

## **“FROM DUST TO DUST.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Text for the Sermon: Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 and 4:1-3**

### **Introduction.**

The Preacher has been showing us the clash between life under the sun and life above the sun, between the temporal and the eternal.

I had a most profound experience of this clash in my first year of ministry in Wisconsin. As the new pastor in town I was invited to give the baccalaureate sermon at our local high school. I decided that if you were inviting a pastor I was free to give them the Gospel, so I did, pure, plain, simple and clear. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God concerning our lives.

When I finished a trio of high school students got up to sing a song, and I couldn't believe what I was hearing. They sang the popular song by the band Kansas, "Dust in the Wind."

All we are is dust in the wind. All we dream, all we do, it all slips away, and all we are is dust in the wind.

Under the sun you won't come to the conclusion there is a good and loving God in control.

If you rely on experience as your guide you are going to come to wrong conclusions about life under the sun and you will not be able to make sense of it and you will end up in despair, frustration, vanity.

In our text Solomon answers three of those faulty conclusions, three objections to his conclusion that God is sovereign over everything. Injustice, death and oppression.

If there is wickedness in the courts and if death comes to everyone, and if there is oppression all around us, how can there be good judge and a loving, caring God in heaven?

**Not knowing or ignoring the just God's presence leads to injustice.**

**Not knowing or ignoring the eternal God's presence removes man's hope of eternity**

**Not knowing or ignoring the purposeful God's presence removes our hope of peace and comfort.**

**First, not knowing or ignoring the just God's presence leads to injustice.**

**Vs. 16 Injustice**

We are wired for justice. We are created in the image of a just God. Justice comes from God. So whenever we run into injustice, something wells up inside of us. We want justice. We want life to be fair, balanced, straight, true. There are few things that can grip us and cry out for change and reversal than obvious injustice.

The staggering amount of injustice in our world calls into question any talk of a good and just God running the world.

Wickedness in the place of justice is the secular realm.

Wickedness in the place of righteousness is the sacred or ethical realm.

It is not just long ago and far away. And while it is rampant in many countries, it is here also. Corrupt politician, bureaucrats, lawyers, officials. We hear of the scandals, college admissions, dirty deals. Our courts are no longer a place of justice and protection for the unborn, for marriage. Spiritual leaders rise to power and prominence and then fall, hurting their flocks, bringing wickedness into the church.

And it is not just in the halls of justice or the cubicles of business, it touches every human relationship, at home, at school, at work. Abuses of power and authority surround us. No one is exempt from the possibility of either receiving injustice or committing injustice against our fellow man.

*Not knowing or ignoring the just God's presence leads to injustice.* When leaders, rulers and judges don't fear God or believe in God or in a just God or in a final, coming judgment they will always lose restraint and become corrupted. When men with power forget the Word they will become a law unto themselves. Power without the restraint of the fear of God and the Word of God will corrupt, and absolute power will corrupt absolutely.

What do you do when you have no recourse?

**Vs. 17 there will be a time for justice.**

This is a glimmer of hope. God exists and as long as God exists He is knowable and therefore there is hope of purpose, meaningfulness. Maybe not under the sun, but at least in the One who created the sun.

There is a time for every purpose under the sun.

There is a time for injustice and a time for judgment.

There is a time for unrighteousness and a time for putting things right.

What Solomon said in 3:1-8 was his confession of faith that God controls the times. This verse is a reminder of that confession, it is a statement of faith. This is not learned by experience from the world around us.

This verse is meant to be for us a huge encouragement, especially for life under the sun. In the face of corruption, injustice, backroom deals, political and judicial compromises we need this reminder, this gift from God that there will be a final judgment when the great high supreme judge will make all things right.

The assurance here is not only *can* God bring about justice, but God *will* bring about justice. God will balance the scales, right every wrong, repay every inequity. Every single person on the face of the earth is answerable and accountable to the holy God of the universe.

God will act. The blood of one billion murdered babies that cry out will be heard and answered and avenged.

**Second, not knowing or ignoring the eternal God's presence removes man's hope of eternity.**

Here is another objection to there being a sovereign God. If we all die just like animals, then what difference is there? Under the sun, there is none. If you just look around and nowhere else you can't come to any other conclusion.

**Vs. 18 we are but beasts**

God is testing and more to the point exposing our hearts.

"They never know their honor, until they have known their shame" (Charles Bridges).

We can never know the heights of glory that Christ lifts us to until we know the depths of depravity He has saved us from. And this we will never see until God has exposed and revealed to us true condition.

Solomon forces us to face reality in how we treat each other. Solomon completely dispossess us of any notion that man is basically good. Yes, we are created in the image of God, but the image is completely corrupted by the fall and it is evident by how we treat each other.

And it seems more evident now more than ever.

Road rage, quick tongues, quick fingers on social media, cancel culture, refusing to listen and seek understanding. No one seems to be doing the Golden Rule.

We can often forget whose image we are made in and whose image our fellow man is made in.

**Vs. 19 we like beasts all die**

The clearest similarity we all share with the animal kingdom is we are all finite, we are all flesh, we all die. We are not superior in this regard.

We like to think of ourselves as pretty special, pretty important, until we face the indignity of death when we end up no different than a dead cow or cat. We all turn into dust.

