

The King's Classroom: Studies In The Book Of Ecclesiastes
THE JOY OF FRIENDSHIP
Ecclesiastes 4:1-12

I. What's Wrong With Ebenezer Scrooge?

A. Well, it's Christmas time again.

1. My iPod has my Christmas playlist on repeat.
2. And I've started making my way through my collection of holiday movies.
3. I love the classics, you know, *Christmas Vacation*, *Home Alone*, *Elf*, etc. But my favorite Christmas movie of all time is Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

B. As I was watching the movie again yesterday, I couldn't help but notice the similarities between Dickens' main character and Ecclesiastes' main character.

1. Watch this clip and see if you can figure out what's wrong with Ebenezer Scrooge.
2. PLAY CLIP.

C. What's wrong with Ebenezer Scrooge is that he's totally consumed with making money. Life is all about profit for Scrooge.

1. So there'll be no additional coal in the fire.
2. There'll be no Christmas dinner with his family.
3. As the scene continues we learn there'll be no going home early on Christmas eve, or giving to the destitute and poor.
4. He's a "tight-fisted hand at the grind- stone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!"

D. That's what's wrong with Ebenezer Scrooge, and according to the Teacher, it's what's wrong with all of humanity.

1. Ecclesiastes 4:1-8:

Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun:

I saw the tears of the oppressed—

and they have no comforter;
power was on the side of their oppressors—
and they have no comforter.
And I declared that the dead,
who had already died,
are happier than the living,
who are still alive.
But better than both
is he who has not yet been,
who has not seen the evil
that is done under the sun.
And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his
neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.
The fool folds his hands
and ruins himself.
Better one handful with tranquility
than two handfuls with toil
and chasing after the wind.
Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:
There was a man all alone;
he had neither son nor brother.
There was no end to his toil,
yet his eyes were not content with his wealth.
"For whom am I toiling," he asked,
"and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?"
This too is meaningless – a miserable business!

2. Or, dare I say, a humbug?!
3. What's wrong with Ebenezer Scrooge is what's wrong with all of humanity.
 - a. Humanity is consumed with making money.
 - b. Life is all about profit.

II. What's Wrong With Us?

- A. It is truly a miserable business in which we are engaged.
 1. Life is all about profit, but profit is elusive and unsatisfying.
 2. To pursue profit is to chase the wind.
 3. Just ask the Teacher.

- 1). There's nothing to be gained from work. Hard work is quickly forgotten.
- 2). There's nothing to be gained from education. Unanswerable questions remain.
- 3). There's nothing to be gained from pleasure, except, perhaps an appetite for more.
- 4). And there is nothing to be gained from one's time under the sun. It is all over when the fat lady sings.
- 5). But none of these realizations restrain the pursuit, do they?
 - a). No, we continue on in our quest for more.
 - b). Like Scrooge we are "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner(s)."

B. How did we end up in such a pitiful state?

1. The Teacher says, "And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor" (4).
2. The fuel that feeds the fires of our pursuits is envy.
3. Envy drives us on in the mad rush after gain.
 - a. Envy is defined as "a feeling of discontent or covetousness with regard to another's advantages, success, possessions, etc."
 - b. In other words, when folks around us profit, rather than rejoice with them in their good fortune, we are compelled to keep up with them.
 - c. Life, then, becomes a competition.
 - 1). Who's got the biggest house?
 - 2). Who's got the most expensive car?
 - 3). Who's got the latest technology?
 - d. The result is that one begins to pursue his neighbors rather than participate in community with them.

4. Notice the three results of this envious pursuit of our neighbors:

a. First, there is **OPPRESSION**.

1). Verse 1 describes it this way: **I saw the tears of the oppressed—
and they have no comforter;
power was on the side of their oppressors—
and they have no comforter (1).**

2). Oppression is profiting at the expense of others.

3). In the Bible, it is often associated with violence and bloodshed, and it usually involves cheating, defrauding, robbing, and abusing others.

4). Oppression is the result when human beings do whatever it takes to get ahead.

5). Now, we don't call it "oppression."

a). We've cleaned it up a bit.

b). We refer it as climbing the ladder of success.

c). We say you've got to eat or be eaten.

6). The world becomes a miserable place for the losers. They have no voice, no power, no comforter.

