

The End of the Matter – Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

“Work in a Fallen World” – September 29, 2019



Introduction

What's the *point*? What makes life worth living? What brings peace to the restless heart? So far in Ecclesiastes, the Preacher has experimented with pleasure and squeezed out everything it has to offer under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2). Then preacher then experimented with wisdom, learning everything he could, recognizing the seasons and living accordingly (Ecclesiastes 2-3). Both pleasure and wisdom brought the same conclusion: it does not produce ultimate gain or remove the vanity of life. It's still ungraspable, (like a puff of smoke) both with our mind and our muscle. Trying to control this world to produce gain is a chasing after wind. But what if we could have *people* do what we want? We can't control the world, but is controlling *others* the answer? In Ecclesiastes 4, the preacher shows us what happens when we put the spotlight on self, rather than God.

Pray

Before you begin, take some time to ask God to help you understand His word, to reveal what needs to change in you, and for the grace to follow Him in response. To help, use [Psalm 119:33-40](#) as a prayer for God to open His word up to you.

Sermon Outline

- I. Selfishness leads to ruin (4:1-6)
- II. Selflessness leads to joy (4:7-16)

Read & Discuss

- 1) Read [Ecclesiastes 4:1-6](#)

As the Preacher takes us on a tour of what he 'saw' (the phrase *I saw* shows up in 4:1, 4, 7, and 15), we're confronted with the sad realities of a fallen world. Our sin has turned us inward and made others look like competition to climb over rather than people to love. As a result, there is much oppression – a taking advantage of others for personal benefit. The fuel of such oppression is man's envy (see v4). Envy is the feeling of sorrow when others get what we want (or think we deserve), but don't have. Envy weeps when others rejoice and rejoices when others weep. Take a quick inventory of *your* heart and life. Where do you see envy at work in your heart?

Envy can make the world feel vicious at times, but we can't escape living *in* this world. How can we respond? The preacher lays out three options: we can give up and be lazy ('the fool folds his hands' [compare with [Proverbs 6:10-11](#)]); we can join the rat-race and become a workaholic ('two hands full of toil'); or we can be content ('a handful of quietness'). Which of these three options describes your response to a competitive world that bases value on

how we compare to our neighbor? Can you see how selfish living leads to ruin not only for the people we're *in* relationship with, but also ourselves?

Additional Reading: Romans 12:15, Proverbs 14:30

2) Read [Ecclesiastes 4:7-16](#)

What is 'better' (note that phrase *also* shows up four times: 4:3, 6, 9, 13) than living in selfish isolation is to be in community: 'two are better than one.' That's all well and good, but being in community doesn't fix the problem of a selfish, envious heart. The contentment we need (a joy *despite* circumstances) comes from knowing the love of a King who is Himself selfless, will never die, and can change our hearts. In Philippians 4:11 Paul says he learned how to be content – but that contentment is based upon knowing Jesus. In Philippians 3:8 Paul says, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." When we come to know the value of knowing Christ, when we count all else as rubbish...nothing can touch our joy – we know contentment.

Do you know and believe and rest in God's love for you as seen in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you *tasting* and seeing the sweetness and value of being in a relationship with the living God? Take some time to pray...ask God to grow you and our church family in our love for Him and love for each other. Pray that we would hunger and thirst for righteousness and truth (Matthew 5:6). Pray that we would enjoy God's gifts (work, pleasure, friends, etc.) but worship and trust and treasure the God who *gives* those gifts.

Additional Reading: 2 Corinthians 8:9, Philippians 2:1-11

Prayer of Response

1) After hearing God's Word, what sin do I need to *confess*? From what do I need to *repent*?

2) How should my life be lived this week based on what I have heard? What should I *understand*, *believe*, *desire*, or *do*?

Spend time praying together in response to God's word asking for His help and greater faith to follow Him in the week to come.

If you missed the sermon on Sunday or would like to listen again, visit our website at <https://fbcum.org/sermons-new/>

*Next week's sermon text: we turn to Ephesians 4:17-32 "Put off and put on"
