

When Life Isn't Fair

Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 11

Ecclesiastes 3:16-17

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Does it ever feel like the wicked seem to get ahead in this life while those who try to live honorable lives lose ground? King Solomon makes the same observations, in *Ecclesiastes*, after he regarded the state of affairs in the culture around him. He laments that evil people seem to win, but he concludes that God will be the ultimate and final judge of all the deeds done on earth. There will be a final judgment.

Discussion Points:

Just because the law of God has been written on everyone's hearts and consciences does not guarantee a person will live rightly.

- How does this God-given inborn sense of right and wrong (*Romans 2:15*) direct our sense of justice in the world?
- We all have this intuitive desire for the wrongs in the world to be made right, so how does the definition of what is wrong and what is right get so distorted?
- What are some ways that leaving justice to men can lead to justice not being served at all?

King Solomon was disturbed by the fact that in his hometown there was wickedness in the place where justice should reign, the courthouse, as well as wickedness in the place where righteousness should be exemplified, the temple.

- Why does it disturb humanity so greatly when the halls of justice morph into the halls of corruption? Or when the rooms under a steeple become dens of iniquity?
- In our current culture, what are the ways the court of law is reversing the core values of the judicial institution? What is driving this change?
- Men and women in our churches who are supposed to represent God and righteousness can become representatives of evil. How does the worship of the one true and living God fall into disrepair when this occurs?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Solomon did not only see a problem, he laid out the resolution, as well. Judgment will come, and this judgment will be meted out by Jesus Christ, God's own son.

- How does this knowledge about the future judgment help guide your perspective when times of discouragement come because the wicked seem to be winning?
- Why does trusting that God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent encourage and sustain a Christian believer?

How do we know that God's judgments will be complete and His verdict will be eternal?

Gospel Connection: (Taken directly from the sermon, *When Life Isn't Fair.*)

According to what the rest of the Bible reveals, you have only two options in light of God's coming justice - either you will stand before God in your sin, be judged as guilty, and sent to Hell as a just verdict for sinners, or you will have asked Jesus to save you from the just penalty of your sin and accepted His free gift of forgiveness. You will avoid the Great White Throne judgment and instead be granted entrance into Heaven.

These are your only two options: Guilty or pardoned.

The Bible says that *it is appointed unto man to die once, and after that the judgment* (Hebrews 9:27). In other words, after you and I die there is no court of appeals to God's eternal verdict. You will either stand before Him in your sin or stand before Him in your Savior. The time to make an appeal to His mercy is now, while you are still breathing.

If you have not already, let me invite you today, while you still life and breath in your lungs, to admit your guilt and sin and claim His promise that *if you confess your sins He will be faithful and just to forgive your sins* (1 John 1:9).

Trust in Him alone and ask for His promise of salvation – *for whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved* (Romans 10:13).

Practical Implications:

Think: Have I confessed my sin and called on the name of the Lord for my salvation?

Pray: Praise God that He is the final judge and holds all accountable. Thank Him for his love and compassion in giving you the gift of salvation to enjoy eternity with Him.

Do: Live life with eternity in view.

When Life Isn't Fair

Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 11

Ecclesiastes 3:16-17

When you were growing up, it didn't take you very long to learn a few lessons about life. You probably learned one of those lessons around the same time you started kindergarten, and you learned it out on the playground – that life isn't perfectly fair. The bigger kids didn't share the swing set or pass the ball when you were wide open.

You might have had older brothers or sisters who enjoyed teaching you that life wasn't fair every chance they got.

Maybe your parents didn't help much either; maybe they didn't play fair. Rodney Dangerfield, that great theologian, used to say, "When I was a kid my parents moved a lot, but I always found them."ⁱ

Trouble is, life didn't become fair when you outgrew the playground. We all discovered sooner or later that we are members of an unjust race, the human race.ⁱⁱ The cheater at work ends up getting the promotion. Good people don't automatically win. Innocent people sometimes get blamed. Guilty people don't always get caught.ⁱⁱⁱ

And the truth is – that bothers us.

