

The Great Injustices of Life

Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:6

CLARIFICATION

Before we start, I need to make a clarification and slight correction to something I said last week. The Bible warns those who would become teachers that they would be subject to a greater judgment or criticism, and potentially miscommunicating God's Word is not something I take lightly.

Last week, I made the statement that I "disagreed with some of Solomon's conclusions."

- Well, the first obvious error is even making the statement, "I disagree with Solomon!" Certainly, the wrong choice of words.
- I want to reaffirm my unwavering belief in the inspiration and inerrancy of all Scripture, including Ecclesiastes. I was not, in any way, suggesting that the Bible has errors or that I disagree with biblical statements.
- I intended to engage with Solomon's challenging questions and observations, not to question Scripture's truth. Ecclesiastes, as wisdom literature, uses Solomon's 'under the sun' perspective as a literary device to explore life's meaning without God at the center of it. Truly, if one lives their life in the pursuit of worldly things apart from God, Solomon's conclusions are valid.
- I also believe that for every "under the sun" conclusion, the New Covenant in Christ gives us an "above the sun" meaning that brings life and eternal purpose beyond Solomon's initial despair.
- My reference to 'kicking back at Solomon's conclusions' aimed to highlight the contrast between Solomon's "under the sun" despair and Christ's "above the sun" hope for a life of true fulfillment and value.
- Ultimately, Solomon concludes the book by telling his son, "Fear God and keep his commandments." In other words, "Learn from someone who's done it the wrong way

and save yourself some trouble by acknowledging God in this short life you have." But Ecclesiastes should point us to what life can be like in Christ, which was the intention of my statement.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Ecc 3:16-22 NKJV] [16] Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; And in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there. [17] I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." [18] I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals." [19] For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. [20] All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. [21] Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? [22] So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

[Ecc 4:1-16 NKJV] [1] Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter--On the side of their oppressors there is power, But they have no comforter. [2] Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, More than the living who are still alive. [3] Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. [4] Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind. [5] The fool folds his hands And consumes his own flesh. [6] Better a handful with quietness Than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.

INTRO

The book of Ecclesiastes is a thesis on life written by King Solomon. A man who searched for the meaning of life “under the sun” using every possible method.

- He tests life with pleasure, success, knowledge, possessions, and power but comes to the conclusion that if this is the apex of life, then you die; it's all really vanity and grasping for the wind.

Solomon echoes the sentiment of many others after him who, without Christ, would come to the same conclusions about life.

The late secular author Kurt Vonnegut wrote,

QUOTE

“Plato says that the unexamined life is not worth living. But what if the examined life turns out to be a clunker as well?”

Kurt Vonnegut

APPLICATION

Well, as we've seen, life under the sun really has no purpose. Life without Christ seems to make no sense. Life can never make sense for the human soul without living the life it was created to live. A life connected to God through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

I agree with Max Lucado when he writes in his book “Traveling Light”,

“Philosophers can debate the meaning of life, but you need a Lord who can declare the meaning of life.” - Max Lucado

At the end of chapter 3 into chapter 4, Solomon observes and exposes several more injustices concerning life.

Let's look at five injustices this morning that Solomon outlines:

1 Injustice in Places of Authority

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ecc 3:16 NKJV – Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment (human government), Wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness (religion), iniquity was there.

APPLICATION

He looks to the judge's bench and sees wicked people. He looks to the spiritual leaders, and he sees people practicing sin. He looks at the political and spiritual leaders and sees wickedness and iniquity running rampant.

- Remember, we were created in the image of God, which means that we have built within us a longing for justice. When justice is perverted, and leadership is wicked, we get frustrated, and rightfully so at times.
- It is unfortunate that people can't trust judges, political leaders, and even religious leaders not to have an agenda and have the people's best interest in mind. But this is reality without Christ. Man, even at his best, without Jesus, will be driven by self.
- Solomon would say, *"Wherever I see men, I also see messes."*

Unfortunately, things have not changed much in the past several thousand years.

ILLUSTRATION

These two men [images] were sentenced to 17 years in prison and over 200 million in fines for participating in a scheme that would earn them money for each teenager that was sent to a juvenile detention center. The problem? This was a crime. The bigger problem? These are two judges who earned more than \$2.6 million unlawfully sentencing teens to a juvenile detention center.

Unfortunately, it wasn't just in the public forum that Solomon saw wickedness, even in the religious realm. I'm reminded of the sons of Eli the priest in the days when Samuel was a child.

1Sa 2:12 NKJV - Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD.

