

## ECCLESIASTES 4

## TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

In the opening words of this chapter, the Preacher makes another confession. He records how he had been plunged into the darkest views of life by the thought of the unrelieved wretchedness which is often caused by tyranny. So keen had been his sense of the misery endured by the victims of oppression, and so deep was his pity for them, that he had pronounced it better to die than to live – and better still to never have been born at all to see “the evil work that is done under the sun.” This does not mean that Solomon was endorsing this melancholy mood. On the contrary, his thoughts were the thoughts of a person who was sympathizing with his countrymen in their deep depression, and who was keenly aware of the evils of an unjust and despotic government. He himself had been tempted to sink into moroseness and despair; and therefore, he urged his readers to seek that true happiness which has been the most satisfying in all ages. And they would surely be more likely to listen to his words when they came from one who had felt the burden of human life in his own soul.

Now, if the Preacher was thus enabled to rise out of his darkest moods through faith in God and in His righteous judgment; and if, in spite of the melancholy of the times and the melancholy which assailed himself, he was able to counsel his countrymen to a Godly and thankful enjoyment of the blessings which remained to them – then surely we, who enjoy the fuller and clearer light that has now been revealed to us in the Gospel, may well be protected against the spirit of pessimism! Pessimism is essentially atheistic – for it has no faith in a living, personal, and righteous God; and it has no hope of a glorious immortality. But we who believe in God – as revealed in His Son Jesus Christ – cannot adopt the dark and dismal view that human existence is a curse rather than a blessing. Sin and pain are realities which are not to be explained away, and there are also many mysteries of Providence which utterly baffle our understanding. But the love of God revealed in Christ, the Fatherhood of God proclaimed in the Gospel, and the redeeming purpose of God which is manifested in the death of Christ – all these things forbid us to dishonor Him with the thought that life is not worth living. We cannot understand all of His ways, but we can trust His love as revealed in Jesus. Our grand defense against gloomy thoughts is the Fatherhood of God and the Cross of Christ. There are many dark things in our human lives; but “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all!”

Solomon goes forward to produce some further illustrations of that element of vanity which runs through human life. He saw that many people, in-

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ Solomon's thoughts on the consideration of the oppressed – verses 1-3
- ❖ The vanity of laboring simply because of envy, and also of being idle – verses 4-6
- ❖ The vanity of being miserly and the blessings of relationships – verses 7-12
- ❖ The vanity and instability of even the highest earthly positions – verses 13-16



stead of rejoicing in their neighbors' successes, often envy them on account of their prosperity; and then they strive mightily to make themselves, in turn, the objects of their neighbors' envy. All this is "vanity and feeding on wind!" How can a man find satisfying happiness in toiling and moiling from no other motive than the selfish desire to outrun or outshine his fellows? However, Solomon also saw that it was possible for a person to blunder by adopting the opposite extreme of idleness and laziness.

The Preacher then proceeds to give us yet another picture of the vanity of human life. There are many who are full of covetousness, yet their greed is greatly veiled by the need to provide for their families. But if we desire to see how the spirit of greed can turn human life into an utter absurdity, we must look at the extreme picture of a lonely miser that the Preacher has painted here. Here we have a man who has no wife, child, relative, friend, or business partner to whom he is particularly attached. He cares nothing for human society, except as a sphere in which he can make and hoard money. Nevertheless, this man toils on with the utmost eagerness – as if his very life depended upon his toil! He sacrifices his own rest and comfort, even though his own needs are amply provided for; but he can give no rational answer to the question, "For whom or what am I toiling thus?" Can any other way of life be imagined that is more idi-



otic than this? But now the thought of this selfish, lonely miser leads the Preacher to speak of the blessings and benefits of relationships! "Two," says he, "are better than one." God has made us for mutual trust, sympathy, help, and love; friendship is a great sweetener of human life. People are miserable because they live only for themselves. But Solomon shows here that it is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18), and he intends hereby to recommend both marriage and friendship. Even in Eden's Paradise, Adam could not be happy without a companion; and therefore, he was no sooner made than matched. Solomon lays this down for a solemn truth: "two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not easily broken." Where two persons are closely joined in holy love and fellowship, Christ will come to them by His Spirit and be the third; and then there is a threefold relationship that can never be broken!

In the closing verses of this chapter, Solomon adds one more illustration of the vanity of earthly things, as seen in the highest of all earthly positions – that of a king, whose position is utterly insecure, as has often been seen in many political revolutions. Conversely, true peace and joy in life come from a relationship with the Lord; and this blessedness may be known even by a little child!

*Thank you, Lord, for the blessing of Godly friends and family members with whom we may enjoy sweet relationships! We pray that Christ Himself may come into our relationships and bless them even further with His own love and fellowship. Amen.*