



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Lessons from Mike Black

Ecclesiastes 3:16 – 4:8

Lesson 5 of 16

2007-08

"Three Views Of Man"

TRANSCRIPT

We are in our fifth study on the book of Ecclesiastes and we will pick up our study in the book, beginning in chapter 3 and verse 16 and go all the way to chapter 4 through verse 8. Now let me begin tonight by reading our text and I will be reading from the New International Version.

And I saw something else under the sun:

In the place of judgment — wickedness was there,
in the place of justice — wickedness was there.

I thought in my heart,

“God will bring to judgment
both the righteous and the wicked,
for there will be a time for every activity,
a time for every deed.”

I also thought, “As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of a man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”

So I saw that there was nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

(Chapter 4) Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun:

I saw the tears of the oppressed —
and they have no comforter;
power was on the side of their oppressors —
and they have no comforter.
And I declared that the dead,
who had already died,
are happier than the living,
who are still alive.
But better than both
is he who has not yet been,
who has not seen the evil
that is done under the sun.

And I saw that all labor and all the achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

The fool folds his hands
and ruins himself.
Better one handful with tranquility
than two handfuls with toil
and chasing after the wind.

Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:

There was a man all alone;
he had neither son nor brother.
There was no end to his toil,
yet his eyes were not content with his wealth.
"For whom am I toiling," he asked,
"and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?"
This too is meaningless —
a miserable business!

Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:8

The structure of our passage falls into three parts. It is three observations of 'man' from our Teacher with a 'powerful mind'. Let's notice the **first** part (Chapters 3:16 through 4:3), 'the man with the powerful mind' observes *man* as 'a beast'. Now I'm not

really taking license with the text. Notice in your NIV, verse 18, the word '*animal*' is used. And it's in verse 19 twice. And also verse 21. The **second** portion of our exposition (Chapter 4:4-6) it is *man* 'the worker'; *man* 'the toiler'. And the **third** part, (Chapter 4:7-12) it is *man* 'the lonely miser'.

Well let's bow for a moment before the LORD of the Word for His blessing and then we'll begin our exposition.

Father, we are very grateful to be together again and we pray that the teaching ministry of the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit would do His work in a very powerful and meaningful way to each and every life that is here tonight. And so is Your Word powerful as It goes forth from Your mouth never to return void; For It will always accomplish the purpose where into You send it. So use Your Word here in our midst to the end that Jesus Christ, and Christ alone, would receive all of the glory. In His name we pray. Amen.

Man As A Beast: There is a new commercial in Oklahoma City by one of the banks, Spirit Bank, in which an executive calls the younger banker in and tells him he wants him to meet with a brand new powerful client. But before he leaves he wants him to know that he's going to be taking a new partner with him; a new man at the bank by the name of Mickey—and Mickey is a chimpanzee. So we have this very humorous commercial with Mickey and his three piece suit sitting in the board room making his funny faces. It's a clever and wonderful commercial leaving you with a good feeling about the bank and about possibly doing business with Spirit Bank. But as I thought about that commercial and I thought about this text it suddenly dawned on me that this isn't very far off: 'Man the beast'; for in many ways we are like the animals.

So we want to spend some time listening to the probing mind of our Teacher as he begins in verse 16 with a new topic. If you'll notice the first person singular perfect in your NIV the word '*saw*' (or '*observed*') displays the direction of this powerful mind. He is going to tell us; 'Here is another reason that life under the sun is messed up'. He says:

(vs16) "In the place of judgment — wickedness was there, In the place of justice — wickedness was there." Now he is going to explain the problem of injustice from a legal perspective with the clear implication being that the guilty and innocent are confused. So, in ancient Israel the innocent are judged guilty and the guilty are judged innocent, and the responsibility for this system fell to the king. Today we would say our elected officials are the ones responsible. So we understand then, all too well, that nothing has really changed in regards to justice in the courts; or justice among men.

