

# THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,  
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in  
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

## From The Editor's Desk

THE COMMON drudgery of daily life can be a Divine Calling. We often speak of a brother as "being called to the ministry"; or people to mission work or whatever, but it is also fitting to speak of a carpenter being called to the bench, a mechanic to his workshop, a farm worker to milk cows or drive machinery to bring it closer to us. "Brethren," said the Apostle, "let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God." We find those words in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 20 and 24.

Remember that our life has been appointed by God's wise providence. God sent Joseph just as much to the drudgery and discipline of the prison as to the glory and responsibility of the palace and we may note that the glory did not come first but the drudgery and discipline did.

Nothing happens to us which is not included in His plan for us; and those things which seem most tiresome are often contrived to give us opportunities to become nobler, stronger characters.

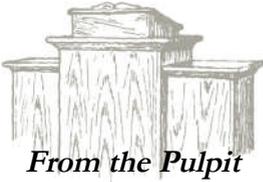
We are called to be faithful in performing our assigned duties. Not brilliance, not success, not notoriety which attracts the world's notice, but the regular, quiet, and careful performance of trivial and common duties; faithfulness in that which is least is as great an attainment in God's sight as in the greatest of achievements.

In every piece of honest work, however irksome, laborious, and commonplace, we are fellow-workers with God. We must help God to give men their daily bread. It is for Him to cause the growth of the crops and so forth, but man must reap and thresh, grind out the flour, make and distribute the bread.

The tailor is God's fellow-workman, helping Him to clothe the bodies which He has made to need garments of various textures. The builder cooperates with God in housing His children. The merchants help to bring the products of many countries to other countries to refresh and enrich the toiling masses of humanity. Many other people unknown to us but known to God attend to things that help or enable us to get from place to place to do God's work God uses man in a thousand ways to serve the children of men, it is part of advancing the Kingdom of God.

How do we see ourselves as serving God in the place where He has placed us and do we serve without complaint?

*J.v.L.*



*Number 8 of 12 expository messages from:  
The Book of Ecclesiastes by:  
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## Who Is in Charge Here?

We are looking again at the book of Ecclesiastes the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter if you would turn there please. You will find the book of Ecclesiastes in the section of the Bible that we call wisdom literature, wisdom literature is usually considered to be the Book of Job, the Book of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

Wisdom literature is here for a reason, God has placed these books and this book particularly that we are studying this morning in his Holy Scripture for our benefit. Now many times the book of Ecclesiastes in particular has been misused and misinterpreted and misapplied but that does not change the fact that God superintended the writing of his word so that we would have his word today.

Let's read Ecclesiastes chapter 8.

**Ecclesiastes 8:1-17** 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. <sup>2</sup> I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. <sup>3</sup> Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. <sup>4</sup> For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" <sup>5</sup> Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. <sup>6</sup> For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. <sup>7</sup> For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of

man is fully set to do evil. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> And 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. <sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> 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.

May God bless the reading of His word.

In the introduction to this passage, verse 1, we see the writer asking some rhetorical questions, Who is like the wise? Who knows the interpretation of a thing?

So who really is wise, what does wisdom look like in our lives?

Well we will try to answer that question this morning and in the rest of this chapter we will find the answer to who is like the wise.

And who knows the interpretation of a thing, who knows what it is supposed to mean? This is a more difficult question and this question brought me to a little bit of an aside and I hope you will give me a little liberty to share with you today because I came to this text as I have come to the whole book of Ecclesiastes with some trepidation.

As I said before this book is often misinterpreted, it is often misused, it is a difficult piece of literature, it is difficult in a number of ways one of the ways that it is difficult is that the text is not abundantly clear and there are nuances here that are translated different ways and so who does really know what it means, who does really know what it is saying?

This got me to thinking about this whole exercise, this whole responsibility that I have in proclaiming the word of God to you and in giving you the

sense of it, the interpretation of it. This task of proclaiming the word of God is a weighty task, it is a task that is heavy with responsibility, it is the task of feeding the sheep, feeding a flock as an under-shepherd and it is a responsibility that I take seriously and all of the brothers here take seriously. This is a task that requires wisdom, a task that requires humility.

And even though it is a difficult, sometimes, and a weighty matter at all times, it is something that we take great joy in, it is something that I personally enjoy. Sometimes the study of texts like this at first glance seems kind of hard, kind of fraught with all kinds of potential peril but in the end even the study for and preparation for a sermon is in itself a joyful experience many times.

But one of the things that I must come back to time and time and again that we all must come back to is the fact that we must depend on God for this, we must depend on God to give us wisdom, we must depend on God to give us interpretation the sense of it.

Another thing we must depend on, the one that requires humility, the one that requires even further humility than just depending on God, is the fact that we must depend on other men.

You see I cannot read Hebrew which is what this book was written in, I'm not fluent in that language, I recognise a few Hebrew characters and so forth but as far as language itself I am dependent on other men to tell me what this text says.

Now one of the solutions to that dilemma might be for me to learn Hebrew and I would be glad to do that, to have the opportunity to do that would be a delight, but I would still need to rely on other men because then I would need to know okay so what does this Hebrew word mean, what did it mean to the readers of Ecclesiastes when it was first written? Unless I grew up in a culture and a time much like this I would still need to rely on other men to tell me what it does mean. So I cannot get away from it.

