

## MATTHEW 11:28-30

### BOWLING ALONE: DYING FOR LACK OF HOPE

“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”<sup>1</sup>

**R**obert Putnam raised a red flag for people living in this modern world with a 1995 essay that was subsequently published in book form. The essay, entitled, “Bowling Alone,” observed that while more Americans than ever before were bowling, the number of bowling leagues was declining—people were bowling alone. Similar observations revealed that fewer Americans were attending school board or town meetings, volunteering or even getting together with their neighbors. And this was long before the isolating effects of the Internet, social media and the ubiquitous cell phone! I doubt that back in 1995 Putnam could have imagined a family of four—mom, dad, sister and brother—dining together at a restaurant, but each one staring into their own mobile device; but you have witnessed this, and so have I.

America’s suicide rate is out of control. How bad is America’s suicide problem? Well, it’s so bad that Americans’ overall life expectancy has declined for the first time since the 1930s. Aaron Kheriaty writes in “First Things” that the suicide crisis in America has reached epidemic proportions. Rates are growing coast to coast, in rural and urban areas, among the poor and the rich, the young and the old. In his article, Kheriaty, director of the Medical Ethics Program at the University of California Irvine School of Medicine, describes a witch’s brew of factors behind this epidemic of death: social fragmentation, an overall decrease in religious involvement, utilitarianism, and—yes—the growth of assisted suicide laws. However, in the final analysis, Kheriaty boils the problem down to one word: *Despair*. Despair, as in the utter lack of hope.<sup>2</sup>

Kheriaty concludes his thought-provoking article by relating the account of a suicide. A man in his thirties took his life by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. He was one of over fifteen hundred people who have jumped from the bridge since it was built. Kheriaty writes, “After his death, his psychiatrist went with the medical examiner to the man’s apartment, where they found his diary. The last entry, written just hours before he died, read, ‘I’m going to walk to the bridge. If one person smiles at me on the way, I will not jump.’” That is heart-breaking!

Isolation breeds loneliness. And loneliness can be a major factor behind depression, which in turn can set people on the road to self-annihilation. Now, Kheriaty notes that clinical depression can and does have chemical causes as well, but, as he writes, “Your serotonin and dopamine levels may be out of kilter, but you may still have a problem with your Tinder compulsion and dinners alone in front of the television.”<sup>3</sup> So, while depression can be a serious mental illness that needs medical and psychological treatment, aloneness is curable.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> See John Stonestreet and David Carlson, “Dying for Lack of Hope (Part 1 of 2),” August 14, 2017, Breakpoint, [http://breakpoint.org/2017/08/breakpoint-america-suicide-crisis/?utm\\_source=Colson+Center+Master+List&utm\\_campaign=120dde6837-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2017\\_06\\_16&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_84bd2dc76d-120dde6837-6629605](http://breakpoint.org/2017/08/breakpoint-america-suicide-crisis/?utm_source=Colson+Center+Master+List&utm_campaign=120dde6837-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_06_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_84bd2dc76d-120dde6837-6629605), accessed 14 August 2017

<sup>3</sup> Aaron Kheriaty, “Dying of Despair,” First Things,” August 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/08/dying-of-despair>, accessed 8 March 2018

Think about what I just said: “Aloneness is curable.” Since aloneness is curable, why are not churches acting on this knowledge? Why are we Christians not shouting out to the lonely? We are taught to be compassionate. Should we not be concerned for the welfare of those who are lonely? Why do we hesitate to shout out to lonely people, “Come join us! Warmth, friendship and comfort are available here with us!” Isn’t that what Jesus is saying when He says, “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Shouldn’t we, of all people, have a message that invites lonely people to find meaning in Christ the Lord? Perhaps we are more like the world than we want to admit.

**THERE IS A FRIEND WHO STICKS CLOSER THAN A BROTHER.** What I say is for the benefit of Christians, encouraging us to call the lonely to find comfort and help in Christ the Lord. No one should imagine that I am unconcerned for those who are outside of Christ to come to Him. While encouraging Christians to call people to life in the Saviour, I pray that some who do not know the Son of God will find life. My words, therefore, are meant to encourage fellow believers to invite lonely people to Christ and to call outsiders to life in the Risen Son of God.

Among my favourite proverbs is that one which asserts:

“A man of many companions may come to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

[**PROVERBS 18:24**]

The Proverb is a favourite in great measure because it points to One who will never desert us. This saying of the Wise Man speaks of One who is more than an elder brother, Someone who is greater than any other we could know on this earth, Someone who is ever present regardless of how we may feel about ourselves. And that is a need that each of us realises, whether we are able to articulate the need or not. Take a few moments to refresh your memories of some the promises given by the Master—promises that speak of His presence with us.

