

Life Under The Sun

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, Ecclesiastes chapter 4, and we're going to walk through the whole chapter, but if we just take as our text the words of verses 9 and 10.

Ecclesiastes 4 at verse 9, where Solomon says, 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 he has not another to lift him up. What's the point to life?

As we said before, that's the question Solomon wants to ask us as we sit and listen to his sermon. What's the point to life? And as we've come to church this morning, and over the past few weeks as well, we've sat in our pew, and we've waited to hear a sermon.

And as we've sat, we've been listening to a sermon, this sermon called Ecclesiastes, because the book of Ecclesiastes, as we said before, it's a sermon. And the preacher of that sermon is King Solomon.

[1 : 25] And in this sermon, Solomon is looking at every area of life, and he's questioning what the meaning of life is. But as we listen to Solomon's sermon, Solomon wants us to come to the realization that life, with all its enjoyment and blessings, and all its great blessings, he says, it's meaningless without God.

And what he's saying is that there's no true lasting joy in life if we don't live our lives trusting the Lord by faith. And so, my friend, as we sit in our pews and listen to his sermon, Solomon is preaching to us about the need to live our lives with an eternal perspective.

Because as Solomon came to discover for himself, he says, you can work hard, you can have many possessions, you can possess great knowledge, you can have lots of wisdom, you can even be the wisest person who ever lived.

But if you're not living your life with an eternal perspective, if you're not living your life thinking of eternity, then you're living your life in a foolish manner. And we have to see that Solomon, he's preaching to us from experience.

Because Solomon was someone who was drawn in by the vanity of the world, and in his sermon here, it's a sermon of repentance, he explains to us that he regrets that he swallowed the lie that this world can give to us all the pleasures that our heart desires.

[2 : 55] But now as an old man looking back, Solomon is humbly admitting that even though it may have seemed good at the time, it was all vanity. It was all vanity.

Vanity. Vanity of vanity, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. It was all meaningless. It was empty. It was futile. It was all chasing and striving after the wind.

It was striving after these things that will never satisfy. And so as we sit in our pew and continue to listen to this sermon called Ecclesiastes, Solomon's hope is that we will spare ourselves the bitterness of learning what he learned and just respond in faith by committing our life to Jesus Christ.

But what we see in this chapter is that in order to press upon us the need to live our lives with an eternal perspective, Solomon begins to consider what life is really like under the sun.

And that's one of Solomon's favorite phrases in his sermon. He calls it life under the sun. He says that everything that happens in life, it happens under the sun.

[4 : 03] And he says that there's nothing new under the sun. And in this chapter, Solomon draws our attention to four areas of life under the sun. And he does so using the phrase, I saw.

That's what he says in verse one. Again, I saw. And Solomon says, I saw affliction. I saw achievement and apathy. I saw aloneness.

And I saw adoration. I saw. Solomon considers life under the sun from a negative perspective. And he says to us, look, look, this is what life is really like.

Life under the sun. It's full of affliction, full of achievement, full of apathy, full of aloneness and full of adoration. Life under the sun is hard.

And so Solomon is asking, how can you live your life under the sun without the Lord? How can you live your life under the sun without depending upon the Lord to help you and to guide you and to keep you each and every day?

[5 : 12] How can you live your life under the sun without the Lord? And the first area Solomon looks at is the affliction. And he asks us, he's asking us, how can you live your life under the sun without the Lord if it's full of affliction?

That's what we see in verse 1. He says, 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. And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun. And in these verses, Solomon, he calls us to consider the affliction and the oppression that takes place under the sun. He says that those who are oppressed, they weep because they have no comfort in.

Their oppressors are powerful, but the innocent, they have no comfort in. And the oppressors, they inflict pain and distress and harassment and heartache against those who are innocent.

[6 : 24] And you know, all we have to do is watch the news. And we don't have to watch the news for very long before we see the effects of oppression. Innocent people living their life in fear because of terrorism.

Innocent people fleeing their homes because of war. Innocent people dying of starvation and lack of medicine because aid can't get through to them. Innocent people being maligned and abused and raped and murdered.

And there are so many. Too many under the sun. Too many innocent people without a comforter. My friend, the world we live in is a world that's full of sin.

But you know, the sin in the world, it's not only seen on a global scale. It's also seen on a local level too. Because when we consider the workplace, the workplace is not an easy place to be for a Christian.

Sometimes neither is a community. Living in a community can have lots of difficulties. Whether it's family or neighbours with certain people. Sometimes we're made to see a side of people that we've never seen before.