Another thing that we must remember in terms of wisdom and interpretation is that the preacher must be affected, he must be affected by the text. And this is probably where the most difficulty and most joy comes from when we wrestle with this ourselves and when we realise that this is God

speaking not just to his people generally but this is God speaking to me, this is God speaking affecting my heart, my behaviour, my judgement. So this is a weighty task it is something that requires a lot preparation. So I would just ask you as a congregation to pray for us as we preach, pray for us as we prepare to preach, this is something we cannot do by ourselves, we depend on God, we depend on other men, we depend on you. So pray particularly that God would grant humility, that God would grant discernment and that God would grant joy.

Another thing you can do is to come prepared, study yourself, come along with us as we go on this journey through the text you can help in this by reading the text ahead of time, if you know for example that we are going to be studying from the Book of Ecclesiastes for a period of time you should make it a practice to read the whole book probably more than once. Right now Brother James is preaching through Galatians he is nearing the end of it, it would be good practice for you to read the book of Galatians, it doesn't take that long to read it at one sitting but come along with us both before the preaching and during the preaching.

One of the ways you can come along during the preaching is that you can take notes, now that isn't for everybody I understand, some people find that distracting and if you are one of those people that find it distracting then find some other way to come along, but stay with us, try to follow the flow of the passage of the text we are dealing with and make some notes to yourself about particular application to your life.

These are ways that together we can come to be wise that we can come to know the interpretation of a thing.

With that in mind let's bow our heads and pray now for God to teach us as we study the rest of this text.

Let's pray.

Father God we come before you with a sense of need, a sense of humility, we recognise that we depend on you, we depend on you to teach us, we depend on your wisdom, we depend on each other, so teach us today Father as we lean on you may you speak through your word to us today, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Now verse 1 goes on to tell us how we can tell who is wise and who is not, and man's face is changed, wisdom makes his face shine and the hardness of his face is changed.

A wise person ought to be recognised as someone who has a subtle peace and joy, someone whose hold on the truth is one of gentleness much like Jesus who came full of grace and truth.

A wise person is a person whose confidence goes much further than himself, as a matter-of-fact the wise person's confidence is not even in himself, a wise person's confidence will be in God and that will come out in the life, that will come out even in the countenance in the face.

So how do we become wise?

The answer from the book of Ecclesiastes is that we must understand our place in the world, we must understand our position in the world, we must understand that God is sovereign and we are not, we must submit to that God.

The term "fear of God" comes up time and time again here in the book of Ecclesiastes, it simply means to submit to God, to live in reverence, to live in that acknowledgement that God is in charge, God is in control.

And so I ask the question this morning, Who is in charge?

And we know what the right answer to that question is I've already given you the right answer, who is in charge? God is.

Yes we know that.

There is a problem, a big, big problem, and that is that we want to be in charge! That really is at the root of our sinfulness, that is at the root of what happened in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and it is still today the kind of root of all of our sins, we want to be in charge, we don't want anybody else telling us what to do, I can do it myself is the attitude that we carry with us as our default setting.

And so the question comes to us again, Who is in charge here? Are you in charge?

Well the wise person understands the answer to this question and the wise person who wrote Ecclesiastes will give us an answer to this question in two ways in two sections here in this book.

So we will have the first answer we will find it in verses 2 through 9, who's in charge here? The authority that is designated by God, earthly authority, kings, governments, that's who is in charge.

Now obviously that authority exists under God, we know that, but it doesn't deny the fact that government exists as an authority they are in charge, the king is in charge. Now this might offend some of our American sensibilities we don't like it very much especially when we don't like our government very much but it doesn't change the reality.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> section that we will deal with in verses 10 through 14 kind of asks the question again, Who is really in charge here? And the answer to that question is God.

And then in the last couple of verses we will see what a wise response to these questions is, humility before God and before human authority.

So who's in charge here? Well verse 2 says obey the king, that implies that somebody else is in charge and it is not you it's the king, the king is in charge so you must obey him but why, why would you obey the king?

Well the answer is right here because of God's oath to him or because he is God's king, God has put him in place, the Scripture tells us this in other places that God sets up kings and He takes down kings.

Romans 13, if you want to turn there, is a good commentary on Ecclesiastes chapter 8, probably the apostle Paul had this in mind when he wrote it where he says in Romans 13 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. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists what God has appointed and those that resist will incur judgement. [Romans 13:1-2](#).

Skipping down to verse 4, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain for he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes for the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing. [Romans 13:4-6](#).

So we obey the King because the King is an appointed authority by God.

Now the phrase here in Ecclesiastes 8 “God’s oath to him” could also be translated because of your oath to God, so this could go either way, again I am kind of showing you some of the difficulties of the text here, either the king has an oath to God or you have an oath to God but either way it doesn’t change the overall meaning here, the king and you are under authority, the authority that God has designed, the authority that God has appointed, the king is that authority.

So we obey the king because God has put him in place because God is designated this authority.

We don’t, notice this, we don’t obey the king because he is right because he is the best king there ever was, because he doesn’t make any mistakes, because he does what we want him to do. No, we obey the king because he is God’s king, he is God’s authority that has been put in place.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reason we obey the king is found here in verse 3 and 4.

We obey the King, this is quite pragmatic actually, we obey the king because he is more powerful than us. So if we get into this contest with the king he is going to win it is just the way it’s going to be okay? The king carries with him a sense of force he has the ability to compel you to do something and if you don’t do it eventually he will kill you. That is the extent of the king’s authority over you however we will find out little later the king can do no more than kill you but that is the kind of force we are dealing with.

