

The Blessing of Companionship

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 June 2016

Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] Ecclesiastes chapter 4. And this morning we are resuming our sermon series in the book of Ecclesiastes. And our attention this morning can be confined to verses 9 through 16. Ecclesiastes 4 verses 9 through 16.

I'm reading from the English Standard Version. If you have another translation, yours will read slightly differently. Please follow along as I read. 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. Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.

[1 : 20] For he went from prison to the throne. Though in his own kingdom he had been poor. I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place.

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. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this gathering today.

That we're able to come together as brothers and sisters of like precious faith. We're able to lift our voices in song, in praise, in adoration of you.

Lord, now we take the time to open your word. And Father, we ask that you would grant us illumination in your word.

[2 : 31] That you would enlighten our hearts and our eyes. That we may comprehend the truth. And Lord, would you grant us the ability to apply your word to our lives and to obey your word.

Lord, I ask that you would grant me grace to be faithful. And grace to proclaim your truth to your people. We thank you for this, Lord.

We trust you to do this. In Jesus' name. Amen. If you were here for any of the two previous sermons in this series, you'd remember, perhaps, that I indicated that when we came to Ecclesiastes chapter 4, Ecclesiastes 4 addresses the big issue of relationships in a fallen world. Another way that we can say it is that Ecclesiastes addresses how we live together in a fallen world. And the verses that we just read really bring this theme into focus.

And in these eight verses, the preacher helps us to see the blessing of companionship. And this morning, here's the overarching point that I want us to see from these verses.

[3 : 55] God created us for companionship. But sin causes us to live alone. God created us for companionship. But sin causes us to live alone.

And by living alone, I don't just mean that we are physically by ourselves. Instead, I mean that living alone, we are in isolation from other people because we know that we can live with people around us, but we can live our lives in isolation.

We don't allow people to enter into our lives, and we don't enter into the lives of others. And what God said about Adam, when he said it is not good for the man to be alone, that's true of all of us. Not just true of Adam, but it's true of all of us. Not just applicable in marriage, but it is true in life. And so in our remaining time this morning, I want to share two key aspects of companionship that are highlighted by the preacher in these verses before us.

The first aspect of companionship that the preacher highlights for us is the benefit of support. The benefit of support. And we see this in verses 9 through 12.

[5 : 15] The preacher identifies the blessing of companionship and the benefit of support by three similar but different illustrations.

First, we see this picture of work. We see this picture of two persons at work. And the preacher's point is that working together will benefit them more than if they did the same work apart.

It's this principle that we call synergy, that the sum of the parts is greater than the individual parts. That two persons who are working together on a task, in particular a task with multiple parts to it, will be more productive than if each of them worked on the same task separately.

And I think there are many of us who have had this experience. We've had this experience where we've had things to do and we saw the benefit that we gained by doing it in conjunction with at least one other person.

[6 : 27] But the preacher tells us that in addition to them getting a good reward or them being more productive for their toil, the preacher makes a further observation. He says in verse 10 that if some misfortune happens to them, if they fall, one can lift up the other.

But he says, woe to the one who is alone and who falls and has no one to lift him up. And as I thought of these words as I prepared yesterday, my mind reflected on two persons right in our congregation who can identify with this vividly in this season of life.

I can certainly identify with it in my own life as well. Where we've had family members who fell. And fortunately, someone was at home or someone came soon after to help them.

But there are people who fell when they were alone and some of them it turned out to be fatal. And humanly speaking, it may not have been if someone was there to come alongside and help them.

So the preacher has this picture of people working together and the imagery that he gives us seems like outdoors in the field or something like that.

[7 : 44] But I think we can see that this whole idea of having companionship and this whole idea of falling is not just confined to the kind of Torah that the preacher seems to describe.

It also takes into account this traveling through life, this walking through life and we sometimes stumble and fall in different ways. Sometimes in eras of judgment.

sometimes just through misfortune that we just could not see and what a difference it makes to have a companion, to have a band of brothers or sisters who are with us, who can help us when we fall in that situation.

And perhaps we can think about it on the other side where we have been there with others who similarly encountered some misfortune and we were able to help them help them up.

So the preacher helps us to see that companionship is also important when we meet with these unexpected misfortunes.

[8 : 57] The next illustration he gives us is in verse 11. And his illustration is again, if two lie together, they keep warm but how can one keep warm alone?

