

# TBC SERMON NOTES & STUDY

January 24, 2021 – Dr. Bryan Ferrell, Senior Pastor

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## Sermon Text:

### **Ecclesiastes 5:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.

<sup>9</sup> But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

## Sermon Outline:

### **3 Observations About Bad Politics**

1. The Sight of Political Corruption (vs. 8a)
2. The Source for Political Corruption (vs. 8b)
3. The Solution to Political Corruption (vs.9)

## Sermon Points – Shepherding Group Discussion:

1. How did this preaching series in 2021 from Ecclesiastes equip you to face the challenges of the new anti-gospel and anti-god government?
2. Why does our response to the political challenges we face a critical discipline of trusting God as Christians?
3. Why is being a “believer in Jesus Christ” an advantage in understanding life in a fallen world?
4. What are the differences and importance in the *two responses* that Solomon teaches in biblically seeing the curse rightly?
5. Discuss the significance in discussing the three areas Solomon notes in Ecclesiastes 5 - (Religion, Politics, and Money), in a fallen world?
6. How well does Solomon know us in this culture, considering a Romans 13 biblical understanding and writing in the first century?
7. Discuss how we can have crooked government leaders in a world that God ordains? (Give some examples in the Bible)
8. How has the “Fall of man” affected current religion, politics, and handling of money, that directly or indirectly affects you personally?
9. What process or responses do you use to get your heart and mind back on the *hope of Christ* in the midst of the crooked world of oppression?
10. What Scriptures are especially important to you when you need to redirect your thinking back to God in your disappointment?

## Deeper Study #1 (Expositional Study)

### 1. [\(5:8-9\)](#) Guard against oppression and the injustices you see others do.

Remember, the Teacher is advising his readers to guard against the problems and entrapments of life. In chapter four, Solomon exposed the problem of oppression. Now, he comes back to it, addressing oppression and injustice specifically within the realm of politics and government.

The king's counsel with regard to political corruption is somewhat of a shock. Solomon came right out and said, "If you see oppression and injustice, do not be surprised." Corruption and oppression exist in politics and government, within the ranks of both elected officials and bureaucrats, those who are appointed or hired. While Solomon was not suggesting that we *accept* the corruption and oppression, he was cautioning us to *expect* it. However, we should not allow it to deter us or discourage us. As believers and responsible citizens, we should do everything in our power to reduce corruption and oppression. We must also guard against being part of the problem, but in the end, there is very little we can do about it. The poor will continue to be oppressed; justice will not always be served; and rights will still be violated.

**a. Because each level of government has corrupt officials who seek to squeeze revenue out of those under them (v.8).**

In every level of government there are dishonest officials, men and women who seek to take advantage of those under them. Whether or not the injustice is ever discovered or the individuals are held accountable is not the point here. The point is that the existence of such corruption is undeniable and is far-reaching. Every corrupt official seeks to get his or her share of the wealth as well as to look out for the interests of all those who are in on the deception. Tragically, the person most affected by all the greed and deceit is the common man, the average citizen who is exploited—exploited both by and for the benefit of it the bureaucrats and politicians.

**b. Because the ruler himself (the king) stands at the head of this corrupt system (v.9).**

The system is corrupt all the way to the top, and the common citizen has little choice but to live with it. The Hebrew for [verses 8-9](#) is unclear and commentators view the verse from different perspectives. Even among reliable translations there is considerable variation. Some see verse eight as describing the various levels of accountability, with officials being accountable to God at the highest level, for it is God who ultimately gives the increase of the fields. Even the king who does not acknowledge God has to rely on the forces of nature, rely on God's control over the affairs of life and of the world. Others interpret Solomon as saying that having a king is an advantage; therefore, a nation is better off with a king than without one. "Government may be evil, but it is a necessary evil."

The perfect government will not exist on earth until Jesus reigns, and until then, oppression and injustice will continue. People are sinners, and they will always act

according to their nature. As long as government offices are occupied by sinners, corruption will exist. The wise believer will expect it and not be distraught because of it.

**Thought 1.** If we have a voice in determining who holds positions of authority, we should cast our votes for candidates who best represent the Christian standards as revealed in God's Word ([Pr.14:34](#)). Even in the best of governments, however, people's greedy, self-serving nature will often prevail. Nevertheless, we as believers must obey the command of Scripture to pray for those in authority, including for their salvation ([1 Ti.2:1-4](#)). Likewise, we must pray for all of those who suffer oppression at the hands of ungodly rulers and officials.

**“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”** ([Ro.13:1-7](#)).

**“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”** ([1 Ti.2:1-4](#)).

**“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”** ([Ps.29:2](#)).

**“Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy”** ([Ps.82:3](#)).

**“He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor” ([Pr.14:31](#)).**

**“And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; *Is it* not for you to know judgment? Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron. Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings. Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. Therefore night *shall be* unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for *there is* no answer of God. But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin. Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, *Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us*” ([Mic.3:1-11](#)).**

(Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.)

***Reflection Notes:***

## Deeper Study #2 (Exegetical Study)

### Critique of Expecting Too Much from a King

When you see how the poor are oppressed in the province, and law and justice are denied, do not be frightened (or: surprised) about this. For a higher [8] (official) watches over a high one, and over them are (even) higher ones. 8[9] And it is an advantage for a land in all this, when every plowed field has a (or: its own) king.

