Living with the End in Mind: We, Not Me, Part 2

Ecclesiastes 4

February 9, 2020

The Preacher tells us that we have to share what we enjoy because there are two ways to live in the world. You can either hate your neighbor and destroy yourself (4:1-6), or you can love your neighbor and so love yourself (4:7-16).

1. Hating My Brother, Destroying Myself (4:1-6)
   1. Oppression is an expression of the love of self and the hatred of others (1-3).
   2. Envy is an expression of the love of self and the hatred of others (4).
   3. Laziness is an expression of the love of self and the hatred of others (5).
   4. Frantic busyness is an expression of the love of self and the hatred of others (6).
2. Loving My Neighbor, Loving Myself (7-16)
   1. Isolation: the tragedy of greed (7-8)
      1. This person has made it to the top of his profession, but he lives there alone; utterly alone; no children, no family; no friends (7-8a).
         1. Greed destroys relationships.
         2. Greed prohibits you from developing healthy relationships.
      2. This person works tirelessly for riches, an idol which cannot satisfy him (8b).
         1. It is the love of money that is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10).
         2. It is the love of money that isolates us from every healthy relationship.
      3. This person is laboring for no one but himself (8c).
         1. Many a business fell apart when it lost sight of serving the customer.
   2. Community: the blessing of generosity (9-12)
      1. For the Preacher, the value of life is not what you earn, but whom you relate to.
         1. Life lived in community and mutual interdependence is better all around for everyone.
         2. We, not me, is always going to be better for me than only me. That’s how we’re designed to flourish.
      2. There’s no better way to defeat the love of money than to use it to serve others.
         1. Give it away regularly, gladly, generously, and you will be happy.
         2. Our entire motivation for earning an income should be to have more to give to others.
         3. If you want a greater capacity to give, seek a greater need to meet.
   3. A final caution (13-16)
      1. Advancement often brings with it the loss of self-awareness, as our achievements cause us to forget where we have come from (13-14).
         1. Generosity is a constant reminder of pit from which we were dug (Isaiah 51:1).
         2. The nation of Israel were to leave behind some of their harvest in the field for the less fortunate so that they would remember that they were once slaves in Egypt (Deut. 24:19-22).
      2. Advancement always brings greater toil, but not necessarily greater thanks (15-16).
         1. This should cause us to remember that achievement in this world is often disappointing.
         2. If we make our chief aim glorifying God and serving others expecting nothing in return, we will enjoy the life that God has chosen for us.
   4. Application:
      1. To expose areas of envy, ask yourself why you choose your friends. Are you choosing people who inspire you, people you can serve, or people you can use for your own benefit?
      2. To expose areas of laziness, ask yourself whom you are feeding off of and who is doing the work so that you don’t have to. How can you give back to those around you?
      3. To expose restless striving, ask yourself who it’s all really for. What tasks and jobs might be set aside so that relationships can flourish?
      4. To expose greed, ask yourself about the health of your relationships. Do you view others as competitors, or as equals? Do you seek to serve those around you from a place of superiority, or from a heart of generosity? Are your pursuits drawing you into healthier relationships with your family, friends, church, and community, or are they hindering?
      5. Remember, you may not have as much as you might like, but you know that you have more than you deserve. As one hand holds, your other one gives.

Conclusion:

1. Which of the oppressive behaviors do you need to focus on changing? Envy? Laziness? Restless striving? Greed?
2. Who are the “we’s” you should think about more often? What can you do to nurture those relationships?