

# Why Doesn't God *Do* Something about the Injustice?

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

*Halifax: 24 November 2013*

## **Introduction:**

Today we pick up in our sermon series from Ecclesiastes with chapter 3, verse 16.

- It is important to recognize that this is very much a continuation of the argument that Solomon has been developing from the beginning.
  - As I have mentioned to you before, the entire book is one that is intended to be read in one sitting.
  - Sometimes we can lose sight of that when we divide it up into chapters and hear sermons on it piece by piece...
    - I have a good mind to do a sermon series some day with just one sermon on each book of the Bible...
      - but until then, I will just keep reminding you as we work through various books of the Bible bit by bit of the larger context.
      - This is especially important in a book like Ecclesiastes as compared to say, one of the history books like Kings or a book of collected writings like Psalms or Proverbs.
      - There is a real flow and development in Ecclesiastes.

So let me remind you how Solomon began...

- He began by telling us that everything under the sun is vanity...
  - In this world, we are only here for a short time and then we die.
    - If we endeavour to find meaning only in this present world, we will find that all is vanity—emptiness.
    - We cannot do anything that is truly lasting or significant if this is it.
- But you will also remember that Solomon eventually came to a much brighter note at the end of chapter 2—even about our lives in this present world...
  - There he said that God can give us wisdom and understanding and joy in this world, and that He does impart these to those who are good in His sight...
    - Being *good*, of course, refers to those who are reconciled to Him through the covenant of redemption that He has established with His people.
    - In the Old Testament, it was Christ revealed through promises, sacrifices, and circumcision, and in the New Testament it is Christ revealed through the gospel—the good news of how He sacrificed Himself for us to atone for our sin and how He pours out His Holy Spirit and those who ask.
    - Through faith in Him, we are able to be in a position to receive God's gift of wisdom, understanding, and joy for life in this present world.
- This, of course, does not mean that we can expect the unmitigated joys of paradise on earth though...

- No! Solomon began chapter 3 with a poem that reminds us that God has appointed seasons in this world—very changeable times and seasons.
- You will remember that his poem lists the opposite extremes and in doing so includes everything in between as well...
  - He begins with “a time to be born and a time to die” and ends with “a time of war and a time of peace.”
  - We noted that life is full of changes and we have very little control over these changes...
    - If we did, then, when it comes to the stock market or our businesses, it would always be a time to gain and never a time to lose.
- But as we do not have control over these radical shifts,
  - Solomon asked what profit the worker has in all his labour?
  - What good is it to build if a time comes for what is built to be torn down?
- Solomon tells us that God has plans for all of these changing times and seasons collectively...
  - God will make everything beautiful in its time.
    - He is weaving together all of the times and seasons into a beautiful tapestry.
    - We can see bits and pieces of it along the way and how something like the cross that was so ugly when it happened became beautiful and glorious in its time.
  - But Solomon told us that it is impossible for us to sort everything out from beginning to end and to see how every piece will make up the whole.
    - It is in our hearts to yearn for paradise, but it is beyond our ability to see how God will use all the pieces of history to bring about the beauty that He has promised.
- So Solomon concluded once again, in verse 12 that we ought simply to rejoice and do good in our lives here—trusting the future with God—knowing that in Christ, our lives have true meaning.
- Even in this changeable world, the Lord enables us to have joy in our work.
  - **Ecc 3:12: I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.**
  - Once again he points out that it is the gift of God that anyone is able to do this—
    - we do not have it in us to rejoice and do good...it is the gift of God.
    - Nothing is better for us in this world than to enjoy life before the Lord and to do good by the grace of God.
- But even though this is the best thing, this is not what most people do!
  - This is very troubling!

- Here Solomon has found what we ought to do and what is good to do in this world, but he finds that we don't do it!
- Instead of doing good, the world is full of injustice and wickedness!
- That is the problem that he introduces in chapter 3 verse 16—
  - the portion we are looking at today.

Here, let me read this portion to you—beginning with Ecc 3:16.

- Pay careful attention because this is the very word of God.

**Ecclesiastes 3:16-22: Moreover I saw under the sun: *in the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.* <sup>17</sup> I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work.” <sup>18</sup> I said in my heart, “Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are *like animals.*” <sup>19</sup> For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing**

**befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity. <sup>20</sup> All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. <sup>21</sup> Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? <sup>22</sup> So I perceived that nothing *is* better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that *is* his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?**

May the Lord bless to us the reading of His holy Word.

Solomon is introducing a theme here in his discourse that will go on for several chapters.

