

Message #12

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

In any society, in every culture and in every life, there will always be oppressors and acts of oppression. There will always be those who will rob others, wrong others and destroy others.

This is not new to our culture; this negative reality was fully operative clear back in the days of Solomon. Solomon saw it in his day. He saw the same kinds of things that we see today. In fact, the words of verse 1—"I looked" and "I saw"—indicate that Solomon was not imagining this or dreaming it up. This was not some scholastic hypotheses; this is what Solomon actually saw. As Michael Eaton, in his commentary said, "The Preacher is an eyewitness" (p. 91). Solomon is writing here about something he had personally seen.

Now the actual Hebrew word "oppress" which is used three times in this verse, is a word that means to treat one violently or unjustly. The idea is to proudly and viciously defraud people (Gesenius, p. 660).

WHEN GOD IS NOT AT THE CENTER OF ONE'S LIFE, THERE WILL BE NO COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF OPPRESSION AND ONE WILL WIND UP WISHING HE WERE DEAD AND NOT EVEN HAVING BEEN BORN .

Solomon, being King of Israel, didn't have too many people who oppressed him. But he saw others who were being oppressed in every area of life. When he was looking at life "under the sun," none of it made sense. He couldn't see anything positive with oppression, he couldn't see any comfort or comforter.

SECTION #1 – The vision of Solomon. 4:1

We use the term "vision" to describe what Solomon saw. The language here is not mystical or metaphysical, it is real—Solomon actually looked at this and actually saw this.

Sight #1 - Solomon saw all acts of oppression. 4:1a

In the Bible the term "oppressor" is not favorable. God has nothing in His Word to say that is positive about oppressors. They are evil and godless. They do not fear God and they are mentioned in the same class as a sorcerer, an adulterer and a liar. These are people who pick on and take advantage of the hurting and the helpless, like widows and orphans (Malachi 3:5). Oppressors are ruthless people and they do ruthless things.

Notice Solomon is so out of step with God that he sees it, but he doesn't do anything about it. When David saw the oppressive Goliath, he took him on man-to-man, one-on-one. When Moses saw an Egyptian beating up an innocent Hebrew, he killed him with his bare hands. When Jesus Christ saw the Pharisaical leadership dominating His temple and His people, His temper exploded and He scourged the whole temple. When one is right with God, one doesn't just idly watch acts of oppression, he tries to stop it.

Sight #2 - Solomon saw the tears of the oppressed. **4:1b**

People who are oppressed are people. They hurt and they cry. The wonderful news is even though people may not see the tear, God does.

Sight #3 - Solomon saw no comfort for the oppressed. **4:1c**

There is a hopelessness to one oppressed.

In my opinion, this verse is tragic. Solomon was King of Israel. Not only could he have comforted the oppressed himself, he could have taught those oppressed to cry out to a God who cared for them.

Sight #4 - Solomon saw the power of the oppressor. **4:1d**

When you get your focus “under the sun” you soon see that great power lies with godless people who are prestigious, prominent and prosperous,

If you keep looking at the godless crowd who has power, you can soon forget that there is one “above the sun” who has a lot more power than they do.

SECTION #2 – The verdict of Solomon. **4:2-3**

Conclusion #1 - It is better to be dead than alive. **4:2**

When you can't make any sense of life and you can't see God in anything and you are being oppressed, death can begin to look better than life because once the person is dead he is out of his oppressive state!

The “it is better to be dead than alive” mentality finds its source in a focus “under the sun,” not “above the sun.”

Conclusion #2 - It is better to never be born. **4:3**

Parting Questions:

1. Who do we really believe has the power—people or God?
2. Do we wish we were dead or are we excited about being alive?
3. Are we thankful we are alive or are we regretful we are alive?