

Refuge City Church — February 19, 2023
Ecclesiastes — “Labor with the Lord” (Chapter 4)

Introduction

- Have you looked outside lately?
 - There’s spy balloons, ‘UFO’s’ our government is shooting down, continued war between Russia and Ukraine, missile strikes in Israel, multiple train derailments, and toxic air & water in Ohio, mass shooting in Memphis killing 1/10 wounded, you need a loan to buy eggs...what the heck is going on?!
 - Yet, you look to a small town in Kentucky, where there seems to be a revival happening right before our eyes at Asbury University [10th or 11th day or continuous worship & prayer]

“Justice without morality” [Verses 1-3]

“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.”

- **QUOTE:** “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” [Martin Luther King Jr.]
- Those in power [authority and wealth] only see the value of the system as it benefits them.
 - There is no compassion for the poor and oppressed.
 - **Jeremiah 9:4-6**, “Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the Lord.”
 - “*Social Darwinism*”: formulated in the late 19th Century. It’s a social construct that the powerful in society are innately better than the weak, and success is proof of their superiority [survival of the fittest]
- Even today, the theory is held tight by those in power.
 - Some hoping to ‘legislate’ morality and virtue back into society.
 - The problem with this mentality, although humanitarian and seemingly coated with beautiful sentiment, is solely determined by sinful human beings who are going to determine the standard of morality apart from Jesus Christ??
 - I think many of us have prayed “Jenny’s Prayer” from Forrest Gump
 - “Dear God, make me a bird so I can fly far, far away from here.”
 - **Psalm 55:4-7**, “My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me. And I say, “Oh, that I had

wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness.”

- Unfortunately, this type of oppression is happening at every level in society. It’s not a power and wealth problem...it’s a sin problem, and the Lord addresses it!
 - **Deuteronomy 24:14**, “You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy...”
 - **Proverbs 22:16**, “Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.”
 - **Zechariah 7:9-10**, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”
- We serve a God of justice, who invites us to participate in coming alongside the oppressed.
 - **Deuteronomy 10:18**, “He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.”
 - **Micah 6:8**, “...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”
 - **Isaiah 1:17**, “...learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”
 - In order to “do justice”, we must admit our own sinful nature, repent, and then envelope ourselves in humility. Why?!
 - This will allow us to see the God-ordained value in everyone.
 - **Matthew 25:34-40**, “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”

“Hard work without focus” [Verses 4-6]

“Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.”

- God determined from the beginning of creation, the value of hard work.
 - Prior to sin, man was placed in the garden to work. [**Genesis 2:15**, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”]
 - His work would be for the glory of God.
 - When sin entered his heart, God destined him to labor and toil in pain and sweat. [**Genesis 3:23**, “therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.”]
- Our labor is petty and self-centered when we compare ourselves to those that have more.

- Understand the difference between working for the Lord and allowing Him to bless you, versus working to satisfy your sinful desire to have more stuff and give off the ‘appearance of prestige’.
 - We then begin the process of doing whatever it takes to “keep up with the Joneses”... a fancier/pleasant term for Social Darwinism.
- The costliness of idleness
 - Understand the difference between laziness and needed rest.
 - **Proverbs 6:6-11**, “Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.”
 - **QUOTE**: “Hard work ought to be the normal routine of us who serve a carpenter-Christ, who follow the lead of a tentmaker-apostle, and who call ourselves children of a Father who is still working.” [David Hubbard]

“Life without another” [Verses 7-12]

“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. 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.”

- We were never meant to live and be alone!
 - This is exactly why the Lord dedicates so much time to calling us to care for the lonely in society [**James 1:27**, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction...”]
- We were created for community! [**Genesis 2:18**, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”]
 - Marriage, family, church, community... We are better together. There is strength in numbers.
 - When we labor together, there is a greater return in what we do.
 - If one of us falls physically, emotionally, or spiritually, others are there to lift them up.
 - **Galatians 6:1-2**, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”
- **Verse 9**: “Two are better than one”.
 - There’s a good return [profit]
 - There’s physical, emotional, and spiritual assistance.
 - There’s comfort and compassion.
 - There’s safety and security.

- **Verse 12:** And then... “a threefold cord is not easily broken.”
 - **BUT GOD!**
 - **1 Corinthians 3:6**, “I planted, Apollos watered, **but God** gave the growth.”
 - We can mess up, and then try to fix it, but it can never satisfy what God desires... a sanctified relationship that can only come by accepting the free gift of salvation.
 - **Romans 5:8**, “**but God** shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- This is the whole “experiment” of Ecclesiastes.
 - We need God in our life at every turn, in every moment!
 - He strengthens the community we have in marriage, family, & church, when we weave Him into the very fabric of our lives.

“Prestige without perspective” [Verses 13-16]

“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 come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.”

- Leaders will rise, and ultimately fade away from history because there will come one after the other for generations.
- The attainment of reaching the top doesn’t equate to success.
- It’s like climbing Mt. Everest.
 - Yes, one of the goals is to stand at the highest point on Earth.
 - But, if you don’t survive the climb down, what was it all for?? Even then, the list is growing longer and longer of those who have accomplished the feat.
- Strive for that promotion, pay increase, benefits, etc. But what is it all for?
 - Maintain the proper perspective of the work God has given us to do.

Conclusion

- **VIDEO:** MLK Jr. Final Speech, “I’ve been to the mountaintop.”
- **QUOTE:** “Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land...Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!” [Martin Luther King Jr.]
- We can strive for justice, hard work, community, and power/prestige, but it’s all vanity if we don’t set our eyes on Jesus, and walk with Him!
- Strive to maintain that heavenly perspective on all we do, for the glory of God!
 - **Colossians 3:2**, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”
 - **Mark 8:34-37**, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?”