Now I think immediately we realize that we live in a different day from the preacher. We live in a day when you have warm blankets and heaters.

Yes, in the Bahamas we have heaters as well. And we can keep warm by ourselves. But clearly what the preacher has in view was his circumstances at the time.

He had in view the cold winter nights in Israel when body heat from a companion nearby was a blessing and especially if it was a spouse because then you can be really close and benefit from the warmth and the body heat of another person next to you.

But in context though some have seen this to be marriage in context the preacher seems to have this picture of companions together the same picture that he had about them in the field it seems that it's more likely this picture of two persons who are traveling and in those days when you traveled and the night met you you basically stopped where you were and typically what they would do is they would take their garments and just lay it over them and the closer they were in proximity to one another they would benefit from the warmth of each other's body.

[10 : 42] this is the practical benefit of not being alone and the preacher's audience would have immediately identified with this they would have understood this as a beneficial thing but I can imagine this morning that if I were to be able to read minds I'm sure that there would be some minds who are going in the direction of homosexuality and all kinds of other things but in that day this would not have entered into their minds two men who would have been out and under the

elements and on a cold night would have benefited from the warmth of each other but here again and in particular since we know that we can keep warm by ourselves and in some contexts don't need to be warm because it's hot I think we can see that the preacher's point goes beyond just this need for warmth to our bodies sometimes again as we traverse through life we come to seasons where the cold comes into our hearts and into our lives and we need the warmth of a friend we need the warmth of a companion we need the warmth of others in our lives to speak those words of encouragement to speak those words of strength in those seasons of cold winters in our lives we need the warmth of the blessing of brothers and sisters who can support us in many ways sometimes with godly counsel and sometimes just for their presence sometimes just being there and you're looking and you're seeing you're not hearing anything but you see that there's someone else who's there with you in this difficult season and so we see this additional benefit of having companionship and then in verse 12 the preacher says he gives us yet this other illustration of companionship and it's the benefit of mutual protection notice what he says in verse 12 he says and though a man might prevail against one who is alone two will withstand him a threefold cord is not quickly broken the preacher's original audience again would have understood this because in those days when they traveled if they traveled alone they were always concerned because sometimes there were bandits who would lurk in very remote areas and they would attack passive eyes who would come and rob them and sometimes even kill them and we see that in the story of the good Samaritan about how that man was taken upon by robbers and so typically they would have tried to travel in groups and what the preacher says is that a bandit wouldn't think twice perhaps to attack a person who is alone he says but if he does it to two of them they would be able to withstand him he would not prevail against two or more of them and we understand this oftentimes we hear the police giving us crime tips and they will say to us when you walk don't walk alone walk with someone else or walk in a group as opposed to alone the children hear this they're often told never go by yourself always have someone with you be in a group and so we understand this we know this very well we know the benefit that we have we know the safety that we feel when we are together with other people in a circumstance that we would not be as confident about if we were all alone now I know that many of us perhaps ourselves or we've heard others talk about this statement of threefold cord and come up with all kinds of different meanings about what it is but the preacher's point is very simple all he is helping us to see is that he is not confining his illustrations about the benefits of companionship just to two people the mere fact that he talks about this threefold cord what he is basically saying is that a cord of three strands is stronger than one of two strands with three strands he's just helping us to see the protection and the care that we can receive when we are in companionship with others it's a community benefit because when you think about companionship companionship is the smallest in terms of two people it's the smallest unit in community so I don't think there's anyone this morning who would say I don't understand what the preacher is saying or we can't identify with what the preacher is saying I think the smallest child present this morning is able to understand that the preacher is telling us that we do benefit when others are involved with us and we are involved with others so here's the question that we need to consider why is it then that the preacher is clearly making a case for the benefit and the blessing of companionship why is it that he seems to be trying to convince us that this is indeed a good thing and that we need to embrace this again I think we would all agree that life with all its twists and turns we need the support of others we need the companionship of others as we traverse through life so why is it again that the preacher has to make this case to us I think he has to do so because of a word with three letters and that word is sin the preacher has to convince us and he is presenting us with these illustrations remember the preacher is this wise man who is observing life in a fallen world and remember earlier in chapter 4 he talks about seeing oppression he says there was no one to help these people in the immediate verses right before verse 9 in verses 7 and 8 he sees this man who is all by himself who is toiling and who is not even considering why he is working and he has no one who is connected to him and so the preacher is observing this and he tells us all the benefits of it and we would agree that we have these benefits and yet still we live in isolation yet still we can find! ourselves around people but yet alone and the reason is because of sin when sin entered into the world through Adam it not only broke our fellowship with God but it also broke fellowship with one another it separated people and beyond Adam's sin is our own sin our own sin that ruptures community and ruptures companionship!

