

**Ecclesiastes 4: 1-3; “The Tears of the Oppressed”, Sermon # 25 in the series –
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall,
on July 9th, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Here in Chapter 4, Solomon the King, turned Preacher, returns to consider certain things that he has observed as he looks around him. As king, he had plenty of time to do this. The first thing that he considers is oppression. (Verses 1-3) The second thing he considers are the people who are skillful in their work who are envied by others around them. (Verse 4) The third thing that he considers is the vanity of idleness on the one side, compared with trying too hard on the other side. (Verses 5 and 6) And then in verses 8-12 he considers the vanity of one person alone, working only for themselves, and not having a companion. And then, finally, in verses 13-16 he compares a poor and wise youth with an old and foolish king to show how fickle the loyalty of subjects can be, and how disappointing it can be. This chapter has many practical lessons in it, and they are lessons which will be very instructive for us who know that there is a God in heaven; a God who sees all the vain things that people will pursue if they do not know Christ. And, for those of us who know Christ, it will help us to ask ourselves what we can personally do, in relation to people all around us who need to know the meaning of life. None of our labor in the Lord is ever in vain in this regard, because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

This afternoon’s subject is oppression. The Lord would have you to know that He sees the tears of the oppressed, and He is willing to do something about these tears. He would have you to recognize oppression when you see it taking place, and pray to Him about what can be done about it. Oppression can be viewed from the standpoint of the one being oppressed, and it can also be viewed from the standpoint of the one who is oppressing others. And we will attempt to look at it from both vantage points. Oppression is usually perpetrated by evil men who knowingly try, and sometimes succeed, in gaining control over others around them in order to get them to do what they selfishly and sinfully want to do and accomplish. Oppressors are generally found among people who have authority over other people. Kings can be oppressors, governors can be oppressors, and bosses can be oppressors. But we should also understand that oppression can subtly or overtly take place even in the home or in the church. Sometimes fathers can be oppressors; husbands can be oppressors; even pastors and religious leaders can be oppressors if they are selfish or tyrannical. And certainly, we know, Satan may deceive a person into thinking that they are not an oppressor, when they really are.

Oppression is perpetrated when a person succeeds in exercising power over another person or group of persons, to bring them under his direct control, so that they will do his will without questioning or resisting. These selfish and sinful actions will produce a spirit of bondage in the one that they are perpetrated upon. So, this afternoon, I would 1st of all, I would like to show you why oppression exists. And then, 2nd, I would like to show you the difference between the existential response and the Christian response to this problem of oppression.

1st of all – Let’s look at why oppression exists and what it does to people.

“On the side of the oppressors there is power.” Often oppression comes from the abuse of power. It could be the natural power that God has given to a man (or to a woman). I do not say that it could not happen to a woman, but because God has given power to men in positions of authority, it is usually men who are oppressors. Oppression, I am saying, usually comes from an abuse of the position or authority which that person has been given by God. God does not approve of oppression, but He does at times permit it to exist in relation to the fulfillment of His holy and wise purposes, in regard to showing His own power to be greater. According to His purposes He is wise enough to deal with oppressors in His own time by setting boundaries around their abuse of power and then overruling all that they attempt to do to God’s people, for their eventual and ultimate good, and for His own glory.

Turn with me to Roman Chapter 9. We will begin our study of the oppressor by thinking together of the life of one of the greatest oppressors of all time; Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Oppression is a matter of power which is abused; power which has been legitimately granted by God, to a particular person, who then abuses that power or that authority. The abuse is sinful, but the purpose of God in permitting it for His people, is holy. You and I need to see that all power belongs to God. Verse 17 says, "For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.'" We see here that God sovereignly raised Pharaoh up to fulfill His purpose in and through him. And this raising up took place so that God's power might be shown in him, and the power of God's name might be declared in all the earth. Indeed it was one of the greatest displays of God's power that has ever been seen in the history of the world.

Turn with me now over to Exodus Chapter 3, verse 6. Moses is receiving his call to go and deliver the children of Israel from their bondage and oppression in Egypt. Verse 6 says, "Moreover He said, 'I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'" "And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God." "And the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.'" "So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites." "Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them." You can see, here, for the encouragement of all of God's saints, that God is a God who sees oppression, and in the case of all of His people, He always does something about it. Oppression may bring a person or a people to tears, but God hears their cries.

What was it that the Egyptians were doing to the Israelites to make them feel oppressed? Well look at Exodus Chapter 1, verse 6. "And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation." "But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them." "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." "And he said to his people, 'Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.'" "Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens." "And they built for Pharaoh supply cities of Pithom and Raamses." "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." "And they were in dread of the children of Israel." "So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor." "And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage – in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field." "All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor."

There are a number of things here that we can see about oppression and what it does. Oppression on a national scale often begins to take place when there is a change in government, and the new man does not know of all the good that Christians, or in this case, God's Old Testament people, have done for the society that they are a part of. Instead of valuing them for their past hard work and service, and all the things that Joseph did to preserve them all alive during the great famine of some years before; he feels threatened by them. But he also wants to use them and enslave them so that he can accomplish great things by them. This is one of real keys to understanding oppression. It is to see that its object is to control and enslave; but the motive is ultimately the profit which will come to one's self, or to one's personal reign.

