

Solomon's Twelve Secrets

Session 8: You Can't Know The Future, So Where Does That Leave Us?

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter eight. We're going to go ahead and do a shout out today to the Basement Boys. Harold Dryden, the leader, wanted us to know, "We're not some secret club. We just happen to meet in the basement." They're six men. They've been meeting with us for about a year on Friday mornings at 7:30 at Harold's house. He says, he writes, "We are a group of old guys who are still overwhelmed with the incredible grace and mercy of the Lord and are striving to please him every day." They're in Hutchinson, Kansas, which is about an hour northwest of Wichita. Would you join me in giving a very warm and a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to the Basement Boys? One, two, three, hoorah.

We're going to do a second hoorah today because Bill Enoch, who recently turned 86, is the oldest member of the group. They were out playing golf, he and Herald, and Bill fell on his face and was rushed to the emergency room. They found tumors in his brain and in his lungs. He's in a difficult way and really longing to be with Jesus, but what I'd like to do today is to give a very warm hoorah and perhaps who knows how many more Bill will hear of these. Herald's going to take it over to Bill's house and show it to him on a laptop. What I want us to do is for Bill Enoch to hear a powerful, rousing Man in the Mirror welcome and hoorah. Let's welcome Bill to our Bible study. One, two, three, hoorah. That's for you, Bill. God bless you.

The series is Solomon's 12 Secrets: Lessons on Life from Ecclesiastes. Today, the title of the message is You Can't Know the Future, So Where Does That Leave Us? For my 50th birthday, I talked my wife into giving me, as a present, a trip to Jimmy Carter's Sunday school class in Plains, Georgia. We rented a room at a bed and breakfast. Then, Plains only has about, well, their population today is 776. The Sunday school class is bigger than the city, but anyway. It's an institution. I wanted to experience it. I mean, where else in the world can you sit 10 feet from a former President of the United States teaching on, that particular day, agape love? It was wonderful. During his message, President Carter told a story that in 1966 he ran for governor of the state of Georgia.

He was already a state senator. He ran against a legendary opponent of civil rights named Lester Maddox. Lester Maddox was notorious. When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, he had three African American Georgia Tech students come to his restaurant and he brandished a gun and would not serve them. He was famous for having a pickax handle that he would carry around. He was not a good ... I don't know if he's a good man or a bad man, but I know he did a lot of really, really bad, bad things, like really, really bad things. Jimmy Carter saw it as his mission to run for governor and defeat this man who was doing these terrible things, and he lost the election. You don't know the future, so where does that leave us? He was devastated.

His sister, who is a famous evangelist, Ruth Carter Stapleton, went out into the woods with her brother to sort of decompress and talk about it. She read him some texts from the book of James, tried to comfort him and encourage him, and he told her this, "I'm out of politics." I'm quoting what he said in the Sunday school class. "I'm out of politics. I will never again have anything to do with public office." That was 1966. In 1971, he was elected to governor of the state of Georgia. In 1976, he became the 39th President of the United States. You can't know the future. You don't know what's going to happen. The narratives that we allow to take over may be true, but they're just as likely not to be true.

In Ecclesiastes chapter eight verse one, it says, "Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Who knows?" Then, over in verse seven, "Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come? Who knows? No one knows." Then, over in verse 17, "No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning." Watch this. "Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it." Who knows? No one knows. Even if the wise claim they know, they don't. You and I, we live in a narrow hall with a door behind us and a door at the end of the hall. Behind us is door number one, and it is the door through which we were born into the hall. What is on the other side of that door? Nothing is on the other side of that door, so we can't go back. Off in the distance, and, by the way, we're given a candle so we have a little bit of light.

Off in the distance, we see the other door. We don't know what's on the other side of that door. How long will it take us to get to that door? What happens to us if we stand still? Do we run towards the door? Do we walk towards the door? God, in his mercy, has put a window into the hall. The window has a shade over it by day, but by night, the shade is pulled back, and he gives us a glimpse into the cosmos, something that is awe-inspiring, something that really makes a difference for us. We see creation. He has given us, in this little hall, he's given us a window. That's creation. He's also given us a pane of glass in the door. If you're a Christian, that door at the end that you don't know what's on the other side, for the Christian, when you become a Christian, he puts a pane of glass, clear glass, in that door so that you can see in general terms what's on the other side of the door.