The king can do as he pleases, verse 3 he does whatever he pleases for the word of the king is supreme, that is he’s got the last word in terms of earthly things, earthly government. And so for us to say in a kind of a taunting way, ha what are you doing that for? Is really kind of dangerous, kind of pointless, he is going to do what he is going to do, the king is going to do what he is going to do so it is better for us to obey.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> reason we obey the king I’ve already alluded to it will go better for you if you submit yourself to earthly authority it will go better for you, if you resist things get harder we all know that, we’ve probably faced that in various ways when we have failed to obey the king.

Maybe we exceeded the speed limit, maybe we forgot to file our taxes on time, maybe, maybe we didn’t ask for or get a permit and we thought well

we will see if this'll sneak by. And then the law comes and says, no, you must do this or you must pay this or you must suffer this punishment. So it goes better for us if we obey the king, things work better if we submit to earthly authority.

Now we are talking about the king here and that is the application-specific to the text but I think we can expand that the principle here. The king is not the only authority God has placed over us in terms of the authority of men there are other authorities in our lives and I think the same principles applied to them, it goes better if we humble ourselves and submit to the authority that God places in our life.

So we must obey the king, that is pretty straightforward but pretty hard for us to do sometimes.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing we must do is we must trust God with the King, trust God with the King.

Why would we do that?

We've already noted that we are supposed to obey the king even when the king isn't a good king, even when the king doesn't do what we think he ought to do we are still called to obey him. The only way we can do that is if we trust God with the king, we trust that God knows what He's doing, God has established his authority, God knows that the king is not a good king, God knows that it is hard for us but we must trust God with the king. Why? Because God has the proper time and place for everything.

God has a proper time and place for everything and that includes the king, God sets up kings, he takes down kings, there is a time and place for everything that extends to even the king, the government, the authorities.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reason we must trust God with the king is because we cannot see the whole picture.

It says here we don't even know what tomorrow brings, we don't know what is going to happen in the future, nobody does not even the king, but God does. And so we can trust God with even the King even our authorities.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> reason we must trust God with the king is because as we see in verse 9 as long as men are in authority over men there is potential for abuse so look to God, not to man, look to God for the solution to our problems.

You see it is easy for us to place our trust and our confidence in man and in government and in all kinds of authorities, earthly authorities, we think if we can only get this sorted out if we could only get the right man elected for President or Senator or Governor or county supervisor or school board member, whatever, if we can get the right person in there then our problems will be solved. Wrong! No that's not how it works.

Because you see when men rule over men there is potential for abuse because men are not God and men like all of us have a propensity to want to be in charge and to not surrender to God, to not live in obedience to God. And so the king, Solomon here, recognises that when man has power over man it brings hurt so we must look to God not to men for the solution to our problems.

Now some practical application for this section.

We find first in verse 3 don't be hasty in changing allegiance, don't be hasty in leaving the presence of the king, don't be hasty in saying you know this authority is not good I'm going to find another authority, I'm going to erect an alternative authority. No don't be hasty, don't be quick because as we have already said man-made authority or authority of men is all going to be subject to potential abuse and problem and so if you are hasty in changing allegiances you're likely be trading one problem for another, you'll likely find that when you get to the new king he's got some issues too, even if you yourself are king, even if you say you know what I'm not going to obey any king, I'm not going to obey any earthly authority of men, I'm going to be king.

Guess what? You are still going to have problems, you're still going to be your own worst enemy.

It's just the way it works, so don't be hasty in changing allegiances.

Secondly it says in verse 3 don't jump on the conspiracy bandwagon, don't jump on the revolution bandwagon, don't go with those who plot to overthrow the king, don't be quick to join an evil cause it says.

Now this is one step further than what we just talked about, this is one step further than just changing allegiances this is actually being active in trying to overthrow authority, this is rebellion pure and simple.

It's what we like to do, it is how we deal with authority generally in our fallen state, we rebel.

Now the reason given for not doing this, it is a reason here, the reason is that we don't know enough, we don't have the full picture, we don't know what the future holds, how are we to know whether this authority that we are rebelling against is God's rightful authority or not, how are we to know that our proposal or our attempt is going to be more successful or better in the grand scheme of things, we don't. We don't know. The king himself doesn't know.

So let's not be quick to jump on the bandwagon to side with it an evil cause or a cause that is against authority.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> practical consideration here is that those who live by the sword die by the sword.

Those who live trusting their welfare, trusting their goodness to government will be beholden to government. You put your confidence in the authority of men you will suffer the results.

You see here it says there is no discharge from war.

If you are in the army and there is active combat going on they are not going to let you say, guess what I would like to go home now.

No, the battle is raging you've got to stay you will be constrained to stay; there is no bailing out when the going gets tough. It's not the way it works we will see here in a moment that's not the way it works with wickedness either, you can't just say okay am going to do my own thing and then do your own thing brings hurt on you and you say, oh sorry, no, I'm going to do something else now.

No you suffer the consequences, you deal with the consequences.

So who is really in charge here? Well for sure it isn't you and for sure it isn't me and it isn't even ultimately the king.

You see you can't really control much of anything, he tells us that here in verse 8, and here again it is another place where the context in the translation is apt to be taken a couple of different ways, no man has power to retain the spirit. Now that word translated spirit there evidently from what I'm told can be translated wind or spirit, it is a similar word in the Hebrew, my thinking is that it makes the most sense for it to be wind in this context.