- He is showing us that in the place where good ought to be found, there is evil.
  - God has left the world in its evil to show us that we have become like beasts before Him—that we might know what we have become—what we are.
- In the chapters that follow—chapters 4-6, he gives us a bunch of examples of this injustice...
  - Our text is the introduction to this problem of wickedness where goodness ought to be found...
    - Then in chapter 4-6 the specific evils of oppression, selfish toil, power grabbing, irreverence toward God, and grasping for material gain are addressed.
- Do you see the flow here?
  - He has just told us twice that there is nothing better for us to do in this world than to “rejoice and do good in our lives,”
  - And now he is showing us all the ways that we (mankind in general) do evil instead.
  - Our text introduces the problem by showing us first of all that...

## **I. Where good ought to be found, evil is found instead**

- If it is true that there nothing better for us than to rejoice and do good in our lives, you would think that you would find us doing good...
    - God is in the world, reconciling sinners to Himself, but instead of coming to Him, they choose to go on in their apostasy,
      - living lives that are vanity.
- A. See how he describes the problem of prevailing injustice in verse 16—
- of injustice where goodness ought to be found.
1. First, he says that in the place of judgement, wickedness was there.
- This is the language in particular of the court room...
    - a. This exposes a very disturbing thing about our courts.
      - Courts are where people are supposed to be able to go to get justice.
        - Where the weak can go and have the wrongs that were done to them redressed.
      - But all too often they are places where corruption is found.
        - The guardian of the innocent becomes the hangman of the innocent!
        - People and not only left without any recourse—they are oppressed by the very courts that are supposed to protect them!
          - In a monarchy or a dictatorship, it often leaves the poor and the weak without a voice...
          - And interestingly, in a democracy, it often leaves owners and managers without recourse because of the tyranny of the majority.
            - The people can literally vote in leaders who will transfer wealth from the wealthy to the poor.
      - But what is so disturbing about the injustice, is that it is found in the place where one expects to and ought to find justice.
        - Here, God is supposed to be represented—the justices are supposed to be His ministers who represent Him—His law is supposed to be upheld,
          - but instead it is trampled over and you have...
            - pay-offs, bribery, politics, and special favours that bring about the complete perversion of justice.
    - b. And though the language pertains to courts, the corruption is found in all levels of society.
      - The perversion of justice is even found in our homes where justice should be found.
        - Children have a sense of justice—it is built into us...
          - but many of them grow up with parents who render judgement that has much more to do with their parent's mood at the moment than justice...

- The father who is supposed to represent God in his home lashes out at his little daughter on Tuesday for spilling her milk or something, because he had a hard day at work...
    - He renders a severe and harsh judgement against her...
    - But then when she comes to him to report an injury that has been done to her by her brother, instead of dealing with the matter justly, the father lashes out at her for bothering him...
      - Why are you always whining about your brother...
        - When that was not the case at all—the issue was that the father did not want to be bothered...
  - But then on Saturday when he just got a great deal on his neighbour's boat,
    - he does not discipline the same daughter even though she speaks harshly and disrespectfully to her mother...
    - He doesn't address it because it doesn't bother him—
      - It is not about justice...it is about his mood.
2. Secondly, in verse 16 Solomon says that in the place of righteousness, wickedness is found.
- a. This too is very disturbing...
- Certainly the church is a place where righteousness ought to be found.
    - And among the leaders of the church this is especially so.
    - God calls them to be an example, and He calls their families to be an example...
  - But instead you find wickedness *there*...
    - All the reports of ministers getting into affairs—of deacons embezzling money from the church—
      - and of minister's children rebelling and becoming drunken vain persons.
    - The world glories in these reports because it eases their conscience.
      - This is a travesty!
      - The place where light is supposed to shine is instead a place of darkness...
      - It is so wrong to find evil where good ought to be found.
- b. And we could go on...
- Again, we could mention the family...that is a place where righteousness should be expected...
    - Parents ought to be godly examples—but instead you find fathers abandoning their children, mothers selfishly manipulating them, drunkenness, cursing, irreverence, parents lying to their own children, and all sorts of other kinds of evil.

- And we could talk of institutions like banks, businesses, or medical offices where integrity is expected, but instead you find wickedness.
- All of this is very disturbing.
- How can we rejoice in our daily lives and do good when there is all of this injustice in the world?
- B. The good news is that God will judge.
1. Solomon says so in verse 17
    - **Ecc 3:17: I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked.”**
    - It brings great comfort to know that when you have exhausted the courts and have found no justice,
      - God has promised to take the matter in hand.
      - Wicked men in high positions may prance and suppose themselves immune to the law for a time—but the Lord *will* deal with them.
        - They will not be able to abuse their position for ever!
    - The Bible tells us not to take vengeance into our own hands, but to turn it over to God.
      - Of course we are to appeal to those that God has appointed in the world—to judges and parents...
        - but if there is no justice there,
          - it brings great comfort to us to know that God will deal with the matter in perfect justice.
      - Knowing that it will be dealt with enables us to go on living in the midst of the corruption with joy before Him, and to go on doing good by His grace.
        - We don’t need to go into a cold shell of bitterness or to lash out in anger—we can go on serving the Lord.

