

Matthew 16.24-26, "Whoever would save his life...."

That is Jesus saying, "vanity of vanities...."

"The Kingdom of Heaven...."

Jesus is also asking us to assess what we are giving ourselves to.

Ecclesiastes is the same way.....

He is marching around the halls of your life and saying....vanity, vanity, vanity.....but then he's also saying...."ok here's the thing that has meaning...dive into that."

### **Title: Community and What Kills It**

You see if you see that as we read: Eccl 4.4-16.

I don't want to spend too long thinking about **BACKGROUND**, but let me just remind you that what **GOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN IN THE BUSINESS** of is making a people for himself, who together enjoy and worship Him. That's still what he is doing, and its what he'll be doing for all of eternity.

**THE FIRST TIME** that the Bible tells us that **SOMETHING IS NOT GOOD** is in the opening chapter of Genesis where we are told that before Eve was made, it was **NOT GOOD FOR THE MAN TO BE ALONE**. The man and woman are created very good. Creation is created good. But, Adam, **ALL BY HIMSELF, WAS NOT GOOD**. That is because he had God above him and he had creation beneath him. But, **HE DIDN'T HAVE SOMEONE TO BE IN COMMUNITY WITH**.

So, then, God creates a **WOMAN, EVE, TO BE WITH ADAM**. And we see, then, that **CREATION IS COMPLETE ONCE ADAM** has a lover, and a friend, and he has someone to make it through life with.

But in Genesis 3 **SIN ENTERS INTO THE EQUATION** of human history. Adam and Eve sin against God and in so doing, they **SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM GOD** and they **SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM ONE** another. They hide from God and they hide from each other. And this is one of the out **WORKINGS OF SIN--WE WANT FRIENDS; WE WANT COMMUNITY**; we want relationship. And that is good. That is the way God has made us. That is an innate part of what it means to be an image bearer of God.

But, **WE HAVE A HARD TIME CONNECTING** with one another in enduring friendships because of sin. Sin comes between people. Sin separates them. Bitterness, envy, laziness, mistrust, hurt, comes into the human equation.

This has always been a struggle: **WE WANT COMMUNITY, BUT OUR OWN SIN**, makes the realization of that desire difficult.

I want to do **TWO THINGS THIS MORNING**. First I want to see from the text **WHY COMMUNITY IS GOOD**. And then second, I want to see from the text some of the **SIN PATTERNS THAT KEEP US FROM EXPERIENCING COMMUNITY**. As we do those two things, I want to **MAGNIFY CHRIST** and his gospel, and set him up as our only hope for the genuine community we long for.

## 1. God's Design for Community

Now, Solomon is **NOT EXHAUSTIVE** in his treatment here, but he's going to point out **TWO THINGS ABOUT COMMUNITY THAT ARE GOOD**; two reasons its important. Two reasons why in this world full of meaninglessness and emptiness you ought not neglect the community of God's people.

It is important that we **SEE ECCLESIASTES THROUGH THE LENSE OF THE NT**, because from the NT we know that the **CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE OF GOD**, and that local churches are where God's people gather and commit to one another and seek to love and serve the Savior together.

So, though Solomon **DOES NOT EXPLICITLY POINT TO THE LOCAL CHURCH IN ECCL 4**, I am going to make **ALL OF MY APPLICATIONS** from Eccl 4 in reference to the local church because (and here's a **PRINCIPAL FOR STUDYING YOUR BIBLE** on your own), you always want to **MAKE SENSE OUT OF THE OT THROUGH THE LENSE OF THE NT**.

### 1. Community is for Troubled Times

verses 9-10

What he is saying is **PRETTY PLAIN THERE**. And don't get hung up on the **EXACT NUMBER**. Its ok to have 3 friends over for dinner....it doesn't just have to be one.

But one good thing about community is that **WHEN LIFE TURNS DIFFICULT....**and invariably it will, you need to be **WELL CONNECTED TO PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT YOU**. Because there is going to be a day that you **LOSE YOUR JOB**; or your kid **DOES NOT COME HOME** for the night; or you are on **BED REST FOR 2 MONTHS**, or your **FRIDGE BREAKS**, or whatever. And people in community have others who show up with **FOOD, AND MONEY, AND AN EAR**, and they give their time and their input.

**\*ill.\*** Do you remember the **1992 OLYMPICS WHEN THE BRITISH SPRINTER DEREK REDMOND** tore his hamstring in the middle of the 400m race?