The reason why think that is because if you look at the next phrase here it is actually making a kind of a logical comparison here, so no man has power to retain the spirit or power over the day of death, so if we use the

word spirit there we are basically saying that both saying the same thing on both sides of the (word) but if we use the word wind in the first instance as compared to our lack of ability to have power over death then it makes more sense. So no man has power over the wind or over the time of this death, the time when his spirit leaves the body.

Now we know that we talk a lot about the weather it is something that comes up in conversation but none of us can control the weather, not one of us.

Now I have a friend of mine who is a meteorologist and sometimes jokingly some of us kind of ask him if he will just kind of tweak things a little for us, but he can't control either all he can do is report and project but he cannot stop the wind any more than you or I can. We are at the mercy of the weather.

How many of us have had some great plans some great idea about what we are going to do and the weather got in the way? It happens.

So if we cannot control that then it should stand to reason that we cannot control the spirit, the wind that is in us, either in terms of when we will die, we don't have power over the day of death, so we cannot control the important stuff of life like the weather and when we will die it is not something that is in our domain.

Neither do we have the ability to avoid the results of our choices.

You see God has said the soul that sinneth it shall die. There is cause and effect going on here.

The same way that it says in verse 8 there is no discharge from war, you enter the war, you sign up you're in and you're not just going to get to come home whenever you jolly well please.

You go down the wicked path, you choose wickedness over righteousness you are going to pay, that's what God says, right.

[Isaiah 3:10-11](#), Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds. <sup>11</sup> Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him.

This is the law of God; this is how it works, except when it doesn't.

Why doesn't it look like this in real life? Why doesn't it always work this way? That is the question that we deal with here, it looks like nobody is in

charge because bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people, if somebody was in charge surely this would not be happening.

But you see here the wicked people they even thumb their nose at God by trampling on sacred stuff, they go into the holy places of the Temple and they just make sacrilege of it and they escape without being struck dead and they die and are buried and people hold a big funeral and say how good people they were or they forget depending on your translation, again one of these places where it depends on how you nuance the Hebrew, but in any case people can thumb their nose at God, for a while at least it seems to us, and apparently nothing bad happens to them and so the commitment of the evil becomes even more entrenched.

We see that happening when the sentence against an evil deed is not carried out promptly, people say, we say oh that wasn't so bad, nothing bad happened to me must be okay let me do it some more.

What we have done in that case is we have presumed upon the grace and mercy of God and we have sunk even lower into depravity.

We should rather see this as the exception, it is the mercy of God to us, [2 Peter 3:15](#) he says this patience of God is our salvation.

So aren't you glad that God doesn't judge sin like we think he ought to judge sin, aren't you glad?

Now be honest with yourself aren't you glad that God did not punish you this week in your sin that you committed this week.

Remember the soul that sinneth it shall die. But we are here God did not strike us dead. If we are honest with ourselves we will realise that in some way this past week we all have sinned, most likely, some small ways or great, doesn't matter we are here, we have so far escaped the righteous judgement and wrath of God. For some of us that sin might have been lust, for some of us it might have been pride or lying or bitterness or God forbid, gluttony on Thursday. But we are here.

So what is missing here? What is missing in our understanding when we see this contradiction?

Well what is necessary is faith and fear of God, faith in God and fear of God are required in order for us to be even able to understand this.

The Psalm that was read said this is difficult, this is hard for me to understand how this works because I see the righteous suffering and the wicked prospering. And I can't understand it. And he says in verse 16 but when I thought how to understand this it seemed to me a wearisome task, I just couldn't figure it out until, he says in verse 17, until I went into the sanctuary of God then, then I figured it out, then I discerned their end. ([Psalm 73](#)).

So we must have this fear of God that he talks about here in verse 12 of Ecclesiastes 8, we must believe that the way things seem to work under the sun is not the way things ultimately end up that there will be a day of reckoning, there will be a day of judgement and justice for God will set everything to rights again.

Takes faith, takes a fear of God to believe that.

There is an end coming and it is talked about here in the terms of a shadow. Now we know how shadows work right, did you ever try to catch your shadow, you move and the shadow keeps moving further and further you cannot catch your shadow and when the sun starts to set your shadow gets longer and longer and longer but it says here that is not the way it's always going to be because when the sun does finally set and there is no more light the shadow is gone, just like that.

And so there is an end coming God will set things to rights again and which side will you be on, which side of the equation will you be on? Will you be on the side of those I am in charge, I'm going to deal with it, I'm going to go do what I want to do or are you going to be on God's side?

Our only hope, our only hope in the light of this in the face of this our only hope is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ the righteous the one who experienced this upside down reality.

Remember Jesus Christ the righteous what happened to him? His life was cut short at age 33; He was hung on a tree with criminals.

It is not the way it is supposed to work, good people are supposed to get good things, bad people get bad things.

Jesus was the best person there ever was and what did He get? Crucifixion on a tree in the midst of criminals!

That's not the end of the story though He got the resurrection, God did come and set things to rights but in the moment that time of suffering and death if it was you or I standing there looking at that tree what would we say, what would we think? Would our hopes be dashed, would our trust and confidence that God knew what He was doing be destroyed? This is why we must have faith and fear in God.

This God who came to our planet to endure the vanity of our world, who suffered and died, the righteous for the unrighteous, He is our only hope because all of us are unrighteous, all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God and if we are going to escape the way things are the wrath of God against wickedness, the only way, the only way is to trust in him.

