

Ecclesiastes 8:10–17 | “What You See vs. What You Know”

Preached on August 16, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 8:10–17. *[pauseeee]*

The book of Ecclesiastes is all about giving us an accurate, no-holding-back picture of real life, and teaching us how we should live in light of it. *[pause]*

In the passage today, we will see how we are to live, knowing that the wicked often prosper and the righteous often don't. *[pause]*

Let's READ it. *[READ 10–17]*

Have you ever experienced a situation where what you saw didn't match what you knew to be true? *[pauseee]*

A couple months ago, I looked into the evening sky and the moon looked huge. *[pause]*

While the moon looked like it grew bigger, I knew that it didn't.

What I saw didn't match what I knew to be true. *[pause]*

Likewise, maybe you know for certain that someone is innocent, but all of the evidence makes it *look* like they are guilty.

It can be a really baffling thing. *[pause]*

You start to wonder, “Wait, am I crazy? I know that he's innocent, but it looks like he did it.” *[pauseee]*

Situations like that cause you to second-guess yourself—they can be perplexing, and throw us off or cause us to doubt or question things.

Well the author of Ecclesiastes here deals with that very type of thing. *[pause]*

What he sees doesn't match what he knows to be true, but what we can learn from how he deals with it? *[pause]*

Let's first find out what he sees...so point #1...

I. There are certain things that we see in this world. (10–11, 14)

In these verses, Solomon describes what he sees, and it's what *we* would see, if only we would open our eyes. *[pauseee]*

What he sees is the wicked seemingly getting away with their wickedness. *[pauseee]*

These people are not those who follow the Lord, but struggle against sin, trying to fight it.

Rather, they are those who are against God, pursue sin, and do not care that they do. *[pauseeee]*

Sadly, though God is good, created people, and gave them Jesus—there are still large numbers of people today, who reject God and live in sin. *[pauseeee]*

So the author looks around and sees wicked people, but that’s not all, for he sees them being honored.

He says that he “saw the wicked buried.” *[pauseee]*

Now we may not think much about this, but he’s probably talking about how they are *honorably* buried. *[pause]*

Back in that day, a proper burial showed honor for a person, while not having one was considered a horrific thing.¹

So here are these sinful people honored in their death, as if they were honorable people! *[pauseeee]*

This type of thing can happen in modern-day funerals, too...

A person could be horrible to everyone they met, yet during their funeral, they are spoken of as if they were the most innocent, good-hearted person in town. *[pauseeeee]*

Something else that Solomon mentions about these people is that they go in and out of the temple. *[pause]*

They are people who acted like they were righteous, for they went in and out of the temple, all the while they were wicked. *[pause]*

This is a picture of a big-time *hypocrite*. *[pause]*

They made it look like they were godly, and did the whole religious routine, but they were ungodly. *[pauseeeee]*

Unfortunately, some of the most ungodly people can be those who go in and out of places of worship. *[pause]*

They *appear* righteous, but they are not.

They boldly enter the holy place full of wickedness, and think that God won’t do anything. *[pauseeee]*

We also see that they are praised by others. *[pause]*

¹ Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 138.

You must understand that sometimes what people praise is not *what should be praised*. [pause]

Some of the most sin-riddled people are lifted up and praised, as if they were righteous. [pause]

The example of these wicked people praised is just another instance of our world praising what's evil, as if it were good.

And this should cause each of us to evaluate how much focus we put on the praise of others. [pauseeee]

What's most important is whether God would commend it or not. [pause]

God is the determiner of what should be praised, so any praise not in alignment with that is simply *misdirected* praise. [pauseeee]

So here are these wicked people honored in death and praised by others, and this happens in our day, as well...

Some who are so against God are lifted up, honored, and praised as if they are living life the way that it ought to be lived.

In fact, verse 14 shows us that many times the righteous receive what the wicked deserve, while the wicked receive what the righteous deserve. [pauseee]

This is what we see...

Christians are treated as scum, even though we seek to do what God has called us to do, all the while, unbelievers are treated as so great, and deserving of good things. [pauseeee]

In verse 11, Solomon adds to the picture of the wicked seemingly getting away with their wickedness...