What is that pane of glass? It's the word of God. That pane of glass is the word of God. Through this word, we're able to actually see in general terms what's on the other side of that door at the end of the hallway. He gives us a window, creation. He gives us a pane of glass in the door, the word. Then, he gives us a chandelier. He sent Jesus Christ to be the light of the hall. You and I live under a chandelier. There are other people, I don't know if they're in our hall or they're in other halls. I didn't try to push this analogy that far, but anyway. They're living with little candles. They're doing the best they can in the dim light that they have. You can't know the future. They don't know the future. The truth is that even with a chandelier, even with a pane of glass, you still, we still are unable to really actually know the future.

Solomon wants to know then what is it that's worthwhile to do while we're in the hall. Where does this leave us? I think where this leaves us is that, and Solomon is now going to make a turn here in Ecclesiastes eight from talking about the sovereignty of God to talking about us taking personal responsibility for our lives. He's not abandoning the idea that God is sovereign. Rather, he is adding to the fact that God is in control, that we are also responsible. Knowing what we know about, "Who knows? No one knows. Even if the wise thinks he knows, he doesn't," adding to that, I think we can say that the only logical thing to do given this is to take personal responsibility for our lives.

THE ONLY LOGICAL THING TO DO IS TO TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Jean-Paul Sartre, very famous atheistic existentialist, lived in Paris in the 20th century in an apartment with his mother. He quoted Dostoyevsky who said, "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted, anything and everything is permitted." Sartre said, "God does not exist. Therefore, everything is permitted," but then he went on to say, "But man is responsible for his choices." Man has complete freedom, but he still has to take responsibility for his choices. Sartre was forlorn because he said that we don't know how those choices are going to turn out and yet we're responsible for them. We are not only free, said Sartre, we are condemned to be free. This personal responsibility for the secularist, it's bad news. Taking personal responsibility for the secularist, it's bad news, but guess what. For the Christian, it is good news. The Big Idea today: Because God is sovereign, it actually makes a difference. It actually means something when you take personal responsibility for your life. **Because God is sovereign, it actually means something when you take personal responsibility for your life.** It's very good news for a Christian.

You know, just a sidebar. I wonder how many atheists really actually die atheists. Antony Flew, F-L-E-W, was perhaps ... Well, he has been called ... I wrote it down. How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind, that's the subtitle for the book. The book that Antony Flew wrote says, "There is no god." Then, the word no is crossed out on the cover and the word A so that the title of the book is There is a God. Antony Flew spent 50 years using the Socratic, following the evidence wherever it leads, that method to disprove the existence of God. Then, in 2004, he changed his mind because he realized that the only logical explanation, if you really followed the evidence, for what we see is some sort of an intelligent being or entity that gave this purpose and this order to the creation. Anyway, that's just a sidebar.

Because God is sovereign, it does mean something when we take personal responsibility. In this chapter then, Solomon introduces three areas of personal responsibility. There are others but he, in this chapter, points our attention to three of them. Sol's take, Solomon's take. There wasn't enough room to write Solomon. Sol's take: obey your government, fear your God, enjoy your life. Let's take a look at these briefly.

SOL'S TAKE: OBEY YOUR GOVERNMENT, FEAR YOUR GOD, ENJOY YOUR LIFE

Obey your government, chapter eight verse two says, "Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is supreme, who can say, 'What are you doing?' Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm. The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure," and the chapter says a few other things. One of the ways we take responsibility is we understand that every government has some kind of rule of law. Americans are convinced that we have the best rule of law that there is. Obey your government. The Bible teaches this from cover to cover. Obey your government.

Secondly, fear your God. Verse 12, "Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow." Why do we fear men? We fear men because they have the power to give us what we don't deserve, injustice, Lester Maddox. Why do we fear God? Same reason. We fear God because he also has the power to give us what we don't deserve, mercy, grace, forgiveness. Psalm chapter 130 verse four, "But you, O God, offer forgiveness, that we might fear you." We're talking here though about two kinds of fear. The fear of God is reverence for God. The fear of man is actually a trembling.

Obey your government, fear your God, and then, number three, enjoy your life. Verse 14, "There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men, who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men, who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad." This is not a new theme with Solomon if you've been here through any part of this series, really. "Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun." Take responsibility to be a positive person, a happy person, a person who enjoys their work.

