

**PP Ecclesiastes: Enjoy life, even in the midst of evil**

**Ecclesiastes 3:15-4:16, Part 4 (p. 554 Pew Bible)**

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There's a latin phrase that rapper Mac Miller scratched inside a coffin in his video, *Self Care*  
That phrase is *Memento Mori* and it means *Remember to Die*

It was used in the medieval ages, to encourage a reflection on mortality, in order to see the vanity  
of this earthly life and the brief nature of all earthy goods and pursuits

This reflection is very much in the mind of Solomon throughout the book of Ecclesiastes

But unlike Miller's reflection, which ultimately moved him to what appears to have been suicide,

Solomon's moved him to find gain and satisfaction from the only source there is...God

Solomon learned, experientially, through observation and reflection, that nothing under the sun

can satisfy our souls, but that indeed God can as we come into relationship with Him

He discovered that it is indeed God's great desire that we be happy, and find enjoyment

That He wants us to trust that He has ordained all seasons and times in our lives into their

appropriate place, and by believing that, we can enjoy life now, under the sun

But...and Solomon knows there is this objection....how can we live in a world so full of evil and  
struggle, and yet trust God and find happiness?

In **3:15**, Solomon begins to defend the gain the worshiper of God can have even under the sun  
with this transition verse

***"That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what  
has been driven away." 3:15***

Solomon is spiraling here, having returned to **1:9**, where he already said much the same thing

This time around though he goes deeper, and it is captured in the last part of the verse: ***'God  
seeks what has been driven away.'***

This is poorly translated, and it would read better, *'God seeks the persecuted'*

God sees those who are being persecuted, and He pursues justice by defending the persecuted  
and holding the persecutor accountable

***"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. 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." 3:16-17***

The place of justice is the court, and sitting on it's chair was wickedness

The place of righteousness was the priestly order, and dressed in their robes was wickedness

Wherever the weak would turn for help, judge or priest, he found evil and injustice

Israel's justice system was corrupt as Isaiah would later say, **PP** ***"Woe to those...who acquit the  
guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!"*** **Isaiah 5:23**

Hardly unique to Israel, injustice was and still is pervasive all over the world

The poor and weak are trampled but Solomon knows a ***'time'*** is coming when God will judge the  
righteous and the wicked

The works of the wicked will condemn them and prove the rightness of God's judgment

Those who do evil may or may not get caught in this life, but they cannot escape God's justice

The works of the righteous will not save them, for they have trusted in Christ, but their righteous  
works will commend them for the rewards they will receive

***"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." 3:18***

You wouldn't have to search far to see the truth of this statement, just watch Maroon 5's video to their hit song *Animals*, with these lyrics...**PP** *'Baby, I'm preying on you tonight; Hunt you down, eat you alive; Just like animals, animals, like animals; Maybe you think that you can hide; I can smell your scent from miles; Just like animals, animals, like animals'*

My favorite scene in the movie, *Finding Nemo*, features a shark intervention where Bruce the Great White leads them in their pledge, *"I am a nice shark, not a mindless eating machine. If I am to change this image, I must first change myself. Fish are friends, not food."*

Well, Bruce's new ways didn't last beyond Dori's bleeding nose, because animals are animals Killers will kill, terrorists will plot, thieves will steal, people in power will exploit, media will lie Get onto BBC and in 10 minutes you'll see evil people acting worse than animals the world over Solomon gazes into the sea of injustice and takes comfort that every human, just like every animal, will die, and for humanity, each of us will be called to God's judgment

**PP** *"...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment"* **Hebrews 9:27**

And sometimes, that is all the comfort the victim of evil is going to get in this life

We cannot control evil, but God can, He is sovereign over all, and will judge perfectly over all

So trust Him, and enjoy life while you live: *"So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot."* **3:22**

But Solomon cannot let this go, he is so bothered by the evil all around, identifying several kinds

### **PP 1-Oppression**

*"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."* **4:1**

*Might makes right* is the too often horrible and devastating result of gaining power over others Oppressors dot the landscape of human history: PolPot, Hitler, Nero, Mark Zuckerberg But the meaning of *'oppressions'* is well defined by Iain Provan, **PP** *'the accumulation...seeking after profit...without regard to the nature, needs, and rights of other people.'*

The evil of oppression is all through the bible: cheating a neighbor, keeping something you found without trying to discover the owner, giving false evidence in court, unjust gain, abuse of power, ignoring the needs of the vulnerable like orphans, widows and immigrants, violence against the helpless

It is an awful evil and it remains a global problem

Hoarding wealth without care for the poor, killing helpless unborn babies, enslaving children into the sex trade, exploiting the poor, racism, turning a blind eye to orphans

Once again, like Alfred Lord Tennyson's famous line in one of his poems, we can be like beasts, *'red in tooth and claw'*

Solomon saw the oppression and despaired: *"And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun."* **4:2-3**

We are wired as God-imagers to recoil at oppression...we would be subhuman if we don't

Solomon draws hope because *'God will judge the righteous and the wicked'* **3:17**

God is sovereign over oppressor and oppressed with judgment for the one and comfort for the other, so what are we do but *"be joyful and to do good as long as [we] live"* **3:12**

