

STRIVING AFTER WIND
Ecclesiastes 4
10/2/16

Life is full of injustice, abuse, and oppression.

Abusive parents

School bullies

Unfair bosses

Oppressive governments

Corrupt lawyers and judges

1. Life hurts for both the oppressed and their oppressors. 4:1-3

a. The weak suffer at the hands of those who are more powerful. v. 1a

- Life isn't fair.
- We struggle with feelings of injustice and helplessness.

b. Neither the oppressed nor their oppressors have anyone to comfort them. v. 1b

- Most of us understand why the oppressed need comfort.
 - ◆ But oppressors also have problems.
- Chuck Swindoll calls this section *The Lonely Whine of the Top Dog*.
 - ◆ Those who envy the ones at the top don't know the price they paid to get there.
 - ◇ Stress, fears, family problems, health problems, betrayal, and most of all loneliness

c. If there is no God, the dead are better off than the living. vv. 2-3

- Solomon is looking at life "under the sun". (v. 1)
- Adding God to the picture makes a difference.
 - ◆ He is working everything together for good.
 - ◇ Even the scheming of the wicked
 - ◆ He will one day judge the wicked and reward the righteous. (3:17)

2. Our labor and rivalry are vanity and a striving after wind. 4:4-12

a. Much of what we do is based on rivalry. v. 4

- Think of all physical and emotional energy we put into getting ahead of others.
- Most competition is motivated by envy, pride, and greed.
 - ◆ We envy other's looks, abilities, job, grades, or their friends.
 - ◆ But most of all we envy their possessions.
- The reason so many people get into debt and max out their credit cards is to get what their neighbor has. (or preferably something better)

- But our competition and labor are a striving after wind because when we get what we want they don't bring us rest or peace. vv. 4,6
 - ◆ Our satisfaction and significance in life do NOT come from out-competing other people.
 - ◆ They are NOT found in . . .
 - ◇ Accomplishments, More money, Better grades, New car, Nicer house, Better job, Positions of authority

b. Labor and rivalry deprive us of rest. v. 4

- The competitive person has no rest.
 - ◆ They wear themselves out trying to get more.

c. Laziness leads to self-destruction. v. 5

Proverbs 24:33-34 "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest," ³⁴ Then your poverty will come *as* a robber And your want like an armed man.

d. A balanced life is better than either rivalry or laziness. v. 6

- *We need a balance between labor and rest.*

e. All our hard work will ultimately be wasted. vv. 7-8

The workaholic needs to ask himself some questions?

- ◆ Why am I so driven to make money?
- ◆ What am I sacrificing to get it?
- ◆ Am I willing to shortchange my children for an extra \$10,000 or \$20,000 a year.
 - ◇ Marriage? Friendships? Spiritual life? Peace?

8a We can't take our possessions with us.

8b Our possessions do not satisfy us

- Winning doesn't satisfy us.
 - ◆ In his 60 Minutes interview Tom Brady admitted that his Super Bowl rings haven't brought him fulfilment and meaning in life.
 - ◆ After winning his second Wimbledon Tennis Championship Boris Becker surprised the world by admitting his great struggle with suicide.
- In the long run what difference does it make who wins?
 - ◆ We will die
 - ◆ Our records will be beaten
 - ◆ Our accomplishments will be forgotten

f. Cooperation is better than competition. vv. 9-12

- Two are better than one because they can get more done. v. 9
 - ◆ 1+1>2 (Synergy)

- ◆ The wise person will pursue cooperative ventures rather than give in to jealous competition.
- **Two are better than one because they can help one another in times of trouble. v. 10**
 - ◆ In 1969 Paul Simon assured us that when everything else fails and there is nothing but trouble all around, there is one thing that will get us through- a friend.
 - ◇ The friend will be “like a bridge over troubled waters.”
 - ◆ The second verse:

When you’re down and out, when you’re on the street,
When evening falls so hard, I will comfort you.
I’ll take my part.

Oh! When darkness comes and pain is all around,
Like a bridge over troubled waters I will lay me down.
- **Two are better than one because they can keep each other warm. v. 11**
 - ◆ My brother and I found this sleeping upstairs in my grandparents’ old farm house.
 - ◆ Diane and I found this out on a cold backpack trip.
 - ◆ This is metaphorically true in the Christian life
 - ◇ Prayer, Exhortation, and Encouragement
- **Two are better than one because they can protect one another. v. 12a**
 - ◆ Physically danger
 - ◆ Spiritually danger
 - ◇ Are you in relationships that are strong enough to help you grow in Christ?
 - ◇ Is there anyone holding you accountable in your most vulnerable area of temptation?
 - ◇ Does anyone know you well enough to guard your back in prayer?
- **Three are better than two because it provides even more protection. v. 12**
 - ◆ If you live with other Christians, are you speaking to one another about spiritual things?
 - ◆ Do you belong to a small group study?
- God is our ultimate companion.

3. Popularity doesn’t last. 4:13-16

a. Positions of leadership are precarious and short-lived. vv. 13-15

- The older foolish king became too proud to receive counsel and correction.
 - ◆ The poor young lad wisely listened.
- The young lad replaced the foolish king but the people ultimately become dissatisfied with him and he is in turn replaced by another.

- Oliver Cromwell took the English throne from Charles I and established the British Commonwealth. He said to a friend:

“Do not trust to the cheering, for those persons would shout as much as if you and I were going to be hanged.”

b. People are fickle and quickly become dissatisfied with their leaders. v. 16

- There is no end to the succession of leaders and in the end people aren't happy with any of them.

◆ Moses, David, Nehemiah, Jesus, the Apostles

- Fame is fleeting.

Former Dallas Cowboy quarterback and National Football League MVP Don Meredith used to say:

“Today you're in the penthouse. Tomorrow you're in the outhouse.”

4. Conclusion

Our passage this morning could be titled, “The lonely whine of the top dog”.

a. The things we pursue are vanity and a striving after wind. 4:4,6,7,8,16

- Our rivalry is pointless because it gives us no rest or peace.
- Our hard work is wasted because it doesn't satisfy the longing in our soul.
- Our possessions are useless because we can't take them with us when we die.
- Popularity and positions of leadership are temporary because people are fickle and quickly become dissatisfied with us.

b. Eternity brings meaning to life.

- Our lives on earth have eternal significance.
- Our labor on earth has eternal rewards.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

- The most important thing is NOT what we accomplish but . . .

Why we do what we do-

Rivalry, recognition and selfish ambition, or out of love for God and love for others

How we do what we do-

◇ Proud, harsh, unethical, or loving, patient, and kind

For Whom we do what we do-

◇ For myself or for God and others

- Our decisions on earth have eternal consequences.

◆ Your eternal destiny depends on the decision you make about Jesus Christ here on earth.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Mark 8:36 "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"