What must be our response to all of this?

Well the writer of Ecclesiastes says this is what I recommend to you, verse 15, I commend joy.

Now isn't that a strange thing to recommend in the face of what we have been talking about, I recommend joy, enjoy eating and drinking, enjoy life and work under the sun because this is what God has given you.

Again this goes back to the fear of God, remember the demeanour of a wise person, what is a wise person look like? They are person who is at peace, a person who is content, a person who is joyful, a person who understands a gentle enjoyment of God's gifts in this life and hope in the life to come.

That is a wise person.

Now it must be clear to us that this is not an obnoxious abuse of God's gifts that gives way to licentiousness that says okay I'm going to do whatever I jolly well please I'm going to live it up!

No this is not what he is talking about here, he is talking about a settled confidence and faith in God that allows us to enjoy the little things in life, that allows us to find joy and enjoyment in even the mundane even the ordinary because we know it is a gift from God and we know that God will figure it all out in the end.

But neither is this fatalism where nothing really matters beyond right now and nothing that I do has any effect in the world.

No it is not that either, this is a confident trusting in God that shapes us, that moulds us, that changes us, that changes even our face our countenance as it says in verse one.

And so we need to be wise enough, humble enough to realise that we won't be able to figure it all out, it is not going to happen, even the wisest person in all the earth couldn't figure it all out.

Now does that mean we shouldn't try? No I don't think so, but it means that we should try with humility, that we should come recognising you know that some of this is just going to be beyond us and that's okay, I don't have to have it all figured out because I know the person the one who does have it all figured out and that makes all the difference.

Life under the sun won't always make sense because our perspective is limited.

Now a word of warning here in the last verse even though a wise man claims to know he cannot find it out.

So if someone comes claiming to have figured out, if someone comes claiming to know the answer the solution to have it all figured out, watch out be careful! Don't be too hasty! Especially when that person is questioning authority, don't be too hasty because the wisest man cannot figure it out. Usually a little knowledge is dangerous. A wise person knows that he doesn't know, a wise person knows that he doesn't understand perfectly.

So in conclusion what are we to do, how are we to live in light of this "who is in charge?" You or King Jesus?

We are to surrender to King Jesus, we are to surrender to his authority, to live wisely under human authority.

The life of the child of the King should be one characterised by a peaceful and resolute rest in the King, confidence in the King, King Jesus.

We should see and experience confidence in the face of confusion.

We should see and experience peace in the face of conflict.

We should see and experience humility in the face of knowledge.

Not because we are so good, not because we are so wise, not because we are so smart but because the only one who endured the vanity of human ex-

istence under the sun and responded perfectly that one, Jesus Christ, the only one who can justly change the verdict for our sinfulness from guilty as charged to therefore there is now no condemnation.

The only One who will come again to judge the living and the dead.

The only One who can set all to rights again is King Jesus, it is He we must trust, we must obey, we must surrender to, and that includes surrendering to his designated authority even when that authority is wrong, imperfect, not very helpful, we surrender to that authority with the only caveat as the apostle said when that authority that is designated by God himself requires us to do something that contradicts the higher authority of God.

We have to remember who is King of who now and we must remember to trust God with the King, trust God with the King but that does not eliminate or do away with our need to obey the King.

So how about you? Who is in charge? You or God?

Let's pray.

Father in heaven we thank you for your word to us it is sharp it is powerful, it discerns the thoughts and intentions of our heart and today we are confronted with the reality that you are in control, that you are the ultimate authority and that you have designated other authorities in our world and so we are called to surrender, we are called to obey. Father you know that this is difficult for us it goes against our natural inclinations and we pray that you would work in our hearts and our experience so that we would be wise.

Most of all we pray that you would through your Holy Spirit work in our hearts so that we would surrender to you, so we would trust you completely to take care of our sin problem even in this very problem of wanting our independence, we must trust you with this, we recognise that this morning.

And so guide us as we go from this place as we interact with earthly authorities this week and next, as we interact with you and your word.

May we be people who are wise, people who love you and fear you, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.



## THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

The peaceable kingdom is the kingdom where Christ reigns supreme. "And his name shall be called ... The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). People who have accepted Christ as their Savior and have joined themselves to His visible body are within this kingdom. To live within the kingdom of Christ will profoundly affect all believers. Their aims and values will be surrendered unto Him, and His ways are accepted as their own. He is truly their King.

This study should awaken us to the fact that our personal witness influences the way the world views Christ's kingdom. Individual faithfulness adorns the doctrine of Christ. Unfaithfulness not only places a shadow on our own lives, but also tarnishes the beauty of His kingdom.

The call of Scripture is very clear: See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:15, and we can see in the account from John's gospel how Jesus responded to the evil done to Him especially after His being taken before the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman Governor Pilate. After Jesus admonished Peter for resorting to violence in a misguided effort to defend His Lord the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. (John 18:12-14)

What followed was an attempt by the Jewish leaders to belittle Jesus and justify their actions but it did not get them far at all,

John 18:18-24: Jesus answered them with the unassailable truth, He said: "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret."<sup>21</sup> Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."<sup>22</sup> When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" They had no answer for Him so Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

The Jewish leaders were determined to get rid of Jesus from their midst as He had become a thorn in their side and saw as a challenge to their authority and their relationship with the Romans and thus in an effort to have someone else deal with this problem Jesus was brought before Pilate and what transpired there is well documented in Scripture – evil seemed to triumph because Jesus did not fight it as He so easily could have but rather submitted to all that transpired and in the fulness of time through much suffering defeated the forces of evil on our behalf, forces we could never defeat in our own strength.