He says that "because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil." [pauseee]

Since judgment doesn't come upon them right away, they continue and increase in their sin. [pauseeee]

Wicked people seemingly get away with their wickedness, and are even honored and praised. [pause]

There's no fear of God in them, nor concern for what's holy, and yet they receive what a righteous person deserves.

So no wonder Solomon calls this "vanity." [pause]

Like trying to grab the wind, expecting to find something in your hand, but finding nothing—so also, the world often doesn't work according to how we think it should.

And this is why life can be like an enigma: what we see happen doesn't always align with what we *expect to happen*. *[pauseeee]*

As you have looked around in life, have you ever seen someone wicked be praised and prosper, while you're trying to follow the Lord, yet struggling? *[pause]*

You could think, "What's with this?!" *[pause]*

Maybe someone at the workplace is getting promoted and praised even though they are so mean to everyone, while you are overlooked. *[pause]*

Maybe someone's bank account is bursting at the seams, and they are experiencing these amazing trips, even though they cheat others. *[pause]*

This happens while people you know, who are following Jesus faithfully, are struggling to even pay the bills. *[pauseeee]*

Or maybe there's a person you know who has sinned against others horribly, and yet they are praised, while others you know, who are so godly, are treated with contempt. *[pauseeee]*

This is something common that we can see in this world, and it can be hard to deal with, but know this: amidst all that we can see...

II. There are certain things that we should know and do. (12–13, 15)

Have you ever judged a book by its cover? *[pause]*

Maybe you looked at the cover of a book, and it looked boring, but once you cracked it open, you were riveted. *[pause]*

Maybe you judged a person by their appearance, but once you got to know them, you realized that you were wrong about them. *[pause]*

Sometimes we put too much emphasis on what we can see, but we can't always trust what we see. *[pauseeee]*

Consider how *limited* our sight is...

We can only see the partial picture, not the full one. *[pause]*

We can only see the present, but we can't see the future. *[pause]*

We do not have 20/20 vision when it comes to life, and this is why we must fall back upon what we *know*. *[pauseeee]*

God often works in unseen ways. *[pause]*

He can also work in mysterious, seemingly unimpressive ways, so who are we to trust what we can see?

And that's why we must cling to what God has said, for that's what we can *know*. [pauseeee]

Verse 12 says, "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, *yet I know* that it will be well with those who fear God." [pauseee]

Solomon *saw* the wicked prosper, but he fell back upon what he *knew* to be true.

He says in verse 13, "it will not be well with the wicked." [pause]

All of the visual evidence was stacked up in front of him, but he toppled it with the mallet of truth. [pauseeee]

The wicked may *look* like they were getting off scot-free, but Solomon determined to see reality through the lens of truth. [pause]

This made a world of a difference, for it meant that instead of being ground down in despair, due to what he saw, he was lifted up in hope, due to what he knew. [pauseeee]

This was a bold act of faith...

Though all of the evidence appeared to contradict what he knew, he didn't let what we saw have the final answer, but the final answer was in God and His Word. [pauseeee]

A prime help in our difficult circumstances isn't that we just need to see something different, but that we need to believe what we know to be true. [pauseeee]

When you look around you and see no one around and feel lonely, fall back upon what you know—he said that He would never leave you nor forsake you.² [pause]

When you look at your life, feel like a failure, and think that God could never love you anymore...

Remember that Scripture says that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."³ [pauseeee]

And when it looks like evil is prevailing and that they aren't getting what they deserve, while the righteous suffer, remember that...

"He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed."⁴ [pause]

² A reference to Deuteronomy 31:6.

³ Romans 8:39.

⁴ Acts 17:31.

What you see isn't always what's going to be. *[pauseeee]*

Though he saw the wicked do more and more wickedness and prolong their days, he knew that ultimately it wouldn't be well with them.

And the reason is because they didn't fear God, so they wouldn't ultimately prolong their lives forever. *[pauseee]*

Solomon knew God and His character—he knew that God wouldn't let wickedness go on endlessly.

So this meant that no matter what he saw at the moment, it wouldn't be the end of the story—God was not done. *[pausee]*

What an important thing to always remember: right now is not the end of the story, for God is not done! *[pauseee]*

There is a coming Day when God will make all things right.

