

Yet I Know

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Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0:00] You can be seated. We'll dismiss our kids to children's ministry.! They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things.

This is also vanity. 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. Verse 13.

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. 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.

[1:28] I said that this is also vanity. 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. So this text starts with a discussion of those who fear God and those who don't.

There are a number of names given in the text in the first few verses for the wicked. There's only one name given for the righteous. There's sinner and wicked and this and that and evil. The righteous is just always called the righteous.

But the best kind of way to frame the two kinds of people, it seems in our text, is between those who fear God and those who don't fear God. You see that in verse 12?

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 those who fear before him. And again at the end of verse 13, because he does not fear before God.

[2:37] So we'll talk about two different kinds of people throughout our sermon this morning and we'll just keep them in the categories of those who fear God and those who don't fear God. God, which forces us to kind of refresh our definition of what it means to fear God.

It's not a term we hear all that often anymore. I like Joel Beeky's definition. Let me read that to you. To fear the Lord is to be deeply aware that everything I do, say, and think, or fail to do and say is open to the all-seeing eyes of God, my creator, father, and judge.

And therefore, to be genuinely concerned to live in such a way as to please him and to keep my conscience clear before him.

So there are two ways of living here, some who fear God and some who don't. And the way that those two different people live, it really stands out. I mean, it's quite different.

The person who fears God is not doing certain things that would be an advantage to him. For instance, if there's a situation where a lie could help him get away with something, the person who fears God, even if he firmly believes that no one will ever know, will not lie because he believes that God knows and that God acts as father and judge.

[4:04] The person who fears God is going to treat people better than he has to, not because he's seeking a reward from any people. He believes that God is watching how he treats other people.

A person who fears God is careful with his words, not because all of his words are going to be called out against him, but because he believes that God hears all of his words. A person who fears God is kind and generous.

A person who fears God is very concerned about his interior thought life. His internal lusts and thoughts and worries are of worry to him.

Not because they may escape one day, but because there is a God who sees the interior just as well as he sees the exterior. A person who fears God will say the hard thing.

And that's interesting because a person who fears God is in particular concerned about sins of omission. Sins of commission are those sins we commit that doing things we should not do. [5:09] And those tend to bear consequences in sort of relative short term. If you do the thing you're not supposed to do, usually you find out about it pretty quick. But the person who fears God is also concerned about sins of omission.

Not because of immediate consequences. There are relatively few immediate consequences for sins of omission, but because he believes that there is a God who sees him and knows him and watches what he does and what he does not do.

And so another element of the person who fears God is he will say the thing that is hard to say because he fears God. The person who does not fear God lives a different kind of life.

He lies when it suits him. He mistreats others when it suits him and when he can get away with it. He does only what obviously pays.

He's not generous in any exceptional way. His generosity extends as far as the recognition for his generosity extends. If he can buy respect with his generosity, he'll be generous.

[6:09] But true anonymous good doing is not something a person who does not fear God engages in. No one can see his internal thoughts.

And so that whole realm of his mind and his heart is just open for whatever. And reality is, is that he would never say the hard thing unless he was forced to for his own good because in reality he knows that he can successfully flatter his way through life.

And that that's really a winning strategy most of the time. And this text is saying that what is difficult about life is not just that there are these two kinds of people, but point number two, the prosperity of the wicked seems to prove that their way of thinking is the right way.

Look at, they say in their heart there is no God and they act like there is no God. They don't live under the fear of God and, as our text just said, it works for them.

It appears to work for them. There's a whole category of people in the scriptures who say in their heart there is no God. And I think we ought to take a moment to think about that because that is not simply carving out this relatively small percentage of atheists in the world.

[7:31] And it is an extremely small percentage. There really aren't that many atheists in existence. And there really never have been that many atheists in existence. When the Bible talks about a person who says in his heart there is no God, the Bible is talking about the kind of person that you and I have been, at least from time to time and maybe right now.

The person who behaves and thinks and acts as if there is no God. That's the person who does not fear God. And the problem that the preacher is dealing with here in Ecclesiastes 8 is that that person who's acting as if there is no God, it kind of pays off for him.

Look back at verse 10 of our text, chapter 8 of Ecclesiastes, 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.

He lists three evidences of their prosperity. Long life, spirituality, and notoriety or celebrity. They have longevity, spirituality, and celebrity.

They live a long life. They're welcome in the house of God. And people think well of them. They have lots of people speaking well of them at their funeral.

[8:49] And the outcome of this particular problem, they are acting as if there is no God to judge their actions, their thoughts, their sins of commission and their sins of omission.

And it seems to be paying off. That outcome teaches the world a troubling lesson. 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.