In the **RAT RACE** of life, the pattern is that as **PEOPLE FALL**, we just **KEEP GOING....**we can't sacrifice our success to help another. But Derek's father had a stake in his son.....

And the point is that **WHEN WE HELP ONE ANOTHER FINISH AS TROUBLE COMES**, people look at that and say, who is it that is helping the guy with the torn hammie? Oh, that's his brother in Christ.....he goes to church with that guy. Wow....**JESUS IS DOING SOMETHING THERE**.

In this church, I think there is **SO MUCH GOOD HAPPENING HERE** along these lines. And I am so encouraged by it.

- Out of the blue I had someone come up to me last Saturday and say – I want to pay for the **RENTAL VEHICLE FOR THE NEXT** conference that the young adults are going on. \$600. No soliciation.....just generosity.
- Did you know that someone's **FRIDGE BROKE DOWN** a few months ago, and another member gave them theirs?

- Did you know that someone in this church built a **WEBSITE AT NOT COST** for someone else's business.
- How many of you have picked the brain of one of **THE IT GUYS** in this church. how many of you have had one of those guys come over?
- How many **YOUNG GIRLS HAVE COME OVER TO MY HOUSE** to help watch the kiddos when Kristy is feeling overwhelmed with life?
- About 2 years ago I was asking **DAVID GAY** for advice about finishing the bedroom in our basement, and he says, "I'll do it."

How many of you made **MEALS FOR MY FAMILY WHEN KRISTY** was on bed rest? Watched the kids? Went to the grocery store? Visited Kristy in the hospital?

How many times have you **STAYED ON THE PHONE WAY PAST WHAT YOU HAD TIME FOR** in order to listen to your sister in Christ pour out here aching heart?

How many times has that **CHURCH TRUCK GOTTEN EMPTIED** of all his preschool chairs and sound equipment so that it could move someone?

**COMMUNITY IS GOOD** because when trouble comes we have people in our life who care about us; who know us; who will make sure that we make it across of the finish line even if it means they don't finish first.

We see the same thing happening in verse 11:

Read verse 11

Now as Westerners we read that, and we think its **SOMETHING WEIRD GOING ON**. Or maybe sexual. But to ancient near Eastern readers they would not think of that at all. What they would think of is **TRAVELING ON COLD NIGHTS**, and grabbing a place on the side of the road in the middle of the night. Listen—**TWO BODIES HUDDLED UP TOGETHER ARE GOING TO BE BETTER** than one. Plain and simple.

But the point is the same. **YOU ENTER LIFE WITH ITS TRIAL, DIFFICULTIES AND COLD LONELY NIGHTS ON YOUR OWN, AND IT IS GOING TO BE MISERABLE**. But you take that on with a group of Christian people around you that love you and are for you, and its just going to be better. Easier. Happier. Possible.

## 2. Community is for Protection

read verse 12

Whereas I think **IN 9-11 THE BENEFIT OF COMMUNITY IS THAT WHEN WE EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTY**, we have brothers and sisters who walk with us through it, verse **12 HAS IN VIEW THE BENEFIT OF COMMUNITY IN ORDER TO PROTECT US FROM EVIL**.

\*ill.\* I was telling someone recently about a **GIRL IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD** who has started dating. And I'm friends with her dad. And now, I see this new guy sort of creeping

around. He's not literally slinking around, but in my mind's eye, when he comes around, he seems to be slinking.

Now, I'm a guy and so I know that almost all 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys are just morally empty. Sorry, but it's true. I cannot think of one redemptive conversation that happened in the PE locker room in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Not one.

And so just because of my friendship with her dad, I just want to sock this kid....

And I know it would not be right to punch him, but in me (and this is no glorious thing) there is just this sense of protection.....i want to keep her away from him.

And I'm **NOT JUST TALKING ABOUT THE ISSUE OF TEENS AND ROMANCE** (I try to reserve those awkward talks for Wednesday nights), but in this church there should be a sense of protection we have for one another in **TERMS OF KEEPING EVIL AT BAY**.

And **LISTEN WELL** at this point: I'm talking about something that is **MOTIVATED BY LOVE** for a brother. I'm **NOT TALKING ABOUT THE OTHER THING THAT HAPPENS IN CHURCHES** where all of my preferences and **CONVICTIONS HAVE TO BE PRESSED ONTO OTHERS IN A SELF-RIGHTEOUS WAY. THAT'S NOT** what I'm talking about. That's no good.