7). According to the Teacher, death is preferable to this kind of life (2-3).

b. Second, there is **WORKAHOLISM**.

1). Listen to verse 6: **Better one handful with tranquility
than two handfuls with toil
and chasing after the wind.**

2). That envious pursuit of the Jones's damns us to never-ending toil.

3). And listen, parents encourage the pursuit at every level:

a). We pit our children against their peers from the very beginning.

b). We push them to out-prepare, and out-perform, and out-play the competition.

c). We prod them on to the most prestigious colleges, and the most promising majors, the most demanding internships, and the most desirable jobs.

4). You heard me; parents feed the disease of workaholism, and then tell the children it's for their own good.

5). And sadly, that's the same ill-conceived logic they'll use on their spouses and children in a few years when they try to explain why they're never home.

b. Third, and not all surprisingly, there is LONELINESS.

1). Look at verses 8-9: **There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?"**

2). The ultimate end of the envious, oppressive, workaholic lifestyle is loneliness.

3). And what else would you expect from the person who's spent his life beating down the competition?

4). These verses describe the quintessential miser:

a). He's completely alone.

b). He has no one with whom to share his work and his wealth.

c). He feels no purpose or peace in life.

5). His toilsome pursuit of more precludes any enjoyment of life.

6). Oh, what a sad state, this loneliness created by envy.

7). The wise man observed: **"A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones"** (Proverbs 14:30).

III. The Joy Of Friendship

A. We live in a cold and lonely world.

1. It's a world defined by the pointless pursuit of profit.
2. It's a world inhabited by "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner(s)."
3. It's a world in which we pursue our neighbors rather than participate in community with them.
4. It's a world that's corrupted by sin and the fall.
5. But you see, God did not create us to be this way.
 - a. God did not intend for us to be isolated and lonely. He knew the truth that it is not good for humans to be alone.
 - b. He made us to live together, to love together, and to work together.
 - c. This isolationism and competitiveness that we pursue is not at all pleasing to our Creator.

B. This morning, I want you to see that there's an alternative to this cold and lonely life.

1. Listen to the Teacher.
2. Verses 9-12:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

3. In these verses the Teacher commends companionship over competition.
4. "What good are all life's accomplishments," the Teacher asks, "if, in the end, you have no one with whom to share them? There is no joy in such a life."

5. The competitive pursuit of profit results in envy, oppression, workaholism, and loneliness.

- a. Life is not about profit.
- b. There is no profit in work, education, or pleasure.
- c. There is no profit in manipulation of the times.
- d. There is no profit in the destruction of the competition.
- e. There is only *hevel* and chasing the wind.

6. If your desire is true and lasting gain that is blessed by God, pursue relationships, friendship.

7. Notice the profit that is gained from friendship:

- a. Cooperation: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work” (9).
- b. Assistance: “If one falls down, his friend can help him up” (10).
- c. Comfort: “Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm” (11).
- d. Protection: “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (12).

C. Ladies and Gentlemen, we were never meant to pursue one another, to squeeze profit out of each other.

1. We were never meant to be isolated and lonely.
2. God created us to live in community, to cooperate, to assist, to comfort, and to protect one another.
3. What’s more, we have experienced a community that Qoheleth never even dreamed of, the church. It’s a place, just like the song says, where we’re drawn together by our commonality, not our competition.

D. What’s wrong with Ebenezer Scrooge and what’s wrong with us is that we’re consumed with us.

1. We operate out of selfish ambition and vain conceit (Philippians 2:3).
2. We look only to our own interests (Philippians 2:4).
3. And we continually bite and devour each other (Galatians 5:15).
4. But listen to Paul: “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other”(Galatians 5:14-15).
5. Today, let us heed the words of Scrooge’s nephew Fred, and let us open our shut up hearts to our fellow creatures.

D. That’s our lesson this morning.

1. It’s a cold and lonely world out there, but you don’t have to go through it alone.
2. It’s a world of broken relationships, but Jesus died to bring us back together – back together with God and back together with each other.
3. Today, if you need to come back to God, Jesus has paved the way by his sinless life and atoning death.
4. Or, if you need to heal some relationships here, Jesus has opened a door of forgiveness.
5. Whatever your need, won’t you come as we stand and sing?