Here we need to pause and consider what we have already learned from our Teacher: That there are periods of time in our lives that evil simply wins; it rules; it reigns. And that's a *tension* that we're to live with according to our Teacher. An all-powerful God includes evil in His plan. Evil is part of His plan. And we don't understand it because we don't have the big picture.

Now see vs 17a: The Teacher's answer is theological, and not moral or political. God will ultimately make wickedness account for what it has done. You see, the standard is God's righteousness and not the United States Constitution (or what you and I would consider its favorable interpreters: The Family Research Council, Laura Ingraham, Justice Thomas, Rush Limbaugh, or Sean Hannity). In the end God is going to judge by His standard. And that standard is going to be absolutely perfect; and all according to His will.

But not only that: (vs17b) "...for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed". Remember, we studied this word time (His sovereign, ordained moments) last lesson. God will deal with this wickedness in His preordained time. And that is what the believer waits for. Here is the apostle's description of that event and it occurred in front of the Greek philosophers, the pagans; all those who didn't know the Word of God. In Acts 17:31; He told the Greeks present that day that God "...has set a day in when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed." That's what we wait for. That's what we believe.

And so, and until then, the believer lives with injustice or he lives with society's 'shadows' of fairness. That's how things really are. But let's make no mistake, your God

is your shield and defender; and those who have wronged you, well, they will have to give an account for what they have done. We seek revenge from no one. We merely lean upon Him, trust in Him, and we wait for Him. That's the life of the Christian.

So for now (verse 18), God is testing men to show them that they are just 'beasts': Chimps in three piece suits. That is what men are. The key word here is 'tests'. Now, Derek Kidner translates this word as 'exposing'; with the idea that mere men, given enough time, will make grand fools of themselves. That chimpanzee; he could only stay in that conference room for so long with his shirt tail tucked in. Now it's out. Now look at those funny faces he's making, lips protruding trying to kiss the secretary and so forth. You see, before long, we discover his real nature. And that is man.

Verse 19: Look at the commonality between 'man the beast', and the 'creature'. Man's fate is like the animal. The same fate awaits them both. As one dies so dies the other. All had the same breath. Man has no advantage over the animal. The word 'advantage' is a word of frustration. Our 'man with a powerful mind' is now sitting across from the Chimpanzee, and it's frustrating him. You see the word 'advantage' is literally the word 'profit' that we have already encountered in our book. Chapter 1:3: "What does a man profit (or the NIV translation, 'gain') from all of his labor?" That's our word. What 'profit' do I have over the animal?

Here is what drives our Teacher crazy. He and the chimp are one and the same. How so you say? I mean look at man; he's so superior in his thinking process; he has so many more advantages than the animal. Well, notice what our Teacher has told us; they both are the same in that they both die. Man, who was created to rule and to reign over the animals, well, they're just as equal after the fall. And that's what the Word of God seems to be telling us again and again. Psalm 49, a wisdom Psalm from the Sons of Korah, says this: "But man in his pomp will not endure; he is like the beasts that perish." (Psalm 49:12, NASB). Man is like the beast. Man is like the sheep. They are destined for the grave and death will rule over them. That's Psalm 49. See, man is just a beast with all the tendencies to cruelty and the same aversions to pain and suffering. All of his cunning, all of his efforts, all of his life is for him; that's the way he lives. That's the way

he exists. Just like the lion; he lives to eat, and devour, and conquer, and rule, and reign, and then live.

I knew a man in business and he was so bright, one of the brightest guys I ever knew. He was always five steps ahead of you; always plotting and planning his own personal agenda. And if he ever got an ounce of leverage on you in any way financially, you would see what a beast he was. But I learned something. I learned what happened to that man. You see despite all of his great gifts and talents he drowned in the Sea of Cortez because his 200 IQ couldn't absorb the complexities of a very difficult warning. Let me try it on you. Here's the warning: 'Stay Out Of The Water!' He couldn't process that. And every person that told him that, on the day of his death, said his response was always one and the same. "I know," he said, "I've been here before." Very interesting: What killed him was his gift. See, he knew. He 'Knew'! And that's what built his confidence, his self-assurance. Fear God my friends, fear God for He alone controls our lives.

