

Working Amid Injustice and Oppression

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[0 : 0 0] Ah, take out your Bibles with me please and turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

You'll find Ecclesiastes right after Proverbs, which you'll find right after Psalms, which I'm going to assume most people can find because it's right in the middle of the Bible and it's huge, so you'll tend to run into it.

Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. We come to chapter 3 this morning as we continue to look at the hard questions of life.

Ecclesiastes is willing to ask and wrestle with those hard questions, the why questions, the how questions.

So, as is our way, we want to read the text and we'll pray and then we'll dig into it. We're looking at the second part or the ending of chapter 3, verses 16 to the end and then the beginning of chapter 4, verses 1 through 6.

[1 : 0 9] There's two sections there that go together. So, if you're able, please stand as I read from Ecclesiastes 3.16 to 4.6.

Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, 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. I said in my heart, God is testing them, that they may see that they themselves are but beasts.

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 beast.

[2 : 2 0] For all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust. And to dust, all return.

Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes downward into the earth. So I saw that there's nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work.

For that is his law. Who can bring him to see what will be after him? Again, I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun.

And behold, 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. 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 born and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

[3 : 3 3] And I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor.

This also is vanity and striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and striving after the wind. So it reads.

Let us pray. Father, grant us your eyes to see. Grant us to see where this Solomon is speaking from. Help us to grasp his perspective.

But also, Father, we pray that you would teach us to rightly evaluate what he interprets in light of the rest of your word. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated.

[4 : 43] So we're talking about work. And we work. God has ordained work, right?

I mean, even in paradise before the fall, God ordained work. He called Adam and Eve to work the garden. That was good.

That was part of paradise. That is good. But ever since the fall, ever since the curse, work has thorns and thistles.

Work has trouble. So we work in a world that has evil. We work in a world that we experience evil both in the workplace and around it.

In work, there are those who do anything to succeed. They cheat, steal, lie to get ahead. Climb over the back of others. Take credit for something someone else has done.

[5 : 50] We see that. Values are turned upside down. Instead of fairness, unfairness. Those who deceive get ahead.

And as a result, many hate their work. For some, work is something you seek to survive and look forward to.

Thank God it's Friday. Get out of this rat race. Live for the weekend. Understandable. When work is hard. Especially if work becomes a place where there is injustice and oppression.

So how do we respond to injustice and oppression? And when it comes into the workplace, what do you do? Do you fight it? Do you give up? Do you just survive?

What do we do? What is the Christian perspective on this? This is the question that Ecclesiastes, at the end of chapter 3, beginning of chapter 4, is asking.

[7 : 00] It's about work. It's about workplace issues. So we've looked at different things in Ecclesiastes. We've looked at the pursuits. We've looked at time.

Now we're looking at work. Okay? So it's looking at the evils of injustice and oppression at work, in the workplace. And a reminder, so here, we're in the 21st century now.

Not 20th anymore, right? We're 21st. So we separate work from home and from other things. Understand that in Bible days, it all melded together.

You didn't just go to work. You did work. It was just part of life. Okay? So what we're calling work here, that was just kind of life and activity all blended together.

So think of it that way. Ecclesiastes is wrestling with the hard questions. We see these questions bringing frustration, vanity, striving after the wind.

[8 : 04] And so we've asked some hard questions already. Chapter 1, verses 1 through 11, he asks the question, What is the gain for all our toil under the sun? Everything that we do, we do all this stuff.

What's left at the end of the day? And if it leaves us nothing in the end, why bother? It's vanity. It's striving after the wind. Then in chapter 1 and chapter 2, he began his quest.

He asked the question, what are the pursuits in life that bring lasting fulfillment? And he tried several different pursuits. And he found that every pursuit under the sun was ultimately unfulfilling.

At the end of the day, it leaves nothing. Nothing is gain. So chapter 3. Last week, we looked at the first part of chapter 3.

Time. Everything, there's a season. There's time for every matter under heaven. We saw the poem that he brought, time to be born and time to die, time for war, time for peace.

[9 : 06] All these different times. And he asked the question again in 3.9, What gain has the worker from all his toil? We see that verse 11, God made everything beautiful in its time.

He puts eternity into man's heart. So where do you find beauty in all our activities? Where are the good times?

And the poem shows, in verses chapter 3, 2 through 8, the poem shows that the good things, like being born, are canceled out by negative things, like dying.