Romans chapter 2 tells us why – the Apostle Paul informs us that we have *the law of God written on our hearts and in our consciences* – which means that wherever you go in the world there is this inborn sense of right and wrong. (Romans 2:15).

One author put it, "Our longing for justice is hardwired into the way we think and feel." We have this God-created desire for justice. In fact,

the only time that changes is when you are the one who gets pulled over for running a red light, then, suddenly, you don't want justice, you want mercy.

But the truth remains, we all have this intuitive desire for the wrongs in the world to be made right, which is why when you hear a news report of justice served something in your heart and mind says, "That's great; that's the way it should be."

That's how I felt as I read the news report of a cold case that finally got solved. In the early 1960's, a young girl went missing from the streets of a small town in Illinois. Her body was found a few days later, leaving her family overcome with shock and grief, along with a deep desire for justice. Detectives would end up listing just over 100 potential suspects but none of them panned out. Among them was a 17-year-old young man in the neighborhood, but since his mother provided a rock-solid alibi that he had been with her on the evening in question, he was never interviewed. However, 55 years later, on her deathbed, his mother confessed that she had lied, and it had troubled her all of those years.

The cold case was reopened, but now this young man was 72 years old. You never outgrow your DNA fingerprint, so all the forensic evidence matched and he was sentenced to life, for the rest of his life, in prison. And there's something in us that applauds, "He didn't get away with it. Justice was served."

What seems to be bothering Solomon, as he records another entry into his private journal, is that there are far too many people in the world who seems to be getting away with murder or any crime against man and God, for that matter, no matter how big or small.

If you take your copy of Solomon's journal, turn back to *Ecclesiastes chapter 3*, and read as Solomon describes the problem.

The Problem

Let's pick our study back up at *verse 16*, just the first line:

Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness (Ecclesiastes 3:16a).

Solomon observes how life is *under the sun*. There again is that favorite expression of his for life without the acknowledgment of God. This is life on planet earth, without God, where men and women are keeping score.

And notice that Solomon is not writing about something he *heard* from officials in the palace. He is not writing about something he *read* in the *Jerusalem News and Observer*. No, Solomon says, "Let me tell you about what I actually saw. I was an eyewitness to this stuff. You can't believe what I saw with my own eyes." Although he does not tell us what they are, Solomon saw specific instances of gross unfairness and injustice under the sun.

And I want to point out that what was alarming to Solomon is the fact that he is an eyewitness to wickedness, but it isn't out there in back alley. No, what Solomon is so troubled over is not the fact there is wickedness in his home town, but that there is wickedness *in the place of justice*. Notice the emphasis – *even there* – in the place of justice, *even in there* was wickedness.

In the place of justice is a reference to a court of law. It is the last place you would ever want to see wickedness. You do not expect to see injustice in the place of justice, like finding

a judge on the criminal's payroll, a lawyer misrepresenting the facts, a witness lying under oath, a member of the jury being bought off, an innocent person framed or a guilty person going free.^{iv}

Solomon is effectively saying, "That isn't fair! That's not the way it's supposed to work!"

Thirteen years before the birth of Christ, The Roman emperor established a female goddess as the symbol of divine justice. We refer to her today as Lady Justitia or Lady Justice. You can see Lady Justice in all kinds of contexts, even here in our home state of North Carolina in the bronze medallions on courthouse walls to statues in courtyards and even standing atop domed rooftops of courthouses.

She is typically sculptured with three distinct features. Firstly, she is blindfolded, representing impartiality. No matter who you are or where you come from, she is supposed to be blind to anything but the truth.

Secondly, she holds in one hand a set of balanced scales to indicate that she is going to weigh all the evidence fairly and evenly.

And then, thirdly, in her other hand is a sword which represents the fact that she will deliver a verdict, and justice will be swift and final.

You find Lady Justice literally all around the civilized world – why? Because everybody has a divinely imprinted desire to see justice served. And there are few things that get us more upset with life under the sun than when the halls of justice become the corridors of corruption.^v

But that is not all that is bothering Solomon. Not only has he seen the halls of justice become the corridors of corruption; he has seen the place of worship become a place of wickedness.

Notice *verse 16* again:

Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness (Ecclesiastes 3:16).

