



The Missing Piece

Ecclesiastes 8:9-17

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Over the years, I have pulled the same trick on my children while they were growing up — and now I'm able to pull the same trick on my grandchildren.

When we are putting together a jigsaw puzzle, and kids love putting those puzzles together, I'll slip one of the pieces away and put it in my shirt pocket.

It's just one of those simple pleasures in life!

We will work feverishly to put that 250-piece puzzle together — the kids are entirely dedicated to conquering the challenge.

And as we near the goal — just a few more pieces left — they insist on putting the last pieces of the puzzle in place, and I'm happy to let them. And then comes that moment of realization, the sheer terror of the moment — there's a piece missing!

They will look everywhere until they notice me smiling, and I'll open my hand and say, "Well would you look at that."

And then they make me go sit in time out!

There's nothing worse than a missing piece. And frankly, that goes for life as well.

Solomon has been recording in his private journal some of those moments in life — and there are many of them — where the puzzle can't be completed. It can be frightening, confusing, disappointing, because there's a missing piece, and sometimes more than one.

Now, throughout the first half of his journal, Solomon has been recording those moments with cynicism and resentment and even despair.

But here in the final half of his journal, he writes again about some of these puzzling mysteries of life down here under the sun, only now he clearly points us to the living God, who arranged the puzzle to begin with.

Today we're back in chapter 8 of his journal, the Book of Ecclesiastes, as Solomon brings up four more puzzles in

life that, unless you have a perspective from above the sun, you could very easily lead to bitterness and frustration and despair.

Why is it that people in power often abuse the lives of others?

*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.*

Ecclesiastes 8:9

The opening of this verse where Solomon says, “I’ve observed all these things down here under the sun,” is not a reference to those things that preceded verse 9 but these observations that follow verse 9.

“Here’s what I’ve seen down here under the sun.”

And his first observation is that those in authority often misuse their authority.

Which ought to immediately inform you that if you think that your boss, or your supervisor, or those in authority over you in your world, or in your culture, are doing something new — that they’re doing something unique — that mankind is just getting worse about it all, keep in mind that Solomon observed this behavior more than 3,000 years ago.



Have you had an experience with a person in authority over you in which “power corrupted”? How did you handle that situation? Did you get bitter and complain to God that it was unfair?

There’s a reason we have a saying, “power corrupts — and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” That phrase has been quoted in the English language now for around 200 years.

One historian wrote 100 years ago that a person’s sense of morality decreases as their power increases.

Solomon essentially says, “This is what I’ve seen over the course of my life, and I don’t understand what it is about the human nature that causes people in power to often abuse the lives of others.

Why is it that hypocrites often receive the loudest praise?

Notice verse 10:

*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.*

Ecclesiastes 8:10

“Then I saw the wicked buried.”

Solomon has evidently been to a funeral. And he specifically watched someone **wicked** get buried in some kind of elaborate funeral.

This Hebrew word for wicked is used of:

- someone who is guilty of crimes (Job 9:24)
- someone who refuses God's moral standards (Genesis 18:23)
- someone who oppresses the innocent (Isaiah 14:5)

But you notice here the implication is that these people are well known and well-respected in the community. They have a following and are evidently wealthy enough to have a funeral where even the King was in the audience. I mean you have to be somebody for the King to be at your funeral!

But according to Solomon, this person had stayed just one step ahead of the law, because they were able to die without being exposed for who they really were.



Do you know anyone like this? Could that person even be you? Are your good works the result of genuine gratitude toward God, or to cover up for your wrongs and sins?

It reminded me of a very wealthy man in Chicago who was known for his generosity.

He lived during the difficult days of the depression years in the early 1900's. But he was rich; he was financially diversified; the Wall Street crash had not affected him. He was personally convinced he was blessed by God.

In 1930, with his own money he bought a huge 3-story building downtown and not only paid to turn it into a soup kitchen, he paid for the food out of his own pocket.

He had a huge sign hung out front that announced: "Free Food for the Unemployed," and more than 3,000 unemployed people and their families ate there every day. After giving away more than 100,000 meals, they quit counting!