Everyone's paying attention to this person who's acting like there is no God and that it's working for them. And they learn a lesson, obviously we wish they wouldn't learn, and that is, well, this seems to prove there is no God.

In particular, there is no God who is concerned about this or that behavior. This is the other kind of thing I'd like to challenge you with this morning, is that if you've tried to walk with God for any length of time, I think you'll probably be able to identify, the Lord gives you a little humility and self-awareness, that there are areas of your life where you act like there are God, the God of the Bible is real, and there are areas of your life where you have talked yourself into believing that God doesn't really care about this part of your life.

So there's sort of a fragmented atheism that's really common. We're kind of a mess. But what makes it worse is that there really is a lot of evidence in the world that suggests that the person who moves carefree, not worried about God at all, at least not in certain areas of his life, that that presupposition that he's operating from seems to be true because, after all, look at his prosperity. [10 : 30] He has longevity. He has celebrity. He has spirituality. And this observation is universal.

If anybody's paying attention, we've all seen this person. I noticed an interesting historical phenomenon the other day. Jim Elliott, a man who died, I think, when he was 32, I believe, left behind a widow and a child, was killed on the beach in Ecuador, of a river in Ecuador, by natives he was trying to bring the gospel to.

Jim Elliott was born right around the same time Hugh Hefner was. Hugh Hefner lived to be 91 years old, essentially died of old age. The data stacks up everywhere.

That's a grotesque example of the data that I'm talking about, but that data exists everywhere, and it teaches a lesson, and that lesson is described in verse 11. It teaches a lesson that tempts people to act accordingly or act likewise.

And the Bible is full of really noble people who almost get seduced by this false lesson. That's the topic of Psalm 73, when Asaph says, truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart, as for me, but as for me, my feet had almost slipped, my steps had nearly slipped, for I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked, for they have no pangs until death, their bodies are fat and sleek, they are not in trouble as others are, they are not stricken like the rest of mankind, therefore pride is their necklace, violence covers them as a garment, their eyes swell out through fatness, their hearts overflow with follies, they scoff and speak with malice, loftily they threaten oppression, they set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth, therefore his people turn back to them and find no fault in them, and they say, how can God know?

[12 : 35] Is their knowledge in the most high? Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease, they increase in riches, all in vain I have kept my heart clean, and washed my hands in innocence, all in vain I have kept my heart clean, and washed my hands in innocence, Asaph saying, it doesn't work, godliness produces no meaningful outcome, those who act in their heart as if there is no God seem to be doing quite fine, for all the day long I have been stricken, and rebuked every morning, so it almost got Asaph, it nicked him, as they say, and it almost got Jeremiah, Jeremiah the prophet, in chapter 15, he complains to the Lord, O Lord, you know, remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me, on my persecutors, in your forbearance, take me not away, know that for your sake I bear reproach, your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy, and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name,

O Lord God of hosts, I did not sit in the company of revilers, nor did I rejoice, I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation, why is my pain unceasing, and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed, will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail, I talk about this verse a couple times every year, this has been a tether, in my own walk with the Lord, and this idea of a deceitful brook, just has always stood with me, because of my middle daughter, no kidding, no this term has always stood with me, because I grew up reading a lot of, little house in the prairie type books, and I understood what he was saying here, because of those books, and that is simply, when you're out in the frontier, and you're building a home, you look for some place, that has a reliable water source, and you find that place, you're like, all right this is a great land, it's got a reliable water source,

I'm going to build my house next to this thing, and I'm going to stake all of my future, next to this water source, and then this would happen in real life, it turns out that that water source, was extraordinarily seasonal, not even once a year would it fill up, it was just, it just happened to be full that year, when you built your house by it, but for the most part, that creek doesn't supply water, and you built your whole life, by a deceitful stream, and if you follow the Lord, for any period of time, and you've observed the prosperity, of the wicked, you will have moments in your life, where you say, God did I choose the wrong thing, to build my life on, it seemed right, I chose to follow you, I did sacrifice a lot, to follow you, is, did I make a mistake, by the way, if you continue reading in that chapter, another reason it's my favorite chapter, is because God, has absolutely no time for this, no pats on the head, he said,

