

Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 6)

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

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So far in Ecclesiastes, our teacher *Qohelet* has explained to us how meaningless the world is. He pursued worldly wisdom and pleasures but came up empty in the end because the world is broken and unsatisfying. However, in chapter 3 he modified that thought by telling us that the world is not all bad. Instead, it's a frustrating mixture of good and bad. It's frustrating because God put eternity in our hearts. We long for peace and steadiness, but instead we get this inconsistent world full of ups and downs. While there are good times, there are also bad times.

Qohelet further laments this frustrating mixture of good and bad in v. 16. But this time he's specifically talking about the unfairness of this world, the fact that where there should be purity, righteousness, and justice there is corruption, wickedness, and injustice. In this world full of both prosperity and suffering, it often seems that the wicked prosper and the innocent suffer. We tell our children that life isn't fair when we can't make things fair for them, but still we try to make things as fair as possible because we too want life to be fair. We accept the unfairness of life, but we still long for fairness. Psalm 73:2-13 captures this sentiment well. We lament when we see the wicked prosper and the innocent being oppressed. We lament when we hear of an innocent family killed in a car crash because a pickup truck crossed the median on the freeway. No amount of money, punishment, or remorse can right this wrong. When I was in elementary school I stood up for my friend when he was being bullied, but I ended up getting my tooth knocked out. I tried to do the right thing, but I got hurt because of it. On a more serious note, think about the rescuer who died trying to save the Thai soccer team trapped in the cave. He was trying to do the right thing, and it cost him his life. In both trivial ways and serious ways, even from childhood, we see that this world is full of injustice. And we can't help but long for things to change.

In v. 17 we see that God eventually will bring justice. When *Qohelet* tells us here that there is a time for everything, he uses words very similar to 3:1. But whereas before he was saying that this life is full of good and bad, now the time for bad is now and the time for good has not yet come. Injustice fills the world now, but God will bring justice later. We should look forward to this time of justice, when the wrongs will be made right. The problems of this world are so complicated and insurmountable that we cannot fix them ourselves. Even though we

should have enough food to feed the world, still children go hungry because of our inability to distribute aid, governmental inefficiency, and corruption. Even if we had the means to provide, we can't fix the brokenness of people, which causes suffering. So we must wait for our King to come and fix these problems. *Qohelet* alludes to the hope which is clearer to us – the hope that Jesus will return to fix things in the end.

In vv. 18-21 *Qohelet* pivots and compares people to animals. He is frustrated and unsatisfied because both men and animals live and die. In this world, the rules that govern the animal kingdom also seem to prevail among mankind. The idea of the survival of the fittest is not limited to animals. We see the strong, the powerful, and the ruthless prosper in this world, while the weak and humble are oppressed. And in the end, like the animals, we too die. *Qohelet* is lamenting the fact that this justice which we long for will most likely not come in this life. It wasn't clear to him what was beyond death. But we know too that the justice we seek won't come until Jesus returns, and meanwhile this unjust world will continue to operate for the benefit of the strong. At least in this life, both the unrighteous and righteous will have the same end. Though we have eternity to look forward to, for this life we too lament with *Qohelet* because our fate is like that of the animals.

So what can we do in this life? *Qohelet* tells us in v. 22 that we should enjoy our work. He also says something similar in 2:24-26 and 3:9-12. The sentiment is that although we recognize the world isn't fair even for the righteous, we should find satisfaction in the simple moments we have. They are a gift from God for us to enjoy. The work *Qohelet* mentions isn't just our occupation, but our daily life and routine. We should enjoy every day we have rather than striving for more and for better things, because when we get more we will still be unsatisfied. Paul says in Philippians 4:12-13 that the strength to be content comes from Jesus. Can you find contentment in where you are now? Let us listen to *Qohelet*, and pray that God brings us to contentment.