[7 : 36] And we don't like it. But as Christians, we have to be faithful to God under the sun. We have to be consistent in our witness. Both when we're in church on the Lord's day.

And when we're at work or in the community during the week. We live in a world that's full of sin. But we have to live our lives with an eternal perspective. Because God is going to bring every evil deed into judgment.

And you know, that's what Solomon was reminding us of in the end of chapter 3. He says it in chapter 3 at verse 16. He says, Solomon says that instead of justice and righteousness, there is injustice and unrighteousness under the sun.

There is wickedness under the sun. And with this, Solomon is saying to us that the Lord, he allows injustice. He permits unrighteousness. And he withholds his wrath.

But only for a time. Only for a time. He will not allow injustice and unrighteousness to go unpunished. Because as Solomon says, he has appointed a time for judgment.

[9 : 00] And what Solomon is trying to get across to us is that this is where the oppressed and the abused and the innocent must find comfort.

They must find comfort in the sovereignty of God and in the justice of God. The abused have to look at life. We all have to look at life with an eternal perspective.

And find comfort in the fact that the God in heaven will bring every evil deed into judgment. And you know, this is why Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek.

He taught us not to retaliate with words or with violence, but to find comfort in the sovereignty of God and in the justice of God. Jesus was saying, let God be the judge.

Because he will bring every evil deed into judgment. That's not to say we can't police things and all that. That's not what we're talking about here. But on a personal level, Jesus says to us, love your enemies.

[10:04] Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you. And pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. So that you may be the children of your Father in heaven.

It was entrusting ourselves to Jesus. That's what Jesus was emphasizing. Entrust yourself into the sovereign care and justice of God. And you know, that's what also the apostle Peter said to the Christian.

He says, this is what you've been called to. Jesus Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his footsteps. He committed no sin.

Neither was there deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten. But continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

He continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. My friend, that's where there's comfort for the oppressed and the innocent. That's where there is comfort when we encounter difficulties in our life.

[11:15] That's where there is comfort. There is comfort when we look at life with an eternal perspective. And we entrust ourselves into the care of the Lord. And you know, I always go back to Solomon's words in Proverbs 3 at verse 5.

Because, you know, they define the Christian life. Where he says to us, Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not upon your own understanding.

But in all your ways acknowledge him. And he shall direct your paths. And so Solomon is asking us in this passage, How can you face life under the sun without the Lord if it's full of affliction?

But then he asks, How can you face life under the sun without the Lord if it's full of achievement and apathy? That's what he talks about in verse 4.

He says in verse 4, Then I saw that all toil and all skill and work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. The fool folds his hand and eats his own flesh.

[12:21] Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and striving after wind. Now one commentator, he describes verse 4 brilliantly as the rat race.

And I'm sure we're all familiar with the concept of the rat race. That the world we live in and the environments we work in and the communities that we're part of, they're all like the rat race. We're all scurrying about like rats.

Minding our own business. Trying to get our own thing done. Keeping ourselves to ourselves. But Solomon says that all the toil and every skillful work, it's envied by his neighbor.

Meaning that sometimes the motivation for work and the motivation for achievement is your neighbor, the rivalry. And he says, We put in the work because we want to develop our skills and techniques.

And we work harder because we want to be promoted. We work longer because we want more money. And there's this scramble to achieve wealth and leadership and power and status.

[13:27] It's in our heart, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. There's this restless desire to outclass one another. And in our heart, it promotes rivalry.

Sometimes the workplace can be this dog-eat-dog world. In which everyone is looking for recognition and promotion and praise. And the scramble of the rat race, it harbors tensions, it causes disputes and it raises conflicts.

And what Solomon is saying is that when our life is not motivated by God's glory, it's being motivated by our desire to achieve. Of course, there's nothing wrong with wanting to achieve in life. That's not what he's saying. But what Solomon is pointing out is that our achievements, they're not to be measured by our recognition or our promotion or our praise.

The praise from others. He says our achievements and our motivation is to be God's glory. Because that's our chief end. That's the point to life, he's saying.

[14:36] That's why we have been created. That's why we exist. We don't exist for ourselves. And we don't exist for our own glory. We exist for the glory and the honour and the praise of God.

My friend, our motivation in the rat race of life, it's not to be rivalry with others or recognition or promotion or the praise of others. Our motivation for life should be Jesus Christ.

Our motivation for life should be Jesus Christ. And our desire should be to live our lives for his glory, for his honour, for his praise.

