



"The Rewards Of Right Relationships" (Ecclesiastes 4)

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We must remember that Solomon is viewing things from the mind of a carnal man, yet a man that once was not carnal. And despite his current carnal state, he has full control of his faculties...

I. THE TEXT

v.1 Solomon looked at the injustice being done in the world, and he was perplexed at how God would allow this to happen...

* See Habakkuk 1:2-3, 5-6; 2:1-3, 9-16, 20; 3:6, 12-13, 17-18

v.2 Solomon declared this, not God. He was not concerned at that moment with the deeper implications of death. Those who have died without a Savior are not at all happier than the person living in even the most miserable circumstances.

* Luke 16 - The parable of the rich man and Lazarus...Lazarus suffered greatly in this life, but if not for his faith, he would have suffered much more after death...

v.3 Once again, this is true for the one who does not have a Savior, but not true for the one who does.

* Phil.1: 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

v.4 Not to be redundant, but this is true for the person living for this life only, but not for the one living for another world.

* Col.3: 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

* God gave Abraham great earthly "success," yet his heart was on a heavenly home, and heavenly riches.

v.5 This is the other extreme, someone who is lazy and will not work, perhaps because they are against all the materialism in the world. But they wrongly conclude that they should not work at all, and therefore produce no fruit...

v.6 Better to be content with less than to toil after things that will not satisfy anyway.

v.8 This is the person who has no family, yet toils toward what he thinks will bring him happiness - just a little more money.

* See Eccl.5:10

* This person has no eternal goal/reward in mind

v.12b Three strands of rope twisted together are more than three times stronger than the total strength of each one individually.

* Some have suggested that the third strand should be God/Jesus Christ...

v.13 Could Solomon be referring to himself?

15-16 Wealth and position are no guarantee of success, and poverty and failure are no barriers to achievement. But if you achieve prestige, power, position, just know that they will not last. History is one vicious cycle of people who rise to power and popularity, only to pass it on to someone in the next generation. Power, prestige, popularity will one day fade...

II. A TOPICAL MESSAGE FROM THE TEXT: THE REWARDS OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS.

A. A Biblical Example

* The book of Leviticus dealt with worship and spiritual position. The book of Numbers deals with walk and spiritual progression. Before their journey begins, God instructs Moses to "number" the people of Israel. Leaders are assigned, marching orders are given. Chapter two tells us that each tribe had it's own "standard," signifying the uniqueness of each tribe. There was diversity, but there was unity. It was a large community identified by smaller communities. Everyone had a responsibility, and everyone was in relationship. And this was essential for personal identification (you were more than a number), for protection, and for progress toward The Promised Land.

* Being rightly related to one another in the family of God (the church) is essential for the very same reasons...

B. Right Relationships Are "Biblical" Relationships

* Biblical: Guided by biblical examples, principles, and clear commands.

* Right relationships in life yield tremendous benefits. Overall, they help keep me on track in a world that is so off track...

* Many people have relationships that are not right/biblical

- I Kings 21: 25 (There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife.

- I Kings 11: 3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

4 As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

- I Cor.15: 33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."
- Samson & Delilah; Samson had no godly relationships in his life...

C. Specific Rewards Of Right Relationships

1. More work accomplished/better return

* This is because you are not a loner/independent, but have teamed up with someone else.

* Jesus called twelve and designated them apostles. This was His team. He would later send them out two by two (teams).

* Some people in the church would produce more for the kingdom if they would "team up" with others in the work...

* Otis Dixon and Dan Shock - same vision, so we put them together...

* Why would anyone not want to be a part of a team?

- See Ill John 1:5-9 (note v.8)
- Everyone cannot play the same position; flag football when I was moved on to "rusher" on defense.
- Barnabas was willing to take a back seat & let Paul become the team leader in their missionary endeavors...
- John the Baptist was willing to take a back seat to Jesus.

* Note: It was Samson's independence that eventually led to his downfall. King Saul was unwilling to let David be a part of his team because David received more glory than Saul. Even the apostles' team was threatened by the internal rivalry over which of them was the greatest.

* Phil.1: 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

2. Help when I fall

* To "the ways of the world"

- Failing to view the oppression/injustice in the world through God's eyes (see Psalm 73:1-9, 16-17); just being here in this meeting helps me in my perspective in life.
- Living only for worldly success (I Tim.6:17-19)

* Into sin

- Do I have someone who will rebuke me? (Nathan to David).
- Do I have people who will restore me? (Galatians 6:1).

* I'm struck down by the enemy

- II Cor.4:8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

3. Warmth, comfort, personal need (When you are "out in the cold").

* Right relationships help me from becoming spiritually cold, or more importantly, when I am spiritually cold, they help to warm me up again. Many of us will come to times in our Christian walk where we tend to grow cold spiritually, and we need someone to warm us up again.

- See II Tim.1:4-8; Col.4:17

- Jonathan encouraging David (I Sam.23:15-18)

* The person who is cold here is cold because they are alone. Unfortunately there are people who attend church services regularly and yet are alone - "out in the cold." They find no warmth/comfort because they are not in any relationships that can provide what they need.

* Talking to (Jim Fitch), his wife died last (November), and the church did not reach out to him. He was out in the cold, because he had never plugged in relationally in the church. He attended church services at CCSP faithfully, but never developed any relationships that would minister to him in his time of need.

* Right relationships will not only provide comfort/warmth in my time of need, but should be the arm of the Lord in meeting my practical needs - clothes, life necessities in times of crisis.

4. Protection against the enemy

* Peter - Satan has desired to sift you as wheat...but I have prayed for you...and when you have turned back, ***strengthen your brothers.***

* Cities of refuge (Joshua 20)

- They were cities of the Levites (Num.35:6); They were the ministers; they had a heritage of heinous sin, & afterward heartfelt repentance (See Gen.49:5-6; 34:25-29; Exodus 32:25-29).

* See Heb.3:12-13

D. Some Practical/Biblical Advice

1. Get involved in church meetings that allow for personal relationships to develop and mature (Heb.10:23-27; Acts 2:42, 46).

* Note: I recommend groups that are led by recognized church leaders. God is not into independence. Also, church leaders are able to watch over you if they know the leader that you are under.

* First and foremost, I recommend life groups. But there are also other groups you can get involved with - S&L, 4 or less, Redemption, Remnant. I recommend these first before

other groups, because these have the greatest opportunity for developing personal relationships because they all involve small group gatherings.

2. Make it a goal to develop 2 & 3 stranded relationships in the church.

* Jesus chose 12, and from them Peter, James & John became a unique 3 stranded relationship.

3. Find a place to serve in a ministry of the local church, preferably every week.

* You will not only become part of a ministry team, but relationships with those you serve with will develop.

CONCLUSION

* Note: An added benefit to developing right relationships is that people will be praying for you (II Cor.2:11).

* Are you a loner?

* Some of us have relationships, but they are not right relationships...

* Invitation to get involved relationally in the church...