

Ecclesiastes 8:12-14

Introduction: Have you ever asked yourself the question, “Why do the wicked prosper while those who try to serve God seem to suffer?” We may not phrase it exactly that way, but many times we ask “why do some people get all the breaks in life?” One of my favorite sayings is “sometimes you’re the bird, but I always feel like the statue.” Life can be pretty frustrating when we don’t have a proper understanding of who God is and how God works. So this morning we want to look at God’s word and draw out some hope for those who are going through difficult times.

Breakdown of the Text:

V. 12: The theme I see in this verse is that God’s justice is slow. Solomon here begins by saying that the sinner does evil “an hundred times” which means their life is characterized by living in sin. Yet Solomon also notes that it seems as though they prosper. People use to say “cheaters never prosper.” That doesn’t seem like the case does it? It seems like if you are going to succeed in politics or sports you have to cheat. I can remember when the steroids scandal broke in baseball and Congress held hearings on it. As a Chicago Cubs fan I can remember Sammy Sosa going up to Washington to testify, and a once loveable, cheerful baseball player forgot how to speak English when he was asked if he used performance enhancing drugs. This was a man who along with Mark McGwire captivated the nation during a summer by both men hitting so many homeruns, but now he had been exposed. In those hearings a man by the name of Rafael Palmeiro wagged his finger at Congress as he said “I have not now nor have I ever used steroids.” Yet it came out just a few weeks later that he had failed a drug test for performance enhancing drugs. These and many others made careers and a lot of money off of cheating, and didn’t pay a fine or spend one night in jail. The nation flew into a rage asking “how can this be?” We look at drunk drivers, serial killers, and drug dealers and we are infuriated because they take the life of countless numbers of people, yet the average sentence for a drunk driver is a suspended license and a fine, if they happen to kill someone on average they spend less than 10 years in prison. When we read these headlines we often ask

“why is God allowing this?” The phrase “neither shall he prolong his days” here is a reference to the fact that God is patient. We also see that in 2 Peter 3:8-9 which says, “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Peter clearly tells us here that God’s timetable is not our timetable and part of the reason that is, is the fact that God is patient and we are not. I heard someone say one time “God is like a crock pot and people are like a microwave.” God’s justice and His plan takes longer, but it is always better for you in the end. Although God could strike a sinner (including Christians who sin) down the very instant they commit a sin, God is patient and He does give people more time and ample opportunities to repent of their sins and turn to faith in Him. And while it may not make sense to us, aren’t you glad that God gave you more than one time of hearing the Gospel before your life ended? I for one am very glad that God doesn’t give me what I deserve! In this verse Solomon is giving assurance to the righteous that they will be fine and that everything will work out. In Genesis 18 Abraham is talking with God and God tells Abraham that because of the sinfulness of Sodom and Gomorrah He is going to destroy the city. Abraham pleads with God. Genesis 18:23 says, “And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” Abraham goes on to ask God if he could find “50 righteous people would God not destroy the city, then Abraham went down to 45 righteous people, then 40 righteous people, then 30, then 20, and finally 10 righteous people.” In His pleading with God for the city Abraham asks this question in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Abraham reached the conclusion that God would do what was right in His sight. Sometimes things don’t make sense to us, but they don’t have to. Isaiah 55 reminds us that God’s ways are not our ways. Our job is to trust that whatever God is doing and whatever He is allowing is part of His plan and that it is for our good as His children. That is what Romans 8:28 reminds us when it says, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.” I know I have said this before but it is worth repeating, please note that this verse doesn’t say that everything is good,

but rather that everything is working for good. Back in Ecclesiastes 8:12 the phrase “fear Him” is not a reference to the fear a slave has towards his master, but rather it is a display of love and obedience. In other words, because I am in awe of God and I love God, then I am going to be obedient to Him. John 14:15 is where Jesus reminds us, “If you love me, keep my commands.” In other words, if you want to prove your love to Christ, then you need to obey Him.

V. 13: The theme I see in this verse is that God’s justice is sure. This verse promises that God’s patience will one day run out. Isaiah 3:11 says, “Woe unto the wicked! *it shall be ill with him*: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” Notice it says “woe to the wicked” and “the reward of his hands shall be given.” Then in James 2:13 we find that when God judges it says “His judgment will be without mercy.” Solomon reminds us that the people’s days are like a shadow which means they are fleeting and they are certain. A shadow will only exist for a certain period of time and then it disappears. The same can be said for our life, we only have it for a certain amount of time and that amount of time is determined by God. James 4:14 reminds us, “For what is your life, it is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” To those who have accepted Christ I would urge you to continue to endure because the pain of this life will not last forever. To those who have not accepted Christ I would urge you to change your ways while there is still time. The phrase “it shall not be well” means that there are great miseries that lay ahead for the wicked. Matthew 25:41 reminds us that those who die without a relationship with Christ will be thrown into the “everlasting fire.” Matthew 13:42 briefly describes that everlasting fire as a place of “wailing and gnashing of teeth” which indicates immense pain and suffering that will last for eternity.

V. 14: Solomon sums up verses 12 and 13 here. On earth it seems as though the wicked get all the breaks, while those who love God and try to do right suffer. The word “vanity” means pointless or unsatisfactory. In this context Solomon clearly means unsatisfactory. He is saying that from our perspective it doesn’t seem right or fair that the wicked seem to have a good life and the righteous suffer. However, Paul reminds us that for those who love God better days are

ahead in 2 Corinthians 4:17 which says, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory.”

Action Steps:

- ✝ **To the unsaved, repent now!** I know you may be thinking “my life is just fine without God in it” and it may seem that way now, but the Word of God is clear that God’s patience and your life is going to run out, and if you die without accepting God’s gift of salvation you will suffer more than you can ever imagine and it will be forever. That may not seem fair to you or you may want to ask how a loving God could do that. The answer is that while God is a God of love, He is also a God of justice and there are consequences to the choices we make. God in His love has given you time to turn to Him. But in His justice, God holds everyone to the same standard, what did you do with My Son?
- ✝ **To the saved, don’t focus on the here and now.** I know it is difficult in this life and it doesn’t seem fair. But I want to ask you the same question Abraham asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Do you trust that God is faithful and will do what He has promised? You may go through a lot in this life. Whoever said that Christians won’t suffer surely didn’t read the book of Job or look at the life of Joseph in the Old Testament or even the life of Christ. But we have a promise from God in 1 Corinthians 2:9, “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” Just hold on a little longer. Jeremy Camp wrote a song that says “there will be a day with no more tears, no more pain, and no more fears, the burdens of this place will be no more, and we’ll see Jesus face to face, but until that day we will hold on to You always.”