Peace is canceled out by war. So there's this kind of yin and yang. There's this kind of balance that, in the end, there's nothing.

It all cancels out. Under heaven. Remember, each of these perspectives and observations are under heaven. Under the sun.

[10 : 10] Horizontal, secular, worldly view. Not from above the sun. Right? So, he's asked those questions.

What do we gain? What are the pursuits that bring fulfillment? Where do we find beauty in our activities? And now, finally, in this last part, chapters 3 and 4, a new question.

How do we find joy in work when there is so much evil under the sun? So many wicked things under the sun, like injustice and oppression, which are things that go on in the workplace.

And in the world where we work. So, work does seem, I was surprised, because when I first was looking at the text, it seemed to kind of go all over the place.

He's talking about injustice. And, okay, where's the injustice? Right? And then, his conclusion, verse 22, is rejoicing in your work.

[11 : 21] Rejoicing in your work. Work is the focus. In verse 73, 17. God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.

So, he keeps talking about work. And the same thing in chapter 4, the end of verse 3. It's better than both. Is he who has not yet been born and has not seen the evil works that are done under the sun.

Then, his conclusion, verse 4, 4, 4. I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from envy. So, he's bringing it back into work.

He's relating this injustice, this oppression, to work. Okay? So, that's the focus as I understand it. So, let's address this last question. How do we find enjoyment in our work when there is so much evil in the world?

And he's going to break it down into those two parts. The chapter 3, 16 to 22. The issue of injustice. How do we view? How do we...

[12 : 28] What's our perspective on the injustice in the world? And how we do our work. And then, secondly, chapter 4, 1 to 6. Oppression. Oppression. Abusers.

And victims. Okay? So, both of those in relation to work. How we go on with our task in life. Do what we need to do. So, how do I find...

So, first of all, injustice. First evil he brings up is injustice. 3, 16. I saw under the sun in the place of justice, even there, was wickedness.

Evil. And in the place of righteousness, even there, was wickedness. Evil. Well, what's in the place of justice? What's evil in the place of justice?

Injustice. What's evil in the place of righteousness? Unrighteousness. Flip-flop. Everything's upside down. So, in terms of injustice, our ultimate response is about eternity.

[13 : 33] That's kind of surprising. Where he ends up in these last verses of chapter 3 is he observes injustice and he talks about where do we end up.

Where does our spirit go? Our response to injustice is ultimately about eternity.

Not about how we fix it right now. He's actually not interested in fixing injustice. He's just observing it and saying, how do I think about that? And how does that work to how I get, how does that relate to how I move on in life?

How I continue to work. Okay? So, I want you to see there's three parts in both of these sections. First, he's going to make an observation. He's going to say, I saw this.

This is what I saw. An observation. Then he's going to make an interpretation. He's going to say, this is what I said in my heart. This is what I thought about it. And then he's going to make a conclusion or an application.

[14 : 43] There's nothing better than this. This is what you do. This is how you live it. So, an observation, an interpretation, application. Just like inductive Bible study, right? We make observations. What do we see in the text?

Before we can ever make an interpretation, we have to see what's being said. See, what does it mean then before we can apply it? We never apply it right away.

We got to make sure we see what he says. Understand what the original writer is saying. Then we can apply it. We can't just simply look at the text and go, oh, what that means to me.

I like that word. And we come up with something totally opposite of what the actual author meant. So, that's what he's doing. This is wisdom. Observing, interpreting, applying.

Okay? That's what he's going to do. So, observation, verse 16. I saw in the place of justice, wickedness. And in the place of righteousness, wickedness.

[15 : 43] He sees injustice, evil. Taking the place of justice and righteousness. And again, this is under the sun.

So, we can see that in our own lives. We can see it in Jesus' life, right? Jesus goes to trial.

What happens? False witnesses are put forward. Jesus is accused of things he didn't do. It's twisted.

We see injustice in Jesus. Not in Jesus. In Jesus' life. In his trial. He suffered injustice. In justice. Right? We see that. It's a reversal of morals.

Things are overturned. Instead of justice, injustice. Instead of righteousness, unrighteousness. And the issue here is not how to fix it. He's not interested at all in fixing this.

[16 : 39] There is, of course, an appeal to us. Especially as believers to look out for. Widows. Orphans. Poor. Right?

