

**Ecclesiastes 4: 1-3; "Considering all the Oppression", A Bible Study  
conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall on the evening  
of September 2nd, 2009, at his own home.**

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 is people who are skillful in their work who are envied by others around them. (Verse 4) The third is the vanity of idleness on the one side compared with trying too hard on the other side. (Verses 5 and 6) Then in verses 8-12 he considers the vanity of one person alone, working only for themselves and not having a companion. And 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. The 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 pursue if they do not know Christ. And for us who know Christ it will help us to ask ourselves what we personally can do in relation to people all around us who need to know the meaning of life. Because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, none of our labor in the Lord is ever in vain in this regard. Tonight's subject is oppression. Oppression can be viewed from the standpoint of the oppressor and also from the standpoint of those who he oppresses. And we will attempt to do both tonight. Oppression is usually done 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, bosses can be oppressors; fathers can be oppressors; husbands can be oppressors; even pastors and religious leaders can be oppressors if they are selfish or tyrannical. And certainly Satan is an oppressor. 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. These selfish and sinful actions produce a bondage of spirit in the one that they are perpetrated upon. Tonight I would first like to show you, first, why oppression exists. Then, secondly, 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 it could be 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 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 up Pharaoh to fulfill His purpose in and through him, 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 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 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 vent 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 profit 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 treated, not with loving consideration, but with cruelty.

If you go on to read down through Chapter 1, you 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 that God does not approve of oppression, but 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 raised him up for the work. But Moses 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 the 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 Moses' taking matters of justice into his own hands did not satisfy either men or God that this was the right way to deliver people from oppression. What was the right way?

**Let's look Secondly, 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 it through 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 this response to oppression we have to suppose that there is not a God in heaven, and that this God will not eventually judge the world. God does not think this way, and neither should anyone who has faith in Him. Solomon is only making human observations; not observations 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 not 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 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 and does 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 when David 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 wandering; put my tears in to 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 me, and that He will note my tears. It is that He will faithfully protect my life and my soul in accordance with His eternal purposes, and that we will be able to praise Him for His faithfulness to His own word. On that basis, we 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 because of His sufferings at that point, our spirit and soul should know that there is strength and grace in abundance for all those who are oppressed. Jesus has come to free the oppressed and set their spirit free. The Apostle Paul in 2 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.