TRANS> But there is another challenge that meets us...

2. If God says that He is going to deal with the injustice, why doesn’t He?
  - a. Why does so much injustice continue to be found in the earth?
    - Why does He let it go on?
    - Why doesn’t He *do* something about it?
    - This is one of the major problems people have with God today...
      - Why does He allow evil in the world if He is good?
  - b. We must remember what we learned last week.
    - Look at verse 1...3:1
      - **Ecc 3:1: To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven.**
    - Solomon picks up on this in the second part of verse 17...
      - After telling us in the first part of that verse that God will judge...

- He then says,
  - **3:17: For there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.**
- So you see that Solomon has not really changed the subject...
  - He is still telling us that there is an appointed time for God to act.
- c. This reminds you that you need to be patient.
  - Yes there is much injustice in the world and it seems to go on and on.
    - The blood of the martyrs cries out and we may cry out with them, “How long, O Lord, until you avenge our blood?”
      - But God has a purpose for the delay.
      - He will make everything beautiful in its time.
  - This being so, you can go on your way rejoicing and doing good as Solomon has advised you to do.
    - You must not wait until everything is resolved to begin.
    - The Lord knows what He is doing and you are to leave it with Him.
- But Solomon even takes this a step further and tells us one the specific reasons that the Lord delays His judgement in this world.
  - Often when we ask questions about something like this, we are told to shut up and leave it to God.
  - But here Solomon tells us at least one reason why God waits so long to judge...
    - And that brings us to our second point...

## **II. The Lord allows injustice to continue in the world that He might show us that we are like beasts before Him.**

- A. Solomon tells us this in verse 18...
  - **Ecc 3:18: I said in my heart, “Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals.”**
- 1. You see, we really aren’t much different than animals without God.
  - The great sin of mankind is our apostasy from our creator.
  - We are distinguished from the animals in that we have the capacity to know God and to understand and do His will.
    - We are able to consciously serve Him.
  - But when we are severed from Him, there is really not much difference...
    - I remember speaking to a girl at Dal who was telling me how people are no different than animals...
    - And she was rather surprised when I agreed with her...
      - pointing out that if we have no relationship with God, we are indeed, as Psalm 73 puts it, like the beasts that perish.
- 2. And so God turns us over to our own way...so we can see that we are like beasts.

- He does not completely turn us over though—He mercifully puts restraints on to retard our degradation...
    - We have the law of God written in our hearts, and we have our consciences...
    - And from time to time He judges a society and brings it down and raises up another—
      - All of that restrains us...
  - But He also gives us a lot of leeway at times and we see what happens to any of us when one of us is given unlimited power...
    - He becomes a tyrant—and God lets such a person go on for a time so that we can all see that we are like beasts before Him.
    - And we find perversions in ourselves—
      - we find ourselves living in immorality, telling lies, cheating people, flaring up in anger, harbouring resentment, growing bitter, estranged from God, murdering the weak, enslaved to drugs...
    - He let us feel our sin so that we will see our need of Him—
      - so that we see that we are like beasts before Him.
3. And so our first business when we find ourselves surrounded by injustice,
- is not to ask where God is and why He is not doing something...
  - Our first order of business is to learn about ourselves—
    - to look at the injustice that resides in our own life and see that we are like animals.
- However, leaving us in a world filled with injustice is not enough to convince us that we, by the fall, are like beasts before Him...
- So He has done something else to help us see this...
  - Something that Solomon talks about here in our text...
- B. The Lord also helps us to see that we have become like beasts by causing us to die like them.
- In Ecc 3:19, Solomon says:
    - **Ecc 3:19: For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.**
1. Death is His sentence of judgement that has befallen us in this present world.
- Death was never meant to be in the beginning.
    - It is a great disruption—a great humiliation—that we die and our bodies rot and return to dust just like the animals.
      - This is what makes our lives on earth vanity...