The final statement Jesus spoke before His ascension, recorded in Matthew’s Gospel is, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [**MATTHEW 28:20b**]. The Master’s promise was meant to serve as a source of hope and comfort for any who should look to Him. The question for each person who hears this promise today is, “Is the Risen Saviour with you now? Are you aware of the presence of the Son of God standing with you? If not, why not?”

In a broader sense, the Lord promised His presence with the people of God in assembly. He promised His people, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” [**MATTHEW 18:20**]. This promise is often misappropriated as the people of God make it into something it was never meant to be. The context of the promise is in the congregation of the righteous gathered to hold one another accountable. This is a promise that when the assembly of the faithful is united to discipline its own, Christ is with them. He guides His people, directing them to do what must be done and to perform these hard tasks with firm, but gentle hands. Again, the question to this assembly, and to any congregation of the Master, “Do you hold one another accountable before the Lord? Do you discipline the wayward? If not, why not?”

I find considerable comfort in the promise the Master gave His disciples shortly before His passion. Perhaps you will recall these particular words Jesus spoke at that time. “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also” [**JOHN 12:26a**]. Where Jesus is, there His servant is found as well. If your desire is to serve the Master, you will discover that in the place where you are serving, the Master is standing with you in that place.

I find great comfort in the words Jesus spoke to Paul when the Apostle was facing opposition in Corinth. “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people” [ACTS 18:9, 10]. There is opposition to this message of life; the darkness does not readily yield to the light. However, we are charged to shine light wherever we live and wherever we go. The message of life that each Christian bears must penetrate into the darkest corners of this world. When this light is shone onto the evil deeds of this fallen world, we may anticipate that wicked people will push back, that evil people will be offended by the message we bring. However, we have this promise, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” God has many people here, in this community, in this province. Our responsibility is to ensure that His Name is made known and that the darkened corners receive the light that we bring.

We Christians are never alone. I found this account of the life of Martin Luther King to illustrate perfectly the response we must have to the push back from this dying world. Noted pastor, John Piper, wrote, “Whatever personal imperfections Martin Luther King had—and there were some substantial ones—King’s life and mission were driven by a biblically informed vision of God and man. In January of 1956 King was receiving 30 hate letters a day. He was averaging 25 obscene phone calls a day. Death threats were normal. After being awakened again by one of these calls in the middle of the night in Montgomery, Alabama, King went to the kitchen and put his head down on the table and prayed,

*Oh, Lord, I’m down here trying to do what is right. But, Lord, I must confess that I’m weak now. I’m afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I can’t face it alone.*

“He tells this story in his book **Strength to Love**, and says that what happened next was life-changing for him. It seemed as if an inner voice was speaking to him with quiet assurance:

*Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And, lo, I will be with you, even unto the end of the world.*

He saw lightening flash. He heard thunder roar. It was the voice of Jesus telling him still to fight on. And

*He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No, never alone, No, never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone ...*

For the first time in his life God was profoundly real and personal to him. The rest of his life, with all its imperfections, was stamped by this experience.”<sup>4</sup>

The Master promised His disciples, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” [JOHN 14:3]. Not only does the Master stand with us now, He has pledged on His sacred honour that He will come again for His own. We are not deserted; we shall be gathered to live with Him throughout eternity.

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted from John Piper, “What Is Man?” (sermon, January 16, 1994), **Sermons from John Piper (1990-1999)** (Desiring God, Minneapolis, MN 2007)

If that was the only time Jesus spoke of our being gathered to Him, it would be enough. However, I note that as He prayed for those who follow Him, our Master prayed, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” [JOHN 17:24]. The return of the Master is the Blessed Hope of the child of God. Jesus, the Son of God, is coming again to receive to Himself the people of God. Until that time, we who follow Him are responsible to live to honour His Holy Name.

We are taught, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” [TITUS 2:11-14].

During this past week, I read again the earlier Letters written by the Apostle to the Gentiles. I took special note of the repeated emphasis Paul made as he encouraged believers. We who believe will face opposition; we will be hated by all people for Jesus’ sake, as the Lord Himself has told us [see MATTHEW 10:16-23]. We should not be astonished that this will happen, we know that Jesus has encouraged us, “When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” [LUKE 21:28].

Paul witnessed persecution even early in his service among the churches. Remember that he wrote the saints in Salonica, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-11].