[18 : 39] and causes us to live away from community and companionship in isolation and in so doing we live away from the blessings of companionship and so the preacher's observation really is an observation of the effect of sin on relationships the what relationships look like in a fallen world something that God never intended God created us for companionship but sin causes us to live in isolation is it not telling that the first murder that is recorded in human history took place between two brothers sinners and the root of it was jealousy Cain was jealous because the Lord accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected his and so jealousy and animosity set in and the companionship between

Cain and Abel ruptured far before Cain murdered his brother and so sin is an ongoing issue for us as we live in this world as we deal with companionship and as we deal with community sin is an ongoing issue and if not properly dealt with sin will separate us sin will rupture community sin will cause us to live in isolation and therefore we need to bear in mind!

the benefit of support that flows from companionship but we mustn't forget that companionship comes with responsibility companionship is not just an opportunity to benefit from the support of others it is also an opportunity to support others it's not just an opportunity to enter into the lives of others it is also an opportunity to call others and invite others into our lives as well it's not just an opportunity to know others but it's also an opportunity to invite others to know us as well but sin separates sin gets in between and we will acknowledge yes there's benefit yet we find ourselves living alone living in isolation living in a way that God never intended for us and again is not confined to not having people around us we can have people around us we can be busy with bodies all around us and we can still live alone we can still live in isolation we can still live with our walls up where we stick our heads over but our lives are separated from others and the truth is that marriage does not even address this not automatically getting married to someone doesn't automatically cause us to share true companionship that requires self-disclosure that requires this traversing between each other's lives this going into and out of one another's lives sin always separates but God's plan was for us to enjoy the blessing of companionship so when I asked you this morning what does companionship look like in your life are you living your life with the recognition that you need others walking alongside you or are you living in isolation doing your own thing and your own way what does it look like for you are there people whose friendship you can benefit from and who you can benefit but you've allowed sin to separate sin to break companionship or even prevent it and that's the case with you this morning please hear the words of the preacher in these verses he makes the case that companionship and the support that it brings are a blessing it's a blessing to us and those of us this morning

I know who know first hand the blessing of companionship we know the blessing of it as I prepared I thought of some of the examples among us where those who walked and experienced adversity the adversity didn't change but the adversity was easier to bear because they were in relationship with others they were benefiting from companionship through community and those of us who identify with that should be grateful for it and we should be mindful of others who aren't experiencing it sometimes we can't always see because sometimes we don't show the reality of our lives but sometimes we can see those in our context in this community who are without the community the companionship that the rest of us enjoy we see them come and we see them go and sometimes we need to reach out and we need to invite them into our lives the second aspect of companionship that the preacher highlights in this passage is found in verses 13 through 16 in these verses the preacher helps us to see the requirement for humility that's the second aspect of companionship that he highlights the requirement for humility look at verse 13 again better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice here the preacher is comparing the poor and wise youth to an old and foolish king and the implication is that this youth was humble and open to counsel and he is marked as being wise he was poor but he was wise but on the other hand the old king was proud and not open to counsel and he therefore is marked as being foolish and so the picture is one of this isolated king who is no longer listening to his advisors so the picture is almost as if they're no longer surrounding him or even if they are it's just like they're not there because he is not listening to them he's proud he lacks humility and therefore he lives in isolation and the irony is that in his mind he is not listening to his advisors he doesn't need his advisors because in his mind maybe time has done it for him he served his king for so long he knows so much he doesn't need them but in reality he doesn't listen he does not listen to them because he doesn't think he really needs them and he's a fool because he does need them but the

preacher tells us that there's this wise youth poor but wise he needs the contrast to this old king and this youth he becomes king as well look at what it says in verse 14 it says for he went from prison to the throne though in his own kingdom he had been poor so this poor wise youth

