nice.

We get the popularity. We get the acceptance. We get the advancement. There's a lot of instant gratification that comes with building our lives fast and cheap. And that is why the life of the wicked is so alluring.

And so many of us run after it. It has some real benefits. Verse 10, it says this, 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.

[12 : 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. What does it say?

It says the wicked will get praised by the masses. Evil is going to be popular. It doesn't matter what time of history you live in. It doesn't matter what country you live in.

Evil is going to be popular. And I don't know whether it's comforting or maddening to know that celebrity existed all the way back then too, right? I mean, apparently there were people that were so good at this, they're being praised.

This verse talks about famously wicked people, rich, powerful, wicked people. Nobody's telling them to repent or they're ignoring those people who are. They go to the holy place.

They go to church with their wickedness and just presume upon God's grace. They're not interested in change because they don't really have any fear of God at all. They're going to church because it's the thing to do.

[13 : 06] It's a popular thing to do. It's another way to get accepted. Or it makes them look good.

Or maybe they can go because they give a lot of money to silence the church or use the power and the position they have to silence the church with regards to their life.

Think about this, guys. Look at Hitler in Germany. China in today's day and age. They put a limit on what churches were able to say.

Hitler kind of said, this is what you can talk about and this is what you can't talk about. China does the same thing. And you either have a choice in that time as a Christian.

You are going to succumb to the pressure or you are going to obey God. Here's the thing, guys.

The wicked are always going to attempt to buy access and acceptance from the church.

And if the church doesn't stand up to call out sin, who else will? It says here, the city, the masses are going to praise the wicked.

[14:10] Whether you're a Christian or not, that plays at our hearts, right? Man, this idea that the wicked go unpunished and they get praised and said, that plays at our hearts.

It seems so unfair. It seems so wrong. If there isn't a consequence for being wicked, then what benefit is there to being righteous? If nice guys finish last, why be nice?

It says, 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. It can be maddening to see the wicked go unpunished.

We look at evil and wonder, how can that be? God, how can you allow that? What benefit then is there to being good if you're not going to step in and stop this? And those are the correct questions, if we're honest, many of us should wrestle with.

[15:15] Many of us would be smart to wrestle with. Many of you here have asked those questions and really haven't found a good answer. And so your faith is teetering on a nice edge.

Or maybe you've just given up on faith altogether. You're just kind of like, man, I can't believe in a God that can't answer those questions. And you know what? That's okay. I'm glad you're here.

And I'm glad you're here with your doubts and asking those questions. This is the place for that.

Because I want to reiterate again, the why is don't switch allegiances so quickly. I'm not asking you to come in here and ditch your brains and objections at the door.

But I do want to say this. The whys are slow to put periods at the end of their assumptions. When we look at the world and we see the wicked winning and the good suffering, how do we come to terms with God also being good?

How do we do that? Well, I want to suggest there's really two ways to look at it. We look at it this way. Number one, this life is the only opportunity there is for justice.

[16:18] And so by all means, if we look and we see that there's evil being perpetrated and the evil go unpunished, and either they die unpunished, we think, ah, unfair. Or maybe we die before we see them unpunished.

And so we go to the grave thinking, like, where is justice in this world? Or we could believe this. Justice deferred is not justice denied.

Jesus taught this parable, Matthew 21, verse 33. Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a wine press in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants and went into another country.

I want you to think about this. He basically made a really great factory and place to live. That's what this is saying in our modern day. And when the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get its fruit.

And the tenants took his servants and beat one and killed another and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first. And they did the same to them. So we see this guy, he creates this perfect scenario, and then he leases this building out to these tenants.

[17:25] He says, take care of my business while I'm gone. And then he comes back. Or he doesn't come back himself. He sends some servants to say, hey, collect some of the proceeds, right?

Seems fair. And then what happens? These tenants, they did some evil things. That powerful owner was far away. They stopped fearing him. And so what they did is they didn't honor their obligation.

Nothing happened. They beat these guys, killed some of them, sent them away. Nothing happened.

And so they said, hey, sweet. No justice. Let's keep behaving this way.

And as the justice was deferred, they became more bold. And so finally, it says in verse 37, he sent his son to them saying, they will respect my son. Maybe they will respect my son at least.

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance. And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When, therefore, the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?

[18:30] Jesus asked the crowd this. They said to him, this wasn't Jesus' response. This is what everyone's saying because everyone has a good sense of justice here.

They said back to Jesus, well, he would put those wretches to a miserable death, right? Sounds like a great movie. And then he'll let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.

So we read this, and you know what? We don't have the problem with how this parable resolves, do we? We know those wicked tenants have what's coming to them. See, we look at that and we see in the beginning justice being deferred, and that agitates us.

That agitated Jesus, the crowd Jesus was speaking to you. But if we step back and look what Jesus is trying to get at, man, even that, God's deference to not bringing justice so swiftly, man, he is right to do that, and he's good to do that.