Those who are suffering. But he's not interested in that. He just wants to talk about the issue in general. How do we live with it? How do we live with the fact that it's out there?

Okay? How does it affect you? What's your view? What's your worldview on injustice in the world? So, that's his observation.

How does he view it? What's his interpretation? Verse 17. Here's what I said. 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.

God will judge. Does that answer it? Well, in one way, yeah, that's the biblical answer. God will judge. Yes, God will judge.

[17 : 36] But when will he do that? Is he going to do that now? No, he's going to be in his own. It's going to be at the end. What do we do now? That's great. Good, good, good. I'm good.

Yep, yep. Everything will be made right. We just went through Revelation. We saw that. And that is great. We trust that. Ancient of Days is our God.

It's in control. But what about now? What's God doing now? Because God's not just a deist God. He's not just set it in motion and leave it all and then fix it in the end.

What's he doing now? So he says, okay, I have another thought. Verse 18. I said in my heart again with regard to the children of man that God is not will, but God is now testing them in what way?

Testing, purifying, refining them. What's he bringing out in them? He's testing them to what end? That they may see something about themselves.

[18 : 42] That they may recognize something about their own condition. That they may see that they themselves are but beasts. What?

He's just calling us animals? Just a bunch of animals. No, it's more than that. He's something about the beasts. We're not beastly, but we're like them in a way.

Because then he goes on. Verse 19. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same. Talking about their ending is the same. As one dies, so dies the other.

That's his point. We die like the beasts. And so, they all have the same breath and man has no advantage over the beasts. So the beasts die, go to the ground, so does man.

This guy's the ultimate cynic, isn't he? He's like, man, I do all this work and at the end of my life, what do I do? I die. Life is hard and you die.

[19 : 43] That's Ecclesiastes. Said in many different ways. There's more there. But we have to recognize that this does not literally claim to be authored by Solomon.

It does not say Solomon. It says king of Israel, right? Son of David. And he talks about how rich and how wise and all this.

We think, well, yeah, that's Solomon. If it's Solomon, it has to be Solomon at the very end of his life after he had abandoned God and become this unhappy man.

That's possible. So, that's why we're missing some stuff. Because we read it, what we read in Ecclesiastes and then we read it in Psalms or we read it in Proverbs.

Oh, it's got different, there's a different tone. Proverbs has the hope. Proverbs has the wisdom that leads to eternal life. He seems here, this author seems to come up just short of that.

[20 : 55] Right? So, God is testing that they might see their true condition. But here's the hint that we need to catch in verse 20. So, at the end of 19, he's saying man and beast have the same breath.

Man has no advantage over the beast. That's vanity. It's all vanity. It's all empty. It's all meaningless. Verse 21. Question, though. So, if the body goes to the dust, if it's dust to dust, if it's, what happens to the spirit?

So, verse 20, I'll go to one place. All are from the dust. And to dust I'll return. So, then the question is, who knows? What about the spirit?

You know where the body goes. We bury bodies. We bury people in the ground. We see that. That's the dust. What happens to the spirit?

So, he just raises the question. Who knows? But let's think about that other phrase first in verse 20. All are from dust, and to dust all return.

[22 : 01] That sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it? Where have we heard that before? Dust to dust. Return to dust. Where is that?

Is that in a poetry book somewhere? Who wrote that? Any ideas? Anyone? Really? Anyone? Anyone? You alert? Genesis. God.

Genesis. God wrote it. All the way back to Genesis chapter 3. Sunday school answer. Jesus. No, no, I'm not.

That's what I used to always do. Oh, it's got to be Jesus. So, dust to dust. That actually comes in a really, really significant chapter of the Bible.

The third one. Chapter 3. Something very significant happened in Genesis chapter 3. That led to the phrase, You are from the dust. To dust you shall return.

[23 : 05] That's where this author got that. Now, what was the context of that? In Genesis chapter 3, we hear creation is beautiful.

Adam and Eve. Beautiful paradise. Everything's good, good, good, good. Oh, very good. Then enters into the garden a dragon.

A serpent dragon. One with legs. And just ask a couple questions. Just ask a couple questions.

Did God really say? Oh, is God hiding something from you? You deserve more. So, Adam, of course, we don't hear anything from Adam in chapter 3 until, you know, God asks him and he just says, she did it.