They were men serving in the temple who didn't even know the Lord! They would steal extra portions from the sacrifices for themselves. In verse 17, we read:

1Sa 2:17 NKJV - Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

How tragic when there are people in pulpits and leadership of the church that don't even know the Lord and are only in it to gain a following and make a profit from deceiving God's people! These people leave a bad taste of Jesus to those in the world and the church!

God used both Ezekiel and Jeremiah to speak out against those who were called to shepherd the flock but were rather abusing and using God's flock for their own gain.

[Jer 23:1-4 NKJV] [1] "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD. [2] Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the LORD. [3] "But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. [4] "I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the LORD.

In God's eyes, it's the flock, not the shepherd, who should be full, safe, and sought after.

[Eze 34:2-5, 9-10 NKJV] [2] "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? [3] "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. [4] "The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. [5] "So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. ... [9] 'therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD! [10] 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them."

The word Greek word pastor (Poimen) means shepherd. Every pastor is an undershepherd to the chief shepherd of the flock, Jesus Christ.

[1Pe 5:2-4 NKJV] [2] Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; [3] nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; [4] and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

There's no perfect human shepherd. I speak as one who has to battle daily his humanity as someone Jesus has called to be a pastor. Oh, His flock. It's humbling and terrifying to read these passages and recognize that God will hold everyone who wielded authority over His people accountable for the state of the flock under their care.

- This is why the flock must beware **evil people and imposters who sneak into the ranks of God's people, but their fruit of demonic doctrines and self-gratification spotlight their errors.**

The recent fall of Mike Bickle, the founder of IHOP (International House of Prayer) in KC, once again spotlights the sick and perverse culture that can happen in places of spiritual authority when that office is used to groom and manipulate people to one's own selfish end.

- It's not my intention to scare you away from the church or make you increasingly paranoid of anyone called a pastor. But we should be quicker to identify the warning signs and fruit of such movements and people:
 - They are quick to dismiss the Bible as their ultimate authority for life and teaching. They will still open it, but they will also manipulate it to say what they want.
 - Lack of humility when corrected - when people are teaching false doctrine, and they are clearly corrected from the scripture, but they hold on to their teachings because it is profitable for them, that's a warning sign. We aren't talking about areas of secondary concern that are clearly debatable. We are talking about issues that change the character of God, manipulate the message of the gospel, or clearly distort the context of scripture.
 - Isolation - the "shepherd" is completely separate from the sheep in a way that intentionally places him as an untouchable.
 - Unhealthy emphasis on money in a way that profits the shepherd and his ministry.
 - Inappropriate boundaries - physically and spiritually.

He next compares men's hypocritical judgment with God's righteous judgment.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ecc 3:17 NKJV – I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.”

APPLICATION

One may perceive that there is injustice where justice belongs and unrighteousness where righteousness belongs and think that God is indifferent to matters of justice.

[Psa 82:2-4 NKJV] [2] How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Selah [3] Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy. [4] Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked.

But Solomon recognizes that sometimes God's judgment is just a matter of timing, that no one really ever gets away with anything. If one is perverting justice or abusing spiritual authority, it's only a matter of time until God exposes them by their fruit and gives to them that which they have sown.

2 Injustice in Death

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ecc 3:18 NKJV - I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals."

Ecc 3:19 NKJV - For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity.

Ecc 3:20 NKJV - All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust

APPLICATION

One thing that constantly troubles Solomon is death. He can't get away from the fact that no matter what he gains on the earth, he is going to die. When he looks at death from under the sun, He sees humanity as nothing more than a glorified animal. No matter what we accomplish in life, we go into the ground just like the stray dog down the street.

QUOTE

“ *All our knowledge merely helps us to die a more painful death than animals that know nothing.*

Maurice Maeterlinck , (poet)

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ecc 3:21 NKJV - Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?

APPLICATION

The ESV has the more appropriate translation of this question that Solomon poses: *Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?*

Basically, he is saying that no one can determine what happens to our soul after we die. Maybe we will go up or down, who knows? So let's just enjoy life for today. Today, we can

have great confidence in the question of what happens to the human soul. The resurrection of Jesus secured us an eternal hope, or as Peter calls it, a living hope that cannot be taken from us.

The Bible is clear on the nature of man's soul. As the only being created in God's image, God gave us a soul that departs our body after die.

2 Cr 5:8 NKJV - We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

- Confident - there's no question
- Well pleased - happy about this!

As Jesus looked at the thief on the cross who believed upon him He said, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus, in explaining life after death to the hard-headed Pharisees said:

Mar 12:26-27 NKJV - "But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."

