

*Evil & Despair; Judgment & Hope*  
Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3  
Reading: Psalm 73

Bethany Baptist Church  
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**In 1975, a young communist Cambodian named Pol Pot led his Khmer Rouge guerillas to power in Cambodia.**

His followers called him *Brother Number One*. Pol Pot was *Marxism on steroids*.

He quickly *cut Cambodia off* from the world, and emptied out her cities in an effort to build a *super-agrarian Marxist society*.

The man was as *ruthless* as he was *deluded*.

In the space of **5** years, Pol Pot & his cruel & youthful *Khmer Rouge* killed **2M** people in the *Kampuchean countryside* – **20+%** of Cambodia's population. History calls it, *The Killing Fields*.

Pol Pot was eventually driven from power, but spent the rest of life trying to foment rebellion from exile.

*Brother Number One* died in prison in **1998**, perhaps succumbing to a heart attack.

A *Time* magazine article (**1999**) reporting on Pol Pot's *atrocities & death*, commented that the *mass murderer*, by dying in custody of natural causes, **escaped justice**.

*Escaped justice?* (PAUSE) Do the wicked & the oppressor ever *get away w/ it?*

**Turn w/ me to Eccl 3:16 – 4:3.** The *prevalence of injustice* and the seeming *futility of death* drive a secular man to conclude that it would be best to never have drawn a breath. That's *grim*...

But be careful! It doesn't pay to think too hard if you only live life *under the sun!*

Re-explain *life under the sun*. → The life of the *agnostic*. Whether or not he/she would admit to the *possibility* of a god, practically speaking it *doesn't matter*. God is not a *factor* in his *equation*. Whatever gods there are, are *far away*.

**Man is on his own.**

*Looking for meaning, beloved? Want to make a difference?*

**Solomon discovers *two more reasons why life is pointless* if there is no God in Heaven.**

**1.) *Wickedness flourishes instead of righteousness, and then you & your dog both die (3:16-22). No one ever pays the piper.***

**2.) *Power is more persuasive than good, so what's the point (4:1-3)!?!  
Might makes right!***

**But look for Solomon's *real conclusion* in v.17: Sin is real but life is *not* meaningless; there is a God in Heaven and there will be a *time of justice* – a *Day of Judgment*.**

*...pray...*

## Wickedness wins & then you die (16-22). *Really?*

1. How can any *reasonable* man or woman find *peace* when the world is filled with *injustice*?
  - a. *Furthermore, I have seen... (v.16)* Solomon is still *searching* for life's meaning - *fulfillment*. He is up against another *road-block*, and it's a *big & bad*. We've all *gnashed our teeth* at this one: *in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness*.
  - b. We can stand *pain* & we can survive *sorrow*, but *injustice* makes us *mad!* Solomon's double-barreled repetition is emphatically clear: where there should be *justice*, I find *wickedness*. Where there should be *righteousness*, I find *wickedness*. American poet James Russell Lowell complained, "*Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne.*"
    - i. *Wickedness* – (2x) The Hebrew term means the *perversion/bending of what is right*. You could say, *corruption*.
  - c. So if God is in *control* of life (v.11); if the Jehovah has *appointed* our times (v.1), then why is this flaunting of good so common? Solomon has two responses: "*I said to myself (vv.17, 18).*" One answer is *below the sun* – the *secular* take on corruption. We aren't surprised by that. But the Preacher's *first* response (17) speaks to injustice from an *eternal perspective*.

2. Why is there *injustice*? Why isn't the *wrong* made *right*?
  - a. Asaph, the author of **Psa73**, *anguished* over the very same question Solomon *tripped over*! Let's look at Asaph's *complaint* (**read 1-14**).
    - i. You know what Asaph's saying, right, *Nice guys finish last! What's the point!?!?*
    - ii. But Asaph kept *considering & praying*, and the truth finally freed him from his *bitterness*. **Read 18-24, 27.**
    - iii. Asaph & Solomon's came to the *same conclusion*. There *is corruption* in this world, but "*God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man.*"
    - iv. Back in Solomon's *ballad*, **vv.1-8**, we were reminded that God has appointed a *time* for everything. Now (**17**) Solomon uncovers the *biggest event of all*, & the solution to the problem of *unanswered evil*: there is *time* for everything...and there will be a *time* for God to *judge it all*.
    - v. Solomon's first response is the *right answer*, and it speaks to many of the obstacles Solomon encounters. *Will not the Judge of all the earth judge justly.*

