

# Ecclesiastes 4

## The World is Oppressive to Everyone

**4:1 - 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.**

- A. Literal translation:
  - 1. "From the hand of their oppressors is power."
  - 2. "In the hands of their oppressors is power."
- B. Qohelet recognizes the oppression of some people
- C. Qohelet does not (cannot) offer any advice, sympathy or solution.
- D. The very nature of reality is the oppressor also has the power to maintain his position.
- E. The oppressor will always work to benefit himself which always means the one without the power will have less and less chance of enjoying the benefits available under the sun.
- F. This will not change. Jesus affirmed this:
  - 1. Matthew 26:11 – "For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me."
  - 2. Mark 14:7 – "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me."
  - 3. John 12:8 – "For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."
  - 4. And, this comes from Deuteronomy 15:11, "For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'"

**4:2 And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.**

- A. This hopelessness in this worldly system is so severe that death is better than life.
- B. But, better than life and death is to not have to exist

**4:3 But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.**

- A. Qohelet's preferences concerning life in this world without power:
  - a. First choice: Not to be born
  - b. Second choice: Death
  - c. Last preference: Live life without power under the oppression of those with power.

## Balance between Striving in Labor and Satisfaction

**4:4 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.**

- A. God created man to work and be productive in the Garden of Eden before man fell and sin entered the world. So, work, labor and productivity is what man is designed for. It brings man satisfaction, meaning and fulfills his purpose. Think this:
  - 1. A bird was made to fly
  - 2. A fish was made to swim
  - 3. A squirrel was made to gather nuts
  - 4. A man was made to work
- B. With the fall and entrance of the sin nature man's toil and the use of his skill are driven by the sin nature or "envy":
  - 1. Avoid oppression by his neighbor
  - 2. Compete with his neighbor
  - 3. Oppress his neighbor

- C. Money is power. Power prevents oppression. So, money is equated to freedom, liberty, happiness, enjoyment and pleasure.
- D. But, man was not designed to WORK to make MONEY to be HAPPY. Instead, man was designed to WORK, LABOR and be PRODUCTIVE. Achieving this PURPOSE makes man FULFILLED. There is no envy, no competition, no oppression and striving for more money.
- E. Since we do not live in that world, but in the fallen reality man MUST WORK to make MONEY to avoid POVERTY and OPPRESSION.
- F. Sorry, we live in a fallen world which we cannot escape. A false teaching, a false philosophy, an idol will try to teach you differently. But, it is not true. This is the harsh reality Qohelet discovered.

**4:5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.**

- A. If you do not accept this fallen reality then you are a fool
- B. The fool will refuse to accept the reality and necessity for working for money and gain.
- C. The result of the fool's false philosophy and corrupt worldview will result in his "eating his own flesh" or "destroying his own life."

**4:6 Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.**

- A. The man who works for money not truly understanding the vanity of this problem will destroy his life by consuming it with toil as he strives for more and more. This is vanity.
- B. This is the opposite corruption of poverty...greed which is motivated by fear of oppression.
- C. The best is to find the balance:
  1. Quietness or peace or balance or satisfaction
  2. One handful with one free hand is better than two hands burdened with a misunderstanding of original purpose and ignorance in the vanity of the fallen state.

**Balance between Achieving and Enjoyment**

**4:7 Again, I saw vanity under the sun:**

**4:8 one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.**

- A. This is a warning against avoiding these things for work, money, security to avoid being oppressed.
  1. No children...no family, no friends, no relationships
  2. No pleasure...no relaxation, no enjoyment of God's creation and his goodness

**Friendship and Companionship Are Beneficial and Necessary for Success**

- A. Relationships and friendships are a necessary part of life.
- B. Below is a list of Qohelets discoveries for the need of other people in your life.

**4:9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.**

- A. First, work is more productive.
- B. Work is designed to be done by people working together.

**4:10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!**

- A. Second, in this world of danger, oppression every man is too weak to make it without someone to assist him in times of need.

B. Investing in friendships and relationships will have great benefits

4:11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?

- A. Third, this could refer to emotional support. Every traveler in this world needs support, encouragement and admiration from someone else.
- B. This is not necessarily referring to a married couple or sexual relationships (but, it does not exclude these either), but is instead using the physical exchange of natural body heat to serve as an example of the exchange of natural soulful heat of encouragement and admiration.

4:12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

- A. A man is designed with a front side with eyes, hands, forward movement, etc. But, every man also has the vulnerable backside with limited sense perception, no natural protection such as hand motion or feet.
- B. Everyman needs his backside covered, and this is most effectively achieved by another person who would actually be defending his own front side.
- C. This is fighting back to back as Jonathan and his armor bearer did against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 14:13.
- D. Now, if this is true, how much better would three fighting back to back in triangular formation!

### **Fads and the Fickleness of Popularity**

POINT: In life and in politics it is better to be weak and aware of your need to improve, than to be strong and out of touch with the reality of your political situation. Learn to read situations.

**4:13 Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.**

- A. The rising politician is aware of his weakness and is looking for advice and counsel in hopes of avoiding a crucial mistake.

**4:14 For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor.**

- A. Even though this world is filled with oppression a wise, resourcefulness man from the lower class of oppression can work the system and rise.
- B. It is better to be rising and hungry than to be settled and distracted.

**4:15 I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place.**

- A. Also, translated: "I saw that all the living, those who walked about under the sun, were with the youth who would arise after the king."
- B. A young king replaces the popularity and the throne of the older king

4:16 There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

- A. Yet, this is not the end of the matter, for soon the new king was the old king. And, the cycle repeats.
- B. The crowds come and go. The population rises and falls. The cycle of generations continues. And, the kings were merely contemporaries of the passing cycles. These kings are also forgotten and replaced.

# Ecclesiastes 5

## **Advice Concerning Religion and Worship: God takes himself and you seriously**

5:1 - Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.

5:2 - Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

5:3 - For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

5:4 - When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow.

5:5 - It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

5:6 - Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

5:7 - For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

## **Economics, Industry, Population and Social Justice**

5:8 - If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.

5:9 - But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

5:10 - He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

5:11 - When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?

5:12 - Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

5:13 - There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt,

5:14 - and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.

5:15 - As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.

5:16 - This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?

5:17 - Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

**Conclusion Concerning Life, Oppression, Labor, Product and Enjoyment**

5:18 - Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.

5:19 - Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.

5:20 - For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.