The opposition He faced was without reason. All the good that He had done in life was forgotten. His accusers were unreasonable, and His followers were in confusion. His disciples wondered what should be done. It seemed that all was lost.

The way Peter responded is too often the way we respond. We try to find answers and solutions by our own might. Force is used to accomplish what we feel is right. People are hurt and feelings are aroused. The situation becomes worse instead of better. Peter's reaction was true to human nature, but Jesus pointed him to submission to God's will. "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" And then Jesus reached out in love and healing to the very ones that were against Him.

Jesus spoke of the openness of His life. A true believer will endeavor to follow His example in this. Christian witness is easiest to understand when it is a natural, open expression coming from a heart that is Christ-like.

The source of a Christian's strength is hidden from the world. In John 3:8, Jesus likened it to the wind. The effect is seen, but not the wind. That hidden strength is at times misunderstood by the world and may bring opposition.

The kingdom we belong to is not an earthly one. Our strength is not in the arm of flesh. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. His work is a work of love. His response is not of self-defense, but His approach is one of love. We are to follow His example. The strength to follow will be found in submission to God's will. Then, when faced with extreme tests that could cause us to rise up in our own defense, we are able to remain calm and at peace. Our witness remains clear.

Yet we tremble when we read of the way Jesus was tested. It would be beyond human ability to face the crown of thorns, the mockery, and the cross.

Our hope is found in the intercessory prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17. He knew we would be unable to overcome alone, and for that reason He prayed that the Father would keep us in the hour of trial.

We are reminded through the life and suffering of Jesus that many of our tests come in common, everyday occurrences. They are in areas of kindness, humility, and honesty. How do we respond to an unkind remark? The Bible says, "A soft answer turns away wrath: but a harsh word stirs up anger" Proverbs 15:1. God is able to use us so much better when we are humble. Humility goes far in promoting peaceful relations with our fellowmen. Honesty is expected of a Christian and helps us to live without offense.

God has a refuge of peace where He wants us to live, yet it often eludes us. Instead we feel the unrest and trouble of the world in which we live. In spite of the effort and money spent by many to find peace, the reality seems farther away than ever. Where is the answer?

Answers can be found in God's Word. Jesus' life gives the supreme example of the doctrine of peace. We need only to follow His example. Our witness depends on obedience and faithfulness to that example. The doctrine of peace is not easily understood through human reasoning. It is much easier to grasp by observing a true believer's daily life. Proof of our walk with Christ is the grace to live at peace with ourselves and others.

Living in the peaceable kingdom enables the believer to make proper decisions in life. His choices are not influenced by the baggage of guilt or resentment. He is able to respond to the situations of life with a clear heart and an open mind.

In contrast, a life lived without peace also produces fruit. The furrowed brow, the flash of anger, and feelings of ill will are noted frequently. Troubled homes are seen all around. The grace of God to live at peace is missing. People with restless hearts too often look to human reasoning for answers. Worldly counselors and self-help books are consulted. Sometimes medication is prescribed. The world seeks ways to mimic the quietness of heart that God has for His children.

Another area that deserves attention is the doctrine of nonresistance. Our peace witness is brought to the forefront in a very real way during a time of

war or civil strife. The specter of being brought before the rulers to answer for our faith brings an earnest search to each heart. In such times, a proper understanding of the biblical basis for our faith is imperative. Much can also be learned by a study of the writings of church fathers on the subject.

The grace to overcome in these major tests is maintained by obedience in everyday Christian living. Whether these everyday battles are won or lost will determine our overall victory in Christian life. Through them our witness is either kept or lost. Small losses are not obvious to others, but they are felt in the soul where the battle was fought. In contrast, small, unnoticed victories give grace to overcome in the next test, whether great or small.

As Christians we have opportunities in our life to witness for the peaceable kingdom and the call in Romans 12:18 calls us if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. That “all” means exactly what it says, it is everyone whom we have contact with irrespective of whether they are a brother or sister in the Lord, our neighbour, the person whom we meet when shopping, travelling, or wherever we find ourselves in life but the test really comes when it is the person we consider an enemy or who considers us their enemy.

Where then is our demonstration of our commitment to Jesus Christ and His peaceable Kingdom?

We have to daily remind ourselves that we believe what Jesus teaches and then commit ourselves to follow that teaching irrespective of our personal opinions.



George MacDonald's life (1824-1905) spanned the greater part of the nineteenth century. He was a devout Scotsman, drawn to the ministry and studied toward that end. But after a brief stay in the pulpit, his warm, human, imaginative and progressive ideas were increasingly found to be unorthodox according to the rigid and backward standards of the religious establishment of his day, and he was forced to leave it. He thus turned to writing; and in the following forty-two years of his active writing career, the enormity of his output was staggering. In all his writing scriptural truths are brought forth the greatest of all being the need to obey lest we hear those dreadful final words of rejection by Jesus, Matthew 7:21-23.