That is his merciful patience. He's giving them opportunity to change and turn from their ways. Even these wicked guys are offered the chance of repentance. We say, yeah, that's kind of cool, but we actually struggle with this.

[19:39] Because we, man, we love justice, and we demand justice until it's us. Then we demand mercy. We are all wired this way, guys.

We are all wired this way, which contributes to our view of life being meaningless and confusing. Verse 14 of Ecclesiastes says, 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.

And I said that this also is vanity. It's meaningless. We look at that, and we see that, and we're just like, no, no, no. This isn't good. This just isn't fair. The reward system on earth is broken, right?

It seems like the cosmic slot machine is paying out to the wrong people. And you know what? It's okay to not be okay with that. It's okay to look at that and say, man, this is unfair.

It's okay to look at that and say, you know what? Man, this isn't right. And embrace and accept the futility of life and see it for what it is. The wrong people do seem to prosper sometimes and get ahead.

[20:46] But here's the thing. We can get fixated on that, and we can get so fixated on that that it just leaves us in despair. It leads us into despair and kind of leaves us there. And to be honest, I think that's why a lot of people today are full of anxiety and depression and dealing with that.

I mean, I want you to think about this, especially the youth for today, man. We live with these, like, maddening headlines flying at us constantly. I mean, it comes at us on social media, on CNN, on Fox News, on all these.

It's just these maddening, crazy headlight. Everything seems unfair all the time. We see unrighteousness and injustice constantly bombarding our brains, and we're left with this, like, hopelessness.

Is this ever going to be fixed? Is everything going to be right? It looks like everything's going to hell in a hat and basket, like, crazy fast. The wrong people seem to be winning. We're destroying each other.

We're destroying our planet. And, guys, if we fixate on that, it'll make you more informed, but it ain't going to make you wise. And here's the tip that the wise live by.

[21:51] The wise find joy in suffering through fixating on God's simple graces. Verse 15, it says this, I commend joy. After going through that whole thing of the unfairness of the righteous deeds being afforded to the wicked and vice versa, he says this, 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.

The false wisdom of this world today, if you think about what's going on, what is commended to us? Is joy commended to us? The headlines flying at us?

Are people wanting us to respond to those things with joy? No. Man, the ethic of today, the call today is outrage. That's what's being commended. Be outraged.

Be angry. Be upset. Look at all the problems and foment. The ethic of our cultural moment is to go beyond just crying out when injustice happens. It's to go looking for it.

[22 : 54] It is to go turn up every possible rock, every possible grave for injustice. We're not even happy with injustice in our day. We got to go back into history to find it and be outraged. And it makes it harder and harder to live in joy and to enjoy anything.

The secular orthodoxy today is huge on asceticism. Asceticism is this idea that if you just inflict pain and deny yourself, it makes you a holy person.

It makes you a more righteous person. Why should I be happy if others can't be? Now, this seems like a very noble axiom to live by. In this day, being joyful has become this unsanctified characteristic.

Something must be wrong with you if you could be happy today. But this is a foolish response to the madness of life. What we are doing is putting ourselves in the impossible place of trying to redeem injustice and pay for it through our own suffering.

Right? This idea of asceticism. And God is saying, guys, don't do that. This writer in Ecclesiastes says, don't do that. That is a fool's errand. It's a total waste of time.

[24 : 02] Rather than do that, enjoy the simple provisional graces of God. If you get three square meals a day, eat them with joy.

Eat them with thankfulness. And don't feel guilty about it. Enjoy his gifts. Don't be guilty. Don't feel guilty about enjoying God's good provisional gifts to you.

There's always this temptation to think, right? I was this way in my teens and 20s when I was super passionate. And you think about, man, why do I get to live the better life when there's poor kids in Africa who are scraping by, you know?

And this is kind of where we get into the territory of the impossible question to answer. You may think, aha, there it is. You don't have all the answers. Your faith is useless.

If you can't have all the answers and dot all your I's and cross every T, your faith is useless. And you know what? I would disagree with you. I'm okay with not having all the answers.

[25 : 06] Are you? But here's my question to you. Does truth require every answer? Sorry. Does truth require that every question be answered?

Because there are many truths that don't have an answer to every question. Take gravity, for instance, right? We know a lot about gravity. We know how it acts.

But if you go and read scientific journals, they don't know why it exists. They can tell you what it does. They can tell you how it does. They can give you experience of how it works.

But none of them can say why it exists. It's one of their top ten things. If you go and Google it, it's like every scientist is like, this is the top ten mysteries of science that we've yet to solve.

We've known about gravity for centuries now. And yet, that little aspect of it, which is a big one, is still a mystery. Yet, who would say, because that question isn't answered, they don't believe in gravity?

[26 : 07] Who would go and jump off a building without a parachute? But so it is with God, guys.

The wise embrace the mystery of God's ways. It says this, Spend time with a four-year-old, and you will realize how little you know.

Right? Usually starts this way. Dad, why is the sky blue? Well, you know, and if you're smart enough and had to pay attention in, like, freshman high school class, science class, you might be able to give an answer.

