

- ii. His point is that there is a satisfaction that the rich cannot take away from the poor laborers and cannot obtain for themselves.

Conclusion

A. Christ Answers to the Preacher's Frustration

"Economic justice includes both the mitigation (alleviation) of suffering and also the restoration of wholeness. Wholeness includes full participation in the life of the community." (NAE, 2004)

B. Engagement in Society at Large

"The earliest Christian ethic, from Jesus to Constantine, can be described as a consistent pro-life ethic... It pleaded for the poor, the weak, women, children and the unborn.... [It] discarded hate in favor of love, war in favor of peace, oppression in favor of justice, bloodshed in favor of life." (Michael Gorman)

LIVE THE STORY

The Gospel is intended to be learned and lived in community. The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.

- How does v8 describe oppression? How might we understand what is meant by the robbery of justice and righteousness from the poor?
- Why do you think the Preacher says not to be surprised by it? What does Scripture say God's heart is concerning this matter?
- How does v10 shine a light in all our hearts? Have you experienced the reality that growing wealth leads to growing consumption?
- How does Christ answer the Preacher's frustration with injustice?

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When Life Gets Twisted: Finding Meaning in the Absurdity of Oppression and Greed

Jerry Cisar — May 31, 2020

Text: Ecclesiastes 5:8-12

Introduction

I. The Oppressed Laborer

A. Oppression and Justice

- i. What is oppression in this context?
 - a) Oppression, in v8, is the theft of justice and rights.
 - b) V8 quite literally begins: "If you see oppression and the robbery of justice and righteousness (*tzedeq*)..."
 - c) *Tzedeq* likely means in context either "the robbery of justice and vindication of the innocent," or "the robbery of justice and doing the right thing by them."
- ii. What is justice?
 - a) First, there are several kinds of justice spoken of in Scripture.
 - b) "To 'do justice' means to render to each what each is due. Justice involves harmony, flourishing, and fairness, and it is based on the image of God in every person—the *Imago Dei*— that grants all people inalienable dignity and infinite worth." (Ken Wytmsa)
 - c) "Justice is the act of restoring something to fullness after it has been harmed. Justice is making things right." (Eugene Cho)
- iii. How are justice and righteousness *robbed* from the poor?

“Calvin was harshly critical of the governments of his day for failing to perform their obligations to the poor. As he complains in a sermon on 2 Samuel, ‘One sees today that princes have neither regard nor consideration for their duty, which is to keep their subjects in good pasture.’ In his commentary on Psalm 72, he charges: ‘The majority of kings, neglecting the well-being of the community, have their minds wholly engrossed with their own private interests.’ Likewise, Calvin interprets Psalm 82 as a psalm of judgment on the magistrates of the earth for not doing justice for the poor and oppressed.” (Matthew Tuininga, Good News for the Poor)

B. Do not be surprised...

- i. The Preacher from his “under the sun” perspective has a keen awareness that injustice and oppression are a common lot in life.
- ii. The God who spoke from beyond the sun informs us of his heart for the poor and oppressed.
 - a) Isaiah 1:17
 - b) Micah 6:8
 - c) Psalm 140:12

C. His Day is Coming

- i. “by other higher ones still” (K & D: plural of majesty)
- ii. Ephesians 1:19-21

D. God Bless the King’s Darlin’ Heart

- i. The Tyndale Comm. Suggests a literal reading: “And the success of the earth, for all it is; a king for a field served.”

ii. They suggest that the text is a veiled criticism of the king.

- a) Read flatly, it may sound like it commends the king.
- b) Read with intonation, it is a critique.
 - Maybe by inuendo saying, “The profit of the earth is for all, but the king is the only one served.”
 - Or as Longman suggests, it is pointing out that the corruption goes to the top; even the king is using the system to take the profit from the fields.

II. The Restless Rich

A. Whoever... never has enough!

- i. Greed leads to more greed! But it never satisfies.
 - 1Timothy 6:9
- ii. Jesus and Greed
 - a) Luke 16:14
 - “Anyone that speaks of despising riches, or bestowing alms on the poor, is regarded by the covetous as a madman.” (Calvin’s Commentaries)
 - b) The rich man and Lazarus.

B. Growing wealth leads to growing consumption (11).

C. The Preacher’s Social Commentary

- i. The Preacher engages in social commentary “from the perspective of those who suffer injustice ... and does so with a refreshing sense of humor.” (Tyndale Commentary)