

# Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-4/ecclesiastes-41-3/>

*Solomon returns to evaluating from the perspective of human reason and experience. He observes the vanity of injustice. Mankind's failure to steward justice in this world makes existence on earth unenviable.*

Solomon has already observed that nature is full of cycles. He writes much of Ecclesiastes by cycling back to the same topic and commenting on it anew. He takes a second look at oppression from the standpoint of human reason and experience.

As Solomon *looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun*, he reconsiders the conclusions made at the end of Chapter 3. Namely, that although God has everything under control in His time, mankind suffers from the injustices at the hands of *oppressors*. Solomon observed in Chapter 3 that both wicked and righteous will give an account of their lives in the Day of Judgment. He now *looked again at the acts of oppression*. Solomon is doing a deeper dive on the reality of humans harming one another.

Solomon comments on *acts of oppression* by one human against another. This is a clear connector to the passage in Chapter 3 that talks about the distorted nature of the world—"in the place of judgment there was wickedness." Here, he talks about the *tears of the oppressed* and that they have *no one to comfort them*. The *oppressors* are equipped with *power*. What do humans do when they get *power*? They could use it to bless, but instead use it to oppress.

And for the *oppressed, they had no one to comfort them*. The nature of oppression is a lack of care about others. When *oppressors* are using their *power*, influence, wealth or position to *oppress*, it only follows that they will not apply their resources to *comfort*. The word for *comfort* is *nacham*, which literally means "to sigh." This perhaps indicates that those with *power* don't feel a twinge of care about those who are *oppressed*. They appear to be only self-centric, only caring about themselves. Other people are merely a means to something the *oppressors* want.

This idea of sighing has a ring of vapor to it. If all of life is filled with anyone who gains *power* predictably oppressing others with it, then isn't life nothing but futility? Doesn't that prove that all is *vanity*? Solomon says in verse 2 that *he congratulated the dead who are already dead*.

The *dead* are *congratulated* more than the *living*. They have escaped the *tears* that come from *oppression*. Because the dead are freed from this systemic *oppression* of those who lack *power*. They have escaped the futility, the *vanity*.

*But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed*. The dead have been given reprieve from oppression, but the one who has not been born has never known it or its effects. The *living* are worse off because they must deal with this reality every day.

The *one who has never existed* is never subjugated to the plight of the *oppressed* (or the shameful sin of being an oppressor). But even more universal, the one who has never been born does not have to contend with the frustration of feeling impotent in the face of injustice. They have never **seen** the *evil activity* done *under the sun*, a wider net than simply those who experience the oppression.

In the midst of *vanity*, with limited capacity to comprehend, resulting in a lack of certainty or clarity, mankind is destined to struggle with perversions and *evil activity*. If this is all there is, it is better not to be alive. For then you would not have to observe all the *evil activity that is done under the sun*.

Solomon is once more commenting from human reason and experience. He will continue to cycle observations from reason and experience with observations from faith.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>1</sup> Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.<sup>2</sup> So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.<sup>3</sup> But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.**