And you might give them a sufficient answer. But then their curious mind just can't stop there, and they'll ask, well, why? And then you might give them another answer, and they'll ask why again.

And quickly you start to realize how much you don't know. You start to realize how empty your brain is. My poorer kids find the end of my brain a lot sooner than most, I think. But here's the thing.

How many whys has God already answered in your life? How many whys has he given us in the Bible? How many whys has he answered in just this little chapter?

[27 : 29] See, truth needs evidence. Yes. And God gives us plenty of it. He gives us plenty of answers to our whys, but he doesn't have to answer all of them. Not because he can't.

He definitely can't. But because he's revealed enough. Like gravity proves to us, some of the truest truths can be shrouded in mystery. We can choose to stand obstinately in response to that and demand that all our questions be answered before we believe.

But I think that's a foolish response. And I think that is an inconsistent response with how we look at everything else. So Christians in the room, we can do this with our disobedience to God.

I need all my questions answered. I need to know all the outcomes before I follow, before I surrender, before I submit. I need to know all the whys before I obey.

But that isn't faith. The story of Abraham. God called him to do some things he didn't understand at the time. Go and sacrifice your son. Wait a second. If I do that, this is the son through which God's promise is going to come true.

[28 : 42] He didn't stop and say, well, God, I'll go ahead and do that. Can I ask why? Why? No, it said he trusted God. He believed God.

Faith says, God, I don't understand it all, but I trust you. I can't see right now how this is good for me, but I know you are good. And how can we know for sure that God is good, guys?

How can we know? We can because it's been revealed in Jesus. You can go to the Gospels and you see how good God is and how much he's loved you.

If you could have the band come up. I want to ask you this question. What is your relationship with God built on? What is it built on? Are you needing another proof?

Are you needing another sign? Has God not given you enough answers to your whys? Does he need to even go beyond the testimonies we find about Jesus in the Gospel?

[29 : 48] See, faith isn't solely dependent on your mind agreeing with the Gospel message. Now, it's certainly not less than that, but there is a necessary ingredient to our faith, a necessary ingredient to say, you know what, yes, I will trust in you, God.

I don't need all the answers. Because the Gospel, knowing the Gospel is good, but it has to be ratified and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. If you're a skeptic, I don't want you to think faith is an easy change.

I don't believe in easy conversions. Nothing in the Bible shows us that. It takes more than you just being a good Bible student. It takes God, the Holy Spirit, intervening.

And there we find another mystery. We stumble into another mystery. Are we okay with that?

Because faith doesn't work like a formula.

Jesus said the Spirit of God is like the wind. It blows where it wants. The Holy Spirit is sovereign.

We don't get to say some, like, magic incantation and the Holy Spirit is like, oh, I'm forced to respond to that. He blows where he wants.

[30 : 57] You can't chase the wind down. You can't chase the Spirit down. You can't twist the Spirit's arm to get your way. And you can't conjure him up. But there is a posture you can take.

If you are truly interested in truth, I would say, you know what? With all your objections, it's okay.

But if you're honest, if you're an honest seeker, you will earnestly seek Jesus.

And you will trust that, you know, what he says is true. And the only way he can make himself true to you is by his Spirit revealing it to be so. That's my testimony of my life.

I knew the Bible. I grew up in church. I knew a lot of the stories. But then there was one moment where it became very real to me. Everybody else who has faith in Jesus has that same testimony. It became very, very, very real. It was an experience. It was a knowledge that went beyond words.

[32 : 03] It's hard to explain. That was the Apostle Paul's testimony. That's all of us who call Jesus Lord and Savior. That's ours. And, you know, it's as sure as the bread and the cup that we're about to take.

When we come, and as we come to communion today, I want us to challenge us to think about that. Man, we're okay to rest in the mystery of Jesus. Yes, the mystery of Jesus revealed by the Holy Spirit and how he continues to reveal him.

I want to invite you, if you're here and you're not a Christian, I invite you to earnestly pray and ask the Spirit to make the hidden mystery of Jesus revealed. And if you pray that prayer, you don't have to pray it out loud.

You can pray it to yourself. And if something happens, only God can make it happen, and you will know when it happens. Now, I would love to speak with you after the service.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you that you have revealed all that we need to know in Jesus Christ.

[33 : 11] We don't need every question answered to know that you're good. We don't need every question answered to know that you're love or that you're just. to know that our sins are forgiven, to know that we have relationship with you, to know that you are a God who is alive and not silent today.

We thank you for that, Lord. As we come to take communion and we get a tangible expression of Jesus and his sacrifice for us in our place, we're reminded that, Jesus, you came as a man. You stepped into this world. You put on flesh and blood. You spoke. People listened to you. Your disciples followed you. They were friends with you. And that message has carried on from one generation to the next.

And the only way that can work is because you ratified that Holy Spirit. You said that message, that testimony is true. And I pray that you would remind us of that today.

Amen.