

ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

BIBLE STUDY, 12/09/2007

STUDY 4

OPPRESSION, FRIENDSHIP AND POPULARITY

Ecclesiastes 4: 1 – 16

Solomon, having shown the vanity of this world in the temptation which those in power feel to oppress and trample upon their subjects, here further shows, I. The temptation which the oppressed feel to discontent and impatience (v. 1-3). II. The temptation which those that love their case feel to take their case and neglect business, for fear of being envied (v. 4-6). III. The folly of hoarding up abundance of worldly wealth (v. 7, 8). IV. A remedy against that folly, in being made sensible of the benefit of society and mutual assistance (v. 9–12). V. The mutability even of royal dignity, not only through the folly of the prince himself (v. 13, 14), but through the fickleness of the people, let the prince be ever so discreet (v. 15, 16). It is not the prerogative even of kings themselves to be exempted from the vanity and vexation that attend these things; let none else then expect it.

1. The prevalence of oppression

Ecc. 4:1-6; 3:16-17; I Kings 4:29; Acts 20:24; Philippians 1:23; Job 3:20-21; Revelation 14:13; Ecc. 2:1; Proverb 27:4; 26:16; James 4:5

It grieved Solomon to see might prevail against right. Wherever we turn, we see melancholy proofs of the wickedness and misery of mankind, who try to create trouble to themselves and to each other. Being thus hardly used, men are tempted to hate and despise life. But a good man, though badly off while in this world, cannot have cause to wish he had never been born, since he is glorifying the Lord, even in the fires, and will be happy at last, for ever happy. Ungodly men have most cause to wish the continuance of life with all its vexations, as a far more miserable condition awaits them if they die in their sins. If human and worldly things were our chief good, not to exist would be preferable to life, considering the various oppressions in life. Solomon notices the sources of trouble peculiar to well-doers, and includes all who labour with diligence, and whose efforts are crowned with success. They often become great and prosperous, but this excites envy and opposition. Others, seeing the vexations of an active course, foolishly expect more satisfaction in sloth and idleness. But idleness is a sin that is its own punishment. Let us by honest industry lay hold on the handful, that we may not want necessaries, but not grasp at both hands full, which would only create vexation of spirit. Moderate pains and gains do best.

2. The folly of covetousness and advantages of mutual assistance

Ecc. 4:7-12; Psalm 127:2; I John 2:16; Ecc. 5:10-11; Proverb 27:20; Matthew 11:28; Genesis 2:18; II Samuel 10:11

Frequently, the more men have, the more they would have; and on this they are so intent, that they get no enjoyment from what they have. Selfishness is the cause of this evil. A selfish man cares for nobody; there is none to take care of but himself, yet he will scarcely allow necessary

rest to himself, and the people he employs. He never thinks he has enough. He has enough for his calling, for his family, but he has not enough for his eyes. Many are so set upon the world, that in pursuit of it they bereave themselves, not only of the favour of God and eternal life, but of the pleasures of this life. The distant relations or strangers who inherit such a man's wealth, never thank him. Covetousness gathers strength by time and habit; men tottering on the brink of the grave, grow more grasping and griping. Alas, and how often do we see men professing to be followers of Him, who, "**though he was rich, for our sakes became poor,**" anxiously scraping money together and holding it fast, excusing themselves by common-place talking about the necessity of care, and the danger of extravagance! Surely he has more satisfaction in life, who labours hard to maintain those he loves, than the miser has in his toil. In all things union tends to success and safety, but above all, the union of Christians. They assist each other by encouragement, or friendly reproof. They warm each other's hearts while they converse together of the love of Christ, or join in singing his praises. Then let us improve our opportunities of Christian fellowship. In these things all is not vanity, though there will be some alloy as long as we are under the sun. Where two are closely joined in holy love and fellowship, Christ will by his Spirit come to them; then there is a threefold cord.

3. The changes of royalty

Ecc. 4:13-16; Proverb 27:24; Psalm 113:7-8; Ecc. 7:19; 9:15; Genesis 41:14, 41-43; Ecc. 1:14 Solomon was himself a king, and therefore may be allowed to speak more freely than another concerning the vanity of kingly state and dignity, which he shows here to be an uncertain thing; he had before said so "**the crown doth not endure to every generation**", and his son found it so. Nothing is more slippery than the highest post of honour without wisdom and the people's love. People are never long easy and satisfied; they are fond of changes. This is no new thing. Princes see themselves slighted by those they have studied to oblige; this is vanity and vexation of spirit. But the willing servants of the Lord Jesus, our King, rejoice in him alone, and they will love Him more and more to all eternity.