From an earthly perspective in life under the sun, we all die and turn into dust. All is vanity, we have no advantage, no pre-eminence.

But there is another glimmer of truth, that there is more to life than just life under the sun.

**3:21** Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?

Who knows? Who can say? This is not a statement of uncertainty, but a statement of who knows.

Everything that happens beyond the grave is completely dependent on someone from there who can testify to the realities of the afterlife.

Under the sun we can't tell whether our spirits go up and animal spirits go down. Science can't answer it, philosophy can't answer it. Only God knows this.

We know what we know because of God. It is the gift of God that we have knowledge of our life after death. The only way to know that answer is not by observation, but by revelation.

**II Timothy 1:10** Our Savior Christ Jesus, ... abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Not knowing or ignoring the eternal God's presence removes man's hope of eternity

**Third, not knowing or ignoring the purposeful God's presence removes our hope of peace and comfort.**

What about oppression? Not just oppression from injustice, but oppression in all its forms in every facet of life, in business, marriage, school, by anyone in power.

There is hardly a word in our language to capture the detestable wickedness of oppression, the tyranny on one human over another expressed in the most violent manner. Man's inhumanity to man is hard to behold and harder to explain how it is possible.

Might prevails against right, wrong seems oft so strong, good is punished by evil. The oppressed are driven to despair, to hate and despise life. Oppression is the pinnacle of cruelty.

Solomon exhibits a heart truly and deeply affected by the cruelty and evil he has seen. Twice he says to add to the poignancy, there is no comforter.

This moves Solomon to make a rather grim reflection about life under the sun. Solomon commends or congratulates the dead. They have moved beyond the grasp of oppression and corruption.

Believers are not exempt from these feelings. Job certainly felt it. Elijah did. King David did.

But even better are those who have never been born in the first place. They haven't seen or experienced the sin and evil of life under the sun.

The definition of despair is suffering without meaning. I feel a deep sadness for those who suffer without any knowledge of Jesus Christ. They cannot know the possibility of suffering with meaning and therefore with hope. Jesus shows us that path, when as the Man of Sorrows He fixed His eyes on the joy set before Him and endured the cross.

Which is better, to never have been born, or to have been born into a life of trouble and suffering and know Jesus and spend all of eternity in the glorious joy of heaven. As Paul says, trials and sufferings are light and momentary, compared to the glory that far outweighs them all.

If anyone in heaven ever asks us was what we suffered on earth worth it to gain heaven, I am confident our answer will be absolutely yes and even if it had been a thousand times worse.

As Christian we look ahead with hope. But it is OK, even good and necessary to look at the present and weep, to look at the reality around us and be sad, moved, sobered, and willing to look at the roots of the same evils in our own hearts.

Where is our comfort? Remember Solomon's answer. There is a sovereign God, there is a final judgment, a final reckoning. This knowledge of a God who is not confined to under the sun, but is above and beyond and outside of the sun, He has given us a gift of knowing Him, and in this is our comfort.

When we understand this, and only when we understand this, can we have any understanding of joy in this life and in its simple pleasures. True joy is only found in the sovereignty and grace of God.

### **Conclusion and application.**

**Ecc 3:22** So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot.

**Ecclesiastes 2:24-25** There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

But everything is meaningless? Enjoy what God has given you.

But injustice racks this broken world? Get up, get dressed, wash your face, join your family, God has not quit or abandoned our world.

But we are all going to die? Eat your breakfast, enjoy your coffee. God is here in the midst. But nothing satisfies, it is all vanity? Hold your wife's hand, hug your kids, wash the dishes, plan your life, walk through life's sorrows together redemptively and help your kids. God is here.

But life is unfair. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might the best you can.

The best remedy for dealing with life under the sun and our approaching death, is to celebrate life's ordinary joys.

Our spouses, children, food, work, school, and our place in the world will not satisfy our souls deepest longings, only God can do that. Trying to use any of these things to fill or do what only God can do will leave us deeply disappointed.

If you use a tea cup for a hammer you are going to be disappointed with the results. And the same will be true if you bring a hammer to a tea party.

A grapefruit makes for a terrible baseball, but for a pleasant breakfast.

But all of those things are God-given gifts and they have a divine purpose in our lives. They are to be a joy to us if received and used in the way God intends.

Open your hands, receive what God has given you, it is grace. Put away any sense of entitlement, or comparing it with what someone else has. Show a little humility toward what He has given, show gratitude, followed by joy. Enjoy it for what it is.

Do you want to know where God is? Look right where you are, look right at what you have, look right at who you are. All of this is the hand of the living God.

God is right here among all the ordinary things of your life. Your lot is your gift.

What is our lot? We have been given a place to be, a time to live, some things to do, the basic necessities and some people to share all of this with. God has given it, God is in it.

Are we alert to God's presence? Are we consciously aware of God in and around us? Do we have a sense of joy in the small and little and ordinary and routine gifts?

Each gift is God's visitation. Each moment is cause and opportunity for worship.

True joy is found only in God and God is found only where He has shown us and given us His gifts. His gifts are our lot. God is right here right now. It is enough.

Since everything is gift, everything is a means for joy. Glory to God.