Right? It's the first thing he says. She did it. Have you eaten from the tree? She did it. And he asked her and she said, snake.

[24 : 26] Dragon, dragon, dragon. Not my fault. Dragon. So, God says in Genesis 3, 17. Okay? He's laying out the justice.

Okay? To the dragon, here's this what happens to you. To the woman, here, this is what happens to you. Now you experience pain in childbirth. And you will have a desire for your husband, but he will rule over you.

Consequence. To the man. To Adam, he says. Cursed is the ground because of you. Not just you, but cursed is the ground.

Cursed is creation. Cursed are the beasts. Everything's cursed because of you, Adam.

You're responsible for that. Because you listen to your wife. Now don't take that out of context. In this issue.

[25 : 29] In this issue. Cursed is the ground because of you. So, in pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread.

Until you return to the ground. For out of it you are taken. For you are dust. And to dust you shall return. New Testament says the wages of sin is death.

Death is a reminder that we are sinners. We die because we are sinners. It is from the beginning. But.

God has provided a way out of that, hasn't he? Not out of death. But out of the debt. So, how do we apply this?

So, here's the interpretation. God will judge. No, God is testing to show people their true condition. That you will die. That you will return to dust. There's a reason for that. The reason that you return to dust is because you have fallen short.

[26 : 44] And you have earned your death. So, that is a very sober reminder. God is testing. Because of the injustice in the world, he is showing you that you are going to die.

And the reason for your death is not because of somebody else's injustice, but because of your own. So, what do we do?

Verse 21. Who knows if the spirit goes up? Who knows if the spirit of man goes up and the spirit of the beast goes down? He doesn't answer that. Who knows if the spirit goes up?

So, the body goes to the ground. Where does the spirit go? Does it go up? He doesn't say up to what? He doesn't say to God. He doesn't say to heaven. He doesn't say to eternity. How can you know?

He doesn't seem to know. So, verse 22. What's his conclusion? So, here's the best thing to do. So, I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot.

[27 : 51] Who can bring him to see what will occur after? Who knows what happens after that? Who knows? He doesn't know. Right? So, that's where he goes. That's his carpe diem.

Live now. Rejoice. Now, there is wisdom in rejoice in your work. He's going there. You know, in spite of all this, find joy in your work. Is that all, though?

See, it's not all for the Christian. Peter says, right? He says, we rejoice even in our trials. Why? Because we know that it produces something.

We know that when we go to heaven, it will, that faith that finds joy in our trials will be honored in heaven.

That's worth it. To respond well in the difficulty. Because it's not about now. It's not about carpe diem. It's about carpe heaven.

[28 : 54] No. Did I get that right? I don't know Latin. Carpe diem. What's it mean? Seize it. Seize the day. Seize heaven. So, seize heaven. There you go. It works. Yeah. Yeah. Paul said that.

Take hold of the eternal life. Yeah. There we go. Seize the E-L. All right. So, who knows? Who knows if they're going up or going down?

Can we know? Paul knew. 2 Corinthians 5. For we know, Paul says, we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, my body, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

For in this tent, this bodily tent, this earthly tent, we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. If indeed putting it on, we may not be found, by putting it on, we may not be found naked.

We want to be clothed. We need a body. For while we are in this body, this tent, we groan, being burdened. It's a limited tent. It's a tent that wears out.

[29 : 59] It's a tent that erodes. It's a tent that groans and is burdened. None of you know that, though, right? You young people don't know anything about the burden and the growth. Just teasing about it.

Not that we should be unclothed, but that we should be further clothed with a better tent, a better body, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

See, Paul and the Ecclesiastes writer are on totally different pages. The Ecclesiastes writer isn't sure. Paul says, we know.

I know. I know. How does he know? He says, he who has prepared us for this, he who has prepared a new place, a new body, a new dwelling for us, for this very thing is God, who not only has promised that, but he has given us something in the meantime.

He's given us something to guarantee it. He's given us an engagement ring. He has given us the spirit as a guarantee.

[31 : 11] He's given us his own holy spirit who confirms to us, who abides with us, who ensures us. Right? Right?

Right? So, because we have that, we are always of good courage. Even in the trials, we are of good courage. We can enjoy our work now.

We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord. Why? For we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. In other words, life still has meaning. Though it's groaning, though it's burdensome, though it's hard, life has meaning.