I will do everything I said I will do, now you stop, you stop it, separate the worthwhile, from the worthless, and continue, so the problem, of the prosperous wicked, has tempted, a lot of people,

and torn a lot of people away, just as verse 11 says, that it will, but, we see that it did not, get the preacher, the problem of the prosperous wicked, did not get hold, of the preacher, he obviously observed, the same things, he says it over, and over again, 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, in other words, there are righteous people, who suffer, what the wicked should suffer, and there are wicked people, to whom it happens, according to the deeds, of the righteous, there are wicked people, who get exactly, what the righteous should have, and I said, this is vanity, so he's seeing clearly, but why didn't it seduce him, why didn't it nick him, like it did Jeremiah, or Asaph, I will tell you exactly why, and he has told us exactly why, because beginning in chapter one, this preacher has said, that whatever he is doing, he is doing in wisdom, chapter one he begins, I gave my heart to seek, and search out by wisdom, all that is done under heaven, verse 16 of chapter one, I said in my heart, I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all, who were over Jerusalem, before me, and my heart has had, great experience of wisdom, and knowledge, verse 17, I applied my heart, to know wisdom, and to know madness, and folly, so why didn't, the prosperity of the wicked, seduce the preacher, because he has wisdom, he has wisdom, that's why he didn't, get seduced, didn't say okay, so to prevent this sort of, seductive, embittering, lesson, that the prosperous wicked teach, you need wisdom, okay, well what is wisdom,

[18:15] I would point you back, to Proverbs 14, 12, which I think is not necessarily, the definition of wisdom, but certainly description, I think this is the most important thing, you can know about being a human being, I will talk about it constantly, and I noticed as I was driving here, that the slides are not quite right, so bear with me, this is an important lesson, for you to understand, Proverbs 14, 12, there is the way that seems right to a man, but in the end leads to death, in other words, what I see, is not the most reliable indicator, for how this or that journey will end, my eyes, my understanding, is limited, and so there is a way, that seems right to me, but in the end, it will lead to death, and this is where the slide is wrong, there's the alternative, is true, and Jesus is the one, who really said this statement, with his own life, and that is, there is a way, that seems wrong to a man, but in the end, leads to life, this is what wisdom perceives, there is a way, that seems right to a man, but in the end, leads to death, there is a way, that seems wrong to a man, but in the end, leads to life, wisdom holds that, and it keeps you, from being seduced, by what you see, what you see, versus what you know, is the main theme, of this passage, look again, at the passage, 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 is also vanity, because the sentence, against an evil deed, is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man, is fully set to do evil, verse 12, 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, all I'd like you, to really grasp this morning, is that the reason, that the preacher, was able to be insulated, from this false message, which is preached, every day of your life, in almost every media outlet, you consume, that the fear of the Lord, is not beneficial, all I would ask, for you to grasp today, is for you to notice, verse 10, beginning, then I saw, and this phrase, in verse 12, yet I know, then I saw, yet I know, that's wisdom, not being guided, merely by what I see, or observe, or what is told to me, through my senses, or my feelings, but being guided, by some source, of information, that is deeper, than my own perceptions, yet I saw, but I know, the gap between, what you see, and what God says, that's where all the trouble, you could possibly get into, in this life exists, the gap between, what you see, and what God says, and if you can, join the preacher, in acquiring wisdom, being able to see, yes I see, but I know, you will be insulated, from the majority of lies, the world, is trying to tell you, that's the reason, that the preacher, escapes, this harrowing observation, unscathed, he sees one thing, he knows something, deeper than that thing, he knows something, that even contradicts, that one thing, now let me take, a quick moment, and hit pause, and do what I call, an excursus, because I think there's, an important moment, happening with AI, and just actually, probably ever since, the advent of the internet, where intelligence,

is being commoditized, what does that mean, intelligence is going to, wind up being, a cheap thing, intelligence, let me tell you, the difference between, intelligence, and wisdom, intelligence is, horsepower, it's hardware, it's an 800, horsepower car, wisdom, wisdom, is knowing the track, the one who made the track, why he made the track, what his purposes are, for the track, and what each curve, is intended to do, on the track, wisdom, is knowing the track, wisdom, is knowing the

maker, of the track, what's the difference, between an intelligent person, and a wise person, an intelligent person, has been given by God, exceptional hardware, there, but it's no guarantee, that they will not crash, on the first, or second, or third turn, in fact, mostly, if you have, massive horsepower, and lack wisdom, you're in for a very, stupid, difficult, and futile life, ideally, it'd be nice, to have above average, horsepower, and above average wisdom, but if you can only have one, and these things, seem to be somewhat, deterministic, get to know, the maker, of the track, know the one, who made, the race you're running, and you will, in the end, win the race, spend all of your time, trying to acquire, all of the things, that the world tells you, are necessary, to get fast, in the race, you'll just be another, sunken Titanic, with a thousand lessons, to teach those, who are dumber than you, but humbler, and that is, is that wisdom, is what helps us, discern, discern, the difference, between what we see, and what God says, and to trust, what God says, where does wisdom, come from, we know, that he was, he had an immune system, against the lies, of the world, and we know, that that immune system, was wisdom, where did that wisdom, come from, the Bible tells us, very clearly, that the beginning, of wisdom, is the fear, and knowledge of God, one of the incredible, things, about Ecclesiastes, is I'm pretty sure, this guy has, decent horsepower, and wisdom,

