

YES WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER!

Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12 and John 4: 34-38 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 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! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a sequel to the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs primarily consists of wise sayings Solomon taught his children so they would live godly and peaceful lives. But in Ecclesiastes, Solomon with words of “Vanity, Vanity,” laments the fact that in some of his life, he has played the fool and failed to take his own advice. Ecclesiastes is a twelve chapter sermon from King Solomon, the Preacher that warns us not to waste our lives on worthless things. This exceedingly interesting book is one of the 66 inspired books of the Bible. It exhorts us to live with godly values which are of eternal significance and to guard our spiritual priorities. The book opens with “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. His last words in Eccl. 12: 13, 14 are “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” Our text today that God the Holy Spirit has asked me to share with you along with Rev. Paul Beech, is a part of Solomon’s instructions for believers to live a meaningful life.

Solomon teaches that in order to live a life that counts you must learn to value relationships over possessions. You must value people more than things. You must find joy in fellowship not pleasure. And Solomon makes this point in a simple, clear, and direct statement: “Two are better than one.” The context of this passage is in stark contrast to our text. Solomon declares in Ecclesiastes 4: 7-8, “Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 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.”

Solomon simply declares the point and allows it to stand on its own that is: “Two are better than one.” This is a countercultural principle in our society that celebrates the power of one. In Solomon’s sequel in Proverbs 18: 1, we read, “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.” For a few moments this morning, with the help of Paul Beech, I want

to ask us to learn or relearn the awesome truth that God's Holy Spirit authenticates which is "two are better than one," and as our title, "Yes We Are Better Together." You may ask, in what ways is this true? I could tell you thousands of ways, but King Solomon lands on four ways that two are better than one? What are these four ways that we need to know and practice today?

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE WHEN WE ARE "WORKING." (I.) Now in our text today, Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 4: 9, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil." Solomon isn't isolated in this one text to this strong point. I love Ecclesiastes 9: 9 which declares, "Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that He (God) has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun." Solomon is saying if you want to enjoy life, enjoy it with the wife whom you love. Solomon is, in a way telling us what he means later in Ecclesiastes 10: 10 which says, "If the iron/axe is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one succeed." In essence, Solomon is saying, "It is better to work smarter than harder." And here, in our text, he is saying, "Work smarter; don't work alone." The good reward for our labor comes when we double our efforts.

Solomon is speaking to an agrarian society and speaking about an agricultural worker in the field. He works hard, knowing that if he does not toil in the field, there will be no harvest. He doesn't need to be prodded to work. He knows that if he doesn't labor in the field, his family will starve. This reminds us that cultivating a meaningful life is hard work. H. B. Charles, Jr. Pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida said it well. He said. "Doing right is hard work. Getting an education is hard work. Building a successful career is hard work. Nurturing a godly marriage is hard work. Raising responsible children is hard work. Doing the work of ministry is hard work. Sharing your faith with others is hard work. Any meaningful life is a life of hard work. But how much better it is, Solomon says to be part of a team in work, and not be all alone. Alex Haley once had a picture in his office of a turtle sitting on a fence. When anyone asked him about it, he would explain that if you ever see a turtle sitting on a fence, you know it got help getting up there. Then he would relate that he never got to where he was in life without help. The case is clear, "two are better than one when you go to work. (Pastor Paul Beech—"May I share an illustration, Pastor Rich?) 2ndly,

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE WHEN WE ARE "WALKING." (II.) Solomon continues in Ecclesiastes 4: 10. "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!” The context may still be working, but verse 10 addresses a common threat every person faces who puts one foot in front of the other. The older we get, the more prone we are to fall down, to break a leg or to break a hip. This danger is not uncommon to anyone who walks. No matter how experienced or skilled or careful we are at walking, watch out. We still may fall. Paul states in I Corinthians 10: 12, “Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall. The point is that there are some failures, mistakes, and errors in life that you cannot recover from on your own. I need your help and you need mine. This is also so true in our walk with the Lord. Where is Barnabas when we need him? Are you a Barnabas or a good Samaritan? No mention is made of walking near a cliff or in slippery places. Walking in itself is dangerous, and we can use a fellow-walker, a partner, especially in our walk with the Lord. (Pastor Paul Beech—“May I share an illustration, Pastor Rich?) Thirdly,

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE WHEN WE NEED WARMTH. (III.)