The person who is given to sinful oppression may have a great national pride, but he will convince others of his own race, or party, that they need to be afraid of those who serve God. The strategy then becomes; let's enslave them and make them work for us. The effect on the

children of Israel? Their lives were made bitter with hard bondage. They were brought to tears at many points, because their freedom had been taken away, and they were not treated with loving consideration, but rather with cruelty. If you go on to read down through Chapter 1, you would see that the Pharaoh wanted to try to limit the people of Israel through population control. He ordered that every son who was born to them should be thrown into the river Nile. You see that in Moses' case, that he was preserved. So we see that oppression comes about as result of the abuse of power which is given by God, but God does not approve of this oppression, but He sees it as a sin. He will deliver His people from all oppression. He hears their cries and He sees their tears.

In our text it says that as Solomon the king considered all the oppression that was done under the sun, he looked and saw the tears of the oppressed. It is a very good thing if a king, a ruler of a nation, can consider and look and see the tears of the oppressed; that they have no comforter. The oppressor has power, but the oppressed has not the power to free himself, and he has no comforter. The truth is mentioned twice in verse 1. It has often been the case in the history of the world that oppression of people continues until God Himself acts; when He raises up a man, or a group of men to address the oppressor. It was so with Moses. Moses did not feel that he was up to the job, but the Lord was intending to raise him up for that work. Moses, however, did not by nature, know how to go about the task.

Turn with me to Acts Chapter 7, verse 17. "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph." "This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live." "At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months." "But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son." "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds." "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel." "And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian." "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand."

"And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' "But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" "Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?" "Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons." "And when forty years had passed, and Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai." So, we see here, that Moses took matters of justice into his own hands, and did not satisfy either men or God that this was the right way to deliver people from oppression. What was the right way?

Well, 2nd – In order to answer that question, I would like us to look at the existential response and the Christian response to this problem of oppression.

Our text in verse 2 says, "Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, more than the living who are still alive, yet better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun." The existentialist view, which is portrayed very well by king Solomon in this statement, is this. It is better to be dead than alive if you have to live an oppressed life for a long time. This, by the way, is the same kind of reasoning that produces the desire to legalize euthanasia because it is assumed that to be released from bodily sufferings through death brings a person into a place of peace and rest from all the turmoil that they are presently experiencing on earth, and so thinking about it from a logical standpoint, this would

be more desirable than to continue to live. “But better yet,” says Solomon, “is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.” Ah, Solomon is right about this in terms of the great and long sufferings that many people are forced to undergo and endure for long periods of time. He is right from the standpoint of this life being the only life, and not bringing God and His judgments, or God and His rewards into the picture. Better to never have lived than to have to live a life full of oppression and grief.

But to really believe that this is the best response to oppression that we have, is to suppose that there is not a God in heaven; and that this God will not eventually judge the world. We would have to believe that God does not see what is happening, and that He will not act to send us help either directly from Himself, or by means of other people to help us. Solomon, here in verse 3, is only making a human observation. He is not making an observation based upon God’s word in other places. He is seeking for meaning, based upon his own observation and experience. He is upset that there is no solution to be found among men; even men of great power and wisdom, such as God had given to him. The truth is, that men cannot ultimately deal with oppression unless God becomes their Savior. They cannot really deal with the oppression that either their own sin, or someone else’s sin brings to their spirit. They cannot stop the evil thoughts and strategies of men. But God can deal with oppression, and He does eventually deal with it for each one who is trusting in Him.

What is the Christian response to being oppressed? Well turn with me to Psalm 56. This psalm was penned by David when he was captured by the Philistines in Gath. “Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; fighting all day he oppresses me.” “My enemies would hound me all day, for there are many who fight against me, O most High.” “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.” “In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what can flesh do to me?” “All day they twist my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil.” “They gather together, they hide, they mark my steps, when they lie in wait for my life, shall they escape by iniquity?”

“In anger cast down the peoples, O God!” “You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?” “When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me.” “In God (I will praise His word), in the Lord (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid.” “What can man do to me?” This is the answer to oppression. It is to trust in God; that God is for you, and that He will note your tears. It is that He who will faithfully protect your life and your soul in accordance with His eternal purposes. And knowing the reality of His grace, that it will be sufficient, you will be able to praise Him for His faithfulness to His own word. On that basis, you do not have to be afraid. Whence comes this grace? It comes from Christ.

Turn over to Isaiah 53 and we will close with this. Verse 6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid the iniquity on Him the iniquity of us all.” “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.” In other words, one of the ways that Christ suffered for us who are needy and sinful is that he was oppressed in our place. And it was because of His sufferings for us, at that point, that in our spirit we will come to know the reality, that there is strength and grace in abundance for all those who are oppressed. Jesus has come to free the oppressed and to set their spirit free.

The Apostle Paul in 2nd Timothy 2: 8, said this: “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.” “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the Elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” Truly this is what it means to know the truth and the truth shall make you free, and you will be free indeed. In the midst of situations where evil men try to oppress

your spirit you shall have grace to trust the Lord and be freed in your spirit from all the oppressions of men.