I'm pretty sure, he's got a lot of both, but even in his, relatively high intellect, it's shocking, to see the number, of things he does not know, and admits to not knowing, in this book, he doesn't know, exactly what happens, when a man dies, chapter 3, 21, who knows, whether the spirit, of man goes upward, or the spirit, of a beast, goes down, into the earth, he doesn't know, the future, chapter 8, verse 7, he does not know, what it is to be, for who can tell him, how it will be, he doesn't know, what's coming, for his own projects, chapter 11, verse 6, you do not know, which will prosper, this or that, he doesn't know, why God mixes the days, the way he does, chapter 7, verse 14, so that man may not, find out anything, that will be after him, he doesn't even know, his own hour, chapter 9, verse 12, man does not know, his time, like a fish, taken in an evil net, so the children of man, are snared, in an evil time, he doesn't even know, how God knits, a baby together, chapter 11, verse 5, as you do not know, the way of the spirit, comes to the bones, in the womb, of a woman with child, he doesn't even really, know, how he can audit, the entire system, chapter 8, verse 17, that he, man cannot find out, the work that is done, under the sun, even though a wise man, claims to know, he cannot find it out, so there's a lot, that he doesn't know, for being the wisest man, in Jerusalem, there's a lot, he doesn't know, now I would guess, that there's a lot, you don't know, and I would guess, that if you were, to trace back, not only the source, of many of your anxieties, but also many of your fears, many of the hesitations, that have kept you, from running a race well, it has been, because you have thought, you needed to know, more things, in order to run the race well, and I'm telling you, no, you just needed to know, the one who built the course, that's what you needed to know, the shape of this preacher's mind, is agnostic, in a bunch of areas, open handed, who can tell, is one of his favorite lines, but when it comes, to the character of God, there is absolute granite, here's the key theme, he doesn't know, the what, of a thousand things, but he knows the who, behind all of them, he doesn't know, the what, of a thousand things, but he knows, the who, behind all of them,

I do not know, what the future holds, but I know, who holds the future, if you can know the who, then you can be wise, and if you can be wise, you can win your race, he knows God, well enough, to know, that certain realities, must come to pass, he says, what God does, endures, God will judge, it will be well, with those who fear him, that's what he knows, what he sees, doesn't seem to comport, with what he knows, but what he knows, wins out, because it's not simply, what he knows, it's who he knows, friends, every day, of your life, you've spent, not coming to know, the creator, the one who made you, better, is a day, you've wasted, on something, superfluous, your chief end, is to know him, and enjoy him forever, and knowing him, is the source, of all wisdom,

I had a picture, come to mind, this morning, as I was praying, through this sermon, always been fascinated, by pontoon bridges, the military, uses these things, to cross, spans of water, can't obviously, stop in the middle, of a war, and pour concrete, and so on, and so forth, so they've got, these pontoon bridges, and they just kind of, lay a section out, and attach it, to another section, and they're just spanning, the water, that they're needing to cross, and I thought about, so many of you, and I do pray for you, regularly, friends, I want to, I want to tell you, that I'm not, indicting anyone, in particular, but here's the concern, I think, I see many of you, being very faithful, and connecting, and very concerned, about connecting, this segment, of the bridge, to that segment, career, health, finances, finances, you'll come to me, when you, because you want to, make sure your marriage, is

good, or you'll come talk to me, because you want to make sure, you're doing a good job, parenting, very few people, come to me, for financial advice,

[30:16] I haven't figured that one out, and I can see, a lot of thought, put into connecting, one section, of the bridge, to the next, and that's all, we're all trying to do, let's be honest, is just get through, just get across, I don't begrudge, anyone for that, I do the same thing, but I do have, a tragic figure, in my mind, and I hope that, if you're here, and you're this person, you'll let this, pierce your heart, I do believe, that there will be, many people, who wind up, building a relatively, nice pontoon bridge, stand in the middle of it, to behold all, that they've done, only to observe, that it is drifting, because the very, first step, has to be, that you tether yourself, to the land, and if I said friends, I'm proud, of so many of you, and all the things, that you're doing, and seeking to do, there's some really, impressive people, at Providence Community Church, but if your, first and foremost, priority, is not to know God, then you're building, a floating bridge, not connected, to anything solid, at the end of the day, who you are, is who you know, most importantly, do you know, your maker, if you know your maker, if you know his heart, if you know his attributes, if you know his person, and you'll be able, to absorb, momentary inferences, out in the world, that suggest that, you know, that the prosperous, actually win out, you'll say, well,