Ecclesiastes 4: 11 is clear, “Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?” Chuck Swindoll said it well, “Friendships must be cultivated. They don’t automatically happen when calamity strikes. And I have never heard of a rent-a-friend business either. When you want to work alone or walk alone or be alone, don’t expect others to come running to help you when you work, when you fall or when you get cold. Many commentators naturally apply this principle to marriage. That is possible and of course true. But if we let the Bible speak for itself, this could just as easily be a stranded traveler ready to die. Night catches up with him and it gets cold. With no place to bed down for the night and no motel in many miles, in a desolate area where there are no homes to offer hospitality, it’s life or death. To sleep in the elements, even with a coat on may be certain death. It is so cold, this man’s life is in jeopardy. Solomon addresses the danger of freezing to death. And in many ways, life can leave us all in the cold. It is true that fellowship helps you succeed in work, and fellowship pulls you up to stand when you are walking and fall. Even in this same way, fellowship gives us a greater chance to survive the dangerous elements. Sometimes, the situation is so severe we cannot survive it on our own. To have someone to warm you up, to rub your hands, and speak life into the death trap of freezing to death, what a blessing proving two are better than one. (Pastor Paul Beech—“May I share an illustration, Pastor Rich?) 4thly,

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE WHEN WE MUST WAGE WAR. (IV.)

Ecclesiastes 4: 12 concludes the quadruplets of two being better than one. We read,

“And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Remember the parable Jesus told of the Good Samaritan. There was a fight—short lived. One man cornered alone on the Jericho Road. He had money and thieves ambushed him when and where there was no one to help. Apparently, this traveler was traveling alone, when robbers attacked him, robbed him, beat him up, and left him for dead. It isn’t enough for one of us to pass by someone wrecked at the side of the road. Millions slow down and start traffic jams to look and gawk at a collision. Yet how many folks like the priest and the Levite, keep on trucking. Precious few risk a great loss of time to stop and lend a hand. It could be when the Good Samaritan stopped, the robbers were carrying the wounded man’s goods away. And like a predator can come back to carry a dead antelope away, so these robbers may have been on their way back to finish the wounded man off and rob him of everything.

We all may be attacked along life’s journey, and even become victims of personal assault. Some of these personal attacks may come from people we don’t even know. People can hate us without knowing us. Some people don’t like the way we look or the way we talk or the way we dress. Some personal attacks come from people we know very well. At times we can be attacked by people who are working with us and walking with us. We can be attacked by people we thought were on our side. Some battles we cannot fight on our own or defeat our foe on our own. There are attitudes and habits that we cannot change or break on our own. There are problems we cannot solve on our own or needs we can’t meet on our own. The last line of verse 12 intensifies this principle of two being better than one by giving us the additional statement, “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Note this progression from “two being better than one” to “three being even better than two.” A single cord can hold only so much. A double cord can sustain more weight. But a threefold cord is not easily broken. There is great strength in spiritual unity. My dear friend, Vance Havner used to say that “snowflakes are frail little things. But if you get enough of them together, they can stop traffic.” This is the power of unity with others. In the family of God, there is nothing greater than standing together in battle for the Lord. (Pastor Paul Beech—“May I share an illustration, Pastor Rich?) I will close the sermon!

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declares and defends the principle that two are better than one. But the last line of verse 12 intensifies this principle with the statement: "a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Note the progression of the text. From two are better than one to three are even better than two. A single cord can hold up only so much. A double cord can sustain more weight. But a threefold cord can three times more than a single cord. It is not quickly broken. This closing statement reminds us again that there is great strength in spiritual unity. VANCE HAVNER used to say that snowflakes are frail little things. But if you get enough of them together, they can stop traffic. This is the power of unity with others.

But this is also a statement about the power of faith in God. That is, if it a powerful thing for two people to hook up with another person; how much more powerful is if for two people to hook up with God. In

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