Whether we're away or here, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Yes, there is that future day.

[32 : 16] So that we may receive what is due for what we have done in the body, whether good or evil. Is that a scary day for a believer? It's not a scary day for the believer.

Maybe some tears on that day. But we hope to hear, well done. Good and faithful. Not perfect. No, no, no, no. I made you fall several times, didn't I?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you'd lean on me more. So you'd trust me more. So you'd back off on that ego. How does Paul know? So Ecclesiastes says, who knows?

Paul says, we know. How does he know? Because I have faith in Christ. God has promised. God has given me a spirit who is my guarantee. I have faith in Christ.

Who, when I face that judgment day, Christ, as we sang in our first hymn today, Christ will say, I'm the interceder. Let that ransomed one pardon him.

[33 : 21] I bore him. I took his debt. I took his pain. We have faith in Christ who has taken our sin and our debt. He's paid with our, with his own life.

And we walk by faith. So the gospel is four things, right? And what the gospel is? Four words. Amen. You look a little strange.

Gospel is, first of all, Jimmy, what's the gospel? First word. God. God. Thank you. Okay. Don't let me hang in here. God.

Who is God? In this text, God is just. Okay. So then the second question is, who is man?

So who is man? In this text, man is beast, dust, dying because he's a sinner. Right? So man, God.

[34 : 17] So God is just. He's also, we know, a forgiving, merciful, loving God. But he's also holy and just. So there's a, there's a tension. How can God be holy and just and forgive?

How does he do that? He can't stop one to do the other. How does he do it? So we've got God who's holy and just. We have man who's a failure. Christ.

Christ is the third word of the gospel. Christ. How does he bring that together? Christ brings his holiness and his forgiveness together.

Because he takes the debt. He makes God just. Because God punishes our debt, our sin in Christ.

Now it's covered. Now he can forgive us. And he does more than that. We get that exchange Luther talks about. We give him our sins.

[35 : 19] He gives us his righteousness. It's a good deal. It's a really good deal. Of course, it's a gift. Right?

So, so then what's the fourth word of the gospel? We got God. We got man. We got Christ. How do we get it? Faith. We walk by faith.

It's not, I had faith once. I prayed a prayer. I believed this truth. And now I'm saved. That's not faith. Faith. I grew up thinking that's how you get saved.

Didn't work. Literally. Hundreds of times. It's not that kind of faith. Saying the right words.

It's not my act that saves me. It's, he says we walk by faith. So it's more than just an act.

- [36 : 17] It's a life. It's a, we walk by faith. It's not just, I mean, it's a trust. It's a dependence. It's an abiding in him. And that, Paul says, is even a gift. Right? When that finally comes. When I can finally open my eyes and I can hear and I'm changed.
- But we walk by faith. We trust his work. So, what's the impact of injustice on our lives? Our ultimate response is about eternity. Not how we fix it, but how do we think about it?
- God will judge, but God is also testing us. And our response to seeing injustice in the world is not about what should others do about it or they should be punished.
- But what about me? My ultimate issue is I'm also unjust and I need to go to God. And whether I go up or go down, that's in his hands.
- [37 : 17] So, second issue, verse chapter 4, 1 to 6. Second issue is oppression. And verse 4, he adds envy, but I think they're related.
- I thought they were two different issues, but I think they're all related together to the issue of work, evil in the workplace. So, second evil is oppression.
- So, what's our response to that? It's learning contentment and godliness, according to the verses here. In terms of seeing oppression, observing oppression in the world, our response is learning contentment and godliness.
- No, we got to go fight it. Well, some people need, yeah, need to go fight it. Some people are called to fight it. Absolutely. We're dealing with a prayer. We're talking about fighting for life. I posted on my Facebook thing about raising money.
- I said, let's go get this Herod. Who's Herod? Polis. He's the new Herod. He's killing the innocents.
- [38 : 28] Yeah. I probably have to explain that a little more. I'm trying to get a response. I'm not getting any responses. So, that's oppression.
- That's bully. That's abuse. That's evil. Evil as Herod. Evil as Pharaoh did the same thing. Caesar did the same thing. Caesar didn't have to pass a bill to make it happen. Neither did Pharaoh.
- So, oppression. So, we learned contentment. So, again, three parts. He makes an observation, verse 1. Verses 2 and 3 and 4. He makes an interpretation. What do I think about it?
- And then, verse 5 and 6. He has an application. So, his observation, verse 1. I saw oppression. I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed.
- [39 : 34] And here's the worst part. Not only is there oppression, but those who are oppressed, they had no one to comfort them. On the side of the oppressors was power. Because oppression is always an abuse of power.
- And there was no one to comfort them. So, twice, he says, there's no one to comfort them. That's what disturbed him. Not that there's oppressors. But the victims have nobody to comfort.
- Nobody to relieve them. Nobody to help them. They're victims. It's an abuse of power against the weak and the poor and the needy.
- It's cruelty. So, how do we view this? So, that's his observation. Oppression. Abuse of power. How do we view it? Verse 2.
- So, I thought. Last time he said, I said in my heart. Now I thought. Here's what I thought. I thought in this situation where there's this oppression and no one can comfort them.
- [40 : 34] I thought the dead who are already dead are more fortunate than the living are still alive. What? And then better than that.