We Christians can take heart; Jesus has promised, and He cannot lie. This is the reason the Apostle wrote those comforting words of the earlier Letter to the Saints in Thessalonica. “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18]. Jesus’ promise is meant to encourage the people of God—and it does! Throughout the centuries, we have lived with our eyes fixed on the eastern sky. Christ the Lord promised, He is coming again. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

**CHRIST IS A STRONG ROCK.** Before speaking the words recorded in our text, Jesus had said, “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” [MATTHEW 11:27]. Of necessity, His statement means that outside of Christ Jesus, the Son of God, it is impossible to know God. Violent men can shout “God is great,” all they want; nevertheless, if they do not know Jesus as Master of life, they do not know God. They have no hope and they are without God in the world [see EPHESIANS 2:12].

Among the Psalms is one Psalm that has proven to be a great comfort to God’s people throughout the long years past and even to this day. The Psalmist has written:

“In you, O LORD, do I take refuge;  
let me never be put to shame;  
in your righteousness deliver me!  
Incline your ear to me;  
rescue me speedily!  
Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me!

“For you are my rock and my fortress;  
and for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me;  
you take me out of the net they have hidden for me,  
for you are my refuge.  
Into your hand I commit my spirit;  
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”

[PSALM 31:1-5]

This promise is a comfort for God’s people, and this same knowledge can serve as your comfort. Though you are now outside the precincts of grace, we can say with confidence that our strong rock will be your strong rock when you receive Him as Master over your life. This is the offer of grace that is extended in the gracious words of our Saviour and Master.

As he warned the nation of the danger of forgetting the LORD Who had delivered them from slavery, Moses issued a stern warning that is essential for us to hear, even today.

“Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked;  
you grew fat, stout, and sleek;  
then he forsook God who made him  
and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.”

[DEUTERONOMY 32:15]

“Jeshurun” was a term of endearment that God applied to Israel, the people whom He chose to deliver out of slavery, calling them His own people. It was a warning that when they arrived at a time of peace, they would be prone to forget where they had once been and they would ignore the God who delivered them.

If the people ignored God, the price they would pay would be awful. As Moses details the awful consequences of ignoring God, he makes a sobering statement concerning the situation for those who do not know God. He writes,

“Their rock is not as our Rock;  
our enemies are by themselves.”

[DEUTERONOMY 32:31]

Our Rock is not as the rock that others look to. To state the obvious, Christ Jesus is our Rock. Moses did not know the Name of the Son of God, he referred to the LORD God and wrote of exploits of the Angel of the LORD, Who appears as a theophany at various times. Jesus did state that Abraham rejoiced in the knowledge that he would see the Day of Christ [see JOHN 8:56]. Nevertheless, Moses continues with this challenge to those who forget God when he writes,

“Then he will say, ‘Where are their gods,  
the rock in which they took refuge,  
who ate the fat of their sacrifices  
and drank the wine of their drink offering?  
Let them rise up and help you;  
let them be your protection!’”

[DEUTERONOMY 32:37, 38]

Think! What have the unbelievers compared to the One Whom we have on our side?

We have a God who is our Rock, the foundation on which we take our stand. He cannot be moved, and so long as we stand on Him, we shall never be moved. This is the offer that promises rest and peace to the one who is willing to come to the Master. To any who are outside of Christ, our offer is rest and peace precisely because we have a place to stand, a place that shall not be shaken. And because the One on Whom we are fixed is solid and secure, we stand secure. We are taught, “Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” [HEBREWS 12:28, 29].

This warning of danger of forgetting God was iterated and reiterated throughout the wilderness wanderings. One such place of warning is found earlier in this particular book. “Take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” [DEUTERONOMY 6:12]. How easy it is for even those who have been delivered to forget where they were when God found them! How easy it is even for us who are redeemed to begin to take for granted the mercies of God, the goodness with which He blesses our lives. When we forget Him, we begin to think we are entitled, rather than knowing that we are blessed.

Again, God spoke through Moses to stress how serious this point was to the nation. “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’”

“You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish” [DEUTERONOMY 8:11-19].

For good or for evil, there are consequences to the choices we make. Yet, it remains that we live in a world that is opposed to the Faith. Religion is no particular threat to those of the world; however, the Faith of Christ the Lord is a decided threat to those identified with this dying world. Since there is a God, they know that they are accountable to Him. If that God has provided the means of peace with Himself and people have rejected His offer, there must be consequences. Therefore, the denizens of this darkened world hate the light, just as Jesus says, “This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” [JOHN 3:19, 20].

The world cannot attack the God who dwells in the heavens, so they attack those who have the audacity to believe what He has said. Jesus spoke to this very phenomenon when He taught His disciples, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” [JOHN 15:18, 19].

Even the brothers of Jesus before His resurrection were part of this darkened world. They were ridiculing Him for not showing His powers, much as the devil had sought to tempt Him to reveal Himself according to the thinking of the evil one. Listen to Jesus’ response to His brothers. “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil” [JOHN 7:7].