For Solomon, the place that represented justice was the court of law, and the place that represented righteousness would have been the Temple. So the court of law and the house of God were filled with evil people who were reversing the core values of each institution. Men who were supposed to represent God and righteousness were representatives of evil, and the worship of the one true and living God was falling into disrepair.

It reminded me of Nehemiah who was responsible for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and regathering and relocating many of the Jewish people in that day. He was threatened and ridiculed. There were even attempts to assassinate him, and on one occasion he was tempted to violate the law by hiding out in the temple in order to save his life. But he refused. He later wrote, recorded in *Nehemiah chapter 6*, that he knew others were trying to tempt him to sin in this way in order to ruin his reputation. He acknowledges this when he literally wrote that they wanted to give him a bad name and thus hinder the work. Nehemiah knew that any corruption on his part would discredit the work of God.

That principle is transferrable to the church in any generation. It surfaces in the qualifications of the New Testament deacon and elder who must be self-controlled, respectable, not quarrelsome, or a lover of money, and a dozen more qualifications recorded in *1 Timothy and Titus*.

Why these qualifications? Because the world, who the church is attempting to reach, can smell corruption quicker than the church can. And wickedness among church leaders dilutes and diminishes and distorts the character of God and the gospel of Christ. The church should be telling the world to repent, so it is a tragic reversal when the world starts telling the church to repent. People representing God should not be compromising the truth with dishonesty or double-dealing.

A few years ago the news reported that a Christian organization promised to build entire communities in a hurricane devastated area,

raising 500 million dollars on that promise, only to be exposed later as having built only six houses.^{vi} That discredits the gospel to a watching world who assume that Christians are just as greedy as non-Christians like nothing else can.

On the other hand, lawbreakers delight in finding corruption in the lives of those who represent the law. In those cases, the confidence of the people in justice is diminished and distorted.

Just recently, in fact, the serial criminal nicknamed the “Golden State Killer” was discovered. In the late 1970’s, this man had burglarized 100 homes, molested 50 women, and killed 13 people in a terrible crime spree. Now, forty years later, DNA samples were sent in to a genealogy-type organization by family members who wanted to find out about their family tree. Something in the family’s DNA pattern alerted a criminal data base tied into the justice system which notified authorities who were able to trace the crime scene DNA back to him. He was caught . . . hiding in that family tree. But to everyone’s dismay, this now 70-year-old murderer had lived and served for years as a policeman, someone who was supposed to have represented the law.

Solomon is essentially recording into his journal what we all know to be true. The problem is that the place of worship has made room for wickedness and the halls of justice have become the corridors of corruption. But, if you look a little closer, there is the implication of a deeper issue with Solomon. Everybody seems to be getting away with it; they’re getting off scot-free. DNA samples were not around 3,000 years ago, so people were literally getting away with murder, corruption, bribery, greed, immorality, wickedness, hypocrisy, and crimes untold.

Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, a document was written that was discovered in the Middle East. It reads, “I have searched the world for order; everything is upside down; the divine assembly (the gods) are powerless to restore order.”^{vii} In other words,

life is unfair; injustice seems to be on the throne and truth seems to have been beaten and run out of town.

Solomon has described the problem to us, but he continues in his journal to deliver nothing less than a prophecy regarding the solution.

The Prophecy

Notice *verse 17*.

I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked – that is, He will determine who is right and who is wrong – ***for there is a time for every matter and for every work*** (Ecclesiastes 3:17).

Simply put, God has appointed a time for judgment. It doesn't look like much is happening in this unjust and wicked world, but one day the universe will shout the news, "Here comes the Judge!"

Who is He?

The Apostle Paul preached to the leaders in Athens when he ended his sermon by declaring that *God has promised a day when His Son will judge the world* (Acts 17:30).

Jesus said that His Father had given Him the privilege of one day judging everything at the end of human history (*John 5:22*). The judgment of all the deeds of the unredeemed will take place, recorded in *Revelation chapter 19*, at what John the Apostle described as the Great White Throne.

Did Solomon know a day of judgment was going to happen? Was he just hoping? Was he guessing?

Oh no . . . he knew.