You know, I used to say five years ago, up until five years ago, I used to say all the time, "I'm the happiest person I've ever known," but I don't feel that way anymore. I'm not the happiest person that I've ever met anymore, and that's just because there's so many people in my life who are going through so many difficult times. It's just hard to remain joyful like I was, but I look at this as a gift from God, one for which I don't know anything about the future, what's going to happen, but one for which I'm going to do the Psalm 118 verse 24, "This is the day the Lord has made." Psalm 118 verse 24, "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us," what? "Rejoice and," what? "Be glad in it."

Now, I think I have taught here before, I know I've taught here before, I don't know if you were here that day. If you were here, I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't remember because I say a lot of things that aren't really worth remembering, but this one actually is worth remembering, Psalm 118:24. In this last five years, when the brilliant shine of the bronze joy began to become more like a patina of joy, if you will ... I'm still happy, but, you know, that's just because I have faith, because I believe. I told you last week. I said if God isn't sovereign, we're hooking up the trailer and I'm out of here tomorrow morning. I mean, that's it. Where was I? This patina ... Actually, I kind of forgot what my point was there. It was kind of off the top of my head anyway, so what difference does it make?

The Big Idea today is this: Because God is sovereign, it actually means something when you take personal responsibility for your life. I guess I just sometimes get carried away and like hearing myself talk. I don't know. I wish I really could remember the point I was going to make because the point is a lot better than everything else that went before. Now to the application.

AND THE APPLICATION? ENGAGE THE CONFUSED

The application is to engage the confused. Back to verse 17, "No one can comprehend what goes ..." Oh, I was talking about Psalm 118 verse 24. See, nobody even remembered enough of what I said to even remind me of what I was talking about even after 10 seconds had gone by. The word rejoice, there had been previous to that two verses of scripture which made me question the reality of Christianity. I've talked about those too before.

Then, all of a sudden, in the last few years, this Psalm 118:24 really started to bug me. "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." I see men having health problems. I see children having opioid problems. I see 30-year-old men walking away from the faith that they knew. I see people who have lost all of their savings and they're in poverty at the end of their life. Maybe that's the curse of having the work that I do, maybe I do hear more bad news. I probably do hear more bad news, but, you know, everybody's going through a difficult thing. Everybody in this room has some difficult thing you're going through, I just get to hear about all of them. Anyway, I was thinking about this word rejoice. I said, "Man, this Christianity thing, this doesn't work."

What I did tell you before is that I one day happened to look up the word rejoice in the original Hebrew language. The word rejoice can either be a feeling or an action. Changed my life. I'm on the road to recovery. I'm carrying all this baggage with me of all these difficult things that people are going through. The problem is with all of these problems that people have, it leaves them confused. By the way, it's not just the people who don't have Jesus in their lives that are confused. A lot of people who do have Jesus in their lives are confused too. The verse reads, "No one can comprehend," this is verse 17. "No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man," believer or unbeliever, "man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it."

I have all these people in my world who are not doing well. It doesn't shake my faith, but it does make me sad. The Lord has put people in your life who are also not doing well and are confused. What he wants us to do here, and this is an application. This is not exactly what the text says, but the application of that text is to engage people who are confused and help them put a chandelier in their hall, to engage the confused and help them install a pane of glass in the door at the end of the hall. Are you tracking with me here? It's to engage people who, for whatever reason, don't look out the window into creation and find themselves to be inspired, to be filled with awe for what's going on outside their own little hall.

I want to give you a little formula for doing that. It has four parts: make a plan, have something to say, have something to give, have somewhere to send. You guys should be writing this down. Most of you are. Put it in your phone. This is like one of those "Pat's saying something that's actually worth remembering" kind of moments. The first thing is to have a plan. One approach to mobilize men to help others, to engage the confused, is to talk about how important it is, but the other approach is to bring men into the presence of the Almighty so that they are filled to the overflow in their own relationship with Jesus so that they have enough Jesus for themselves but also some left over that they want to give away to other people.

We're using the latter approach here. We're not trying to beat guys up for not being more interested in lost people. What we want to do here is we want to show you the awe. We want to experience together the awe of being in the presence of God, in the immediate presence of Jesus Christ himself. Then, out of the overflow of that, to do something about it. Assuming that you're there or assuming that you will be there or get back there, you need to have a plan to engage the confused. One great way to do that is Reach3. It's so simple. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken this challenge, mostly men. You can pick up the cards on your table. Basically, it's very simple. You write the names of three people, probably men, but three people. You write down the names of three people who need to have a chandelier in their hallway, who need to have the light. Then, you begin to pray for them.

