

# THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,  
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in  
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

**From The Editor's Desk**

JESUS THE KING - *used by permission from Discovering the Heart of God*

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” John 1:49  
 Consider also John 18:36-37 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

Pilate asks Jesus if He is a king. The question is called forth by what the Lord had just said concerning his kingdom, closing with the statement that it was not of this world. He now answers Pilate that He is a king indeed, but shows him that his kingdom is of a very different kind from what is called kingdom in this world. The rank and rule of this world are uninteresting to him (as they should be to us as his followers).

But He did not care for government. No such kingdom would serve the ends of his Father in heaven, or comfort his own soul. What was the perfect empire to the Son of God is when He might teach one human being to love his neighbour and be good like his Father!

Whatever interpretations we put on Pilate's action, he must be far less to be blamed than those "Christians" who, instead of setting themselves to be pure "even as He is pure," to be their brother and sister's keeper, and to serve God by being honourable in shop and office and labour market, proceed to "serve" him, as they would call it, by going to church, some by condemning the opinions of their neighbours, and some by teaching others what they do not themselves heed. The truth is God; the witness to the truth is Jesus. The kingdom of the truth is the hearts of men. The bliss of men is the true God. The thought of God is the truth of everything. All well-being lies in true relation to God. The man who responds to this with his whole being is of the truth. The man who knows these things, but merely knows them in his head; the man who sees them to be true, and does not order life and action, judgment and love by them, is of the worst of lying.

A man content to bear no witness to the truth is not in the kingdom of heaven: One who believes must bear witness. One who sees the truth must live witnessing truth. Jesus bore witness to the truth, not by words, but by the essence of his very being. Is our life, then, a witnessing to the truth?



*Number 4 of 12 expository messages from:  
The Book of Ecclesiastes by:  
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## **Work, Relationships and Politics**

I bring you Christian greetings from our Lord Jesus Christ and hopefully we can together, through the study of his Word, be drawn to him and to his Gospel.

Turn with me to Ecclesiastes the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter as we continue this study in the book of Ecclesiastes, let me remind you where we are in this book and what this book is about.

This book is a discourse from the preacher, the preacher being one name for Solomon, and he is on a search to discover meaning and purpose in life, he is undertaking this study to find where there is meaning and purpose and in his opening chapters of Ecclesiastes the picture looks pretty grim, pretty bleak because he looks at or studies that area which is under the sun, that is the earthly sphere, and so he talks about all is vanity under the sun and those words under the sun keep coming up over and over again.

The preacher, the man Solomon, is studying what is going on under the sun but every now and again he kind of punches through and breaks through that under the sun barrier and some light shines in and he gives us some insight into God's perspective on things, we see this increasing as the book goes along and we see this contrast, on the one hand we have life under the sun that seems to be vanity, vexation, it is futile, it is without hope and in contrast a life that is lived pleasing God, life that is lived with a godly perspective, perspective of the Son of God, that life is where meaning and purpose and hope is found.

And of course we as Christians know part of the rest of the story because we understand and know from the Scriptures that Jesus Christ came, God himself has come down to earth, God himself has come under the sun to

rescue us from the vanity and the futility and hopelessness that this life is without him, He did this by becoming one of us, took on human flesh and dwelt with us, He died for us and rose again so that we could trust in him.

So let's read Ecclesiastes chapter 4 starting in verse 22 of chapter 3.

**Ecclesiastes 3:22** <sup>22</sup> So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

**Ecclesiastes 4:1-16** <sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. <sup>3</sup> But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun. <sup>4</sup> Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbour. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. <sup>5</sup> The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. <sup>6</sup> Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind. <sup>7</sup> Again, I saw vanity under the sun: <sup>8</sup> one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business. <sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! <sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. <sup>13</sup> Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. <sup>14</sup> For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. <sup>15</sup> I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. <sup>16</sup> There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

Now today I want us to see four choices, four choices that we must make in this life under the sun, four choices that we must make if we are going to experience the kind of life that is meaningful, that is not vanity that is not striving after wind.

I also want to point out than that without Christ these 4 choices are no end in themselves, these choices have to do with how we view and the perspective we have on work, relationships and politics, this goes along well with our Sunday school lesson this morning, but I want you to see here that we have a choice to make under the sun between that which is good and that which is better or that which is not good and that which is good, we have those choices to make, but in the end there is a choice that is more important than all of them and Solomon expresses it this way later on in the book he says, Foolish people are living a vain life.

There is no meaning, there is no purpose in being foolish and ultimately to be wise under the sun really isn't much better, but it is better but it is still foolish, it is still vanity as long as we are under the sun but wisdom ultimately is better than foolishness even if it is only a little better there are some benefits to being wise in this world.

And that is the kind of perspective that we want to see on these 4 questions that he addresses in Ecclesiastes chapter 4.

So the first question is or the first choice that we need is to choose right over might.

To choose right over might and we see that in verses 1 to 3.

In verses 4 to 6 we see the choice between contentment and achievement.

In verses 7 through 12 we see the choice between relationships and riches.

In verses 13 through 16 we see a choice between wisdom and popularity.

And then I want us to see that we must choose Christ over everything.

So the first 3 verses of this book are pretty dark the preacher sees all this oppression and he sees that there is no comfort.

Oppression is one of the dark facts of life under the sun, we see it in our political arena, those who are powerful, those who have the most votes, the most money, they win it doesn't matter whether they are right or not. The guy with the most power wins.

We see this corporately in large companies and small, we see this personally individually, we see it we saw it this week in the tragedy in Aurora Colorado where a man with force and power was able to oppress a crowd of moviegoers, we see this in our world, we turn on the news, we read the paper we find this time and time again and Solomon observes that there are 2 parties in this oppression.

There are the oppressed and there are the oppressors.

And for the oppressed there is no one to comfort, the term comfort here means to encourage to push on, to encourage to continue, to give hope. And we often we feel sorry for the oppressed and we might be able to work to eliminate oppression at least in some small way temporarily but it soon crops up somewhere else and so in our political situation for example we have economic stress and we have oppression that happens when those who are economically more powerful oppress those who are not and so our government enacts laws to try to right that, to try to relieve that oppression, and those laws end up creating a whole new class of oppression for somebody else.

On the secular plane or field in the life under the sun there is no true comfort, there is no true resolution to oppression.

The next parallel then is drawn to the oppressors.

The oppressors grasp for power, they do so through oppression.

The reason that they grasp for that power is the same reason that the oppressed weep, they are seeking for comfort as well, they are seeking for meaning, they are seeking for purpose they don't really intend, at least at first, to see the innocent suffer they are just interested in themselves they are interested in their own significance in their terms and at any cost. And often the reality and the horror of their oppression is never really considered.

There was a man named Adolph Eichmann who was a member of the Nazi regime he was responsible for the killing of millions of Jews and he described his role in that, he described this as a part of his job description he was just doing his job and he was being commended for it he was being made to feel important, he was comforted in knowing that others thought he was doing the right thing but in fact he was doing evil.

Solomon says there is no comfort in any of this, this is the cycle of oppression that has developed, the oppressed often become the oppressors, more power is sought, more innocents suffer, more power corrupts. Solomon is speaking of this oppression in its evil and cruel forms and he uses some pretty strong language here he uses hyperbole, he says basically it would be better not to even be born then to be born into this world where all there is is oppression, being oppressed and oppressing, there are no answers to this under the sun

The under the sun kind of answers just lead to more oppression but God does have an answer and God's answer is in the person of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ our Saviour, the one who was our example, the one who suffered oppression. It says in Isaiah 53 He was oppressed, He was afflicted yet He opened not his mouth, like a lamb He was led to the slaughter and like a sheep before its shearers is silent so He opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgement He was taken away and as for his generation who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living stricken for the transgression of my people? [Isaiah 53:7-8](#).

And yet in the face of that oppression Jesus did not become an oppressor, He did not seek more power, He did not seek to defend himself instead Jesus held to the joy that was set before him enduring the cross, despising the shame and is now seated at the right hand of God ([Hebrews 12:2](#)) and that is what we are to do, that is how we are to respond to oppression we are to take a stand with Christ and for the truth.

Sometimes evil will be corrected, sometimes injustice and oppression maybe temporarily at least banished but when it is not we must realise that these evils will continue in this world in some form or another until God intervenes in history and his kingdom is perfectly established. In the meantime we live in the midst of these harsh realities under the sun, we live in a fallen world but an even greater reality is the kingdom and eternal glory of God.

So we must choose what is right over what is powerful not seeking to avenge ourselves when we are oppressed for then we will become the oppressed instead we must follow the instructions of [Romans 12:19-21](#) –

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

So instead of returning the favour when we are oppressed and seeking to exact vengeance and thereby becoming an oppressor ourselves instead we are to comfort those who are the oppressor!

Often we look at those who are oppressed as the ones needing comfort, and they do, but look what it says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 1, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, we are to comfort them with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. [2 Corinthians 1:1-5](#).

So we are responsible to respond in a different way than the world system responds, we are responsible to respond in a Christlike way, we are called to comfort the oppressed and the oppressor with the comfort with which we have been comforted with, mainly calling people to the Gospel of the suffering Son of God the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we see here also in verses 4 through 6 (Ecclesiastes 4) that we are not only to choose right over might but we are to choose contentment over achievement.

The preacher here in Ecclesiastes as he observes life under the sun as he watches people he notices that there is this spirit of rivalry and contention and competition that exists within us. Man by his nature is very competitive we desire to be the best at what we do, we desire to be better than our neighbour, to have more stuff than our neighbour, and this spirit of competition motivates and enables all kinds of achievements in life, in verse 4 he says; I have seen that every labour and every skill which is done is the result of envy or rivalry between a man and his neighbour ([Ecclesiastes 4:4](#)). Solomon discovers that people compete with one another in almost everything.

This twofold use of the word “every” probably means every type of labour, every type of achievement rather than every individual instance of those things but the point is that achievement often most times is a result of a desire to be superior to others. We live in a constant state of competition and this is not far removed from the oppressor and the oppressed.

The oppressor is one who wants to rise over others and seek glory for himself to achieve his own ends his own purposes at the expense of others.

We see this in the political realm and even in the economic realm where there is this huge debate that goes on between whether capitalism is the right approach to the economy or whether socialism is the right approach and we see both approaches it reflected here in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Capitalism is that of competition that of the strongest winning, it's what makes the world go round, it is good for an economic system to have that kind of competition but then we see what happens with the oppression and those who have the power how they oppress the weak so our governments and our people and our economies devise systems to deal with this in those systems and often create even more problems, so it's this vicious cycle, and the preacher says it empty, it is vanity, it is striving after wind there is no end to it, it is futile, it's empty this striving for toil and achievement out of envy for your neighbour because you see if all you are about is to keep up with the Joneses then you will find that there are always some new Joneses to keep up with. If you think you've got to where the Joneses are you will look around and you will find there are other Joneses out there that have more and do better and there is no end to it.

It's like the sign that says, “I don't like this rat race because every time I think I'm winning the rat race a bigger rat comes along!”

That's the way it is in this spirit of competition and envy and rivalry.

So what's the answer, what is the solution to this how should we respond to this?

Well one of the responses is found in the next verse, verse 5, where it says a fool clasps his hands to himself and consumes himself, [Ecclesiastes 4:5](#), he is lazy he decides forget this I'm not going to trample over other people in an attempt to lift myself up and get somewhere in life I'm just going to sit down and take it easy, but he is not productive and he doesn't work and

he ends up consuming himself, starving himself, he folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

Some of us realise the evils of envy, the evils of rivalry, the evils of competition but we determine that we will be different, we don't want to be that kind of person and so we drop out of any competitive endeavour but this is dangerous as well because it ends up consuming us, we are not contributing any more even to our own welfare.

This verse basically says the lazy people eventually make cannibals of themselves they consume all the resources for themselves, they kill themselves with starvation.

In the 1960s there was a generation of people who got sick of the affluence and the competition and the incredible hard work ethic of the greatest generation, those who came out of World War II, and so this group bailed out and they claimed the title of flower children, everybody gave up ambition and the drive for financial success instead they just let their hair grow long, they quit bathing and they sat around in the grass and hummed.

Obviously this is not the way to accomplish God's purposes in the world, this is laziness, this is foolishness, God intends for us to work hence the instruction at the end of chapter 3 which I read at the beginning [Ecclesiastes 3:22](#), there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work for this is his lot.

That is why we emphasise the importance of a godly work ethic, that is why in our Sunday school lesson this morning Paul said it best when he wrote to the church at Thessalonica if anyone will not work neither let him eat, ([2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)) elsewhere Paul said whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than men ([Colossians 3:23](#)).

The Bible is clear that we are to represent Christ in our work.

The issue here is one of motivation, why are we working, what are we working for, who are we working for, whose interests are we trying to advance, what does your work mean to you and how much, how much of your well-being, how much of your sense of your well-being do you tie to your work?

How much are you invested?

Is your work something that you rejoice in as God's blessing in your life or is it a drudgery that you engage in just long enough to get ahead of the Joneses, and you are just putting in time trying to make enough money so you can retire and take it easy and live a life of ease.

That is a misuse of work.

Maybe it's like this, one day a mother walked in on her 6-year-old son and found him crying and asked: "What is the matter?"

And the boy replied, "I just figured out how to tie my shoes."

And the mother said, "Well honey that's wonderful, that's great, why are you crying, what's wrong here?"

Because, he says, now I will have to do it every day for the rest of my life!

Maybe you feel like that, maybe you feel like that 6-year-old, maybe you are a stay-at-home mum and you recognise that you are going to be doing this same task, the same menial task day in and day out for 20 years.

Perhaps you work at a monotonous job day in and day out and it kills you to know that you might be working this job for another 30 years.

God wants you to know there is glory in the grind, there is glory in the mundane. Shrug off the laziness work like today is your last day of work because it just might be, work for Him, work for his glory, his purpose is not for your own selfish interests it will change how you see your work it will change how you do your work.

And now Solomon brings us back to the proper perspective here in verse 6. So we have the extremes, the excesses of scrambling to the top trying to be better than everybody else or we have the reaction to that of just sitting back and saying well I don't want to be that kind of person so I'm not going to do anything.

And here we have the rest of the proverb, one handful of rest or quietness is better than two hands full of labour and striving after the wind, [Ecclesiastes 4:6](#). You see the wise person realises that somethings matter more than other things not everything is equal, so your career is not to be the measure of your self-worth, more money, having more money can't replace the joy of spending time with people you love, contentment means that you have everything you need right now and if you needed more God would give it to you.

So Solomon is saying rather than grasping for so much trying to get the next best thing being a workaholic to get it instead of that be content with less, it is better to have less and enjoy it more.

You see our problem is not the high cost of living, we tend to talk about the high cost of living it costs so much to live, but that's not really our problem, our problem is the cost of high living because we want far too much and we strive and we stress and we fret and we worry. The cure for this is contentment being willing to settle for less materially if it means we can have some rest, some quietness, rest in God and his provisions for you. We've already heard this from Luke chapter 12 and here I will give you Matthews rendition of it, Therefore do not be anxious saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. [Matthew 6:31-33](#).

And furthermore godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can take nothing out of this world but if we have food and clothing with these we will be content. But those who desire to be reached fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil is. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. [1 Timothy 6:6-10](#).

So how much more could we enjoy life if we were content with God has given us, how many families would cease to be divided and destroyed, parents stop breaking their necks to give their kids a better life than they had.

Let me close this section by giving you Ecclesiastes 4:6 in the Linford Berry translation, rather than putting two hands in for 80 hours a week why don't you put in 40 hours with one hand and with the other hand take your children out for ice cream.

Not only must we choose contentment over achievement but we must also choose relationship over riches.

We see this in verses 7 through 12.

These verses remind us that people should be our priority, if you are too busy for people in your life that means you are too busy.

Solomon writes here and he says he looked again at all this vanity under the sun and he saw a person, a certain person who has neither son or brother and yet he is working hard, he is toiling, his eyes are never satisfied with riches, he never even stops to think, What am I doing this for, who's going to benefit from this? He has the big house, he has the boat, he has the vacation home on the lake, the hunting cabin in the mountains, he has all these toys, all these things but he never has any time to enjoy them and nobody to enjoy them with instead he is senselessly and mindlessly in the pursuit of more and more riches, denying himself pleasure and enjoyment.

Do you know anybody like that? Are you somebody like that?

The big point is not whether we have children or relatives to work for that is not the point, the point is what do we value and do we value people over riches?

Even if you are not a successful high powered businessman you can probably relate to this person in some small way, it is so easy to become consumed with work, it is easier for some of us than others, but we are busy people we are busy, so busy sometimes that we miss the significant things right in front of us.

How many fathers, how many mothers have short changed their children for 10 or 20,000 extra a year?

How many young people make great money but don't have friends because they are so busy working?

How many wealthy people have accumulated huge nest eggs but have no friends?

Do you have anyone to enjoy life with, are you taking time to enjoy people or are you alone at the top of the heap?

The need to have someone to relate to, the need for relationship, prompts Solomon to touch on this in the next few verses he lists 4 distinct benefits of a relationship, of community, of friendship and we especially need to hear this in America, in the land of the free and the brave, in this land of the lonely, the independent.

You see we cultivate this loneliness in our culture we take pride in being independent and alone, we even have a Declaration of Independence we want to make it on our own and we take great offence when someone like President Obama makes a comment like he made this past week regarding the fact that we are not entirely responsible for our success.

So we have this issue with independence, men especially are raised with this kind of macho attitude, for you to be a man is if you can stand alone as a survivor, as a winner, as on top, but one of the very first decrees of God following the creation of man was, It is not good for man to be alone ([Genesis 2:18](#)) Remember the context of that was the Garden of Eden, Paradise, everything was perfect, God had just created it that way and He said it is not good for man to be alone.

This isn't something that happened just after the fall this is prior to the fall, God created us for relationship.

Think about that a minute, think about the fact that there might've been loneliness before the fall, before Eve was created, loneliness in paradise and then we wonder why loneliness is such a big deal in our culture, why people complain about loneliness so much.

Well the preacher lists four reasons why it is better not to be alone why it is better to have relationships with people than to have money.

He says in verse 9 two are better than one because they have a good return for their labour, [Ecclesiastes 4:9](#).

Here he goes back to work again, two human beings combining their strength and resources and working together with their combined creativity and talent and strength two people working together accomplish what people working by themselves cannot.

There is something special about working together, there's relationships that are forged there is a bond that is developed there.

I've worked with many people in my short life and there is a special relationship I have with those I have worked with even if I haven't worked with them for years we can still pick up where we left off, there is something that happens when you work with someone else.

And furthermore he says in verse 10, [Ecclesiastes 4:10](#), friends pick up one another in trouble, so if you fall then there will be somebody there to pick

you up but woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up!

So when you're in trouble who's going to come to your rescue? And this is a problem in our world today we have people who are loners, who live alone, who don't have a family, don't have a church, don't have friends and they can die and no one will know about it for a week.

That's a tragedy, that's terrible!

But if you have not been working together, if you haven't been seeking relationship with others and cultivating that the chances are there is not going to be anybody there when you get in trouble.

Verse 11, [Ecclesiastes 4:11](#), Solomon says friends warm one another in a cold world.

In Solomon's time cold was a much more serious issue than it is today with all our modern conveniences we hardly know what to do without our heater and our air-conditioning but we need each other. If you take two coals and you heat them up you start them on fire and then separate them they die out, but if you leave them together they will keep burning.

It is important for us to be together and that is one of the reasons why it's so important for the church to meet together, it says in Hebrews 10 let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, let's fan this flame, not neglecting to meet together as the habit of some is but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near. [Hebrews 10: 24-25](#).

So we come together as people to create a bonfire so to speak, a bonfire of fellowship that we might set each other aflame with the zeal for serving the Lord for loving each other.

And then in verse 12, [Ecclesiastes 4:12](#), says friends hold each other up in adversity. We need other people to give us strength in the midst of persecution and hardship, a cord of 3 strands is not quickly torn apart, it is another way of saying there is strength in numbers.

There are friends that stick closer than a brother, once something comes against you you need friends, you need relationship.

Unfortunately for some of us our natural inclination is when we get into trouble we want to go and be alone, we want to go hide out in a corner by

ourselves, it is absolutely the worst thing that we can do, in those moments, in those times we need each other more than ever.

So are you helping to bear someone else's burdens, are you coming to the defence of your brother or sister or are you only concerned about your own problems, to better your own life, about your own success?

We must choose contentment over achievement and relationships over riches and now Solomon tells us we must choose wisdom over popularity, verses 13 through 16. [Ecclesiastes 4](#)

Solomon reminds us here that popularity, particularly political popularity, is a very fleeting thing and the story goes something like this: There was a poor yet wise young man and it was seen that he had better ideas how to run the country than an old rich king who no longer knew how to take advice and so the people put this young lad into a position of authority, he had all the great ideas, he knew how to make it happen so they put him there in the position of the king but it wasn't very long before people became dissatisfied with this young lad and they replaced him with yet someone else.

And the preacher says that this too is vanity and a striving after wind.

What is in view here is that there is a succession of kings none of whom satisfies the populace, it is better he says to stay poor and wise than to become popular by this world's standards.

Presidents and prime ministers have extremely high approval ratings for a while but they don't last, just ask President Bush or President Clinton or President Obama, this fame, this popularity is a fleeting thing and what is true of politicians is also true for us, for pastors, for teachers, for business leaders.

Popularity does not last if we strive for it and bank our hopes on it, it will be immensely disappointing because today's heroes are tomorrow's bums, that's just the way it works in this life under the sun.

So you want to be president, okay, you want to be president of the country or president of the trade association that your business is associated with well you will be fortunate if when you get done with your term half the people still like you. That's just the way it works.

So instead of making it our ambition to be popular to be in charge we should rather as in [1 Thessalonians 4:11](#) make it our ambition to lead a quiet life, this is a life of service for others, a life dependent on Christ. If we live our lives seeking after wealth, after prosperity, after fame, after popularity, if that is what we live our life for we will become terribly frustrated in this life and we will miss out on the blessings of the next life.

But here comes the rub, we can choose all of the right things in this life under the sun, we can choose contentment, we can choose to be right rather than to be mighty, we can choose relationships over riches, we can choose wisdom over popularity but if that is without Christ, if we do all of that without the perspective of God we still don't have anything.

Granted it is better than the alternative but it still doesn't amount to a hill of beans because even if you tried to find meaning and purpose in being right, in being content, in relationships or in wisdom you will find that all of these things in a temporal way will let you down.

You think you're right and you act accordingly and then you find out you were wrong, what's that going to do to you?

You think you have good relationships with people and then somebody stabs you in the back, what are you going to do with that?

You think you are denying fame and popularity for wisdom but you come to the point where you recognise that what you are still seeking is self-satisfaction, you are still seeking to be somebody, to be known as wise, to be known as someone who is important.

The solution for all of this is to choose Christ over everything, Christ over everything.

[Ephesians 2:12-13](#) "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." That is our position without Christ having no hope in this world, no hope whatsoever. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

So do you want to experience true relationships, healthy relationships, do you want to know what meaning and purpose is in life, do you want to

know what real wisdom is, do you want to be on the side of righteousness, of contentment?

If you are trying to do all of those things apart from Jesus Christ you have no hope, we are strangers, we are aliens, no meaningful relationships that will last eternally, we will tend to be either the oppressors or the oppressed, we will tend to choose achievement over contentment, we will tend to choose riches over relationship, we will tend to be popular rather than wise but Christ has come to bridge that gap both in this life and the next.

And Jesus Christ says this in Matthew 11, come to me, come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden, that's us right, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, that doesn't sound like rest, take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. ([Matthew 11: 28-30](#)).

As you can see from that, from those verses this kind of surrender to Christ requires surrender; it requires full surrender to take his yoke rather than the one you currently have, to trade in the old priorities for the new, to surrender to him and his design for your life.

He has come to bridge that gap, He has come to draw us near to God, He has come so that we might choose life rather than death.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven we thank you for your word, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ that you sent to this world, to this life under the sun, and I pray that you would use your word and your truth to convict us of our need of you, to help us see that without you even the good things in life are vanity and futile and help us not to seek and strife in vanity and futility after these things but to seek your kingdom first, to seek your truth first, to be content with what you have given us and to long for your wisdom rather than our popularity.

We pray that you would help us and guide us in the coming weeks, days ahead that you would help us to live this way in your presence and by your power we pray in Jesus name. Amen



## Power over Death

“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

Our Lord Jesus Christ, being the Son of God and one with the Father, proclaimed Himself to be the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). The Old Testament records miracles of healing and of the dead being brought to life by the prophets through the power of God. The prophets spoke of Him who could kill and make alive. Miracles of healing and deliverance were to be one of the signs of the coming of the Saviour. The New Testament records many occasions where Jesus demonstrated this power. Even though the Lord had compassion on man His miracles were done to glorify God. The apostles also received power to heal and to raise men from the dead. They exercised this power through the name of Jesus but never used it for their own benefit.

A number of times in His ministry on earth Jesus demonstrated his power over death by bringing the dead back to life, we have the accounts in Matthew 9:24-25, Luke 7:12-15 and John 11:43-44, it is interesting to read those accounts and see the responses of the people who witnessed those miracles it certainly became very obvious to them, even those who did not yet believe in Him, that here was a man of great power, indeed so great that it could only come from God.

This bringing back to life from the dead was a demonstration of His power but an even greater demonstration of His power was yet to come, His own death and resurrection by His own power, John 10:17-18.

The acquaintance that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus had made with Jesus served to establish a faith and confidence that He was the Messiah. They heard His teaching, observed His miracles, and claimed Him as a special friend. Their faith and confidence in Jesus endeared them to Him, and He took a special interest in them. However, they did not fully comprehend who He really was nor the power over all creation that He had. Jesus used the occasion of Lazarus' death to show forth the glory and power of God and His connection with the Father.

Prophecy concerning the Saviour depicts Him as one having pity and com-

passion toward mankind. The acts of kindness and healing that Jesus performed caused some to believe on Him, but many were still in doubt. The people marveled at His power, yet His true identity seemed to be hidden from them. They did not comprehend that here was the Creator of all the earth, that here was the one who was in the fiery furnace with the three Hebrew children, the one who could close the mouth of lions, the one who could walk upon the water, still the storm, and part the sea. This power was given to Him by His Father, and He performed these acts to glorify God.

Jesus knew that Lazarus was sick, but He intentionally lingered until Lazarus had died so that the power and glory of God could be shown. When Jesus came to Bethany, He found Lazarus' sisters and friends grieving deeply, and it seemed that He joined them in that grief. It maybe that the trouble in Jesus' heart and spirit and His weeping were caused not so much by the death of Lazarus but more by the unbelief of the people. Yet His compassion was touched when He saw how they grieved over the death of Lazarus. His sorrow was noticed and served to touch those who observed.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead caused many to believe on Jesus since it was a well-known fact that Lazarus had died. It also served to arouse the feelings of the religious leaders to the point of seeking the life of Jesus. They even considered taking Lazarus' life in an effort to destroy the faith of those who believed.

We read in the Bible of the power of God and of the mercy and compassion of Jesus. Though we would like to be recipients of this great power, are we willing for the valley it may take us through? Do we believe that we merit the mercy and compassion of the Lord when misfortune comes our way? Mary and Martha both said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Were they implying that it was Jesus' fault? They had sent for him but He did not come in time. At times we also may find ourselves with feelings of deep grief and hopelessness. We may think the Lord does not notice our disappointments and losses. We may fail to recognize His compassion and not receive the comfort He provides. Are we interested more in our own benefit or that God would be glorified?

Jesus came to the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus occasionally but did not really live there, but we, since the Day of Pentecost, we believe in the divine presence of God, the indwelling Spirit, the daily—not occasional—

communion with God, the continual walking in obedience with Him. We believe that nothing about our lives escapes His notice. Often in our prayers we request protection and care for ourselves and our loved ones. We ask for health and strength and for wisdom to know how to conduct our natural affairs.

We are intensely interested in our personal safety and prosperity. We greatly fear illness and financial hardship. Those who promote or sell healing remedies or insurance plans often play upon our fears, and we may become caught up in or unduly obsessed with dubious treatments or health benefits. However, if our faith in God is firm and we truly trust in Him, we will be ready to offer ourselves for His use and purpose. True submission to the plan of God may not be according to our design or wish but will always work to glorify His name. The Bible teaches that the Lord is of great mercy and His compassions do not fail (Lamentations 3:22-23). Man is the crown of His creation, and He deeply cares about us.

Someone has said, "The gardener is never so near as when he prunes the trees." We read of the miraculous things that God has done for man, and we treasure those stories. Many of the people in these accounts were in a real crisis when the Lord came on the scene. The glories of heaven were opened to many of the martyrs, and they longed to go there. They saw that their victory would be in enduring to the end and not in sustained life. Others saw the serenity and faithfulness of those suffering for the Lord, and it caused them to become believers as well. The patient suffering of the martyrs served to glorify God and brought increase to His kingdom.

"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" 2 Timothy 2:12.

Jesus had the power to bring the dead back to life in the physical realm and His own resurrection shows an even greater power, one that He is willing to use on our behalf to bring us from the death through sin back to life eternal, Ephesians 2:1-7 spells it out very clearly to us so that we can be among those in heaven who are saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. Revelation 7:12



## AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

The tenth chapter of Luke begins with Jesus sending out seventy disciples to preach. He begins His instructions with, "The harvest truly is great" (v. 2).

The mind immediately goes to far off places such as the mission efforts in Africa, India, Haiti, Asia, etc. This is right and good as long as one does not forget the front doorstep.

In the same chapter a lawyer who stood to tempt Jesus asked Him a proper question (v. 25). "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with a question Himself, "What is written in the law? how do you read it?" (v. 26). Verse 27 is certainly a correct answer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself."

The lawyer continued down his own path in tempting Jesus and justifying himself until he asked the question that has echoed down through the ages: "And who is my neighbour?" (v. 29). Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

This parable is one of the best loved stories in the Gospels. It likely carries more challenge and depth than many think. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews, so much so that the Jews refused to walk through Samaria on their travels. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people, and the Jews considered it a contamination to have dealings with them. Why then did Jesus challenge the lawyer with the detail that it was a Samaritan who had compassion on the half-dead traveler?

The true significance is dear. As Jesus finished the parable, His question went right to the heart: Who was the true neighbor? The lawyer's response was positive, "He that showed mercy." Jesus follows with a command, or it may be a plea, "Go, and do thou likewise." This plea is for each of us today.

Some forty years ago the writer spent two years working in the physical therapy department in a large hospital. This was during the time when the Vietnam War was escalating to its peak, with several hundred thousand American troops serving there. The draft was in force in the United States at that time. Many handicapped patients were treated and relationships made in those two years. Because of exposure to handicapped people and the satisfaction of seeing what treatment accomplished, it seemed almost natural to take special note of those in wheelchairs, etc.

One day, a short time after completing service days, the writer met a tall young man in a wheelchair. In getting acquainted with him, he told of his time in Vietnam, how strong and nearly fearless he had been, even requesting to be placed in one of the most dangerous positions. He came home without injury, but continued in his "no fear" way of life. He loved the most dangerous pleasures as well. One day while hang gliding, he fell, and his injury was severe. He was paralyzed from the neck down. Through his time of recovery, he found the Lord. He loved the Bible and visiting about spiritual things. He made a statement that was profound, "I'm not handicapped now, but I was before."

The focus of this article may not be so much on "neighbor" or "handicapped" as it is on knowing how to help those who have desperate situations in the present or the past. One brother in an editorial many years ago, wrote about the importance of understanding. He states, "When there is understanding, there is always a solution."

Among us, more and more adoptions are taking place. This is very good; many of these decisions are shared with family and friends. Most, if not all, of these children have some serious issues in their very young life. Much wisdom is needed to deal properly with them. The important question that must often be asked is, "Do I truly understand this child? And if I don't, would someone please help me understand him?"

Among our beloved brothers and sisters a deep cry is heard today. This is a cry of deep pain. These dear ones have issues in their lives that deeply trouble and even haunt them. Their cry is for someone to understand, for someone to listen without censuring. They feel like the man beside the road and half dead. They will not be helped by the priest or the Levite, but the Samaritan will be able to help. They need so badly to have oil and wine poured into those wounds of the past.

It appears there are those who are not being helped through to healing and deliverance. To these people the future looks as hopeless as the past has been. There is a loss of confidence in God's power. While they are praying desperately, their prayers about personal problems do not seem to be answered. They try every Christian discipline, but with no result. While they keep up every outward observance of praying and paying and professing, they are going deeper and deeper into disillusionment and despair.

Others, with similar problems, handle the matter quite differently. These people repress their inner feelings and deny to themselves that there is any-

thing seriously wrong, because "Christians can't have such problems." Instead of facing their problems, they cover them with a veneer of spiritual talk and concern for others. These denied problems go underground, only to later reappear in all manner of illnesses, eccentricities, unhappy marriages, and sometimes even in emotional destruction of their children.

A church father who left the church of his young life and who labored hard to help his elders see the error of the way their church was going, made this comment: "I was not meek enough to help them." Such a profound statement surely convicts our hearts today.

Compassion was the very nature of our Savior. He found this element sadly missing among the leaders of that time. Usually there is something else that takes the place of compassion when it wanes. Just as pride replaces humility, so power often replaces compassion. And pride fuels power. If I am unwilling to listen without censuring, if I am adamant in my position, the neighbor spirit may be missing.

Who is a neighbour? He that shows mercy.

*Brother Gilbert*



### *Consecration and Worship*

*At times I feel I could bear any suffering, but how can I dishonour this glorious God? What shall I do to glorify and worship this best of beings? O that I could consecrate my soul and body to His service, without restraint, for ever! O that I could give myself up to Him, so as never more to attempt to be my own! or have any will or affections that are not perfectly conformed to His will and His love! But, alas, I cannot live and not sin.*

*From Puritan Prayers*

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