■ [7-8](#) This section continues the direct address to the reader in [4:17-5:6](#). Thematically the section brings to mind [4:13-16](#) (key words: “king” and “the poor”); moreover, “oppression” recalls [4:1-3](#) and the denial of “law and justice” recalls [3:16-21](#). Verse [9a](#) α can be read initially as a continuation of v. [8](#). Only with continued reading does it become clear that v. [9](#) (then also) begins a new theme.

■ [7](#) Like the preceding sections in [4:17-5:6](#), v. [7](#) formulates a well-reasoned request. The introductory circumstantial clause (“when you see...”) directs one’s view away from the Jerusalem temple ([4:17](#)) and toward the surrounding “province” Judea. In view of what is to be seen in this “province,” its Hebrew designation, מְדִינָה *mēdīnâ* (“judicial district,” from the root דִּן *dyn*: “do justice, maintain justice, hold judgment”) gains an ironic undertone. Since the verbs תִּמַּח *tmh* (“be frightened” or “be surprised”) and שָׁמַר *šmr* (“pay attention to ...”—in the sense of “guard, watch over”—or “protect”) are ambiguous in the present context (cf., e.g., Murphy and Gerson), request and reason in v. [7](#) can be read and interpreted in two ways:

(1) “... do not *be frightened*. For a higher one *watches* over a high one ...”

(2) “... do not *be surprised*. For a higher one *protects* a high one ...”

If one follows the first reading, v. [7](#) downplays the experience of oppression and injustice in Judea with a reference to the functioning of the Ptolemaic system of governance and administration: individual evils are no reason to be disturbed; they are bound to be discovered and eliminated by a cleverly devised system of hierarchical controls.

The extant “official” documents from the Ptolemaic empire are by no means silent about evils resulting from “maladministration.” “The evidence is unusually abundant and explicit compared to the other monarchies.” In a “memorandum”

from the late third century, in which the duties of an οἰκονόμος are described—probably by a διοικητής—we read, for example: “During your tour of inspection try as you [go] about to encourage everybody and make them feel happier; you should do this not only by words, but also should any of them have a complaint against the village-scribes or the village-chiefs (κώμαρχαι) about anything to do with agriculture, you should investigate the matter and as far as possible put an end to such incidents” (ll. 42ff.). “Take especial care that no act of extortion or any other misdeed is committed. For everyone who lives in the country must clearly know and believe that all such acts have come to an end and that they have been delivered from the previous bad state of affairs, and that [nobody] is allowed to do what he wishes, [but] everything is arranged for the best. And (so) you will make the countryside safe and (sc. will increase) the revenues in no small way” (ll. 224ff.). This text reveals the control system of the Ptolemaic administration, the related claim (propagated by officials) that “everything is arranged for the best,” and the underlying interest in the assurance of incomes for the crown.

If, however, one follows the second reading of v. [7](#), the verse forms a radical critique of the Ptolemaic governmental organization, in which “the authorities that check each other at the same time protect each other” (Galling): that this repeatedly resulted in evils is no wonder in view of the “corruption of the administration” (Lauha). “They mutually protect their advantage: no crow is going to peck out the eye of another” (Hitzig). As in [4:13-16](#), so here also it is not a question of evils that are to be eliminated within the system; rather, this system produces the very evils that it claims to eliminate.

■ [8](#) This verse seems to see an advantage in the existence of the king—and thus the top of the hierarchy of the highly and more highly placed—and therefore to express an antirevolutionary, skeptical conservatism (Kroeber), which still holds the monarchy to be relatively better than anarchy (Zimmerli). More specifically, v. [8](#) could see the “advantage” of the monarchy in the idea that the king is there “for a cultivated field”; that is, he is concerned about agriculture.

In fact, the Ptolemaic rulers had a special interest in the “cultivated field,” a prime source of their revenues. The increase in proceeds from taxes in Ptolemaic Judea was “only possible as a result of more intensive cultivation and the consequent increase in the fertility of the country.” One stimulus in this direction came, for example, from (temporary) tax exemptions for newly cultivated land. In this way, the interest of the king in the “tilled field” could also be of “advantage” for the small farmer.

After the ambiguous v. [7](#), nonetheless, v. [8](#)—understood as a statement about the advantage of the monarchy—can hardly be read other than as an ironic “quotation” of “official” Ptolemaic power ideology. According to v. [7](#) there is no doubt as to what should be thought about that: the king is only the “culmination” of a system in which each “more highly placed one” strives solely for his own advantage (cf. [Neh 5:4](#); [9:36-37](#)). “Whoever loves money will never have enough money” (v. [9](#)).

Yet v. [8](#), like v. [7](#) before it, also seems to be readable in two ways. The expression מֶלֶךְ לְשָׂדֵה נִעְבָּד *melek lěśādeh ne ‘ēbād* can also be understood in the sense of “one king for every cultivated field,” that is, “for every cultivated field its own king.” The advantage for a country would then consist in the fact that everyone (at least every landowner?) is his own master (cf. [8:9](#)).

(*Hermeneia - Qoheleth.*)

### **Reflection Notes:**

## **Deeper Study #3 (Practical Theology)**

Read the two articles below and write down the most important promises that minister to your heart in the political season.

### **“God’s PEACE is Available”**

<https://wordtruth.org/PDF/Gods%20Peace%20is%20Available.pdf>

### **“Leadership is not for Fools and Scoffers...but it Happens”**

<https://wordtruth.org/PDF/Leadership%20is%20not%20for%20Fools%20and%20Scoffers.pdf>

REFLECTION NOTES: