

Topic	Together
Reference	Ecclesiastes 4:7-16
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Ecclesiastes is not a person who is depressed, clinging onto a little threat of life and saying that okay I will live God willing. No it is not. The teacher is actually a very pragmatic and realistic person. He embraces murphy's law. What the worse could happen, will happen, but by the grace of God he can pick himself up and go on with life and still witness God's goodness.

For the past three chapters you have been looking at the teacher himself. He has been speaking about his experiences and he is sharing to each and every one of you individually. Now he gives us a bit of relief because now he calls us to look not just at him but now also to one another. You finally can step away from the depression and say, I am all alone, but actually in fact I am not alone.

### **Loneliness Abounds (vv7-8)**

There is an abundant amount of loneliness in life under the sun.

**7** Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: **8** 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!

So when we break down the text we see the very familiar word, 'meaningless'. Life is hard especially for this man. This man in Jewish culture is actually receiving the worse of the lot. He has neither son nor does he have any brothers, he is all alone and he is working hard it seems to be for no one else but himself and so he asked this very true existential question which we ourselves today would ask.

### **For whom I am doing this for?**

### **And why. What is the point of doing this on my own?**

Therefore, business by myself with no purpose and no end goal with nothing that can live beyond myself is useless. So the rat race for no reason. I think some of us who are working even until now or holding onto businesses for dear life you will feel exactly the same. You will feel like you are holding onto your business so tight and you feel that no one else can help you, but the teacher tells the same and in fact he is also wanting to share another aspect of it. He says, even if you are wealthy, even if you have friends, they will all go away.

In my neighborhood there was a story of a wealthy man. He fought hard through the 87 Depression and 97 Depression and the Y2K economy crisis. He actually was able to stay afloat and was able to not just survive but thrive. This man fought with everybody. He fought with his family until divorce, not just the wife divorced him but his children want no part of him and so they divorced him. It can be done in Malaysian law. He fought with all of his partners. He maintained majority and he was so frugal he was taking home 6 digits a year and yet at the end of the day until his dying dies he will eat the cheapest meal and every day he does this. It was unfortunate for him that after a week when he stopped coming to the shop, a guy at shop noticed that this man is not coming. So they searched for him and they found him. He had a stroke. He fell dead on his own living room, an empty home. His stomach was already bloated because he has been dead and rotting for few days. He was all alone. **What is the point?**

For pillow talk me and my wife decided to buy a little book. It is called the 'Great Book Of Questions'. There was a question inside it, *Would you rather die with loved ones surrounding you at 50 years old or alone at 80?* It was a very interesting conversation that we had at that night. **Which would you choose?**

Believe it or not, although we fight for immortality we will rather not be alone then to live forever alone, a very stark reality. Now of course some of you may think deeper and say, at 80 years old I hope that my children die before me, okay at least I hope they had a good life. As long as we all have full lives that me dying alone means that not only does anybody care for me but I have nobody I care for that I cannot help. It is a good thinking but actually after I did some thinking about this question I found out that this is actually a very wrong question. It assumes two things. It assumes that you won't be alone at 50. We have plenty of people today even before touching 30 they feel so alone that they would rather end their life right then instead of waiting 20 years for perhaps a time of change.

The statistics now confirm that ever since 2012 to 2016 it is now official suicide rate in Subang Jaya and Klang Valley are now even for those below 30 years old and for those above 60 years old. The elderly are killing themselves and when we check why. Because when they committed suicide they die in nice homes, it wasn't in a nursing home, it was in their own grandchildren's home. It is because they felt lonely, which brings us back to our church vision. Vow to us if we do not do anything for the poor, for the widow, for the elderly, for the alien or migrant and for the orphan. Because loneliness abounds, it is everywhere, it hits across the ages. That is one false thing about this. The second false thing about this is that it assumes that we are truly-truly alone. But Jesus changes this whole thing altogether. He was truly alone when on the cross he cried out onto God, "O God my God why have you forsaken me." He took that loneliness so that we may never need be lonely again. You think you need one or two people around you then you will never feel lonely. King David says it, he knew somehow the gospel in his heart and now through Jesus Christ this rings through

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Psalm 23:4**

There are those among us even right now that feel utterly alone. You may have staff working for you. You may even be married but when you go home instead of talking to one another you pick up your smartphone and you end up talking to people outside of the bedroom. If you feel lonely, here is what Christ said. I walk through that loneliness so that you will never need to be lonely again. Would you surrender that enfold to Jesus and he promises that through the gospel and through this community who believes in Christ the same, the one that died for our sins and rose again from the dead, he is the one that promises us that we will never be alone ever again. Loneliness abounds but with Jesus we can go to the devil and say, 'I am never alone.'

### **Sharing Relieves (vv 9-12)**

It is so refreshing. You have actually had passages of refreshment before in chapter 3 where he says there is a time for everything. So therefore our time is now. How encouraging. Now together as another thing that actually the teacher wants us to find hope in and that is this, sharing relieves, sharing helps.

**9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: 10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.**

So here we see therefore in finding a community of two or three, number one is that you will find:

- Relief while at work
- Relief when we fall
- Relief while journeying
- Relief when challenged
- Two is good, three is better.

What the teacher is actually telling us is that in our lives today, although miserable and sucky it might be, God is actually seeing in the background and actually is giving you moments of grace to be able to live together and to realize the truth of who God is. God is a God of community. If God were to play hide and seek and he goes and hides, who wins? Can we really therefore seek him? No, of course not, He is perfect in everything including hiding and seeking. So therefore he wanted to be found. Two is good, three is better and how relieving it is. In fact, Jesus saw this as a reality. Twice when Jesus sent out his 12 disciples he didn't send them alone. He sent them in pairs. When Jesus send out the other 72 of his followers, he didn't send them alone, he sent them in pairs because he knows the truth and reality of this grace that God gives in the way

that we live today that if we are together we can keep each other from falling. When you have fallen down into a well or a pit or so and so forth, it is always good to know that somebody is there.

It goes to show in the background even though it looks horrible because of the sin of the world God is actually giving you these graces of mercy that there is a way to live in this world because God is graciously giving it to you. One example that people always tend to throw at me, how can you say that God intended for us to live so well when there is so much evil in this world.

So I like the way one of my favorite preachers like to say it, *because you notice what is evil you therefore know that there is God*. When you assume that there is something bad, there have to be something that is good to measure it. Now when you determine the good and bad, so therefore there is a way of determining what is good and evil which is called moral law. In fact, a lot of atheist who don't believe in God even says that to say that raping little children is okay is as wrong as saying that 2 plus 2 equals 5. So there is a moral law, something that we realize that there is such a thing as good and evil.

Now if you assume that there is a moral law, you assume that there is a moral law giver. A person who is independent from society, somehow who is self-sustaining, has no benefits to himself in anyway whatsoever in light of the law in this world that for we call God. We call God the person who therefore dictates what is right and wrong, why because whatever he assumes what is right and wrong, he does not benefit or disbenefit from it, it doesn't affect him. So He therefore can be the most just. Because if you ask a judge of this world or a judge in this country what is good and what is bad he may write things to his own benefit, human law.

There are good and bad people in this world, both Christians and non-Christians. The truth of the matter is that we can see these things is because it is a grace of God that we can see these things and therefore learn to step back, defend, fight for what is right, be able to sustain not just of ourselves individually but ourselves collectively, together. The great speaker George Swinnock once said this, *Every breath in your life is a gift of mercy*

If there is so much evil and meaninglessness in this life, why are we therefore still alive? Because every breath we take therefore in our life is a gift of God's mercy.

Two is good, three is better, helping one another. Jesus saw this also. He said this very famously.

**28** Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

When you are thinking of farmers at that time when they were using two oxen and a yoke, you will see it very clearly. Jesus is saying that you are talking one side of the yoke he is also taking

the other. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. Jesus is inviting us to cast our cares upon Him. Come to him and He will give us rest. Jesus gave all of that so that we may know for sure that we are not alone and in Him we can be relieved indeed.

### **Change is Temporary (vv 13-16)**

Under the sun in this meaningless life, we say we want change but it is only for a while.

**13** Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. **14** The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. **15** I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. **16** There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

- Change is good
- Change brings different perspectives
- Good changes last for a while
- BUT, later generations want a different change as well

The way human kind chooses without the guidance of God under the sun we end up going back making the same mistake again and again and again. Change is temporary. It is no wonder that every time when we say look I discovered something new, actually it was there all along. Change is only temporary even in our personal lives. We make new year resolutions and we promise to fulfill them but as the days pass we go back to base one.

The change that Jesus brings in to your lives today will be the one that will change not just your life but the circumstances behind. Jesus went to Lazarus because Lazarus was dead for three to four days. He wept because he saw the meaninglessness of life, not even 40 years old Lazarus had to die, but before he rose Lazarus from the dead He says this that reminds us about us feeling alone and therefore powerless in whatever situation. Jesus prayed, O father I thank you that you hear me, I thank you that you heed my prayers. Now for the thing that I am about to do let it be done because you have sent me that they may believe. Jesus's every single action in this world, from his miracles to his death, to his resurrection, it is not just to change the way we live, it is not just to change the way we do things, but it is especially to change the fact that we no longer called to believe just in ourselves, we are called to believe in Him, and when we does that part it is the gospel.

Jesus is calling out to the death of our souls right now and he wants us to rise and through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus we can certainly rise in Him. Ravi Zacharias says this

*“The Christian faith, simply stated, reminds us that our fundamental problem is not moral; rather, our fundamental problem is spiritual. It is not just that we are immoral, but that a moral*

*life alone cannot bridge what separates us from God. Herein lies the cardinal difference between the moralizing religions and Jesus' offer to us. Jesus does not offer to make bad people good but to make dead people alive."*

That is the change that through Jesus will last for forever. Change is temporary but through Jesus we are changed forever.

**How does all of this come together? Where do we even start?**

Actually the reflection of gospel, community and mission, the vision of our church can actually be resonating from this passage as well and Paul definitely was thinking about this passage when he wrote this encouragement to us.

**17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! **18** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **20** We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. **We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2  
Corinthians 5:17-21

That is the change that we can have in Christ Jesus.