3. But what if you factor God *out of the equation*? What if God *doesn't care & won't act*? Then what do you w/ *injustice*? "I said to myself..." Solomon's *second response (18-22)* is the *only answer you get* if your worldview is completely *under the sun*.
  - a. The problem of this seeming triumph of *evil* over *good* is a *litmus test*. Maybe God allows *unanswered evil* to tell you what you really are!
  - b. Well, your test results are *back & here's* what they *show*: you're just an *animal*. The *problem of v.16* is *answered* in man's *base nature*.
  - c. You say there is no *eternity*; no *corrective judgment to come*? Then that just *proves the point*. If there is no *eternity*, you simply *live, suffer, die, return to dust*. No *advantage* to being a man; it's *vanity*. Genesis tells us God *fashioned* us from the *dust (2:7)*, maybe the big *dustbin* is where we're headed.
  - d. If you choose to live *only under the sun & ignore God & His truth* in this life, you can't be *confident* of what happens when you die! **Read 21.**
4. Solomon pauses (22) with a *conclusion* he's offered before.
  - a. If God doesn't *set things right* (here or hereafter), if the *cow & I* are destined for the *dust-heap*, then the best you can do is make up your mind to *sit back & enjoy the ride*.
  - b. Cause if there is no God, *who knows what's next*?
5. Beloved, before we move, I must remind that the *right answer* is behind *door #1!* "God will judge both the *righteous man & the wicked man.*"
  - a. Again, **v.1**, stands: *There is an appointed time for everything, for every event under heaven. And v.11, He has made everything beautiful in its time. Now, v.17, God will judge... for a time for every matter and for every deed there is.*
  - b. Further, you are *not* a soulless beast. God has *set eternity in your heart (11)*. By God's *grace, in Christ*, this *life & its disappointments* are *not* all there is, & *dust is not your destiny*. (PAUSE)

**But Solomon is still searching *below the sun*, & Solomon is still troubled...**

**It all boils down to *might makes right* (read 4:1-3).**

1. *Then I looked again...* This is a familiar expression in Ecclesiastes; Solomon often uses the idea of *looking* or *seeing* to introduce another *search for fulfillment*. Jerusalem's king, though *renowned* for his wisdom, is still looking *under the sun*.
2. His findings are much like those in **v.16**: *oppression* in the place of *freedom*.
  - a. What marks the *oppressed*? Here's what Solomon saw: *tears*. Weeping.
  - b. Who champions the *oppressed*? No one – apparently. Solomon says it once, *they had no one to comfort them*. Did you *miss it*? He says it again: *they had no one to comfort them*. No ally.
  - c. But the hallmark of the oppressor? *Power*. *Survival of the fittest*. *Might makes right*.
3. Oppression is as old as *Pharaoh* forcing *Jacob's sons* to bake his bricks. As contemporary as the *Underground Church* in *Communist Church*. Oppression is as small & ordinary as a *neighborhood bully*, or as big & dangerous as a *corrupt bureaucrat*. And it's all about *power*.
4. If that's all there is *under the sun*, then Solomon can offer only one *dark response*. His grim conclusion *cascades* from *worst case* to "*best*."
  - a. The *worst* is to be alive in these days, and *witness (taste!)* the *bitter tears* of the oppressed. No *ally*. No *comforter*.
  - b. Better than that is to be *already dead!* At least *death* puts you out of reach of the *oppressor*. You don't have to *deal w/ it* any more.
  - c. But better than *either*, is the one who simply *never is*. Why witness *any* of this?

*Wickedness...oppression...uncertainty...despair*. Is that all there is? Where's the *advantage* in all of that?

Solomon's *under the sun* perspective drove him to the *brink of despair*.

**If *evil* trumps *good* & *power* trumps *right*, then *man* is little better than a *cow*, & *death* is better than *life*.**

But don't lose sight of Solomon's *real* answer (**read v. 17**). God is in *control* and God has set His *timetable* to make things right.

But beloved, that means you & I must have *faith*. We must *trust* that God will make all things right; sometimes in *this life*, **always** in the *life to come*.

Abraham, the man of faith, asked this question: "*Will not the Judge of all the earth judge justly?*"

He will!

*...pray...*