

Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 7)

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

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Qohelet is our old teacher, who is sharing with us the wisdom God gave him through his life and experiences. Most likely the identity of *Qohelet* is Solomon, the king who was given wisdom, wealth, and power by God. But as he looks back he finds that everything he pursued in life was meaningless and unsatisfying, so he warns us against pursuing these meaningless things. He pursued worldly wisdom only to find that the world is irreparably broken. He sought pleasure and experiences, only to end up empty and unfulfilled. Everything the world strives for is meaningless. *Qohelet* concludes by saying that we should find satisfaction in the simple things, such as eating, drinking, and resting. Rather than chasing after the wind, we should be content with what we have and enjoy what God has given us. But this is hard. We always naturally long for more, thinking it will bring us satisfaction. But fulfillment has nothing to do with having more or changing our external circumstances; it comes internally from a change of heart.

In Ecclesiastes 3, *Qohelet* told us that the world is full of injustice. The world is full of sinful people who serve themselves above all else. The proud and strong seek power, and that power corrupts them further. So naturally wickedness and injustice will flourish. Because the world is full of sinners, it will be unfair. Bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people all the time. We can't ignore this fact. This injustice sometimes is due generally to the fallen state of the world, but often it is caused directly by the wickedness of man. In 4:1-3 we see that those in power oppress the weak. Just as *Qohelet* explains in 3:18-21, humans are like animals. The strong win and the weak lose. In the animal kingdom, the females always choose the strongest males. We would like to hope that this is not true of humans, but we see it all the time in this world. Those in power pick on the powerless. Twice in 4:1 the phrase "They have no comforter," is repeated. First, this indicates that the oppression of the weak is wrong and that we should not just accept it as a matter of course. We accept that animals behave this way, and so we usually don't help the weak animals who might become prey. And though we also know it's natural for humans to behave likewise, when we find ourselves in a position to help or protect the weak, we should not hesitate to do so. Second, *Qohelet* sets up his readers to hope for and long for a comforter, who will one day come in the form of a Person. We know that when Jesus returns He will provide comfort to all who are suffering, because He will right every

wrong and fix this broken world. This is the hope that all Christians should have. We should long for Jesus' return.

In vv. 4-6 *Qohelet* talks about our individual pursuits once again. He tells us that we are not satisfied because we pursue the wrong things. We work so hard because we envy each other, which is another way to say that we succumb to peer pressure. We do things because others do them, and we want to have what everyone else has. During childhood and adolescence we experienced peer pressure, but we would be deceiving ourselves if we claimed to be free of peer pressure as adults. Everyone's trying to keep up with everyone else. In v. 5 *Qohelet* quotes a proverb saying that fools ruin themselves because they will not work. But in v. 6 he gives the opposite extreme, comparing someone who is rich but restless to someone who has less but is at peace. We must not be the fool who doesn't work, but we should also not be like the restless worker who has much, but is full of stress and sorrow. What drives your work ethic? You may seek promotions, raises, and titles, but with higher positions comes higher demands. Money isn't free. Can you be at peace with your work and be content with what you have, or will you let work consume you?

Finally, in vv. 7-12 *Qohelet* speaks about companionship, not just about the relationship between husband and wife but rather the general need for community and interpersonal relationships, as suggested by v. 8. If we pursue achievement and wealth while neglecting relationships, we will be empty. *Qohelet* explains the benefits of companionship in vv. 9-12. Verse 9 says companionship is better because when two work together they synergistically produce more than they could separately. They can help each other out (vv. 10-11), and there is strength in numbers (v. 12). So let us not work so hard as to neglect our relationships, otherwise we will miss the fulfillment that can come from these relationships. Let us listen to *Qohelet's* wisdom, and let it speak into our lives.