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Joy despite adversity is Gods gift Part 1

Introduction

We kick off again with a two part sermon.

Our world is filled with sufferings, distress, calamities, disasters, catastrophic events, corruption, deceit, sin and so much more.

You and I live in this difficult world and the question you may ask is how does one get joy despite these adversities of life.

Our passage comes from [Ecc 4](#)

Historical background

Solomon concluded that in Gods plan for life, joy, enjoyment and happiness are within the reach of God's people.

Those who reject God are left with with lives of accumulating stuff only to leave it for those who please God. Ecc 3:26

In ch 3:1-15 Solomon reveals that God has a plan for life.

God governs **every event in life and its timing.**

Gods plan embraces all of reality (Kaizer)

Ecclesiastes 3:1 ESV

¹ For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

Gods plan is so vast and comprehensive that man is not able to fully discover or understand it.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 ESV

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

The constant theme throughout the book is that there is joy in labor, joy in life, joy found in the mundane when its seen as a gift from God .

Ecclesiastes 3:13 ESV

¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

So enjoyment, not gathering worldly stuff, is God's ultimate goal for His people in life.

If God's plan has joy as one of its end goals, what about the effects of the fall.

What about all the adversities in life, all the problems, the suffering, the loneliness, the injustices

God's sovereignty and His providential control includes all of these events.

Essential Christian Doctrine: A Handbook on Biblical Truth Divine Providence

Divine providence is God's preserving his creation, operating in every event in the world, and directing the things in the universe to his appointed end for them

Do these adversities make it impossible to gain joy in this life?

Our passage looks at various adversities that form part of God's plan for life.

Passage

Ecclesiastes 4:1-6 ESV

¹ Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

² And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.

³ But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

⁴ Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

⁵ The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

⁶ Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

Proposition

Contemplating 4 areas of adversity in God's plan for life, helps you find joy from God

Part 1

1. Considering oppression as part of Gods life plan vs 1-3
2. Considering jealousy as part of Gods life plan vs 4-6

Part 2

1. Considering loneliness as part of Gods life plan vs 7-12
2. Considering succession as part of Gods life plan vs 13-16

1. Considering oppression as part of Gods life plan vs 1-3

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 ESV

¹ Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

² And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.

³ But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

¹ Again I saw

Solomon uses an introductory formula as he considered a **variety of adversarial events** that seems to oppose God's plan of life.

[Ecc 3:16](#) I saw under the sun, justice replaced with wickedness (unjust courts and wicked behavior)

[Ecc 3:18](#) I said in my heart that the children of Adam are like mere beasts in the

fact that all die (death comes to all)

[Ecc 4:1](#) I saw all the oppression in life (people are oppressed)

[Ecc 4:4](#) I saw the envy as core motive in the toil of life (People are envious)

[Ecc 4:7](#) I saw the vanity of life in the area of lonelines (People are isolated)

[Ecc 4:13](#) Here the formula is broken, but he simply stated the problem of succession

all the oppressions that are done under the sun.

Oppression's refers to the abuse of power, the trampling and crushing of others, the act of subjugating by cruelty.

Job used the term

Job 35:9 ESV

⁹ “Because of the multitude of oppressions people cry out; they call for help because of the arm of the mighty.

Under the sun = refers to events that take place in this world, in life.

Solomon not only saw the abuse by those in authority, but also the emotional response to the abuse.

And behold,

This adds dramatic effect

the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them!

The reality of those oppressed is that there is the absence of a comforter.

Someone who expresses sympathy, who understands, who consoles and helps ease some of the emotional pain.

Having no comforter can be worse than death.

This is illustrated in the life of Jonah

Jonah 4:3 ESV

³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

Or Elijah

1 Kings 19:4 ESV

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

The lack of comfort also emphasizes the hopeless condition of these people.

Both the repetition and the grammar of the Phrase **there was no one to comfort** them emphasized the desperate plight of those oppressed by those in authority.

On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

Solomon himself did not face oppression, but he would have been keenly aware of what His dad had faced under King Saul.