May we all draw inspiration for our personal relationship with Jesus Christ from the following excerpts “*JESUS THE KING*” and “*WHO IS CHRIST? WHAT AM I DOING AS A RESULT?*” are used by permission from the edited works of George MacDonald by Michael Phillips in his compiled book “Discovering the Character of God”



***JESUS THE KING:*** King by His Essential Being

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” John 1:49  
Consider also John 18:36-37 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

Pilate asks Jesus if He is a king. The question is called forth by what the Lord had just said concerning his kingdom, closing with the statement that it was not of this world. He now answers Pilate that He is a king indeed, but shows him that his kingdom is of a very different kind from what is called kingdom in this world.

The rank and rule of this world are uninteresting to him as they should be to us as his followers.

He might have had them. With his disciples to follow him and twelve legions of angels to help them, He might soon have driven the Romans into the abyss. What would have been easier for him than to have thus cleared the way and then reigned over the world as the just monarch that was the dream of the Jews? He might from Jerusalem have ruled the world, not merely dispensing what men call justice, but compelling atonement.

But He did not care for government. No such kingdom would serve the ends of his Father in heaven, or comfort his own soul. What was the perfect empire to the Son of God, when he might teach one human being to love his neighbour and be good like his Father!

To be a love-helper to one heart, for its joy, and the glory of his Father was the beginning of true kingship! The Lord would rather wash the feet of his weary brothers than be the one only perfect monarch that ever ruled the world.

It was empire He rejected when He ordered Satan behind him like a dog to his heel.

Government, I repeat, was to him flat, stale, unprofitable.

What then is the kingdom over which the Lord cares to reign, for He says he came into the world to be a king? I answer, a kingdom of kings, and no other. Where every man is a king, there and there only does the Lord care to reign, in the name of his Father. The Lord cares for no kingdom over anything this world calls a nation. A king must rule over his own kind. Jesus is a king in virtue of no conquest, inheritance, or election, but in right of his essential being. His subjects must be of his own kind, in their very nature and essence kings.

The Lord's is a kingdom in which no man seeks to be above another: ambition is of the dirt of this world's kingdoms. He says, "I am a king, for I was born for the purpose of bearing witness to the truth." Thereupon Pilate—as would most Christians nowadays—instead of setting about being true, requests a definition of truth, a presentation to his intellect in set terms of what the word "true" means.

Whatever interpretations we put on Pilate's action, he must be far less to be blamed than those "Christians" who, instead of setting themselves to be pure "even as He is pure," to be their brother and sister's keeper, and to serve God by being honourable in shop and office and labour market, proceed to "serve" him, as they would call it, by going to church, some by condemning the opinions of their neighbours, and some by teaching others what they do not themselves heed.

Neither Pilate nor they ask the one true question, How am I to be a true man? How am I to become a man or woman worth bearing the name?

The Lord is a king because his life, the life of his thoughts, of his imagination, of his will, of every smallest action, is true—true first to God in that He is altogether his, true to himself in that He forgets himself altogether, and true to his fellows in that He will endure anything they do to him without ceasing to declare himself the Son and messenger and likeness of God.

They will kill him, but it matters not: the truth is as He says!

Bearing Witness to the Truth

Jesus is a king because his business is to bear witness to the truth: all truth; all verity of relation throughout the universe—first of all, that his Father is good, perfectly good, and that the crown and joy of life is to desire and do the will of the eternal source of will and of all life.

He deals thus the death blow to the power of hell. For the one principle of hell is, "I am my own. I am my own king and my own subject. I am the centre from which go out my thoughts. I am the object and end of my thoughts. My own glory is my chief care; my ambition to gather the regards of men to myself. My pleasure is my pleasure. My right is what I desire. I will be free with the freedom that consists in doing whatever I am inclined to do. To do my own will, so long as I feel anything to be my will, is to be free, is to live."

To all these principles of hell, or of this world—they are the same thing, and it matters not whether they are actually said or defended so long as they are acted upon—the Lord, the King, gives the direct lie.

It is as if he said: "My perfect freedom, my pure individuality, rests on the fact that I have no other will than my Father's. My will is all for his will, for his will is right. He is righteousness itself. His very being is love and equity and self-devotion, and he will have his children such as himself—creatures of love, of fairness, of self-devotion to him and their fellows. I was born to bear witness to the truth—in my own person to be the truth visible, the very likeness and manifestation of the God who is true. My very being is his witness. Every fact of me witnesses him. He is the truth, and I am the truth."

Remember, friends, I said, "It is as if he said." I am daring to present a shadow of the Lord's witnessing. If I mistake, He will forgive me. I do not fear him; I fear only lest, able to see and write these things, I should fail of witnessing to them, and be, after all, no king but a talker, no disciple of Jesus, ready to go with him to the death, but an arguer about the truth, and not a doer of the Word.

We see, then, that the Lord bore his witness to the Truth, to the one God, by standing as just what He was before the eyes and lies of men. The true king is the man who stands up as a true man and speaks the truth, and will die but not lie. The robes of such a king may be rags or purple; it matters neither way. The rags are the more likely, but neither better nor worse than the robes. Of the men who before Christ bore witness to the truth, some were sawn asunder, some subdued kingdoms. It matters nothing which; they witnessed.

The truth is God; the witness to the truth is Jesus. The kingdom of the truth is the hearts of men. The bliss of men is the true God. The thought of God is the truth of everything. All well-being lies in true relation to God. The

man who responds to this with his whole being is of the truth. The man who knows these things, but merely knows them in his head; the man who sees them to be true, and does not order life and action, judgment and love by them, is of the worst of lying.