The wicked will not be let go, but face judgment, and those who are recipients of the grace of forgiveness will experience eternal bliss. *[pauseee]*

The key difference is the fear of the Lord. *[pause]*

Those who are wicked are those who have rejected God and so have no reverence for Him and His name.

On the other hand, those who fear God are those who have a healthy reverence, awe, and respect for God as God. *[pause]*

They cling to Him, trust Him, revere Him, and rest in Him.

They find refuge in Him because they have seen Him for who He is and trust Him, while those who don't fear Him have pushed away in rebellion. *[pausee]*

This is why when you move over into the New Testament, we see that if you reject Christ, you will experience eternal condemnation...

While if you humbly trust in Him, you will find eternal life and joy. *[pause]*

The difference is what you do with Christ—either He's a rock you are built upon, or a rock that you stumble over.⁵ *[pauseeee]*

To think that it can eternally go well with me based on simply my fear of the Lord is astounding! *[pause]*

⁵ A reference to 1 Peter 2:6–8.

It doesn't say that you have to do a certain amount of things, or complete this step, then that step.
[pause]

I must fear the Lord, which is seen in a person who humbly recognizes that they are deserving of judgment for their sin, and so repents of their sin, and turns in faith to Jesus Christ. [pauseeee]

I may see the wicked prosper, and the righteous suffer now, but I must trust what I know to be true...

If I have a right relationship with God through Christ then it will be well with me eternally.
[pause]

What a joyous thought! What gracious news! [pause]

But if you reject God and spurn His grace, it will not be well with you. [pause]

You may live a long, earthly life, but your life will not truly be prolonged, for you will face eternity in Hell. [pauseeeee]

Knowing these things, what should we do? We should fear God! [pause]

Don't join in the rebellion of others, but turn in faith to Christ, if you have never done that.
[pause]

If you do trust Christ, then keep trusting Him, living for the Lord, knowing that it's worth it.
[pauseeeee]

Amidst all of the injustices that we see in this world, Solomon points us towards something else that we can know and do, and it's that we can have joy! [pause]

Verse 15 says, "And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful." [pauseeee]

Solomon knows that seeing the righteous get what the wicked deserve and vice versa could easily cause people to not live life with joy. [pause]

Some might think, "What's the point?!" and throw up their hands in despair.

Others might live in resentment or frustration continually, but instead of letting those things steal your joy, Solomon calls us to find joy in life. [pauseee]

So don't let the things that you don't understand nor control hinder you from finding joy.

Instead, look around you, and see the blessings of food, drink, and so many other gifts from God.
[pauseeee]

How much joy have you missed out on because you were obsessed over the frustrations of life?
[pauseeeee]

When we have joy, then that joy tags along with our toil—now life isn't just toil upon toil, but joy alongside toil.

So find joy by cherishing and enjoying the gifts of God in the days of life that God has given to you. *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that you cannot make sense of why a godly person goes through some horrible thing, while some wicked person over there seems to have it good and easy.

You are not in control of that, but God is. *[pause]*

Don't let the unknowns of life cause you to be a joyless person, missing out on the simple, yet precious gifts of today. *[pauseeee]*

God has called us to certain things...

And we would do well to focus on the things that we can know and have been called to do, rather than driving ourselves mad over what we don't know nor control. *[pauseeee]*

This leads right into verses 16–17, which show us that...

III. **There are certain things that we cannot know. (16–17)**

Over the centuries, we have made huge leaps of progress in our knowledge. *[pause]*

In the medical world, we now know so much about DNA, bacteria, viruses, and can even perform open-heart surgery. *[pauseee]*

When it comes to the universe, we know more about black holes, gravity, atoms, and all of that. *[pauseee]*

As the human race, we went from walking and horse riding to riding in an airplane and walking on the moon. *[pauseee]*

This advance in knowledge has made us think that we can find out the answer to anything that we set our minds to, if only we put enough effort in. *[pauseee]*

This is an assumption of modern man: that knowledge of everything is within our reach, and Solomon obliterates that mentality. *[pauseeee]*

Solomon was the wisest person to have lived, and yet he found that there were things out of his reach, and not only out of *his* reach, but out of humanity's reach. *[pauseeee]*

He did no half-hearted, lackadaisical attempt, but he applied his heart to know wisdom. *[pause]*

He sought to “see the business that is done on earth.”