The reality is that those in power, may abuse their positions of authority.

We see this in how Putin, is sending many young men to a war, for his own political purposes.

Crushing the very lives of his own country men.

Application

In life , you may face situations where someone in authority misuses their position as a boss, a director or a parent, or a pastor and use it in a cruel way to crush you.

I think the best illustration for me was in the military in which those in authority would use cruel methods to train those under them.

But even this situation, is a part of God's plan for life.

What is the perspective you and I should hold on to?

Solomon reveals some of His thoughts.

² And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.

God cares about the oppressed

He is their **stronghold**.

Psalm 9:9 ESV

⁹ The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

God **hears** their desires and brings justice for them

Psalm 10:17-18 ESV

¹⁷ O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear

¹⁸ to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

Psalm 103:6 ESV

⁶ The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

But **for Gods people** that live under oppression, God God has a glorious future for them.

Romans 8:18 ESV

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Solomon provides a perspective.

Death he states is a better alternative than being in this life filled with oppression.

But he goes even further.

Whats better than both death or this life

³ But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

Better than both is those who have not yet been born.

Its better to not even existed that living in this sin stained life.

This was Jobs perspective in [Job 3:11-26](#), as he endured the great sufferings of life.

He cursed the day that he had been born as he compares it with the suffering he was experiencing in this life.

Application

For you and I , well we have the unfortunate reality of being alive and well in a world filled with oppression, and sufferings.

So what is the 2nd best situation rather than to have never existed is...

for death.

That's why Gods people ultimately long for the life here after.

Paul stated

Philippians 1:21-23 ESV

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

If you are a child of Jesus Christ,

If you have repented of your sin and trusted in Christ death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins, then your simply a pilgrim towards heaven.

Philippians 3:20–21 ESV

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

When I think of this church and the people I've buried, I know that those who were true believers are truly in a better place.

This gives every believer great hope.

The believer finds hope and joy in what awaits them after death.

1 Peter 1:3–7 ESV

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,

⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,

⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

But what about in this life.

In this life the believer has God the Father to **comfort** them.

For the believer we have God the Father.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ESV

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

This brings us to the 2nd point

2. Considering jealousy as part of Gods life plan vs 4-6

Ecclesiastes 4:4-6 ESV

⁴ Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

⁵ The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

⁶ Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

⁴ Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor.

What is envy?

John Street defines it as the resentment you have towards the success of another

The Hebrew term means: a competition, it means to be jealous, having a strong greedy or prideful desire for something that belongs to another.

Solomon had observed that in the business world, success is often met not with praise or compliments, but with envy, this greedy desire to have more or better than the other person.

We see this illustrated in the life of Cain, who out of envy killed his brother, or Saul who did not rejoice in David's success, but rather viewed him as an enemy and a threat to be killed.

Envy and greed within the heart serves to motivate people to, upskill and be workaholics, to endure great hardships, work overtime, sacrifice their families and even their walk with God.

Envy lies at the heart of people who are willing to step on their fellow workers to climb the corporate ladder.

Envy lies at the heart of many sins like:

[Gen 30:1](#) Rachel envy over her sister led to her wanting to die.

[Job 5:2](#) Envy leads to murder

[Pr 6:34](#) Envy produces anger

[Pr 14:30](#) Envy produces ill health

[Ezek 35:11](#) Hatred may produce envy

[Pr 23:17](#) Envy should rather be replaced with the fear of the Lord

Envy lies at the heart of many peoples ambition.

Envy ultimately leads to idolatry.

The world even has TV shows producing idols, like Britian has talent, and the result of this is creating a pop idol, that become the object of many peoples envy.

The Bible does not oppose education, or up skill-ing, or working hard.

But if your heart is filled with envy and greed, then all those activities become sinful in the eyes of the Lord.

Kaizer sates:

Coping With Change - Ecclesiastes 2. Understanding the All-encompassing Plan of God
Why should anyone want to work so hard in a dog-eat-dog world, only to be envied as the reward for one's success?