Little thought the sons of Zebedee and their ambitious mother what the earthly throne of Christ's glory was which they and she begged they might share. For the king witnessed to the height of his uttermost argument when He hung upon the cross. Infinitely more than had He sat on the throne of the whole earth, did Jesus witness to the truth when' Pilate brought him out for the last time, saying, "Behold your king!" Just because of those robes and that crown, that sceptre and that throne of ridicule, He was the only real king that ever sat on any throne.

Is every Christian expected to bear witness? A man content to bear no witness to the truth is not in the kingdom of heaven: One who believes must bear witness. One who sees the truth must live witnessing truth. Is our life, then, a witnessing to the truth? Do we carry ourselves in bank, on farm, in house or store, in study or room or workshop as the Lord would, or as the Lord would not?

Are we true? Do we try to live to the height of our ideas? Or are we self-serving? When contempt is cast on the truth, what is our reaction?

When the truth is wronged in our presence, do we make no sign that we hold by it?

I do not say we are called upon to dispute and defend the truth with logic and argument, but we are called upon to show by our lives that we stand on the side of truth. But when I say truth, I do not mean opinion. To treat opinion as if that were truth is grievously to wrong the truth. The soul that loves the truth and tries to be true will know when to speak and when to be silent. Jesus defended his kingship, not with argument, logic, or opinion, but rather by the laying down of his earthly life. He bore witness to the truth, not by words, but by the essence of his very being. Thus He is king, today, as He was when He spoke the words to Pilate. And his kingdom is still not of this world!



## WHO IS CHRIST? WHAT AM I DOING AS A RESULT?

*(A Fictional Selection from The Curate's Awakening by George MacDonald)*

There are those who in their very first seeking of it are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than many who have for years believed themselves in it. In

the former there is more of the mind of Jesus, and when He calls them, they recognize him at once and go after him. The others examine him from head to foot, and finding him not sufficiently like the Jesus of their conception, turn their backs, and go to church to kneel before a vague form mingled of tradition and imagination.

Wingfold (the curate) soon found that his nature was being stirred to depths unsuspected before. His first sermon showed that he had begun to have thoughts of his own. The news of that strange outpouring of honesty had of course spread through the town, and the people came to church the next Sunday in crowds—twice as many as the usual number—some who went seldom, some who went nowhere, some who belonged to other congregations. Mostly they were bent on witnessing whatever eccentricity the very peculiar young man might be guilty of next.

His second sermon was like the first. Proposing no text, he spoke the following:

”This church stands here in the name of Christianity. But what is Christianity? I know but one definition. Christianity does not mean what you think or what I think concerning Christ, but who Christ is. Last Sunday I showed you our Lord’s very words—that anyone is his disciple who does what he commands. I said, therefore, that I dared not call myself a disciple, a Christian. Yet it is in the name of Christianity that I stand here.

I have signed my name as a believer to the articles of the Church of England, with no better reason than that I had no particular dissent with any of the points of it at the time. Thus, knowing no better, I was ordained as one of her ministers. So it remains my business, as an honest man in the employment of the church, to do my best to set forth the claims of Jesus Christ, upon whom the church is founded and in whose name she exists. As one standing on the outskirts of a listening Galilean crowd, a word comes now and then to my hungry ears and hungrier heart. I tum and tell it again to you—not that you have not heard it also. If anything, I certainly am behind you rather than ahead of you in the hearing of these things. I tell you what I have learned only that I may stir you up to ask yourselves, as I ask myself, ‘Do I then obey this word? Have I ever, have I once, sought to obey it? Am I a pupil of Jesus? Am I a Christian?’

Hear then his words. For me, they fill my heart with doubt and dismay. “The Lord says, ‘Love your enemies.’ Do you say, ‘It is impossible’? Do

you say, 'Alas, I cannot'? But have you tried to see whether He who made you will not increase your strength when you step out to obey him?

"The Lord says, 'Be perfect.' Do you then aim for perfection, or do you excuse your shortcomings and say, 'To err is human'? If so, then you must ask yourself what part you have in him. "The Lord says, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.'

My part is not now to preach against the love of money, but to ask you, 'Are you laying up for yourselves treasures on earth'? As to what the command means, the honest heart and the dishonest must each settle it in his own way. No doubt you can point to other men who are no better than you and of whom yet no one would dare question the validity of their Christianity. But all that matters not a hair. All that does is confirm that you may all be pagans together. Do not mistake me. I am not judging you for my finger points at myself along with you. But I ask you simply to judge yourselves by the words of Jesus. "The Lord says, 'Take no thought for your life. Take no thought for tomorrow.' Explain it as you may, but ask yourselves, 'Do I take no thought for my life? Do I take no thought for tomorrow?'

"The Lord says, 'judge not.' Did you judge your neighbour yesterday? Will you judge him again tomorrow? Are you judging him now in the very heart that sits hearing the words, 'judge not'? Or do you sidestep the command by asking, 'Who is my neighbour?' Does not your own profession of Christianity counsel you to fall upon your face, and cry to him, 'I am a sinful man, O Lord'?

"The Lord said, 'All things you would that men should do to you, do also to them.' You that buy and sell, do you obey this law? Examine yourselves and see. You would want men to deal fairly to you: do you deal just as fairly to them as you would count fairness in them toward you? If conscience makes you hang your head inwardly, however you sit with it erect in the pew, can you dare to add to your crime against the law and the prophets the insult to Christ of calling yourselves his disciples?

"Not every one that says unto me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven.' "



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