I think we can imagine that because he first of all no one gets to be king all by yourself you don't become king by living in isolation and not embracing and gathering around you a band of supporters who will help you to ascend to the throne and so although we're not told this specifically I think it is reasonable to conclude that part of the wisdom of this poor youth was that he was open to others he received counsel of others he drew in the support of others and he over time though we're not told how he over time became the king you can safely assume that so he had these trusted companions around him in contrast to the king foolish old king and a young wise king and I think immediately we're reminded of the fact that it takes humility to receive counsel from others and I believe that we're able to see as well that this is a requirement for companionship it is requirement to have others around us and for us to be around others and to have our lives interconnected this is an essential character trait that we all need this character trait of being like a child being teachable being humble and this should be especially easier for us those of us who live in community and those of us who have the benefit of brothers and sisters and the godly counsel that they can offer to us and yet many times in our sin we don't seek out or we reject the counsel that can come to us through brothers and sisters in Christ and so we walk alone in our own wisdom and we walk alone through hardships that we don't necessarily have to walk alone in but in order to receive the blessing of companionship we need the character of humility they go hand in hand together scripture tells us that love covers a multitude of sin and one of the realities is that as we live life in a fallen world we're just going to have to deal with sin in relationships and when we don't deal with it properly we're going to find ourselves with ruptured relationships we're going to find ourselves in isolation and sometimes we find ourselves bearing alone what we did not have to bear alone and so [30 : 21] I want to ask you this morning as you think about these two kings these two examples these two individuals that the preacher lays out for us which one do you most identify with the isolated foolish king who doesn't need advice from others doesn't need the support of others or this poor but wise youth who evidently embraced and had others around him to help him to ascend to the throne or maybe that's not the question I should ask or I should ask it another way and simply it is are you open to the counsel of others or do you believe that you're just fine and you can do without the counsel of godly companions and just live life in your own way and on your own terms maybe that's the question we need to consider this morning what does what does your life say about how much you value counsel what does your life say in terms of how you're living life in comparison to how life can be lived when you take into account the people who are in your life if we could see it sometimes what we would notice is that we are connecting with people we are in relationship with people who we never let into our lives and if we can see it we would see the problem in our lives and we would see the solution in those other people's lives so what does your life say is your life marked by the godly counsel of companions godly companions who you're walking with or is it more marked by isolation and living life on your own and the preacher before we consider these verses again he gives us some sad pictures of people who live life on their own he showed us those who are oppressed and there's no one there to help them he shows us this man who's just toiling and working and striving and he's all by himself there's no one to really do it for there's no one to enjoy it with and yet still he continues on and never asks some good questions to help him to change course in terms of what he is doing

I think husbands and wives we should recognize that God has given us a lifelong companion an opportunity to not live in isolation an opportunity to live out what was described of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 that they were both naked and felt no shame that their lives were open to one another there was nothing being hidden from each other we have the opportunity to live life together with that kind of companionship it is a gift from God and yet if we don't embrace it we know better than the person who doesn't have that gift and so we need to embrace it because it is God's gift to us but whatever extent we see our lives marked by a willingness to receive godly counsel and to be teachable whatever extent that is the extent to which we are receiving and embracing the gift of companionship this story ends in a somewhat puzzling way the preacher tells us in verses 15 and 16 look at what he says he says

I saw all the living who move about under the sun along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place 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 is vanity and a striving after wind and here's a very good picture of our broken fallen world we have this picture of this public servant this king who served a lot of people who led a lot of people yet those who succeed him those who come after him will not rejoice in him they will not celebrate his leadership celebrate his accomplishments celebrate what he did for all the people that he led and I think it's a reminder to us that life does not always turn out the way it should or the way we expect it to we wouldn't expect naturally that this would be the conclusion on this wise king's life who led so many people who served so many people we would have thought that he would have been celebrated but he is not and sometimes that's the way it is in companionship sometimes that is the way it is when we are connected with others and we do for them many things sacrificial things and sometimes it goes unappreciated it goes unnoticed and the reality is that this is life in a fallen world this is life in a broken world sometimes the service and the benefit that we bring to others in companionship and in community they're not celebrated and so the preacher ends and he he says surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind the preacher's commentary is this makes no sense this is this is this is this makes as much sense as chasing the wind and trying to catch the wind in your hand it makes no sense the whole thing makes no sense but this is our broken fallen world relationships are ruptured relationships even when beneficial are not celebrated not appreciated this is our reality

