

# Envy, Opression, and Evil

(A Time for Judgment)

Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:6

“I also noticed that under the sun there is evil in the courtroom. Yes, even the courts of law are corrupt!”

- Ecclesiastes 3:16

The world hasn't really changed. This was true then and it's true now.

Big Idea: We cannot escape evil times;  
so, we trust God when evil abounds.

<sup>16</sup> Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.

<sup>17</sup> I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.

<sup>18</sup> I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts.

<sup>19</sup> For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. <sup>20</sup> All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. <sup>21</sup> Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? <sup>22</sup> So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

<sup>4:1</sup>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! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. <sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. <sup>3</sup> But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun. <sup>4</sup> Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. <sup>5</sup> The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. <sup>6</sup> Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

Big Idea: We cannot escape evil times;  
so, we trust God when evil abounds.

Envy leads us to all kinds of evil.

1. Envy drives me to toil and gain skill (4:4).
2. It's not enough, so I take advantage of others (4:1-3).
3. So, I'm no better than the beasts ... giving in to my envy/lusts and living for myself until I die (3:18-22).
4. Which means I deserve God's judgment (3:16-17).
5. Don't despair, look to Christ (4:5-6).

We can make this  
whole passage  
about someone  
else, or we can



invite ourselves  
into the narrative.

Today, as much as I  
want you to see  
that we need a  
savior because of  
the evil around us, I  
also want you to

see we need a  
savior because of  
the evil within us.

1. We cannot  
escape evil (3:16).

A. God judges  
everyone (17).

B. We all die (18-22).

C. Sometimes the

world seems *really*  
bad (4:1-3).

D. Envy promotes  
oppression and evil  
(4:4).

2. Instead of  
despair (4:5-6),  
look to Christ.

1. Envy drives me to toil and gain skill (4:4).

<sup>4</sup> Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind (Ecc. 4:4; *cf.* Gen 3:6).

## 2. It's not enough, so I oppress others (4:1-3).

<sup>4:1</sup>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! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. <sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. <sup>3</sup> But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

Sometimes things seem *really* bad (4:1-3).

- i. We cannot escape oppression.
- ii. Powerful people oppress the weak (v. 1).
- iii. It seems like no one comforts the weak (v. 1b).
- iv. Maybe it's better to be dead (vv. 2, 3; Job 3).

We cannot escape oppression ... but we can stand up for the oppressed (Ps 9:9; Jam 1:27).

3. And so, I'm no better than the beasts ...  
giving in to my envy/lusts and living for myself until I die (18-22).

<sup>18</sup> I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. <sup>19</sup> For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity [a mist].

Remember, this is poetry not a systematic theology. Read it like poetry, not theology.



## Instead of giving into endless carnality.

- i. Properly use and enjoy our work and possessions while you still can (Ecc 3:13).
- ii. Put your hope of eternal life in God (1Pt 1:3-6; Ecc 12:7, 13-14).
- iii. Learn that immortality is only found in Christ (1Co 15:12).

- i. Death is a curse/enemy (1 Cor 15:26-55; Rev 20:14).
- ii. Our days are numbered (Ps 90:10-12).

4. Which means, I deserve judgment (3:16-17).

<sup>16</sup> Moreover, I saw under the sun there is evil in the courtroom. Yes, even the courts of law are corrupt!

<sup>17</sup> I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.

## Every one of us shall be judged (3:17).

- i. Everyone deserves judgement (Rom 3:23).
- ii. Only God judges righteously (Rom 6:23; Jn 8:15-16).
- iii. Judgement comes when we don't expect it (2Pt 3:10).
- iv. Judgement applied to Jesus (Rom 3:24-26; 10:9-10).
- v. Helps us deal with evil (Rom 12:14-21).

## 5. Don't despair, look to Christ (4:5-6).

*Without God, 3 options exist.*

<sup>5</sup> The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh  
[he gives up, consumes himself with laziness].

<sup>6</sup> Better is a handful of quietness  
[enjoy a few things and be satisfied]  
than two hands full of toil and a *striving after wind*.  
[work for a lot but never find satisfaction]

- i. Give up -- consume yourself with laziness (v. 5).
- ii. Enjoy a few things (one handful) and be satisfied (v. 6a).
- iii. Work hard for many things (two handfuls) and never be satisfied (v. 6b).

All these are futile and lead to despair ... instead, look to Christ.

Look to Jesus. He overcame evil and canceled our debt, nailing it to the cross (Col 2:13-15).

**13**And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **14**by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **15**He disarmed the rulers and authorities<sup>b</sup> and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.<sup>c</sup>