Better than both of those is he who has not yet been born. Wow. Thought he was cynical before. Better off dead.

Why? Well, look at the end of verse 3. Better is he who has not been born. Why? Because then he hasn't seen the evil deeds that are done. That seems extreme.

But I kind of get it. Even Jesus said, Blessed are the women who are not pregnant in the days of the great tribulation. It's just a comparison.

It's like those days are going to be so bad. Blessed are those who aren't pregnant. Because if you're pregnant, that's going to be even harder. That's all he's saying. He's not saying he's not blessed to be pregnant.

[41 : 40] He's just saying that time. And here he's saying the same kind of thing. Solomon, whoever Solomon is here, is saying the same kind of thing. It's so bad. The oppression is so ugly and so cruel.

It would be better never to have seen it. And how do you do that? Because you can't escape it. It's to either be dead or not ever be born. Because everyone born is going to see it.

Everyone alive is going to see it. And it's going to oppress your soul. And that's horrible. That's what he's saying. So better off that way.

Then he raises another issue in verse 4. Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work, in man's work, come from a man's envy of his neighbor.

This is vanity and striving after wind. What's he saying? He's not bringing up a new issue. At first I thought he was bringing up a new issue. He's got oppression. He's got injustice and oppression. Then he's got envy. Now envy is behind something.

[42 : 47] It's not the issue. Envy is what drives something. Envy is the cause of the oppression. I see the oppression. What causes the oppression?

You know what causes oppression? People to be bullies. People to be abusers. You know what causes that? He says envy causes that. Envy is the cause of oppression.

Envy. What's envy? Jealousy? Coveting what others have? What does envy and jealousy and coveting lead to in the workplace?

If I'm jealous of other workers, if I'm envious of those who are ahead of me, it leads to competition. Rivalry. It leads to fighting.

It leads to cheating. It leads to oppression. Survival of the fittest, isn't it?

[43 : 49] Isn't that what we believe in our culture? If evolution is true? If evolution is true, then we believe in survival of the fittest, right? That is the theory. That means I step on other people and that's okay.

Because that's it. We're just evolving. Right? So some people live that out, actually. Not some. A lot of people. It's for me.

It's about me. I got to get ahead. And if I got to step on somebody else to get ahead, I got to step on somebody else to get ahead. If I got to cheat and lie and deceive to do that, I got to cheat and lie and deceive to do that. Because it's all about me getting ahead.

Because I envy. I covet. I want more. Like Genesis 3, the dragon says to Eve, is God holding back?

Is there something? Why can't you touch that tree? Oh, God doesn't want you to have that tree. And Eve says, now I want that tree.

[44 : 55] And Adam says, give me, give me. He was a real stand-up guy there, Adam. That's Genesis 3.

Genesis 4. What happens in Genesis 4? We have two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel. What happened? Murder. Why? Envy.

Go down to chapter 6 of Genesis. We got the flood happening. Why does the flood happen? Because there's mass violence. Mass violence. And wickedness.

Why? Envy. Chapter. What is it? Tower of Babel. What is that? On and on and on. Joseph and his brothers. What happened? Envy.

Jesus is crucified. Why? Chief priests and elders. And he was envious. Because Jesus was popular for a while.