And we're to live for his glory, his honour and his praise by loving, obeying and serving him with all our heart. But you know, Solomon, he not only challenges the person whose motivation in life is to achieve praise from others.

He also challenges those who have no motivation at all. He challenges those who are overcome by apathy and laziness. He says in verse 5, The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

[15 : 50] Solomon makes this stark contrast between the person of achievement, always looking for the praise of others and recognition, the person of achievement and the person of apathy.

He says that the person of achievement, they toil and they use their skills with their hands for praise. But the person of apathy, they're the fool that doesn't care. They just fold their hands and eat their own flesh.

That's what he says. And with this Solomon, he's challenging laziness. And he's promoting the importance of work. Solomon knows that we have to work.

We all know we have to work because we were created to work. And we're to work, whether it's in an office or on a work site or in a school or on a boat or on a lorry or at home.

With children, we were created to work. And we're not to be lazy and apathetic in our work. And you know, my friend, a lazy Christian is a poor witness.

[16 : 52] A lazy Christian in the workplace who has no care or concern for their job is a poor witness. Because we were created to work for God's glory.

And in all our efforts, as insignificant as they may seem to us, they are to be for God's glory. And so we're not to fold our hands and sit back and become lazy and apathetic.

But you know, this not only applies to the workplace and to our home, but also to our view of church. And you know, I often hear Christians say that, well, we're living in a day of small things. Church is, the church is in the minority and congregations are getting smaller and fewer people are going to church. And Christians think that the church is weak because our nation is being overrun by Muslims.

Christians think that the church is weak because our communities are being outpopulated by incomers. Christians think that the church is weak because our parliament is promoting secularism.

[18 : 00] Christians think that the church is weak because instead of being in church, everyone is sitting in front of their television. And yes, that may be true in part. But you know, I'm more convinced than ever that it's not Muslims, incomers, secularism or television that's making the church weak.

It's the apathy of the Christian. The apathy of the Christian. My friend, lazy Christianity makes the church weak.

Lazy Christianity, it turns a blind eye to the sin that's in the world. Lazy Christianity makes the church more and more like the world. Lazy Christianity, it doesn't bother with church.

Both ends on the Lord's Day. Lazy Christianity doesn't see the value of the prayer meeting. Lazy Christianity withdraws. And it withdraws from its great commission to reach out.

My friend, lazy Christianity, it leads to a dead Christianity. And you know, I look at my own heart. And all I see is that it's like the valley of the dry bones.

[19 : 15] Where I've folded my hands and I feel I've gone into retirement. And where we can become so lazy and apathetic to the things of Christ. We've become like the valley of dry bones that need to be revived and reformed.

My friend, we need these dry bones to live. We need the spirit to prophesy over us and say to us, oh dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

My friend, we need to wake up. Some of what Isaiah says to us, awake. Awake. Wake up, sleepy Christian, he says. My friend, we need to wake up.

We need to put our hand to the plow and not turn back. Because the Bible says, Jesus says, whoever puts their hand to the plow and turns back, they are not fit for the kingdom of God.

And there's no denying it. The church is a voluntary army. And it needs people. Not just the church member, but also the church goer.

[20 : 20] It needs everyone to get involved and help out. My friend, this is where the Lord has put us. This is our congregation. And it is in this community, our community.

And we're to work in our congregation for our community. And we're to serve in it all for God's glory. All for His glory. We're not to stand on the sidelines and let others do it.

We're not to fold our arms and eat our flesh and sit in church as a lazy Christian. We're to not avoid the life of the church. We're to get involved.

Sitting back, that's not the calling of the Christian life. Because the calling of the Christian life is to be like Jesus. And the gospel clearly reminds us that Jesus came into the world not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

And so if we're going to be like Jesus, if we're going to be active Christians and not passive ones, then we're going to live as a Christian. And then our life has to be Christ-like.

[21 : 31] It must be self-sacrificial. It must contain self-denial. It must be rid of all self-righteousness. My friend, we are saved to serve. We're saved to serve.

And in that salvation, there's no room for our achievements. There's no room for the praise of others. There's no room for apathy. It's all about God's glory.

Not unto us, Lord. Not to us. But do thou glory take. And so Solomon is asking us in this passage, how can you face life under the sun when it's full of affliction?

How can you face life under the sun without the Lord if it's full of achievement and apathy? But then he asks, thirdly, how can you face life under the sun without the Lord if it's full of aloneness?

Look down at verse 7. He says, 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.