God created us for companionship but sin causes us to live alone I think we can always see how when we've had such an experience where companionship did not work out the way we thought it should have worked out that we just want to give up on it and we want to keep people at a distance and maybe perhaps the very things that we withhold from relationships out of some desire to protect ourselves and to guard against the pain and the hurt and the loss and the lack of appreciation that we may have experienced before the very thing that we withhold is the very thing that's needed to cause that companionship to flourish and to grow to and I think we should realize that there is nothing that we can do to cause this to be safe we are broken people we are fallen people we sin against others and others will sin against us and that's just the reality that we have in this life but remember this is not what

God intended! God intended that we would live in community and not live alone but Adam's sin and our own sin has changed all of that and the wonderful thing about that though is though the first Adam is the root cause of this rupturing of relationships this rupturing of companionship this inability for us to remain in these relationships without sin affecting us scripture tells us that God sent the last Adam the last Adam in the person of Jesus Christ his own son who came to this earth not just to make us right with God not only to give his life and to make it possible that sinners like you and me can be forgiven of our sins and restored in right relationship with

[39 : 40] God he also did that so that we may be restored in right relationship with one another so that though we will still live life in a fallen world companionship can because now we don't have to just look at the example of the first Adam who when God confronted him by his sin he said it's this woman you gave me he blamed his wife through the last Adam through Jesus Christ we can bear with one another we can allow love to cover a multitude of sin we can demonstrate the kind of humility that is needed to keep relationships together

I want you to see that Jesus Jesus had to do more than just come and teach about humility and teach about forgiveness if all Jesus did was come to this earth and give us wonderful teachings! And then go back to heaven we still have no greater possibility of enjoying better companionship and dealing with sin in the midst of it Jesus had to do more than teach humility and teach forgiveness he demonstrated it himself by coming taking on the form of a man and going to a cross and dying a death it was not his death to die it was our death to die and then enabling us to receive God's forgiveness so that we would know forgiveness and we can therefore extend that forgiveness to one another and it will be needed as we live life together so he had to not only come and live he had to come and also die taking the place of sinners on the cross bearing their sin receiving the punishment of God for those sins rising again sitting at the right hand of the father and enabling us as sinners to get a foretaste of the kind of companionship that we can have and that we will have when he returns and he removes us from the presence of sin and moves sin from our presence that we will be able to enjoy those relationships he has enabled us to exhibit the humility that is necessary to preserve companionship to give counsel and receive counsel to extend forgiveness and receive forgiveness so brothers and sisters let us hear the preacher let us hear the case that he makes for us about the blessing of companionship in this fallen world and just think about it even

with companionship sometimes it's hard as we experience the fallenness of this world the brokenness of this world even with companions it is hard imagine if it were not if we didn't have companions how difficult that would be and so this morning

I want to encourage us as we seek to embrace companionship let's not forget that important piece that we are still broken and fallen people we will sin against others others will sin against us but companionship is still a blessing and we should allow the whole experience sometimes when we are disappointed in companionship and when we are tempted to bolt we should allow the whole experience to cause us to be conformed more and more to the image of Jesus Christ and we should allow the hardships that sometimes we experience even with companions to cause us to look for and long for the day when Christ will come and finally bring us to himself where we can enjoy perfect union with him and with one another as I close this morning I want to just take a moment to address those of you who are present and you know within your heart that you are away from Jesus

Christ you know that you are not walking with him as your Lord and personal savior one of the easiest things for you I think is to hear you know what I need some really close companions I need some good friends who will just stick with me and be with me as I walk through the difficulties of life that's not the most important thing that is on offer this morning that's not the most important thing that's being communicated to you this morning it is far worse living this life without Christ than without companionship it's far worse far worse living this life without Christ than living without companionship companionship cannot save only Jesus Christ can save and so I say to you this morning seek Christ then companionship as a matter of fact if you seek Christ companionship would be easier to pursue and certainly easier to maintain

[45 : 53] Jesus is our only hope in this life and in the life to come and his promise is that all who come to him all without exception he will receive and not only that he promises I'll never turn you away all all who come to me I receive and I will never turn you away and so this morning I urge you to turn to Christ turn from sin and trust in him as your only savior let's pray