[45 : 58] And he could do stuff. I mean, he could do stuff. I mean, that's cheating. I mean, he's walking on water and raising dead people. How can he compete with that?

Kill him. So, what causes abuse of power? What causes envy? Excuse me. What causes oppression? Envy. Envy.

Desire for more. What caused Solomon to fall away from the Lord? 1 Kings 11 says, Solomon loved what?

Many women. Many women. He loved women. So, he abandoned the Lord.

He already had women. He already had wives. He already had concubines. But it wasn't enough. Right? David did the same thing. David's bad day.

[47 : 04] I like to think of it as a bad day. His bad week. His bad whatever it was. I mean, he was a different person. Right? He's just home. Not at war like he's supposed to be. Just relaxing on the patio.

Or the porch. Or whatever. Because it's high place. Because he can look down into Bathsheba's bath. And that leads. He already had seven wives.

He had concubines. Why do you have to have her? Same thing. Have to have more. Not enough.

God's not enough. What I've got, I'm not content with. I've got to have more. That's the driving force of all this. So how do we respond to this? What's his response?

Interesting. He quotes two parables. One in verse 5. And another one in verse 6. First he quotes a parable about the fool. Verse 5. The fool. Lots of parables.

[48 : 00] Not parables. Excuse me. Proverbs. Lots of proverbs about the fool. In fact, later we'll get into some of the original Solomon's writings about the fool.

All right. But here, just one. The fool. The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. I'm like, what? Proverb. Proverb. Just word picture.

He folds his hands. What is he doing? He folds his hands and eats his own flesh. How's he eating his own flesh? What's his hands doing?

Nothing. Both hands. Folded. Family's hungry. Yeah, I'm good. Bills are due.

Yeah, I'm good. That's the fool. He will starve. There's another parable. Better.

[48 : 56] Much better than the fool. But this is actually compared to another one. There's three options here. You could be the fool. Fold your hands. Not work. And eat your own flesh. You're going to just devour yourself.

You destroy yourself. By your sloth. Verse six. Better is a handful of quietness. Huh? Okay, let's hang on to that for a second.

A handful of quietness. Better is a handful of quietness than what? Two hands. Full of what? Toil and striving after the wind.

So you got three kinds of hands. You got folded hands. That's laziness. That's sloth. That's the fool. Then you have one hand that's full of quietness.

What's the other hand doing? Working. Working. But one hand full of quietness. And then that's better than the two hands. Two hands full of toil and striving after the wind.

[50 : 01] How's that working for you? We already went through that, right? We say, what's the gain for all the toil? It's vanity. Striving after wind. All that hard work. So if I have two hands of work and toil, what I'm doing is striving after the wind.

If that's all I do, if both of my hands are dedicated to working and striving and getting ahead and pursuing and getting more.

Because whatever I have isn't enough. He's not talking about working hard. He's simply saying, that's everything. It's both hands. I got no hand for rest. I got no hand for quiet.

I got no hand for calmness. I got no Sabbath. If all of my things. Then he says, that's.

What do you get? What do you get for all that hard work? So you got three options. You got the sloth who doesn't work at all. You got the workaholic.

[51 : 00] That is all he does and it's unfulfilling. And then you have this one that has a handful of quietness. A handful of rest. A handful of calm. Who recognizes that work is not all.

Work is good. Work is important. Work is a virtue from God. It's a gift of God. But it's not everything. There must be times to be content with what I have.

To enjoy life. How do you do that? How do you find contentment? And what hinders it? Paul talks about contentment. He talks about Philippians 4. I know how to get along with little.

And I know how to get along with much. That's actually a learning. How do you get along with much? I'm like, I'll try that one. I'm good.

I'll try. Everybody wins the lottery ticket. But I want to try. So what hinders it?

[52 : 05] So 1 Timothy 6. I think he addresses this well. Well, Paul says, There is great gain in godliness with contentment. Those words reflect Ecclesiastes.

Where's the gain? Paul says, There is great gain in godliness with contentment. Why? For we brought nothing into the world. We cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, With these, we will be content.

I have everything I need. Maybe not everything I want, But I have everything I need. But those, So here, that's contentment. With these we shall be content.

But, here's what hinders it. Here's the obstacle. But those who desire to be rich, Not those who are rich, But those who desire to be rich, Fall into temptation.

Into a snare. Into many senseless and harmful desires That plunge people into ruin and destruction.