[22 : 52] This also is vanity and an unhappy business. Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. And in these verses, Solomon, he draws our attention to another area in life, but this time it's the area of friendship.

Now Solomon, he's not confining his understanding of friendship to the relationship between a man and a woman. Of course, Solomon knows that the Lord said to Adam in the Garden of Eden, it's not good that a man should be alone, and that the Lord provided Adam a wife in the Passion of Eve.

But this area of friendship that he's talking about, it's extended beyond the relationship of marriage between a man and a woman because Solomon isn't saying that you have to be married in order to be happy, or that you have to have family in order to be content in life.

That's not what he's saying at all. But what Solomon is reminding us about is the value of a friend. The value of a friend, and that we ought to value our friends and maintain our friendships.

And it seems so simple, but it's so easy for us to lose touch with people. And it's so easy for us to drift from people. It's very easy for us to get so busy that we forget about people.

[24 : 14] And we don't phone them, or we don't text them, or we don't get in touch with them. And sometimes these things happen naturally, they happen by mistake, sometimes, sadly, it's purposefully.

But it's easy for friendships to fall apart. So we have to value our friendships. That's what Solomon is saying. Because without friends, we can feel lonely.

Without friends, we can feel isolated. We all need friends. And we all need to be friendly. And maybe there's someone you've been meaning to get in touch with, but you haven't got round to it. Well, I'd encourage you to get in touch with him. Because we need to value our friends. We all need friends. Even Jesus needed friends. Out of the 12 disciples, Jesus had three friends which were closest to him.

Peter, James, and John. We all need friends. And you know, it's sad to think that there are people who are lonely and even isolated in our own community.

[25 : 18] People who are housebound, those who are widowed, those who are struggling, and they could do with a friend. But you know, the loneliness and the isolation that others feel, it should always make us value the friends that we have.

And it should make us value our friendships. Because a friend is someone we can not only talk to and share things with and share burdens with and anxieties and worries and talk to, we can also pray with them.

And you know, that's sometimes the beauty of it. That we can pray with them. And that's what Solomon is drawing our attention to and reminding us of. He's reminding us of the value of a friend. And with that, Solomon gives to us all these illustrations from verses 7 to 12. He gives to us all these illustrations to draw our attention to the value of a friend. And he describes two pilgrims who

are walking together on a journey.

And he says that it's better for two pilgrims to walk the road together than for one pilgrim to walk alone. He says two are better than one because they will have a good reward for their labour than if they did it alone.

[26 : 34] They can get more done if they cooperate together. Just as the saying goes, more hands make light work. But more than that, Solomon says that two are better than one because if one falls into the pit whilst they're on this journey, the other can pull them out.

But if you're on your own, no one can pull you out. Then he says if two lie down together like pilgrims sleeping in the same tent, they'll keep warm. And if a robber attacks them whilst on their journey, two will be better than one because they will both be able to withstand him.

And of course, Solomon's point about the value of friendship is that two are better than one. But remember the question Solomon is asking.

How can you face life under the sun without the Lord if it's full of aloneness? How can you face life under the sun without the Lord?

And that's a point Solomon is making because we can have many friends. we can have good friends, we can have faithful friends, we can have close friends, but the point he's making is that we will never have a friend like Jesus.

[27 : 45] We'll never have a friend like Jesus. And you know, that's what Solomon said in Proverbs chapter 18. A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

And that friend is Jesus. And Jesus says to us in the gospel, greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you. And the command is to come, commit your life to him, follow him, be his friend. And this is what we were saying to the children, we need to have face time with Jesus.

Like Moses, we need to speak to Jesus face to face as we would speak to a friend. Because Jesus is a friend that will never leave us. He'll never forsake us. And who better to have on our journey through life than Jesus?

Who better to have by our side than Jesus? Who better for you to go through all the ups and downs with in life than Jesus? Who better to look to and turn to and speak to and trust in when life takes these unexpected turns than Jesus?

[29 : 03] This Jesus, he's a friend of sinners. And he's a friend that sticks closer than any brother. You know, that's why the hymn writer said, what a friend we have in Jesus.

All our sins and griefs to bear. what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Then he says to us, oh, what peace we often forfeit.

Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. My friend, Solomon is asking you today, how can you get through life without Jesus?

How can you get through life without Jesus as your friend and your saviour? How can you face life under the sun if it's full of affliction?

How can you face life under the sun if it's full of achievement and apathy? How can you face life under the sun if it's full of aloneness? But then lastly and briefly, Solomon asks us, how can you face life under the sun without the Lord if it's full of adoration?