But what I'm talking about is just that **WE HAVE A STAKE IN ONE ANOTHER'S LIVES**. And so when we see a brother **GOING DOWN A CERTAIN ROAD**.....we don't let him go there w/o us **PLEADING** with him.

- Maybe it's a pity party....
- maybe it's a relationship.....
- maybe it's that there is weird, unexplained irregularity about fellowship with the body...something is up.

Man, **WE DON'T JUST LET PEOPLE DO THAT**. We **GO AFTER** them. Yes, it **TAKES TIME**. Yes, it's **HARD**. Yes, they may **REJECT YOU**.

But **HOW CAN WE SAY WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER** when we see a brother or sister getting wrapped about with the **CORDS OF SIN**, and we just keep on going? We can't.

Now, **TEENAGERS LISTEN TO ME FOR A SECOND**, because this is so big with you all. When your **FRIENDS IN THIS CHURCH START TO GO DOWN THE SIN ROAD**, little by little, I know that the **COOL THING** is not to speak up. But what I want to tell you is that **ITS NOT ENOUGH** for you to just not go down that road with them. Please don't. But don't let them go down that road without saying something to them. **WITHOUT PLEADING** with them. At least text them.

And can we just kick this **IDIOIC IDEA** to the curb that says, "well, I don't want to be thought of as a **SNITCH**, so I'm not going to tell their parents." How is it a demonstration of friendship for you to cut your friend off from God's primary means of protection and safety: his parents? And **IF HIS PARENTS ARE BAD NEWS, THEN YOU COME TELL ME**. And I'll go and plead with them.

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**BECAUSE OF SIN, COMMUNITY IS NOT AN AUTOMATIC THING.** And so I know that there are some of you in here that are saying, “all well and good Mr. Pastor, but I’ve tried, and nobody wants to be my friend.” I know its not automatic.

But is it worth it....with prayer....leaning on grace.....to seek to love these others sinners that are here?

Be so careful about loving the idea of community more than you love the community itself. It’s a real danger.

### **WHY IS IT WORTH IT TO CONTINUE TO PURSUE COMMUNITY?**

**JESUS SAYS THAT THE WAY THE WORLD WILL KNOW THAT WE BELONG TO HIM IS BY HOW WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER.** The eternal destiny of Gainesville, VA is hanging in the balance. **YOU CAN RETRACT INTO YOUR PROTECTIVE SHELL FOR ANOTHER DECADE** and let the world look on at what amounts to another social club. Or you can lean on God’s grace, come out of that shell, **START TO LOVE THESE PEOPLE**, and then watch how God will use that to draw others to himself. This is important.

**HERE’S AN ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT I’M SAYING.** If we could gather up all of the people in this church who have **COME TO FAITH IN CHRIST THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF THIS CHURCH**, and if we could **ASK THEM THEIR STORY**....how they came to trust in Christ.....just about all of them would tell us that they experienced and/or witnessed the love of the body of Christ, and parallel to that they heard the gospel of Christ. And God used that to draw them. That’s how its going to happen.

Please consider that before you blow me off.

Please consider that before you persist in your petty squabble.

Please consider that before you retract back into your self-protective shell.

Our **HYPOCRISY WILL TURN THEM AWAY**; our **LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER** will force them to ask what’s different.

The world will know, they will come, **THEY WILL PAY ATTENTION TO OUR WORDS**, to the degree that they see that what is happening between us is different than what they experience in the world.

**ROD CAN PREACH HIS BRAINS OUT FROM THIS PULPIT.** Well and good. They need that too. But they need to see those ideas and words fleshed out into real people’s lives. To use fancy theological words, they need to see our theology incarnated.

**MATERIALISTIC, HEDONISTIC, INDIVIDUALISTIC, GAINESVILLE** and Haymarket come **NEED TO SEE US** helping one another, protecting one another, loving one another. And then they’ll wonder....what’s different?

And at the same time we’ll be **SHARING THIS MESSAGE:**

You see **JESUS CAME TO RESCUE US**. We were separated from him because of our sin, but he loved us so much that he came and died and forgave us and **MADE US SONS AND DAUGHTERS**, and so we want to treat each other in the same loving way....accepting one another, loving one another, rooting one another on.

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Well, there you have it. **LIFE LIVED IN COMMUNITY IS PART OF SOLOMON'S VISION FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE ON EARTH. WE ARE WIRED TO WANT THAT. The CHURCH IS GOD'S PLACE FOR YOU TO EXPERIENCE** that.

But there's a fly in the ointment. And Solomon is going to point out what it could be. So let's see 4 things that prevent us from experiencing the community that God intends for us.