APPLICATION

But ultimately, those who live life under the son, without God at the center are often content to consider eternity and shrug their shoulder and say, "well know one really knows what happens anyway." Ecclesiastes points out the shortsightedness and error of not being willing to consider one's eternal destiny.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ecc 3:22 NKJV - So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

APPLICATION

He skips the record player back and repeats a common conclusion in this book: **Might as well just live for today because this is the best it gets.**

3 Injustice in Society

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ecc 4:1 NKJV - Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter. On the side of their oppressors there is power, but they have no comforter.

10:05



Ecc 4:3 NKJV - Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

APPLICATION

The long and short of it: it's better to not be born than to live and be unjustly oppressed.

- It bothered Solomon that the money and the power seem to be in the hands of those who exploit the weak, while those who are truly victims of injustice don't have the means to defend themselves.

- Now some who are uninformed might use this as a platform to argue for systems of socialism or communism because, on the surface, they present themselves as systems of equity and fairness. But in practice and reality, these are the very systems that have actually created the images that Solomon is describing.
- Listen, America has this. No matter where you are, you will find corruption. You will find people with power and wealth manipulating the general public to use them and oppress them. But there has never, in the history of the world, been a society for accountable and free, where equal opportunity flourishes and the oppressed have a voice in government, in the legal system, and have equal protections under the law.
- Instead of destroying that through socialistic overtures, we should steward it and seek to protect our constitutional rights that are afforded to every citizen.

APPLICATION

We should be grateful that we don't have a system like the one that Hinduism has developed in India, where there is a caste of 250 million "untouchables" who live perpetually oppressed. Or a system like China that oppresses its people through force of compliance to the ideas of those in power rather than allowing for individual liberty. Or systems like Iran or Syria that make women second-class citizens, or North Korea where the average salary for the working class is \$1-\$3 / month.

APPLICATION

We should be fighting injustices and oppression where we find it in our society:

- We should see to it that the "landowners" of the abortion industry no longer have the ability to oppress the innocent, vulnerable human population of the unborn in order to pad their pockets and keep themselves in seats of political influence and power.
- We should see to it that politicians are held accountable who seek to exploit minorities and lower-income individuals, promising them freedom but implementing policies that keep them dependent on a political party rather than becoming independent, free Americans with the ability to thrive as individuals rather than become entitled dependents of the state.

One of America's most fiery and influential founding Father's Thomas Paine wrote a revolutionary work called "Common Sense," which denounced British control and influenced America's leaders to recant and renounce British rule. He penned these wise words about governing authority:

"Government has no other object than the general happiness. When, instead of this, it operates to create and increase wretchedness in any of the parts of society, it is on a wrong system, and reformation is necessary."

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ecc 4:4 NKJV - Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Ecc 4:5 NKJV - The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

Ecc 4:6 NKJV - Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.

APPLICATION

You have a guy who has worked his rear end off using all of his skill, and what does he get? Respect? Honor? Appreciation? Congratulations? NOPE. He gets envied by everyone else who wants all his stuff. He can't trust anyone because he doesn't know what their motives are.

Human **envy** and **entitlement** are the source of great evil. Solomon recognizes that mankind if left to their own devices, will build systems that border two extremes:

- Fools who are lazy, as a result of their jealousy, will demand that they have an equal share with those who work hard.
- Or those who work hard will make it their ultimate aim to fill both their hands with more, even at the expense of their sanity or the good of others.

- It's better, Solomon says, to live your own life, work hard to get what you need, don't envy what others have, and enjoy the fruit of your labor rather than constantly living for the next thing you'll be able to put in your hands.

1 Above the Sun: True Justice is Coming

APPLICATION

There is a time coming when there will be no injustice from the top down. The throne of the ruling power in the world will not be filled with a marred, selfish, carnally ambitious human being but by the perfect Son of God who will rule in righteousness and goodness.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Mat 13:41-43 NKJV] [41] "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, [42] "and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. [43] "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

CONCLUSION

Church, you and I are sons and daughters of the Kingdom of Christ. Every time we emulate Christ and stand for His will in the earth, we create a better world for everyone around us while giving people a taste of the world that is to come, to which we invite them.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Gal 6:14 NKJV] [14] But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

APPLICATION

Paul is not saying, "I'm dead to the world" in the sense that nothing in the world matters to him. He's not saying, "So find some isolated place to live our your days where you don't have to interact with the world."

The world = the vanishing aspects of this life - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

It's the cross of Jesus, not our religious performance or piety that sets us free from the world, but the cross of Jesus.

That is, in Christ, living life above the sun, we have the ability to be free from grasping the wind and living life without purpose, and for once can actually live our lives in this world for the will of God and the good of others.

QUOTE

“ If every Christian lived in the cross of Christ, the world around them would not be the same.

Pastor Josh
