

The Tears of Justice – Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3

Main Idea: Refuse to celebrate what God condemns.

I. Justice Misplaced | Ecclesiastes 3:16-17

At the conclusion of Ecclesiastes 3, **Solomon moves from contemplating the divinely appointed times of life to exposing the grim realities that mar life under the sun.** Here, Solomon invites us to stare directly into it, not to breed cynicism, but to shatter our illusions of self-sufficiency and point us toward a hope that transcends this fleeting life. The reality of injustice, the tears of the oppressed, and the cold finality of the grave are all laid bare. After reflecting on the sovereignty of God over all seasons (Ecc. 3:1-15), Solomon now adds a critical, painful footnote to the reality of life under the sun, "Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness." This is a corruption that cuts deeper than random acts of evil; it is the poisoning of life because of man's sin. **Under the sun, the very institutions designed to protect the innocent and punish the guilty—the courts, the seats of power, and even many religious assemblies—have become breeding grounds for wickedness.** It is in the place where righteousness should be most clearly reflected that its opposite is most starkly seen. This is not merely an administrative failure; it is a spiritual catastrophe, a sign of a world fundamentally out of joint with its Creator.

Solomon's cry against corrupted justice resonates with the ministry of the prophets. Amos cried out against those who "hated him who reproves in the gate," calling for justice to "roll down like waters" (Amos 5:10-12, 24). Jeremiah denounced leaders who built their houses by unrighteousness and who failed to defend the cause of the needy (Jeremiah 22:13). Jesus Himself reserved His most severe rebukes for the religious elites who meticulously tithed their interests but "neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23). **The consistent biblical witness confirms that injustice, especially when institutionalized, is a grave sin that profanes God's character and harms His image-bearers.** However, the human tendency, when confronted with such systemic sin, is to externalize the problem. We see the corruption in others, in the system, in the "them." Yet, the reality of misplaced justice acts as a mirror for our own souls. Injustice is not God's problem; it is man's problem. Each of us possesses a heart capable of rationalizing our own wrongs, of seeking advantage at the expense of others, and of redefining right and wrong to suit our desires. **The same capacity for selfishness that leads a judge to accept a bribe exists in our own willingness to cut ethical corners or turn a blind eye to the suffering of our neighbor.** The problem of injustice begins in the human heart. As believers, we are called to be people who, in big ways and small, embody the justice we long to see. This means refusing to celebrate what God condemns, speaking truth with courage and love. It is a costly path, often met with resistance, but we are called to fear God alone, finding our comfort and our identity not in the approval of the world, but in the One who is perfectly just.

To Ponder:

1. Where do you see "wickedness in the place of justice" at work in our culture today? How should we (as believers) confront the systemic evil that surrounds us?
2. What does it look like to "refuse to celebrate what God condemns" in our current cultural context, while still extending Christ-like compassion and love toward people?

II. Man's End | Ecclesiastes 3:18-22

Having examined the corruption that permeates life under the sun, **Solomon turns his gaze to the unchanging reality that awaits every living being: death.** He gives the congregation a jarring comparison, stating that God is testing humanity so "that they may see that they themselves are but beasts" (v.18). Both man and beasts share the same breath, and in the end, both return to the dust. **From a purely physical, "under the sun" perspective, this is a stark and humbling reality.** The wisdom, achievements, and aspirations that seem to set humanity apart ultimately cannot prevent the same fate that meets the animal kingdom. It is crucial to understand that Solomon is not making a theological statement about the absence of eternity for humans. Rather, he is emphasizing the stark reality of our physical mortality.

The Hebrew word used for "beasts" (*behema*) refers to animals that are ignorant of any moral responsibility. A lion does not kill a zebra out of malice or a sense of injustice; it acts on instinct, without shame or guilt, driven by the need to survive. Solomon's point is not that humans are merely animals, but that, in our mortality, we share their fate. This confrontation with mortality is meant to instill a necessary realism into our lives. We live in a culture that often treats death as something to be afraid of. But the same Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 7:2, argues that it is "better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart." To truly "lay it to heart" is to allow the certainty of our death to shape how we live. It strips away pretense, clarifies our priorities, and forces us to ask the most important questions about meaning, purpose, and what lies beyond the grave. **This realization of our mortality and moral responsibility should lead to serious self-examination.** Do we, in our marriages, our work, our finances, or our friendships, operate on autopilot, reacting out of selfish impulse rather than acting out of godly wisdom and Christlikeness? The beasts have no responsibility in the matter; we do. **The awareness that our choices have eternal significance—that we will give an account to God—should compel us to live with purpose and integrity.**

To Ponder:

1. Solomon compares human and animal mortality. How does this comparison humble you, and how does it emphasize humanity's unique role and responsibility to seek justice as creatures made in God's image?
2. Reflecting on the difference between living "instinctively" versus "intentionally," in what areas of your life are you most prone to react on impulse rather than with godly wisdom?

III. Oppression's Cry | Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

Chapter 4 begins with what is perhaps the most distressing scene in the entire book, "Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them!" (v.1). The practical consequence of justice being misplaced results in the suffering of all humanity. In light of such overwhelming reality, Solomon's lesson reaches its deepest point. He declares that the dead are more fortunate than the living, and those who have never been born are more fortunate still, for they are spared the sight of such evil (v.2-3). **This is not a philosophical proposition endorsing non-existence; it is the cry of a righteous heart overwhelmed by the sheer weight of sin's cruelty.** Solomon is giving voice to the profound grief that every believing soul feels when confronted with stories of abuse, tyranny, violence, and injustice. He names the despair that can lead some to view death as a release and others to question the very goodness of God.

In conclusion, **Solomon shepherds the Congregation of Israel in light of his own anger and sorrow in the face of evil; showing them that those were not signs of a failure of faith, but a proper response to a broken world.** Into this reality of apparent hopelessness, the Gospel shines with great clarity. On the cross, Jesus became the oppressed, rejected, and mistreated, so that He might become the eternal comfort for all who are oppressed under the sun. This is why the scene in Revelation 5 is the ultimate answer to Ecclesiastes 4. When John weeps because no one is found worthy to open the scroll of God's judgment and redemption, an elder tells him, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered" (Rev. 5:5). But when John looks, he sees not a conquering lion, but a "Lamb, looking as if it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). The answer to oppression is the slaughtered Lamb who is also the victorious Lion. His victory was won not by crushing the oppressed, but by being crushed for them. **As those who have been saved by the Lamb, we are called to be people who, in big ways and small, embody the justice we long to see.**

To Ponder

1. How does the sure hope of final justice and the end of all oppression (Revelation 21:4) sustain you and motivate you to work for justice now, even when the task seems overwhelming?