He wanted to remain anonymous, even though he was often in the public eye. And with all this widespread gratitude throughout Chicago, newspaper reporters began to search for "Mr. Good-deed," as he was called.

When they finally identified him, this businessman and wealthy philanthropist was honored by throngs of grateful people.

In one interview he said, and I quote, "Honor and truth and the law were falling from public respect."

A well-known school of journalism in Chicago voted him among the top 10 outstanding persons in modern world

history — right there with Gandhi, Charles Lindbergh and Albert Einstein.

He loved baseball and it was not unusual for thousands of people to cheer him when he entered the stadium.

He sided with those who wanted to censor motion pictures, he joined anxious parents in publicly calling for an end to violent movies, which he said were doing nothing but harming the young people.

Only near the end of his career did public opinion change, when the full story came out about who Al Capone really was. This compassionate and caring philanthropist, this movie censor, this man who cared about honor and truth and the law — all of that was sheer hypocrisy.



Have you ever done a good thing to cover up a bad? Do you feel like you need to do good things to balance out all the evil you do? Why should we desire to do good in the world?

Solomon adds this interesting fact about these people who died – **notice again in verse 10b**;

They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city...

Ecclesiastes 8:10b

Solomon writes here that this person would have been recognized on the temple grounds as pious and religious. He used to go in and out of the holy place, Solomon writes, as if the guy had a key to the front door.

“I saw a wicked individual buried, and you should have heard how they praised him in the city. They made him out to be a saint; he had all the trappings of religious connections, but it was all for show. He just went through the religious motions.”

Reminds me about the humorous story I read: two friends were sitting in the audience waiting for a boxing match to begin. They noticed as both boxers got out into the ring, one boxer bounced around loosening up; the other boxer knelt down, kissed the mat, got on his knees and crossed himself several times, bowed his head in prayer and then pointed up to the ceiling. One of the men asked his friend, “What does all that mean?” The other guys responded, “If he can’t box, it doesn’t mean a thing.”

Religious rituals are not the same thing as a regenerated heart.

Solomon asks, “Why is it that the worst hypocrites often receive the most praise?”

Why is it that the wheels of justice turn slowly - and sometimes not at all?

Look at verse 11:

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not

executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. 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.

Ecclesiastes 8:11-13

Solomon takes us full circle here but notice how he begins: justice isn't served; people think they're getting away with crime. He adds here: a sinner does evil a hundred times and lives a long life.

He's gotten away with it!

This doesn't mean justice should not be pursued or that those representing the law should give up rather than press forward to carry out the law.



Do you desire justice? How do you balance justice with the gospel? Do you look for justice in earthly means, or do you trust in God to fulfill it?

That's an honorable demonstration of the attributes of God's righteousness and justice.

But Solomon says here that one of puzzling things about life is that evil people seem to get away with breaking the law — they repeat their crimes a hundred times.

Maybe they were clever enough to evade the law. Maybe they had a good lawyer.

Robert Frost once wrote, tongue in cheek that a jury is 12 people chosen to decide on who has the best lawyer.

Maybe they had connections.

Notice how Solomon compares this person's life to a **shadow**.

Shadows get longer and longer, when? Just before the sun sets.

So, this man's life just seems to get longer and longer, and it seems he's never going to die — but just like a shadow, the longer it grows, the nearer they are to running out of daylight.

No one is clever enough or well-connected enough to prevent the nightfall of death.

The Bible says ***you can be sure your sins will find you out (Numbers 32:23).***

The Bible tells us in Revelation 20 of that judgment day when all the unredeemed from all of human history will be brought to court. The Judge and Jury are the holiness and righteousness and justice of God.

And God the Son, it says, will open the books for Himself. The books that have recorded in them everyone's sins — large and small, motives and plans and thoughts and deeds.

Everyone will be tried and, as Paul wrote in his inspired letter, "every mouth will be stopped" (Romans 3:19).

In other words, there will be no more excuses — no sufficient answers — everyone will be fully convinced of their guilt.

