

Ecclesiastes 4: 7-10; "Two are Better than One", A Bible Study
delivered On the Evening of October 14th, 2009,
at the Rendall Home.

Tonight we want to focus on the importance and the desirability of Christian companionship. I am only going to go halfway through the passage on this subject tonight, because it runs from verse 7 down to verse 12, and there are a number of points that I would like to make. From this passage we see that there are certain real advantages to having a companion, or even more than one companion in your work and in your life. There is the truth which is laid out for us here, that first of all, there is a real advantage to our labor when we have a companion. We want to think of this in terms of having good companions; not companions in wickedness and evil which the Bible expressly forbids our having. But the importance and desirability of having a "good" companion is given to us here in verses 7-10. And then, secondly, there are real advantages which come to our personal well-being, encouragement and strength that come from our having one or more companions. Tonight we want to look at the advantages which will come to our labors when we have a companion. If we are living a life of loneliness and isolation it is not always our fault, but sometimes it is our fault; and if it is; we ought to do something to correct it. It is called, "a grave misfortune" in our text. I want you to see that by God's grace, a person who is a Christian should want to do something about it. They should not want to be all alone in their Christian life or in their work. In verses 7 and 8 we see the vanity of being alone in our living our life and laboring for the things which only we want to get out of life. We want to examine the chief reason for this vanity. That will be our first point. Then in verses 9 and 10 we find the answer to that vanity of working alone and being alone; it is to see the advantage and reward that is found in finding, and working together with, at least one other person. I hope that each of us will profit from this time around God's Word.

1st of all - I want to show you that sinful selfishness is the chief reason for this vanity of loneliness in our life and work. (Verses 7 and 8)

"Then I returned, and I saw vanity (I saw emptiness; I saw meaninglessness) under the sun: There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother." "Yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches." "But he never asks, for whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" "This also is vanity and a grave misfortune." Solomon says that "then he returned." He came back and thought about the subject of labor once again. Let us never think for a moment and assume that we will never have to re-think a matter if we have thought it through once before. There are many things in life that require a second look, or even a steady gaze, in order to determine the meaning or the significance of how people live their lives. We might think that something is good until we take a closer look, a longer look. Solomon came back and looked at this matter of labor once again. And he looked at it now, this second time, in terms of companionship.

He had looked at it before in Chapter 2 and he had shown us that he had made great works. (Chapter 2, verse 4) He made houses and vineyards and gardens and orchards; he planted fruit trees and made water pools; he had servants and flocks. He had greater possessions, it says in verse 7 of Chapter 2 than all who were in Jerusalem before him. He was very wealthy. He had silver and gold and the special treasures of kings. He had music and singers to sing to him and musical instruments of all kinds; all the delights of the sons of men. And he became great and excelled, it says in verse 9, more than all who were before him. And even though his heart rejoiced in his labor; yet after he had accomplished all this, he still says in verse 11 that he concluded that it was all was vanity and striving after the wind. But if you will notice, it says that in that passage in Chapter two, it was "I" who did this, and "I" who did that. He did not say "we" were doing this, or "we" were doing that. Even though surrounded with workers and people who did things for him; they did not do those things with him. "He does not ask, "Who am I doing this for?"

Now he is re-thinking the whole thing, and again he looks at the subject of labor; this time, in terms of a person who is working alone. He portrays the situation hypothetically. He knows that a person who is lonely may be surrounded by people who are working for him, but he may feel very much alone. But he poses this situation in the most extreme of terms. This person who he has seen, or who he is thinking about; does not have a companion, or a "second" as it say here in the margin. He has neither son nor brother. He is a man who is working hard at his job and yet the labors seem to go on and on with nothing changing. He is in charge of the work; he is doing the work, and he is still getting rich from the work; but that is all that there is. He is not satisfied with having obtained the riches that he has gotten from his diligent labor. And, what is even more amazing is this: He does not ask himself why he lives this way, and why he is unsatisfied. There is no mention of God, or of other people. He just keeps going on working hard for himself. Notice the wording: "But he never asks, for whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" The "good", here, that is being spoken of, is to have other people around you; people who you are working with; people who are your companions; and other people around you, whose welfare you are working for. Even if there was just one companion; it would be that you would be thinking about their well-being and working for their well-being, as well as your own. That is what Solomon is talking about here; that is what he is saying will bring satisfaction and meaning to life. Let me ask you tonight if you have sufficiently considered this? Do you have even one other person in the world that you are working with and working for? Are you working with them in the way of your both coming to learn the meaning of life, which is learn about God; to fear Him, to love Him, and serve Him? Sometimes we do not even ask the question. And this is the reason, I believe, that sinful selfishness is the greatest single reason why a person is lonely and unfulfilled. It is sometimes the reason why he isolates himself. And then ultimately, no matter how hard he works; no matter how rich he becomes, he is