That is, he tried his best to know and see how everything worked in the universe, and what were his findings?...

Verse 17, “Then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.” *[pauseeee]*

He tried to see all the work of God, but found out that all of His work is unable to be discerned by man. *[pause]*

This means that we cannot fathom everything that God has done, is doing, or will do.

We can’t understand how it all works together. *[pause]*

He says that even a wise man cannot figure it out, no matter how much he claims that he can. *[pauseee]*

No amount of toil will gain you a full understanding of every ‘how’ and ‘why’ of life. *[pauseeee]*

While in our day, people may think that we can figure out anything that we set our minds to, it’s simply not true...

There are some things beyond our knowledge, for they are known by God alone. *[pauseee]*

We may see some things, know some things, and do some things, but we cannot understand everything.

And this lack of complete knowledge should fling us into the arms of God. *[pauseeee]*

Since I can’t know everything, I must trust Him with everything.

So don’t let your lack of understanding cause you to become angry at God or bitter, but let it drive you to the Lord. *[pauseee]*

Though I don’t know everything, God does, and I can rest in that. *[pauseeee]*

When you are met with the unknowns of life, do those unknowns push you to the God who can be known, and who knows everything? *[pauseeee]*

This passage shows us that there are a lot of puzzling things in life, but it also shows us what we should do in light of them...

In the perplexities of life, let’s fall back upon what we know and what we should do.

There are things that we see in this life that perplex us. *[pause]*

The wicked are honored and praised, and we know that this should not be.

They seem to just get away with their wickedness, receiving what a righteous person should.
[pausee]

Likewise, we see the righteous put down and treated with contempt.

And this can be a really baffling thing, for what we see doesn't match what we know and expect.
[pauseeee]

There are many things that we also *cannot* know...

We can't see behind-the-scenes of the universe, nor see the full picture—our sight and knowledge are limited.

We don't know all that God is up to. [pauseeee]

So amidst all of these perplexing things, what are we to do?...

We are to fall back upon what we know and what we should do. [pausee]

There are things that we *do* know, so let's hold onto them and trust them! [pause]

Let's thank God that He has given us *even these things* in grace, so that we can know Him and know how to live for His glory. [pauseeeee]

Sometimes we stress over what we don't know when we should be prioritizing the things that we can know from God's Word. [pause]

What if you reminded yourself that it's more important that I believe God's revealed Word than it is for me to try to figure out every mystery. [pauseeee]

Don't let what you see in this world wreck you, but cling to the truth like Solomon...

Say, "I see this happening, but *this I know*..." [pausee]

What if you faced every circumstance, no matter how bleak-looking or confusing, with a reliance upon the revealed Word of God? [pausee]

Though you may see all of these different things happening that are not good, you know what you are to do...

You are to trust God, and trust what He has said, and enjoy the gifts that He has given. [pause]

We are responsible for *that*, and we must leave the rest to God. [pauseeee]

The Christian life entails a lot of falling back upon what you know to be true even amidst what looks not so good. [pausee]

The cross is an excellent example...

As Jesus hung on the cross, it looked like defeat and that Satan had won, but if only Jesus' disciples would have fallen back upon what they knew to be true! *[pause]*

They knew who Jesus was, and He kept telling them that He would die and rise again three days later.⁶ *[pause]*

Instead of living by faith, they were living by sight, for redemption and victory were at work amidst the horrific sight of Jesus hanging on the cross. *[pauseeee]*

In your hard, difficult, messy situations do not put too much weight into what you see, but put it into what you know to be true. *[pauseee]*

Though you might feel like a failure due to circumstances that you see, you can know that you are NOT a failure in God's eyes, if you're in Christ. *[pause]*

Though we see many walk away, we know that God will have a people, who love Him and serve Him. *[pauseeee]*

What truth do you need to trust, which seems contrary to what you see? *[pause]*

Maybe you need to start saying, "This is what I see right now, Lord, but I know you have said *this*, so help me to trust it."

⁶ See Matthew 16:21, 17:22–23, 20:18–19.