Verse 20: This theological reality hits us where it hurts. You see, this is our condition from the Garden of Eden with the man and the woman. You and I are just biding our time between the dusts: The dust that we were created with and the dust that we're going to return to. And apart from the subsequent revelation of the Word of God, as far as 'life under the sun' is concerned, what happens to you and what happens to the animals is anybody's best guess.

Verse 21: '*Who knows if the spirit of man (or 'breath' with the idea that breath represents life) rises upward or the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth*'. You see, apart from the Word of God, you and I simply don't know. We have no way of knowing. Life 'under the sun', for all that it's cranked up to be, is very limited. The life of a beast is just what's in front of him. And you know what? That's man as well.

"No", you say, "that's not man. You see man knows the future. He plans. He knows he's going to die. I mean he buys insurance and he buys the funeral plots and then he prepays his funeral. Man knows he's going to die. That makes him different than the animal." But if that's the case let me ask you: "Why doesn't he live that way?"

You see, when I look at man, man doesn't live like he's going to die at all. Man looks like he's going to live forever. Just listen to the way he talks, listen to the words that come out of his mouth. Do you think he thinks about God or having to face God with what he's done; the way he's treated people, the covenants he's broken? The lies, the cheating, the stealing, and all of his rebellious activity; you think he thinks about God? No. No, he doesn't think about God. He doesn't think about God because, you see, to watch him he's not going to die. He's just going to go on and on and on. And at best he's got manners, but those are soiled with his own conceit; or what he feels like is proprietary conduct for his own advantage.

Now here's the best that man can do; and it's not that he can beat the grave. Verse 22: It's his temporary satisfaction of doing a job well. And yet even that is spiked with frustration. He is laboring so well that our Teacher tells us back in chapter 2 and verse 26 that even his store of wealth will eventually be handed over to one who pleases God. Now I ask you in light of that, who is really the chimp and who is the man?

Man with power, man the beast (Chapter 4 verse 1) becomes the oppressor. The world is simply his place to gain an advantage or conquer. He's the beast. An animal of the jungle: That's him. And the oppressed, we're told in verse 1, well, they have no comforter. Our 'man with a powerful mind' says that this is just simply the way things are. 'Under the sun', power is always on the side of the oppressor. This is describing a Hitler. From one single heart, from one single mind came the death of 6 million people. 'Get them in those cattle cars, waltz them into those gas chambers'. "No wonder", our teacher tells us in declaring, "the dead who have already died are happier than the living who are still alive."

This word translated in the NIV '*declared*' is the word "*praise*". In Psalm 63:4 it is used to express admiration for God in His attributes. In our book here, Ecclesiastes 5:20, this same word is translated in the NIV as '*gladness*'. 'God keeps the man occupied with *gladness*'. That's our word; "*gladness of heart*". So this word is like an anesthesia. Death protects one from painful oppression. And for the living: God gives *gladness*, (*praise*); even in the face of oppression or those who would oppose him in a scandalous way.

And scripture is replete with examples about that: Stone the prophets; torture the apostles. Yet they were never men who were defeated. They did not cower. The world was not worthy of them. For the world gave them their best shot; but they could not land a knockout punch on their chin. "They danced all night", as Muhammad Ali would say: All through their lives—These Great Men and Woman of the Word of God. Those who were faithful to God cut through life like a hot knife through butter. That's the life of *gladness*; that's the life of *praise*; and that's the life of dependence upon God. That, our Teacher says, is really living.

Now verse 3: And here is the first time in the book that our 'man with a powerful mind' uses a number of so called '*better than*' proverbs. The form here is simple: Taking one thing or a relationship between two things and compare it favorably with the other. Vs 3: "...better than both is he who has yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun." In our proceeding verse he said it was better to be dead than alive. Now here he goes beyond that sentiment by asserting that it is better never to have lived than to have lived and died. Now you think about that; that's total madness, isn't it? Better never to have been born than to have lived life and then died? That surely couldn't be any teaching of the Bible! But yes it is.