- We have eternity in our hearts, but we know that we are going to die—and we end up just sustaining ourselves like animals and then returning to the dust.
    - Life on earth is vanity because we die—unless we are attached to our creator.
  - We know deep down that we are more than animals...
    - Even the most radical environmentalist preaches to us about our moral responsibility and how we ought to save the trees and sacrifice to save the animals...
      - as if we were in charge of the trees and the animals or something!
        - According to environmentalism, we are supposed to be their equals, so who do we think we are trying to manage them?
      - You see, they can't escape it—they know that we are in charge.
        - If we were just animals, we shouldn't care about saving anything—what do we want to save it for?
        - For itself? For us?
          - But the earth has no ability to enjoy itself or appreciate that it is even here—that is our thing...
          - And we all die anyway.
            - If there is no eternal God, what are we trying to save anything for?
2. Death teaches us that we need to be reconciled to God.
- Without eternal life, our lives on earth are sheer vanity.
  - We know that we are made for more than this—
    - that we are capable of far more than eking out a mere existence here for a few years...
      - trampling upon each other to get a bigger piece of the pie, only then to die and return to the dust!
  - The lesson is very clear—we are not what we are meant to be as people.
    - Death and injustice together constantly reminds us that things are not right with us.
- With injustice all around us together with death to show us that we are reduced to beastliness before God...
- C. We ought to tremble at the thought of standing before God to be judged!
1. But Solomon recognises that in our sinful dullness, we are often quite oblivious to the reality that our spirit will return to God...
- In verse 21, Solomon says,
    - **Ecc 3:21: Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?**
  - Solomon is not saying that *he* does not know if our spirit will return to God when we die—that it is something that just cannot be known...

- He has already said in verse 17 that God will judge both the righteous and the wicked at the appointed time...
  - so we know he is not saying that he does not know...
- His meaning is rather that most people completely disregard the coming judgement of God...
  - *Who knows the spirit of the sons of men which goes upward*
  - Who is mindful of this?
  - Who really takes it to heart that we are here for Him?
  - Who lives in the reality of it?

2. When you do not, you have no fear of God.

- You have no reason to act justly except as it furthers your own interests.
  - Really, the only check against tyranny in the courts is a knowledge of the coming judgement.
  - We should not be surprised if rulers who do not believe in the judgement of God are not restrained by it!
  - They have nothing to restrain them beyond their own interests.
    - Maybe we should think twice about voting for such persons!
- This is the world in which we live...
  - A world of injustice where there is very little fear of God.
  - We are indeed like beasts before Him.

➤ Yet, even though this is so, Solomon still reaches the same conclusion that he has come to twice before...

**III. Even though we live a world of injustice, “nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage.”**

- Do you see that in verse 22?
  - **Ecc 3:22: So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage.**

A. That is the portion that God has given you even in this fallen world.

1. You can't find anything better to do than to go about your business with rejoicing.
  - Remember what we saw back in 2:24 and 26.
    - We are incapable of rejoicing in our work unless God imparts wisdom and joy to us.
    - It is not within ourselves.
    - It is His gift.
2. Even though injustice is all around you, you can still live for God.
  - The injustice simply teaches you how much you need Christ.
  - Only in Him can you do good because only in Him can you be reconciled to your creator from whom we have all fallen away.

- Only then is your labour not in vain.
    - You know, when Paul spoke about the resurrection in 1 Cor 15, he said that he and the other apostles who were suffering persecution were of all men most miserable if there is not resurrection.
    - But he concluded that because there was a resurrection,
      - our labour in the Lord is not in vain—it has eternal purpose because it is for the Lord who is eternal...
      - And it enhances our eternal relationship with Him.
3. So don't let the injustice all around you discourage you or worse than that- turn you against God for not dealing with it!
- It is necessary for it to be around us in our present state that we might see that without Christ, we are beasts before God...
  - We have no more to live for than the animals.
- B. But again, Solomon speaks of the difficulty of persuading men to face the coming judgement...
- In the last part of verse 22, he says,
    - **Ecc 3:22: For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?**
1. Your average person won't seriously face the fact that he must give an account to God.
- You just can't bring him to see what will happen after him.
  - He puts it far from his mind because it is not comfortable to think about.
2. But God's judgement does not have to be uncomfortable for you.
- There is a wonderful way to prepare for it!
  - All you have to do is acknowledge that we are all like beasts before God and come to the Saviour that He has provided...
    - Come to Him for the forgiveness that He purchased on the cross to all who believe.
    - Then instead of feeling that you must avoid the judgement, you will rather prepare yourself for it.
    - Then, in this present time, you can enjoy living for the Lord.
3. But most people will not be persuaded...
- So Solomon now turns to consider all the injustice that goes in the world—how men who are beasts before God live...
    - In 4:1-3, he talks about how they oppress one another...
    - in 4:4-12, about how they toil for themselves and not for others...
    - in 4:13-16 about how they strive for power...
    - in 5:1-7 about how they are irreverent before God...
    - And in 5:8 - 6:12 about how they are covetous.

**Conclusion:** Now what about you?