He had studied the Torah and had no doubt memorized a verse that must have kept him up at night until later in life when he repented. That verse from Moses promised – *Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?*" (Genesis 18:25).

Later on Moses announced that *God will not allow the guilty to go unpunished* (Exodus 34:7). Solomon knew the truth that mankind

has an appointment with their Creator God somewhere at a future time.

Did Solomon really believe that?

It might surprise you to read the very last entry and verse in *Ecclesiastes chapter 12*, where Solomon records in his journal:

For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Solomon knew that one day all the unredeemed will be resurrected to stand at the appointed day of divine justice. The host of heaven will essentially deliver the thunderous announcement, "All rise . . . here comes the Judge!" And to the utter dismay of millions if not billions, that Judge be than none other than Jesus Christ, the resplendent God the Son.

When God the Son takes His seat behind the bench, the ruling of that pure and holy court will unveil even the secrets of men's hearts. There will be no partiality and no favoritism.^{viii} It will be nothing less than absolute and perfect justice.

- He will not have missed any sin or secret because He is omniscient – all knowing.
- He will not need witnesses because He is omnipresent – He was there and He saw every crime and discerned every motive.
- He will not need any assistance in carrying out His eternal verdict of justice because He is omnipotent – He is all powerful.

His judgments will be complete and His verdict will be eternal. Solomon is essentially telling us that no one is going to get away with anything.

According to what the rest of the Bible reveals, you have only two options in light of God's coming justice - either you will stand before God in your sin, be judged as guilty, and sent to Hell as a just verdict for sinners, or you will have asked Jesus to save you from the just penalty of your sin and accepted His free gift of forgiveness. You will avoid the Great White Throne judgment and instead be granted entrance into Heaven.

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If you have not already, let me invite you today, while you still life and breath in your lungs, to admit your guilt and sin and claim His promise that *if you confess your sins He will be faithful and just to forgive your sins* (1 John 1:9).

Trust in Him alone and ask for His promise of salvation – *for whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved* (Romans 10:13).

The problem is everybody seems to be getting away with everything. Oh, but there is the prophecy that nobody is going to get away with anything. Everyone will have their appointment with God.

- For the unbeliever, there will be no *appeal*.
- For the believer, they will have an *advocate*, Jesus Christ Himself, who paid the full penalty for every sin and crime against God (*1 John 2:2*).

For now, Solomon pens in his journal, it looks like people are getting away with sin, but

according to the Bible and God's plan for human history, it is just a matter of time. It is just a matter of time before God makes everything right.

Paul Harvey illustrated this point when he told about a man named Gary Tindle who was charged with robbery. While standing in the California courtroom of Judge Rodriguez, Tindle asked permission to go to the bathroom. The judge agreed, and Tindle was escorted upstairs to the bathroom on the second floor while the bathroom door was guarded on the outside. Tindle was determined to escape. He climbed up some exterior plumbing, opened a panel in the ceiling, and started crawling through the space. He had crawled some 30 feet when the ceiling panels broke under his weight and he dropped to the floor – right inside the courtroom he had just left. It appeared he was going to escape but it was only short crawl before he was back in front of the judge.^{ix}

According to the Bible, the only legal maneuver you have in light of the coming Judge is to settle out of court before your appointment. Settle out of court. Accept the offer of Jesus Christ, and He will pardon you. He will represent you as your Advocate when you take Him as your Lord and Savior.

Settle out of court and avoid the wrath of God, and instead, enjoy the grace of God forever.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/17/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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i Don Givens, *Storms of Life: Ecclesiastes Explained* (Xulon Press, 2008), p. 49

ii Adapted from Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters* (Crossway, 2010), p. 100

iii Adapted from Wayne C. Kellis, *Life Under the Sun* (WestBow Press, 2017), p. 68

iv Adapted from Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Ecclesiastes* (P&R Publishing, 2014), p. 83

v Adapted from Ryken, p. 101

vi Daniel L. Akin and Jonathan Akin, Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes (Holman, 2016), p. 49

vii Stephen J. Bennett, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 89

viii David Jeremiah, Searching for Heaven on Earth (Integrity, 2004), p. 75

ix Adapted from Jeremiah, p. 76