In Job 3:3-5, here is Job in his pain. Listen to his words, "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' That day — may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. May darkness and deep shadows claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light". That's what Job thought about his birth, and that's what he thought about his life. And not only Job; but here's the sentiments of Jerimiah as well. In his book, chapter 20 verse 18 he asked, "Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?" Now the point from these Godly men is that 'man the beast' and his ability to create pain and derision can exhaust any and all from any hope of living and enjoyment. To be free from pain is the great tranquilizer.

I can remember many years ago having a conversation with Dr. Charles Howard and he was describing a severe accident that a young man had been involved in: The

broken bones and the burns—and yet he was still alive. And Dr. Howard said as a medical doctor you look at that tortured frame and you think to yourself, ‘There are some things a lot worse than death’. He was talking about the pain that the young man would have to go through in his recovery; if there was ever going to be a recovery.

Man The Worker: Now to our second part, beginning in verse 4, he contemplates ‘*toil*’ and success in ‘*work*’. And to our surprise he gives us an insight; a dirty little secret. ‘Much of the hard work and high endeavor of man is motivated by jealousy’, he tells us. Now, many feel that rivalry is the mark of a virtue in a free economy: For example; the often quoted ‘rivalry of scholars increases wisdom’.

But I believe such a thought misses what Proverbs teaches the believer, and that's what we are interested in here at Believers Chapel. Proverbs 14:30: "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." You see, envy, covetousness, jealousy: These are a permanent tattoo to your soul and in your life ‘under the sun’; you will never have any satisfaction. You remember Haman's words regarding Mordecai in Esther 5:11? He boasted to all his friends “...about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him...” Then in verse 13, But all this brought him ‘...no satisfaction as long as he saw the Jew, Mordecai, sitting at the king's gate.’ That, my friends, is our nature. And we saw it for the first time in the Garden. Man and woman there could have had the fruit from any and every tree they wanted; save one. But it was that one: That one tree that held the woman's attention. All the other provisions evaporated as she observed that one tree. And that's your nature and mine. We are exhorted by the apostle to ‘weep with those who weep’ (Rom 12:15b). And frankly I find that easy to do. It's the other one that gives me trouble. Rom 12:15a: ‘Rejoicing with those who rejoice’. Why? Well, it's my nature to envy, to covet, to be jealous. That says, our ‘man with a powerful mind’, is meaningless; a waste; no way to live; a chasing after the wind.

So in verses 5 and 6 he gives us a couple of short sayings that parallel the book of Proverbs. The first, verse 5, is a terse, pithy, sarcastic image that ridicules the lazy fool.

People who refuse to work end up with nothing but their own flesh to eat. They become cannibals of themselves. The simple implication: They kill themselves by starvation. Man in idleness eats away not only what he has but what he is.

To such an unholy way of life verse 6 offers another alternative. A 'better than' saying: 'Better one handful with rest than two fists full with toil and a chasing after the wind.' Here our Teacher contemplates that *toil*, *rest*, and *work* are certainly 'better than' the motive of *jealousy* in verse 4 and *idleness* in verse 5. And he says that they bring *peace*. That's the best; to have *peace*. But that, my friends, has a price tag.

You want that *peace*; that inner peace? You have to walk with God. You have to live with Him. You have to make Him your daily delight; to really make the chief end of your life the glory of God and the enjoyment of Him forever. That will give you peace beyond anything that we could ever ask or think. So, we sing the hymn:

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of Earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace".

That's Peace.