never really happy. And we know that he, or she, cannot be glorifying God with their life.

Unfortunately this condition of sinful selfishness can even happen to a Christian if they do not come back and take a good look at why they are working so hard, and what they are working for. Are you working for yourself alone, and have you isolated yourself from those who could be your best companions? These are good questions to ask yourself. Turn with me to Proverbs Chapter 18, verse 1. "A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment." Here we have a good description of sinful selfishness; it is called here, "seeking your own desire." Now we all have desires. And we all need to evaluate our desires. It is our desires that fuel what we will do with our life. The way that we should evaluate them is to bring them to the touchstone of the Word of God. It is not at all evident to most people that their greatest desires should be related to God, and to other people around them; that they would live to God and love other people around them. A person who separates himself from godly influences and companions is seeking his own desire and it is probably in order to fulfill something selfish. But look over at Psalm 37, verses 3 and 4. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness." "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." If you trust in the Lord and feed on His faithfulness and delight yourself in Him, then He will give you what you really want; that is the things that are righteous and good for you and for other people around. This verse has nothing to do with sinful selfishness; becoming richer or more materially blessed. That may happen in the process of your cultivating faithfulness, but it also may not. Rather, this verse applies only to those who have these righteous desires running through their heart and mind. Much depends upon what you cultivate in your mind and heart as a Christian. If you are desiring what God would have you to pursue and you want a godly companion in your work; this is pleasing to God. And so, let's come to our second point.

2ndly - I would like to try to show you the answer to that vanity of working alone and being alone whether it is in a secular job or in the Lord's work; it is to see the advantage and reward that is found in finding a godly companion to share your vision in your work.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor." "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion." "But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up." The message of these verses for a New Testament Christian is: Let us seek for a godly companion. Before we came to know Christ we did not care about whether we had such a one. Let's look over at Ephesians Chapter 2, verses 1-3. Here is a description of how we once were, before we became a Christian. "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience., among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the

flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." "But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sin, made us alive together with Christ...." (By grace you have been saved) You can see here what it is that people will work for and what they will labor for, when they do not know God. They will work to fulfill their sinful, selfish desires; the desires of the flesh and the desires of the mind. A person's companions will in all likelihood be those who will help them to fulfill their own desires, whether they are sinful desires or righteous desires. It helps exceedingly to choose your friends carefully. If a person has moral parents; this is a decided advantage in the sense that they will be made more acutely aware of the importance of doing what is right. But this will not insure that their attitude towards others who need God's grace and conversion to Christ will be right. As the parable of the prodigal son illustrates, it only made the older son self-righteous and condemnatory of others who had not lived morally as he had. He was in just as bad or a worse situation than the younger son whose companions before conversion were of the worst sort. "Woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to lift him up." Don't isolate yourself from your godly parents and don't isolate yourself from a godly companion. It is very dangerous spiritually. It is important for those children and young people of godly parents that they find companions who are morally good, in an outward sense, at the very least. But how much better it will be if they will strive (labor for this) to enter the narrow gate, for the way is broad that leads to destruction. (Matthew 7: 13) 2 are better than one if you are on the path of righteousness and in the path of life. Otherwise 2 would not be better than one in the spiritual and eternal sense. "How can two walk together unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3: 3) Many people, young and old, want to be great and do their great things to be seen by other men; but they are unconcerned about God and their eternal souls. They are more interested in their great works being seen by others and to impress them with their great abilities. But as Solomon learned by painful experience; this does not at all necessarily lead to good companionship being cultivated or developed. It may lead to loneliness and isolation, and even to ungodliness. Our text says that this is a grave misfortune. It is "an evil task", it says in the margin.