[53 : 12] Wow! Just the desire to be rich. Not even achieving wealth, But just the desire to be rich, Plunges you into ruin and destruction.

Why? Here's the reason. For the love of money, Not money itself. The love of money, Is a root of all kinds of evils.

Like injustice, And oppression. The love of money, That's envy. The root of, The love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving, That some, Even some believers, Have wandered away from the faith, And pierced themselves with many pains.

So there's the hindrance. It's the desire. It's the love. That's the hindrance to contentment. You cannot be content with, If you're envious.

If you want more. You can't, You'll never be content, Because I want more. Oh yeah, That makes sense. He ends up by just saying, Here's your focus. But as for you, Oh man of God, Flee these things.

[54 : 24] Run from them. Pursue other things, Like pursue righteousness, Godliness, Faith, Love, Steadfastness, Gentleness.

Gentleness. That's an interesting thing to pursue. Especially in contrast with oppression. How many want to pursue gentleness?

Oh, Gentle people, They don't get ahead to that. Interesting, Isn't it? Just interesting. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life, To which you were called. Seize the eternal life.

Take hold of the eternal life, To which you were called, And about which you made, The good confession, In the presence of many witnesses. In other words, Probably when you were baptized. You came to faith, And you gave the testimony, That you believed in Jesus Christ, And that he has taken your life.

So how do you find contentment? Flee the world's envy of riches. There is great gain in godliness. What's godliness, by the way? It's one of those Bible words.

[55 : 29] What's godliness? Does that mean, You follow all the rules, And you dress a certain way, And you know, Your hair is cut the right way. And what's godliness? Go around with the Bible in your hand.

You know what godliness is? Godly. Yes. God directed. God focused. That's all it means.

God oriented. God is in my life. God focused. That's all it is. It makes a huge difference. If I'm focused on, If I'm walking with God, If I'm focused on God, Throughout my life, And all my decisions, All my, It's going to make a huge difference.

It's not a big gotta do, Just an orientation of life. Godliness. You'll pursue things like, Righteousness, Faith, Love, Gentleness, Steadfastness.

So here's the question. Are you content? How you doing? Going to meddle for a minute. How you doing? Are you content? Are you content? Are you content?

[56 : 36] Are you good? Are you content with what you have? Are you content with your work? What if you hate work? Can you be content with your work? What if your work's really, Really, Unjoyful?

I don't know. Okay, I'll confess. My job, No. I'm fortunate.

I'm blessed. Now, It hasn't always been fun. I've had a few years. I'm fine. So, So, So I get it.

How do you be content? When it's hard? When people don't want you there? When people slander you? How do you find contentment then?

People are fighting. So, How are you content? So, How do you think? You know, What's natural to think is, This is what I want. What's wise is to think, This is what I need.

[57 : 43] A big difference between need and want. If we have food and shelter, We shall be content. Can I say that? Yeah, What about a car? House?

Running water? What else do I need? Huh? Cell phone. You can get those for free now.

As long as you buy other stuff. Okay. As long as you have desires and coveting and envy, As long as you want more, You will never find contentment.

True contentment is only found in godliness. Godliness. So, We're going to close today. We're going to sing Ancient of Days.

This is the second time we've sung it. We're learning a new song. We're learning a couple of new songs. Have you noticed? We'll sing it, And then we'll sing it again, Because we want to learn it, Because it's a really good song. So, We're going to close with this one called Ancient of Days.

[58 : 46] Let me just read the verses. Because I think it addresses, Goes to the heart of what we're talking about here. Though the nations rage, Kingdoms rise and fall, There is still one king reigning over all.

So, I will not fear, For this truth remains, That my God is the Ancient of Days. None above him, Go down to the second verse, Though the dread of night overwhelms my soul.

Been there? He is here with me, And I'm not alone. Oh, His love is sure. He knows my name, For my God is the Ancient of Days.

Though I may not see what the future brings, I will watch and wait for my Savior King. Then my joy complete, Standing face to face in the presence, Of the ancients, Of days, None above him, None before him, All of time is in his hands, For his throne, It shall remain and ever stand.

All the power, All the glory, I will trust in his name, For my God is the Ancient of Days. Sing that. Now you can go. Trying to wait.

[60 : 03] I know. What am I doing? Sorry. Sorry. Never know what's going to happen.