And the gavel will strike that bench and the sentence of everlasting judgment will echo out and it will be undeniable; it will be unarguable; it will be unavoidable, and it will be eternal.

What hope do you have? We have filled our own volumes with sin.



Stop here for a moment, and make sure that your day of judgement is secure in Christ. When you stand before God, giving an account for your wrongs, will Jesus be able to say of you, my death on the cross covers their sin?

The only hope when measured against God's holy standard, is to have placed our faith in Christ Jesus, and John the Apostle writes, we then have an Advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ, the perfect one (1 John 2).

He has already spoken on our behalf, to the jury of God's righteous judgment, "Yes, they have sinned, they have sinned, oh how they have sinned, but because of their trust in My death for their sin:

- I have already experienced in their place the sentence of separation;
- I have already experienced in their place the wrath of God
- And I have already paid in full the penalty of their sin.

They can go free.

For all who refused the gospel and rejected the Savior and would not acknowledge their sinfulness, this coming judgment called the Great White Throne in Revelation 20 is the missing piece in Solomon's puzzle here in this verse.

This is where a holy God will make all things just and right!

Why is it that someone isn't rewarded fairly for what they've accomplished in life?

Verse 14;

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.

Ecclesiastes 8:14a

Why is it that sometimes wicked people are treated as if they are good people and good people are treated as if they are wicked people?

In other words, I thought life was supposed to be fair!

I thought if you worked hard, did your homework, paid your taxes, took your vitamins, smiled at strangers and never swore — at least out loud — life would be one treat after another!

Solomon says, I can't figure life out.

That's because there are pieces to the puzzle that God is still holding in His hand.

So, what do we do until He reveals them? With that, Solomon shifts to give us to pieces of advice.

Notice verse 15;

And I commend joy, for man has no good thing 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.

Ecclesiastes 8:15

Solomon is not recommending the hedonistic version of “eat drink and be merry for tomorrow you die.” That's the fatalistic philosophy of an unbeliever.

Solomon is actually recommending the joy that comes from trusting the Lord who gives us “all things richly to enjoy (I Timothy 6:17).

In principle form, Solomon is giving us this advice:

Thank God for blessings that have arrived from every corner

If you have a job and a meal on the table — enjoy it! Even though life is a mystery, here's what God *has* done. The simplest and most overlooked blessings that many in the world do not have are your blessing. You have food and clothing and shelter and a job — wow! There's nothing wrong with enjoying all of that — just remember Who gave it to you.

Thank God for blessings that have arrived from every corner.

Trust God for burdens that are just around the corner

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, 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.

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17

In other words, there is just no way to know what's coming around that corner; you can't figure life out. You have very little idea all that God is doing on this planet, for one thing, and with your life, for another.

You will lose sleep, Solomon writes, if you worry over what you can't see coming.

The trouble is, you just can't see around a corner. And life is filled with corners. What's going to happen? Well it might not happen at all!

Mark Twain once said with a smile, "There has been much tragedy in my life; and at least half of it actually happened."

Thank God for what's happened that you can see. And trust God for whatever is going to happen that you can't yet see.



What are some blessings you have been given that are easy to take for granted? Spend some time thanking God for the little things today!

When I put those puzzles together with my children and now lately my grandchildren, when that last piece is missing, I'll say, "Oh no, where is it?"

They look under the box; they'll get down on their hands and knees and look under the table; I'll tell them to check their pockets and they do.

And then I'll show them — it's in my hand.

But here's the convicting part: I can only do that with them one time — maybe twice — until the next time that last piece is missing, they will smile and look at me and say, "You have it!"

Lord, there's a piece missing; the picture is not coming together; things are not tying together; I'm looking everywhere for it; I'm staying up at night; I'm convinced it's around here somewhere.

How often do we learn, and then forget, and then relearn that it's in His hand? He's got it.

When will we learn to look at Him and say, "Oh . . . that's right, Lord, you have it."?

Life is filled with puzzles and frankly, beloved, they're all missing a piece, as if to remind us that God must remain that primary piece.

Solomon is reminding us that God is, and will always be, the final piece, tying it all together, making the picture complete at last.

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