It can also happen to Christians as well as unbelievers. A Christian is not to live to himself in terms of either God or men. Living to yourself often leads to isolating yourself from what God and other people might have to say to you which would give you wisdom in the way to live. Turn to 2nd Corinthians 5: 14. "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." You can see, here, that this is the reason for living; this is what brings true and lasting satisfaction. This is the meaning of life. It is related to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who loved selfish and lonely people; people who have been living a life of vanity. But sometimes even a Christian can find themselves slipping back into the world. We need to confess

this as sin and pray to find a godly companion. "Two are better than one." Look over at the book of Philippians Chapter 2, and verse 19. "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state." "For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state." "For they all seek after their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus." This a great indictment upon the state of things in the churches if the Apostle Paul could say that he could find no one like-minded because they were all too busy minding their own things. But thanks be to God he did have Timothy to call upon to help him. "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor." This is the case in the natural world, in terms of material things and it is true in spiritual labors and spiritual things. They have a good reward. The labors in a common cause are doubled and their good results are multiplied. This is why the Lord God created woman and marriage at the beginning of the World. He saw that "it was not good for man to be alone." So he made him a helper suitable to him. "Two are better than one." When the Lord sent out the 70 in Luke Chapter 10, to declare to people that the kingdom of God had come near to them; He sent them out two by two so that the truth could be confirmed by the mouth of two witnesses. When the Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples about church discipline and also telling them how their prayers could be effectual; when they were asking for wisdom and blessing to come to them, in terms of the church's enacting that discipline and doing the right thing in relation to the unrepentant, and also those who had repented, he said to them: "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven." "For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them." Two are better than one.

In conclusion we should say that there is a good reward for the labor of the righteous person, even though sometimes they will be hard-pressed to find a good companion who will work with them and help them on, in their work at work, and their work for the Lord. Thank the Lord for a godly wife. She is the companion who does us good all of our days and she helps us to have a good reward for all of our labors in both material and spiritual things if we are a Christian. Thank the Lord for Christ's church, where we might pray and find a godly friend to lift us up when we are down and discouraged; one who will point us in the right direction when we err. But we must pray for the work of the Lord in this regard. Turn with me to 2 Timothy Chapter 4 and you will see the difficulties the Apostle Paul faced in this regard. Look at verse 9. "Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world, and departed for Thessalonica -- Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia." "Only Luke is with me." Will Luke be sufficient for that hour of difficulty? Yes, he will. Two will be better than one. But it was disconcerting to Paul to realize that Demas (who had claimed to be a Christian) had deserted them for the World in their time of need. Now look how he bore up under this. What was the secret of Paul's strength? We find it in verse 14 - "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm." "May the Lord repay him

according to his works." "You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words." "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me." "May it not be charged against them." "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear." You see; the Lord stood with Paul. He was closer to him than all of his other companions. Turn with me to Proverbs 18, verse 24 and we will close. It says here, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend which sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18: 24) Now who is this friend but the Lord Jesus Christ? Usually in the Christian life, you can count on other Christians to be faithful to you when you labor at work, and when you labor in the church. But even if there are points where this is not so, we can know that Christ is with us; Christ is in us; Christ is our closest companion; and that two are better than one. In this case, having Christ to be your "second" makes all the difference. One plus Christ is a majority. Remember what Elisha said to his servant when surrounded by the horses and chariots of the Syrian army? "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (2 Kings 6: 17) "Greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the World." (1 John 4: 4) He lifts us up when we fall, and He will keep lifting us up forever. "For He lifts me up to glory; for He lifts me up to Thee." (Hymn 453 in the Trinity Hymnal)