## **2. Community Killers**

### **a. Envy**

The first thing that kills community, Eccl 4 says, is envy. We **CANNOT CARE FOR SOMEONE THAT WE ARE COMPETING AGAINST**.

And this leaves us **LONELY, DETACHED, AND ISOLATED**. It **MAKES OUR BONES ROT**, Proverbs 14.30 says.

Some of us don't like to be around people that have the things we don't:

- They are wealthy and we are not.
- They are attractive and we are not.
- They are smart, and we are not.
- They got a boyfriend, and we did not.
- They got the position we sought.
- They have spiritual gifts and relationship platforms that we do not.
- Their opinion is respected and sought and ours is not.

**IF YOU CANNOT REJOICE WITH THE PROSPERITY OF YOUR BROTHER OR SISTER** than you are envious, and you are undermining what God wants to build here.

Do you see how **ENVY WOULD GET IN THE WAY OF COMMUNITY?** That's **OBVIOUS, RIGHT?**

**THINK ABOUT HOW INSIDIOUS ENVY** is in the church—especially envy of another's gifts and ministry responsibilities.

**\*ill.\*** Here all of us are.....we are like **BAND MEMBERS IN THE TOWN PARADE**. And we have one song to sing....you've got a trumpet....i've got a drum. But we are making music from the same sheet ....and the song is one of Christ. That lifts his name high.

Envy is like the drummer just stewing that there's not enough drum in the arrangement. He wants to highlight the drum.

And it makes it awfully difficult for that drummer to care about how the trumpet player is doing. Because he envies him....he wants his glory.

When we do that in our hearts, we are **BUILDING A KINGDOM FOR OURSELVES** rather than **PLAYING OUR PART WELL** for the glory of Christ.

It's the kind of glory-stealing that's going on in verse 16.....

#### b. laziness

The truth of verse 4 does not lead the Bible to say that its better to not work....

Laziness is no noble thing.

According to Ephesians 4.28, God's design is that we work instead of steal in order to provide for our own family and share with others. That's a philosophy of work, if I ever heard one.

If we are lazy in our pursuit of work; or lazy at school; or lazy at home with the kids, than we are **PROBABLY GOING TO BE LAZY AT COMMUNITY.**

And you all know this: **COMMUNITY TAKES WORK.** Cooking, cleaning, what to do with the kids....buying new stuff when their kids break your stuff, etc.

**\*ill.\* THE JUDKINS HAD A BUNCH OF PEOPLE OVER LAST NIGHT – 35 SOME.** The rule at their house in no shoes on the carpet....you know why? Because they've been up late after everyone is gone, and they've scrubbed the carpet of mud. It takes work.

It's a strange thing, but usually when you have people over, there is a **HUGE PILE OF DISHES** in the sink afterwards. Raise your hand if you have the spiritual gift of dish-washing. I didn't think so.

**\*ill.\* The FULTZES HAD 75 PEOPLE AT THEIR HOUSE ON SUNDAY NIGHT.** That takes work friends. And not just the Fultzes. They had multiple people there on Friday, Saturday and Sunday doing yard work, and setting up chairs and canopies, and making ice tea, an sweeping the floor, and planning a skit, and painting a tomb. That's blood, sweat and tears work. Nothing glorious about it. Nothing kum-by-yah about it. Its gritty. But it creates a platform for community.

**\*ill.\*** Did you know that at **9PM ON SUNDAY NIGHT**, after just about everyone was gone Daniel Chiles and Jordan Wilson were loading chairs and taking down canopies in the dark. Its just work.

Is that kind of work ethic flowing through you by God's grace?

And did you notice **THE IMAGERY OF THIS TEXT?** It's a lazy guy, sitting in his house, probably **HAVING A PITY PARTY** about how no one likes him, and eventually it leads to self-cannibalism. Is that what the Bible is picturing?

Isn't it true that **USUALLY FRIENDSHIP IS FORMED OUT OF WORKING TOGETHER** toward some shared goal? But if you are over there on the sofa, twiddling your thumbs..... well, its going to be a community killer.

Now, let me be clear. I am **NOT WANTING TO JUST HEAP CONDEMNATION** on your head here.

But I want to ask—**WHEN JESUS SAVED YOU, DO YOU BELIEVE THAT HE SAVED YOU INTO HIS FAMILY** where you don't just have a new Father (heavenly), but you have new brothers and sisters? And if Jesus was willing to shed his blood for them, do you think they are worthy of your effort?

