

Value People

July 7, 2013 ~ Ecclesiastes 4

Chapters 1 through 3 Presented 2 Opposing Worldviews

- ❖ Vain Repetition from 1.1 to 2.23
- ❖ Purpose & Meaning from 2.24 to 3.22
- ❖ These 2 perspectives define the ends of a spectrum on life
 - ✧ The 1st perspective sees life as ultimately meaningless / leading to despair
 - ✧ The 2nd perspective sees purpose & meaning in everything / leading to joy
 - ✧ Which perspective is the correct one? / Are we to choose between them?
- ❖ The main lesson of Ecclesiastes is: “**A man’s got to know his limitations.**”
 1. “**Man is limited in ability**” / “**Grasping for the wind**” ~ inability to **DO**
 2. “**Man is limited in knowledge**” / “**Cannot find out**” ~ inability to **KNOW**
- ❖ Today we step out into life / Solomon makes several observations

Today’s Observations

- ❖ We are with Solomon as he makes 5 observations about life
 1. **v1-3** addresses oppression (*abuse of power*) and pity for the oppressed
 2. **v4-6** concerns envying others and he shares proverbs on work
 3. **v7-8** he shares a “grave misfortune” of someone w/misplaced priorities
 4. **v9-12** he shares more proverbs on life & relationships / contrasting good & bad
 5. **v13-16** the parable seems out of place until you identify the common thread
- ❖ We’ll review these one at a time and then tie them all together

1a. Vision of Oppression

- ❖ Solomon almost appears to see this in a vision / It moves him
- ❖ He declares that the oppressed “have no comforter”
 - ✧ He states that “on the side of their oppressors there is power”
 - ✧ Then he repeats his complaint that “they have no comforter”
- ❖ Now... Think about this... “**What is odd about Solomon’s concern?**”
 - ✧ What could Solomon have instead lamented that the oppressed did not have?
 - ✧ “**What would oppressed people need more than comfort?**” ~ rescue
 - ◇ A hero — champion — protector — defender — savior — (*salvation*)
- ❖ These oppressed had no hope – no merciful ones in their midst
- ❖ Solomon lamented this lack more than that of a savior – a rescuer

1b. Solomon May Shock us With the Next 2 Verses

- ❖ In **v2** he says that these oppressed would be better off dead
- ❖ Then in **v3** he says that better still is to have never existed
 - ✧ Job says this of himself ~ And Elijah and Jeremiah long for death
- ❖ Oppression is evil – and at times it fills this world
 - ✧ III: Great Leap Forward ~ 1958-1961 Destroy family – build utopia (~20-45m)
 - ✧ III: Cultural Revolution ~ 1966-1969 Chaotic violence ruled (~15-35m)
 - ◆ Yet this (China) doesn't even appear on the United Nations list of genocides
 - ✧ III: The Killing Fields ~ 1975-1978 Cambodian genocide (25% pop died)
- ❖ But consider what Solomon says here . . .
 - ✧ Because these oppressed had no comforter they should not exist
 - ◆ This type of argument leads to the concept of “**mercy killings**”
 - ◆ Someone is powerless to heal another in pain – so instead they kill them
 - ◆ This has become a common element in modern books and films
- ❖ But remember, the mercy killer benefits from the death
 - ✧ They can now sleep without hearing agonized screams
 - ✧ When you realize they benefit from death the reasons for killing expand quickly

2. Envy and Greed is Addressed in the Next Section

- ❖ **v4** ~ Envy of another's labor is declared to be vanity
 - ✧ Primitive cultures no private property | But God sanctioned it “**good & evil**”
- ❖ **v5** ~ Yet adopting a non-working extreme leads to starvation
- ❖ **v6** ~ Instead we must be content with enough
 - ✧ The daily manna collection was training in this ~ couldn't keep extra (**Ex 16.17**)
 - ✧ This “**handful**” only practice cannot combat envy ~ only greed

3. v8 ~ Greed is Elaborated on in this Story of the Solitary Man

- ❖ We may err and call him lonely ~ but he doesn't appear to be so
 - ✧ Though he is alone he's chosen the solitary life
 - ◆ Yet he is not happy ~ He's not “**satisfied with riches**”
- ❖ But “**he never asks ..**”
 - ✧ He doesn't see that his life is illogical ~ I'm sure to him it has great meaning
 - ✧ He arrived at this stage of life one day at a time
- ❖ But is earning an inheritance for brother or son or posterity more meaningful?
 - ✧ This man's life is plainly meaningless ~ with others it must be reasoned out

4. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward ~~for their labor~~”

- ❖ v9 ~ A declaration of comparative good is made - two better than one
 - ✧ Then he goes on to give 3 reasons for this belief
- ❖ v10 ~ assistance / help ~ “one will lift up his companion”
 - ✧ III: Mountain climber (Aron Ralston) trapped 5 days Moab area ~ cut arm off
- ❖ v11 ~ comfort / warmth – “if two lie down together, they will keep warm”
 - ✧ Heated homes only common over past 100 years ~ A/C only 50 years
- ❖ v12 ~ safety / strength – “one may be overpowered .. two can withstand him”
 - ✧ III: Bonanza scene ~ Pa has Little Joe break pencil / then hands him 3
- ❖ Return to v9 ~ What does “their labor” refer to?
 - ✧ This prefaces others ~ “For” & “Again” / Friendship takes work / get rewards

5. Parable of Transition of Power in Kingdom

- ❖ There are only 2 people in the story ~ king and youth
 - ✧ Both are introduced in v13 ~ “poor & wise youth” / “old & foolish king”
 - ✧ v14 refers to the king in his youth
- ❖ v15 shows a new youth now taking the old king’s place
 - ✧ The 2nd youth is praised & accepted by all | “all the living .. were with”
- ❖ v16 ~ “Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him”
 - ✧ The ones that bring him to power love him & support him
 - ✧ But to others he’s regarded as foolish & unresponsive as the old king was
- ❖ NKJV subtitle is “Popularity Passes Away”
 - ✧ It’s not just popularity ~ it’s more ~ it’s hero worship (*political salvation*)
 - ✧ This process is as flawed as it is predictable ~ because ignorance is recurring
 - ◆ “They that are ignorant of history are doomed to repeat it.”

All of Chapter 4 was Selected Because of an Underlying Theme

- ❖ Only one of the 6 commentaries recognized the theme
 - ✧ Some exclude **vss 1-3** or **1-6** | Others include **13-16** but don’t want to
- ❖ All 5 of these observations revolve around human relationships
 - ✧ And more than that, human relations are central to the chapter
 - ✧ e.g., Injustice introduced in **4.16** but as foil for God’s promised judgment
 - ✧ It’s introduced here too but as a dysfunctional aspect of human relations

Xition: Let’s look at the 5 observations in light of this theme ..

Theme of Chapter 4 is Humans Relating to One Another

1. Oppression is first (and all too common in our world)
 - ✧ It's common because it's efficient | A supreme Communist leader gets his way
 - ✧ III: The Road to Serfdom ~ von Hayek "Why the Worst Get on Top"
 - ✧ "There is an increasing tendency among modern men to imagine themselves ethical because they have delegated their vices to larger and larger groups."
p157, Reinhold Neibuhr "Moral Man and Immoral Society"
 - ✧ Evil men are successful because they're willing to do anything (pg 165)
2. Envy of others and rapacious greed for more ~ cruel (*unfair*) competition
3. Excessive greed even leads to odd behavior ~ wealthy workaholic with no heirs
4. Mutually beneficial (proper communal) behavior is then shown by example
5. We close with the example of replacing a ruler
 - ✧ Everyone has unrealistically high hopes ~ euphoria
 - ✧ In the US we refer to this period as the honeymoon
 - ✧ But time passes / disappointment mounts / powerful rulers grow jaded
 - ✧ Until there comes a time to replace the old ruler (sometimes violently)
 - ✧ Yet the cycle repeats itself ~ Another example of vain repetition

God is Absent from Chapter 4

- ❖ Solomon doesn't propose solutions to these dysfunctional relations
 - ✧ He does criticize them though | sometimes harshly
 1. He wishes that the oppressed didn't exist
 2. He declares that greed is vanity and grasping for the wind
 3. He says the same about seeking utopia through political rulers
- ❖ Yet he does point out the value of friendship ~ There is:
 - ✧ **v10** ~ assistance in times of trouble,
 - ✧ **v11** ~ comfort in difficult or challenging circumstances
 - ✧ **v12** ~ and safety in time of adversity

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,

And to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

To God our Savior, who alone is wise,

Be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen *pause* Go in peace . . .