Secondly, you have something to say. Around here, I talk about, from time to time, the golden question. That's something to say, "Where are you on your spiritual journey today?" This gives you an opportunity to engage the confused and find out where their points of confusion are. I talk with men all the time. Do you know I don't actually give much advice? You know what I mostly do? I ask questions. I just ask questions. I've worked personally with thousands of men one-on-one and what I have discovered is that men, for the most part, already know the answers. They have it within them. They just need to be, what's the word? Validated. They need to be validated that what they have been thinking is correct. Rather than trying to fix men, I just ask them questions. When I say have something to say, what I really probably should say is have a few questions that you can ask a man.

Have a plan, have something to say, have something to give. We have these giveaway copies of Man in the Mirror. Did we put them out? What we're going to do is we're going to give each of you a copy of this book today. Sorry for the guys online. It's not going to happen to you, obviously. That doesn't mean we don't love you. We do, but if you want the books, somehow get in touch with me. I'll get them to you. I'll just do it. I'll do it out of my own pocket. How's that? Yeah, books by the box or you can go to BooksbytheBox.org. Anyway, we'll get you the books if you want them. We're going to give each of you a copy of this book today. You got your plan. You got your three names. You've got your something to say, "Where are you on your spiritual journey?" Then, basically, in my own experience, it doesn't make any difference what they say. The answer's always the same, the direction's always the same, so I typically will give the man a book, something to give, and then somewhere to send.

I bought a car and I walked into the dealership. I always have a few books with me so I had some of those to give. I was just there to buy a car, but by the time I left, I'd made four new friends. The saleswoman, got to talking with her. She had a 14-year-old child. She's married, trying to figure out what life was all about. She's very kind of open to spiritual things. Then, she took me to the manager's office. I could tell what he was all about, success. I gave him a copy of this particular book, The Man in the Mirror. He seemed appreciative. Then, they walked me over to the finance office. As we were talking, he was the kind of man who was interested in other people. He said, "So what do you do for a living?" I said, "Well, I help men find meaning and purpose in life." It's like he just deflated like a balloon would deflate. I didn't get back to him that day, but I made a note.

Then, they walked me over to the woman where I actually paid the money for the car. I had heard from the woman, the first woman, the saleswoman, that there were some people that were religious that worked at this car dealership. By the time I got to the finance place to pay the woman, I suspected that she was one of the people that were spiritual there. I got to talking with her. She's just really getting back to her faith, was attending Northland Church. I said to her, I said, "You know, there's a real opportunity here for you because there's another woman over here who's interested in spiritual things. Something that you could do," this would be somewhere to send, "something you could do is that maybe start a Bible study here in the office, maybe meet once a week, and invite this other woman to come and help her learn what's going on."

For you, you have somewhere to send too. Your own church is a good place, but a lot of men are not ready for the church yet, so you could send them here. On your tables are some of these cards. I'd like just to see that everybody has a copy of the Reach3 card today. Do you have it? Anybody not have a Reach3 card? Do we have enough of those? Then, I'd like to see that everybody will get a Man in the Mirror. We'll pass those out during the discussion time. Then, I'd like to see that everybody would have one of these cards. Does anybody not have one of these cards? Can you work that out? Well, yeah, okay. Good. Either one is fine. All right. Now, you have a plan, you have something to say, the golden question, you have something to give or will have shortly, a copy of this book, and then you have somewhere to send. It could be your church or the card to bring them here to the Bible study. That's taking personal responsibility for the Great Commission.

See, I told you every now and then I say something important around here. That's an actual actionable plan for you to personally take responsible for making disciples, to personally take responsible for the Great Commission. The Big Idea: **Because God is sovereign, it actually means something when you do these things, when you take personal responsibility for your life.** Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for these men who are passionate about knowing you, passionate about growing in you, and passionate about going for you and doing things, especially helping the confused. Lord, I pray that you

would now animate our discussion time so that these men might be able to figure out how to make sense of this for their own lives. We ask this, Jesus, in your wonderful name. Amen.