[30 : 19] It's full of adoration. He says in verse 11, again, if two lie down together, they will 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. For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born 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 came later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and is thriving after wind.

And in these closing verses, Solomon highlights the vanity of seeking the approval of others.

He says that someone can climb the social ladder from being a pauper to a prince, but the popularity says it'll just be short-lived. And you know, sadly many people, they have this restless desire to have a position or to gain prestige or to have popularity among people.

[31 : 38] people. But Solomon says, it doesn't last. Your fame soon fades. People will talk about you for a while, but very, very quickly you'll just become yesterday's news.

And you know, Solomon, he knew that from his own experience as a king because there was no one more glorious than King Solomon. And yet it didn't take long for people to turn their back on him.

And the same was also true for the greater than King Solomon, Jesus. One commentator he makes this brilliant observation that he makes the observation about the crowds who followed Jesus.

He says, people are fickle and they may cast their palms before a new arrival only to cry, crucify him a few days later. And that's what happened with Jesus.

They were singing, Hosanna to him on Sunday morning. And they were chanting, crucify him, crucify him, by Friday morning. And Solomon's point is that it doesn't matter how popular you are, how popular you become, you're soon forgotten.

[32 : 53] You soon become old news and people, well, they just forget about you. But Solomon says, there is one who will never forget you.

there's one who will never turn his back on you. There's one who will never leave you. There's one who will never forsake you. And that is the Lord.

The Lord will always be there for you when you trust in him. The Lord will always be there for you if you commit your life to him. And you know, that's what Solomon is trying to get across to us in this whole chapter.

He's talking about life under the sun. And he wants us to see that we need to have the Lord in our life under the sun.

We need to make Jesus our saviour. We need to confess our need of the Lord and that we can't do it ourselves. We can't get through life on our own. We can't get through without Jesus.

[33 : 54] We need to depend upon him, to trust in him, to look to him, to know that he's keeping us. Because Solomon is saying, look, this is what life is really like.

Life under the sun, it's hard, full of sin. It's full of affliction, full of achievement, people wanting their own glory, full of apathy, laziness, full of aloneness, people on their own, and it's full of adoration, people looking to be exalted.

Life under the sun, it's full of sin. Life under the sun, he's saying it's vanity without the Lord. And he's asking, how can you face life under the sun without the Lord?

How can you face life and all that it has without Jesus as your friend? How can you go on another day without Jesus as your saviour?

And you know, the psalmist in Psalm 100 118, he had it right. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.

[35 : 09] Better to trust in Jesus with life under the sun than to put your confidence in anyone else under the sun. Better for you to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.

And so my friend, while you are living under the sun, I urge you and I encourage you to trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Lean not upon your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths. How can you cope in life under the sun without Jesus?

Make Jesus your friend and your saviour and your king and your Lord today by trusting in him. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we realize that life under the sun is not the way we often want it to go.

[36 : 17] That it is a life that is full of sin. full of heartache and sorrow, full of affliction and loneliness, full of difficulty and all these experiences in life.

But we give thanks to thee that Jesus not only experienced life for himself, that he came to be so like us, but he also calls us to follow after him, to trust in him, to know that every time we cast our cares upon him, that he is the one who cares for us, help us then to trust him today, to trust him every day, to trust him for time and for eternity.

O Lord, keep us, we pray, for we know that we cannot keep ourselves, but help us to keep looking to Jesus, knowing him and loving him as the author and the finisher of our faith.

Go before us then, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We shall conclude by singing the words of Psalm 62.

Psalm 62, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 294. Psalm 62, we're singing from verse 5 down to the verse 8.

[37 : 39] This is a psalm which David wrote it and he's testifying to us, especially in verse 6, he says about the Lord, he only my salvation is and my strong rock is he, he only is my sure defence, I shall not move to be.

That's how he could live life under the sun. The Lord was his rock and his sure defence. And that's why he says in verse 8, calls everyone to do the same.

You people place your confidence in him continually before him pour ye out your heart. God is our refuge high. So Psalm 62 from verse 5 down to the verse marked 8 to God's praise.

My soul wait now with patience upon my God our Lord.

On him dependeth all my hope and expectation.

[38 : 58] He only is my sure defense.

I shall not let be. He only is my sure defense.

I shall not let be. In God my glory blessed is and my salvation sure.

In God the rock is all my strength my refuge most secure.

He people place your confidence in him continually before him pour ye out your heart bought his refuge high.

[40 : 41] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever more. Amen.