I know the one, who made all of this, and that's, he's not going to do that, you see this, sort of, strategy for sin, unfold, this like, I will win, by being nice, or I will, win by being manly, or I will win, by being whatever, and you see all this, you're like, you know, yeah, I mean, it appears to be working, in the short term, but I know the one, who made the course, and he built the course, precisely, to handle these kinds of things, and so, this capacity, to filter, what you see, through who you know, will keep you safe, and on the right track, likewise, if you want, the briefest of all, possible explanations, for what a deconstruction is, you simply have to invert, everything I've just said, and it's people, who ultimately read, the character, of God, through their circumstances, and they take, what they see, and turn it into, what they know, about God, so, the goal, is to know, your maker, to know the one, who made your life, to know the one, who holds your future, and to spend less time, concerned, about the details, of the future itself, get to know, your maker, which leads us, to the table,

Chris, how can I know, God, how can I know, who God is, there's a thousand, different opinions, about who God is, a thousand different religions, a thousand different preachers, a thousand different, holy books, how can I know, who God is, the Christian, who is a faithful Christian, will always tell you, that the place, you can go, to know who God is, is the cross, of Jesus Christ, it's been the same answer, for two thousand years, in the Christian church, you want to know, who God is, look at the cross, of Jesus Christ, because there you'll see, a God, who hates sin, but loves sinners, so much, that he sent his own son, to take on your sins, so that his wrath, against your sins, could pass on his own son, that's what the cross is, that's what's happening, at the cross, and what happens, at the cross, for everybody, who actually knows God, is that God places, the righteousness, of his son,

Jesus Christ, on the sinner, and makes it so, that the sinner, can know God, so if I'm telling you, this morning, you know, you need to get to know God, and you say, what does that even look like, I would say, God needs to do a miracle, on you, by your believing, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he has this, incredible thing, he's done, to every person, in this room, who would say, that they are saved, that is this, he turns sinners, into friends, he turns enemies, into sons and daughters, I'm not telling you, to study theology, I'm telling you, to study the cross, and understand, that there, God demonstrated, his own love for us, and that while, we were still sinners, he sent his son, to die for us, that's who God is, he hates sin, he loves you, and wants to save you, and make you his friend, and so today, when we celebrate the table, we take up the bread, which is representative, of Jesus's body, offered up for us, and we take up the cup, which is representative, of Jesus's blood, poured for us, and we say, this is the absolute, center of, our understanding, that God loves us, and gave us, his son, let me pray, close your eyes, oh father, we are so grateful, for who you are, and so grateful, that you love us enough, to deal very openly, about one of the major, temptations, that befalls, men and women, and has for, the history of the world, and that is, that the evidence, sometimes seems to be, that the wicked prosper, and that the righteous suffer, and that there must be no God, because if there were a God, then, why, would he let the wicked suffer, fundamentally, the insulation, against that lie, the immune system, against that kind of mind virus, is that, those of us, who know you, know, that you will always bring justice, to pass, and that in spite of whatever we

see, the reality will be, that your perfect will, will come to pass, because you are sovereign, you have all power, you are never overthrown, by anything, all your purposes, come to pass, and that fundamentally, when the sentences, are all written, and a period is put, at the end of history, you will be seen to be, just and loving, and good and kind, and there will be, no footnotes, no qualifiers, you will be seen to be, everything you've ever said, you were, and nothing, your enemies say you are, so Lord God, we pray that through your,

Holy Spirit today, the preaching of your word, the celebration of this table, you would confirm these things, to the hearts of your saints, and God, if someone's here, and they heard, that they are building a bridge, disconnected from the fundamental, and they desire to know you, Lord, you say that, we are called to seek you, when, so that, when you are to be found, and God, we just ask that you would, reveal yourself, to those people, let them call out to you, ask them to save you, ask you to save them, and God, please, introduce new people, even today, to you, or bless us, as we participate, in this time of communion, communion, in Jesus name we pray, amen, so if you're here, and you have placed your faith, in Jesus Christ, would you come, and partake of this table, which is really meant, to teach you, about who God is, and if you're here, and you haven't yet done that, listen, you're just at a different stage, than other people, we've all been at that stage, I would encourage you to sit, just quietly, no one's noticing you, and just do business with God, call upon the name of the Lord, and be saved.