Finally, in our last section we observe **Man The Lonely Miser**. Verse 7: "Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:". The direct object '*meaningless*' appears here rather abruptly since we have been conditioned to hearing about *meaningless* and *vain* expressions towards the end of a section. Here though, with the direct object so early in this section it gives us a new example of something of no value. It's like a flashing light: **Here it is. Pay attention!**

Verse 8: He is a man all alone; no friends, no business partners, no wife, no children. All of his time is consumed by his labor: And notice the term '*wealth*'. Obviously this man is very productive. But yet before we can applaud his industry we cringe at the real truth, for he never derives any pleasure from his wealth. Year after year, he stays up there on that 'Fortune 400 list', compounding his wealth. And yet

look, here is your literal translation: "His eye was not satisfied", (The combination of the 'eyes' and this verb 'dissatisfied', that the NIV renders 'content'). We have seen this verb before in chapter 1:8. The effect, according to the NIV, is that this man's wealth made him wearisome. His money didn't ring the bell for him. It didn't bring him what he thought it would. Here's what's going on in his mind: (vs8c), He asks, "For whom am I toiling...and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" The question from this pathetic soul displays his own self-delusion. You see, he has no ability to see what he has become, and this phrase is a picture of this man's entire life. You see, his wealth is his crowning achievement; his crowning achievement to the 1,000's of decisions that he has already made.

Let's think of some of them. Verse 8: No family, no friends, no relatives. So, long ago he decided to embrace loneliness in order to get here. And now he's here! And now he wonders, "If I'm at the dance, where's the music?" He made the decision to go it alone strategically because 'others just slow you down'. Even if he had chosen a wife and had children, he would not have had any time for them. And their lives would be his excuse to convince himself that his long hours into the night and on the weekends were ultimately for their benefit anyway. That's a lie. That's a lie!

I know a guy in Oklahoma City. He ran for governor. He ran for governor the same year that his son was a senior in high school. His son was the quarterback of the high school football team. And this man, by his own words, never saw his son play his senior year because every Friday night he was out eating roast beef at somebody's banquet and shaking all those hands. And to make matters worse, he lost in the general election. But make no mistake about it: He made his decision. Above all else he made his pact. And here it was: My life, my career comes first. Above all else know that. That is the way he chose live. And now—He's got films to watch.

How about this one: "That's when I knew he was running for president," said Ms. Adlai Stevenson II quoted in the *New York Times*, "He said one Sunday morning, 'Get the children ready for church.' Then I knew he was a candidate." Oh what games we play; what empty lives we live. You see, our 'man with a powerful mind' has looked at us all

'under the sun' and he has seen us for what we are. Beasts: We're just animals. Oh we have our manners and we have our social customs but we're all just a part of the jungle, trying to rule and reign as best we can. So here is Man. Here he is in all his glory: Man 'the beast', Man 'the worker', and Man 'the miser'. And for what? For what! That is no way to live!

My friends I don't offer you this book. It is a part of the Word of God and it is worthy for instruction, and meditation, and consideration: But that is not to be offered. What is to be offered is Christ. Christ, Who came to set us all free from ourselves, to save our souls from this pitiful life and this pitiful lifestyle. Christ came to do that; and He did that. He elected you for His glory and for His eternal purpose. Snatching you 'out of the fire' to be set apart for His service. That's what He wants for you. And then you are to live your life in such a way that your light shines before others. You're the 'salt' of the earth. You're the 'light' of the earth. You are to live your life in such a way that God receives great glory because of what He did in you and through you.

Many, many years ago a young lad stood at the window and he was watching as the men came to the city square; lighting the lamps around the square. And his mother sent him off to bed; but he refused: He wanted to stay there. And his argument was this, "Mother just let me stay a minute more. I like to watch the men poke holes in the darkness." That's what we are. We are people poking holes in the darkness.

We are not called to live lives like these '**Three Views of Man**'. But rather, God has called you to live a life in which we serve God by loving Him, by serving others, and by counting others better than ourselves. And in so doing we tell men everywhere we're different. We're different because we have a Master who saved our souls and brought us to Himself.

This is what I offer you tonight. Christ Jesus, Who gives life and Who saves you from the condition that you're in. Won't you come to place your trust in Him? Won't you in the quietness of your heart embrace Him as your Savior? I offer that to you now in our time of prayer.

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