This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

Once again, Solomon states that this pursuit of hard work, motivated by envy

is vanity,(vapor, air, transient,limited, brief) and a chasing after wind, a pursuit that is pointless.

So whats the answer?

Dont do work! No

Solomon also looked at the opposite situation.

The person who decided not to do work

The person who is lazy.

⁵ The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

In the book of Proverbs we see a similar statement

Proverbs 6:9–11 ESV

⁹ How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?

¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

¹¹ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

The Bible condemns **laziness**, fool who folds his hands(the man who chooses not to work.

The sluggard is a term used for the lazy person, who does not work.

The bible states that it causes irritation

Proverbs 10:26 ESV

²⁶ Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him.

It leads to hunger.

Many claim to be poor, and as a result hungry, yet when offered work, they never pitch.

They prefer poverty over sweat.

Many are poor people are poor because of laziness rather than lack of opportunities to work.

Proverbs 19:15 ESV

¹⁵ Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.

Laziness leads to being unprepared.

Proverbs 20:4 ESV

⁴ The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing.

It may lead to death.

Proverbs 21:25 ESV

²⁵ The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

A lazy person:

- loves their own bed,
- despises basic house chores
- and claims to be wise in their own eyes.

Proverbs 26:14–16 ESV

¹⁴ As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed.

¹⁵ The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.

¹⁶ The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.

The fruit of being lazy, of being the sluggard
is destruction.

and eats his own flesh.

Eats his own flesh does not mean self cannibalism, but rather is a metaphor for self destruction.

Solomon understood that the alternative to working hard driven by envy is not being foolish, lazy and unwilling to work.

So instead of competition, work driven by envy and greed, what is to be recommended?

The answer:

⁶ Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

What he was saying is a small slice of bread with peanut butter is better than steaks, prawns and calamari with lots of conflict.

Contentment can exist with fewer material goods (Barrick)

Yes Gods plan includes the adversities of :

- people motivated by envy and greed in their toil
- people who are sluggards, lazy and prefer not to work

So if these are the negative realities of life, what would it look like to fear God and obey God.

What would God's alternatives be?

The alternative to these two extremes is contentment (having a handful of quietness (freedom from activity, work or strain) and moderation.

The pursuit of wealth driven by envy is just as evil as laziness.

Psalm 127:2 ESV

² It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Contentment is connected with a loving relationship with God and other people.

Proverbs 15:16–17 ESV

¹⁶ Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.

¹⁷ Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

Proverbs 16:8 ESV

⁸ Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.

Proverbs 17:1 ESV

¹ Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

Application

You and I must ask God to expose if our hearts are motivated by envy or greed?

If you realize that the reason your working and laboring is driven by the motive of greed or envy Ask God to change your heart motives to sacrificial giving.

Greed and envy are self centered at the core, like a thief.

God's perspective

Ephesians 4:28 ESV

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Ask God to help you become content in whatever life throws at you.

Begin to thank the Lord for the small things in life, and you will begin to see how much the Lord has blessed you.

Philippians 4:11-12 ESV

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

In contrast are you a sluggard?

Are you that person who always has an excuse not to work?

Are you missing when help is needed at home?

Do you make up your bed?

Is your clothes mountains on the floor?

Are you always procrastinating?

Are you that person who makes promises and commitments and you never keep them.

If so, maybe you're like the fool that always falls and is heading towards destruction.

If so

Confess this to the Lord

Make the decision every day to walk in yieldedness to the Lord.

Walk moment by moment under control of the HS

And learn to deny yourself .

This is only possible if you have ultimately come to the foot of the cross and acknowledged your own sinfulness, and trusted Jesus to save you, to be your Lord and to transform you every day more and more into His likeness.

Conclusion

Contemplating 4 areas of adversity in God's plan for life, helps you find joy from God

(We've looked at the first 2)

1. Considering oppression as part of God's life plan vs 1-3
2. Considering jealousy as part of God's life plan vs 4-6
3. Considering loneliness as part of God's life plan vs 7-12

4. Considering succession as part of Gods life plan vs 13-16