**PP** *“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8*

But Solomon is no sooner comforted by this truth than his eye sees another evil under the sun

## **PP 2-Envy**

Solomon already confronted us in 1:3, *“What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?”*, and he answered with a silent, ‘none’

Now he circles back to it, but more deeply exposes the motivation that renders it unable to satisfy *“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.” 4:4*

Solomon is using hyperbole and exaggerating to make his point...so much of work is done from the motivation of envy, wanting what others have

We can enjoy work as 3:22 reveals, but not when our motivation to work is selfish ambition

It’s a dog eat dog world, where you step on the one above as you climb the corporate ladder

To get ahead, someone has to be left behind, and so many are motivated to just that

A coworker gets a promotion, or an award, and the gossip and backstabbing begins immediately

They show up in the parking lot in a premium car, coworkers secretly look to see how much they paid, and how they might afford an even better one

Exotic vacations, luxury cars, latest devices inspire coveting, jealousy and bitterness

Envy leads to what the Germans call, schadenfreude, pleasure at another’s misfortune, and spawns criticism and competition

A church, neighborhood, home or business can be torn apart from envy and left in broken pieces

The failed solution is to stop working altogether, and attempt made in 1967 by Timothy Leary, who led an entire generation to ‘Tune in, turn on, drop out’, calling it the summer of love

They were reacting against excess and materialism and said **PP** *“We’ll quit working; we’ll quit striving, for we have seen the vanity of the materialism of the previous generation,”*

But this movement also failed as it turned into a summer of sickness with drugs and death all over San Francisco

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

Both envy and laziness are evils under the sun, and Solomon gives us a much better way

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

Just take a handful, get what you need, rather than grab all you can in life

Nothing by way of earthly possession can in and of themselves satisfy our souls

Yet there is a lie that the stuff of earth can do just that, and it leads to the next evil under the sun

## **PP 3-Selfishness**

Cutting off relationships, living life for yourself is an aberration to what it means to be human

*“Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 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.” 4:7-8*

This is Dickens’ Ebenezer Scrooge, Dr. Seuss’ Grinch, and it might be you...growing old alone

It’s a gradual process getting to that point and it begins by believing you don’t need others

Have you seen that older couple in the restaurant that never talks with each other?  
 They order, eat, pay and leave and it always leaves me wondering how they got to that point  
 Solomon has in the mind the person who won't join a Life Group, prefers to work alone, sits in  
 front the television with their dinner every night, every weekend the same  
 This guy orders flowers for his own funerals because no one else is going to

I was recently told I'm probably going to be a grumpy old grandpa so I did a little research to  
 discover what makes men get grouchy as they get older  
 One set of research suggested several factors such as health issues, like hair loss, muscle fatigue,  
 belly fat and gynecomastia, which sounded so terrible that I looked it up and to my horror  
 learned it meant growing man boobs  
 I got back to the gym the next day...but the factor that seems present in these studies....isolation  
 We are not meant to live life alone but the tendency is to grow to older and isolate!  
 Solomon saw that when people cut them off from relationship, their lives go downhill fast  
 They can become workaholics, never have enough money, go on unchecked because nobody is  
 making them look inward at their motives  
 We are not designed to live apart from others, and when we do, it's not only vanity, it is an  
 unhappy business...the roadway to a joyless life  
 Solomon argues that life in community has many benefits but then turns to one more evil

#### **PP 4-Success**

One of the best selling Christian books is The Prayer of Jabez, in which Bruce Wilkinson teaches  
 a prayer that God will always answer, one which will get you whatever you want  
 Of course the sales were fueled by the desire in so many to get that elusive success in life  
 The craving to make it to the top was another evil under the sun that Solomon exposes, by telling  
 a short story of two kings

***“Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to  
 take advice. For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been  
 born poor. I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was  
 to stand in the king's place. 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.”***

**4:13-16**

One king was at the top, and pride closed his heart from any counsel other than his own  
 He was replaced by a kid born in the poorhouse who made it to the White House  
 He started in a black and white jumpsuit, and made it to purple royal robes  
 Everyone rejoiced at this second king, and his kingdom grew but one day he died, and the kings  
 who came after never even remembered him

Solomon is telling us that it is lonely at the top  
 What do we do when we see all these evils under the sun?

We could sing with **Mayer** 'Waiting on the world to change', or turn up **Twenty One Pilots'**  
*'Stressed Out'*, and long to return to easier times when *'We used to play pretend, give  
 each other different names, We would build a rocket ship and then we'd fly it far away  
 Used to dream of outer space but now they're laughing at our face, Saying, "Wake up,  
 you need to make money'*

But Solomon has been telling us the way to handle evil is to know that God has life under control

He's about to help us learn to worship and fear God in such a way that we could sing with Simon and Garfunkel their hit song *Bridge over Troubled Waters*

**PP** *"When you're down and out, When you're on the street; When evening falls so hard I will comfort you; I'll take your part When darkness comes; And pain is all around; Like a bridge over troubled water I will lay me down. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down"*

There is pain and evil all around, but Jesus Christ, one greater than Solomon, our Good Shepherd, laid down His life for us

The worship of our great, sovereign God makes it possible to enjoy life, even with evil all around

Let's Pray