And if that is the case, do you think there is **ENOUGH GRACE IN GOD'S STOREHOUSE**, to empower you to work hard at community?

### c. Dissatisfaction

read verse 6

**DO YOU SEE THE IMAGE THERE?** First image:, **THE GUY HAS ONLY ONE HANDFUL** of whatever it is that he desires, but there is **PEACE** in your heart. On the other hand you have **TWO HAND FULLS** of that thing, but its **NOT ENOUGH**.

You are not happy. Its not enough. You are dissatisfied.

And this is something that absolutely kills community. I said it before....its a real temptation for some of you that love God, and want to be well connected to others who love God....its a **REAL TEMPTATION FOR YOU TO LOVE THE IDEA OF COMMUNITY MORE THAN YOU LOVE THE ACTUAL COMMUNITY** that God has put around you.

And that **MAY FEEL REALLY SPIRITUAL AT TIMES**....you are just **LONGING AFTER THIS GODLY THING** that God created you for. That sounds spiritual. But here's the reality: when God calls us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ (and here's a little secret)....**THOSE BROTHERS AND SISTERS ARE SINNERS**.

**\*ill.\*** They are not like the models in the **EDDIE BAUER CATALOG** where the clothes fit just right and they are perfectly happy and adventurous and in shape. Nope. The people God calls you to love are imperfect, quirky, sinners. And they can be hard to love.

**THIS TAKES ANOTHER FORM....THIS DISSATISFACTION....THIS LONGING AFTER SOMETHING BETTER.** Some of you are killing community here because you're always **LOOKING ON THE HORIZON**. You are looking **OUT AT THE FUTURE**. You aren't here. Not really.

And so for you, its something like, "ok, when this happens to me....when I sort this out....when this comes together....when I'm at this place in my life....then I'll dig in. Then I'll get connected."

And you are dissatisfied, and disconnected from community.

Now both sorts of dissatisfaction kill community. And here's how that often happens:

**DISSATISFIED PEOPLE TEND TO SUCK THE LIFE OUT OF OTHER PEOPLE**

because they look around and try to find the reason that they aren't happy.....and they tend to place a lot of blame on other people for that.

And that kills community.

d. Work-a-Holism

Read verses 7-8

One commentator described these verses as a **MAN WHO STRIVES TOWARD AN UNSPECIFIED YET ALL ABSORBING GOAL.**

And here's what I love about how Ecclesiastes works. He is **ASKING US TO SURVEY THE CONTOURS OF OUR LIFE:** what we give our best energy to; how we spend our time; from what corner of my life I seek to gain true meaning and purpose and happiness.....

And then he says....ok, that's how you are doing life right now. **WHERE DOES THAT TAKE YOU A YEAR FROM NOW?** Five years? Ten years?

And for **SOME OF YOU IT TAKES YOU TO A BETTER PAY GRADE, MORE RESPONSIBILITY, AND A GREATER SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT**....in the race of your life it forwards you down the track.

That is not inherently evil.

But.....could it be.....and oh how this flies in the face of the American Dream....could it be that **GOD WANTS YOU TO NOT GET QUITE AS FAR DOWN** that race course so that you can pour into the people of God here?

Could it be that doing what God wants means you **ARRIVING AT YOUR PERSONAL AMBITION GOALS A LITTLE LATE?** Or re-adjusting your goals so that you can give more time and energy to these people?

Would God ask that?

Let me make it **PRACTICAL.** If I came to you after service, and I said....**THERE IS A GUY IN THE CHURCH....HE REALLY NEEDS SOMEONE TO DISCIPLE HIM**....to pour into him. Could you start meeting with him once a week to just read the Bible and pray together...an hour/week?

Would you **CARVE THAT OUT?** Do you have **TIME FOR SUCH AN ENDEAVOR?**

We pride ourselves on margin-less lives. But here Solomon is saying: what for? Why? For what are you striving?

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**\*iii.\*** Charles Spurgeon described the local church as the dearest place on earth.

I wonder, do you think about your local church that way?

Is it dear to you? Are these people precious to you?

Why should they be?

*Better looking....more intelligent.....funnier?*

None of those are reasons

Look around you today. These are people for whom **JESUS SHED IS PURE, PRICELESS BLOOD**. God **CHOSE THESE PARTICULAR PEOPLE** from before the foundation of the world. If Jesus was willing to be **CRUSHED FOR THEM; IF GOD CHOSE THEM**.....are you willing to plug in with them?

On top of that, these