Here is the comfort for those who look to Christ—He is our strong Rock. We abide in Him and we are kept safe. How comforting is the promise of the Saviour Who said to disciples, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” [JOHN 15:4-11].

In Christ I find joy and I become productive. In His love is the love of God that comforts and consoles. Residing in the Saviour, the Father, is glorified through my actions. In Christ I am kept safe from the assaults of the evil one. Before He went to the cross, Jesus made this request. “I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” [JOHN 17:11-15].

**REST FOR THE SOUL** — “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” [MATTHEW 11:28-30]. The invitation Jesus issued promises rest. In a pressure-cooker world, the offer of rest is more than attractive—it is essential.

I am always humbled as I stand to deliver the message God has given in any given week. I look into the eyes of busy people, people who have unceasing demands on their time, people with constant calls for their attention to matters that are important for their families; and yet, these same people come to the services of the congregation. They come wanting to hear a word from the Living God; they come seeking refreshment and rest. As the Lord speaks to His people through the Word, and as they share in the fellowship of the saints, the Father Himself is giving them rest. As the message finds lodging in their hearts through the ministry of the Spirit of God, they are refreshed. In this manner God’s people are nourished and strengthened and refreshed.

Christ promises rest, but what is the rest that is promised? It is relief, a cessation from labour.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that the angels in Heaven are engaged in unceasing worship of the Living God—they are tireless in their worship [see REVELATION 4:8]. These holy angels are reenergised as they worship; and such reenergising should be our own experience as we worship. We can anticipate continual refreshing throughout eternity as we worship before the throne of the Living God and in the presence of the Lamb Who was Slain to redeem a people for His Name.

Just as the people of God are reenergised by worship, so the lost shall be restless throughout eternity. What a dark future is portrayed as the Revelator reveals the fate of the lost. “Another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and *they have no rest*, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name” [REVELATION 14:9-11]. As for those who do not know Christ as Lord over life, Isaiah has described life for them when he writes,

“The wicked are like the tossing sea;  
for it cannot be quiet,  
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.  
There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

[ISAIAH 57:20, 21]

Though Christ ensures peace for His own, His presence means conflict in the world. Remember that Jesus warned, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” [MATTHEW 10:34-38].

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<sup>5</sup> See James Swanson, **Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)** (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor 1997)



In the Letter to Hebrew Christians, the writer quotes the Holy Spirit speaking through the Psalmist, as He warns that refusal to obey the Lord, hardening the heart against His commands and following our own will rather than doing what God calls us to do leads to exhaustion. Know that *God does not grant His rest to self-willed people* [see **HEBREWS 3:7-19**].

The writer of that letter continues by focusing on God's rest. He makes a stunning statement when he says, "We who have believed enter that rest" [**HEBREWS 4:3**]. Building on this concept, the writer then reminds those reading the letter, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his." The writer concludes with this exhortation, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest" [**HEBREWS 4:9-11a**]. This is nothing less than a call to receive the rest that Christ offers when He says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" [**MATTHEW 11:28**].

In Christ, the Christian may rest because the Christian has peace that Christ alone gives. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" [**JOHN 14:27**].

Christians do not have a Pollyannaish view of the world; ours is a realistic view of the world in which we live. Jesus taught us, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" [**JOHN 16:33**]. The peace, the rest and refreshment which is the heritage of the Christian, is freely offered to all who will receive that peace by receiving the Prince of Peace as Master over life.

I began the message by citing an article by Aaron Kheriaty. He begins that article with a story that can only be said to be chilling. He relates how a popular, athletic, straight-A student from one of the wealthiest school districts in the nation jumped in front of a commuter train. This young man left a suicide note which gave no clear reason for what he did. There were no obvious signs of mental illness; he was not a bullied misfit. However, his death followed two other student suicides in that same area just three weeks prior. Three months later, another senior at the same school, which became known as "the suicide school," jumped to his death from the roof of his family's home.<sup>6</sup> Kheriaty notes that suicide has now become the second leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults. This heart-breaking trend is primarily the result of isolation, aloneness. There is another factor leading to such aloneness.

What gives us our worth? How do we determine our worth in life, and especially in our own estimate? How we answer that question shapes how we live. Increasingly, we are witnessing a societal transformation to a meritocratic age. Increasingly, we are adopting a utilitarian view of life. We value life according to how useful we see that life. Unborn infants seem to have little value, so we can justify aborting the unborn. Children with an extra chromosome, children diagnosed as being Down Syndrome, the elderly and perhaps the poor, are not highly valued in society; consequently, they can be jettisoned, cast aside or even killed. When such a utilitarian view of life becomes entrenched in society, it allows for the creation of the Gulags, camps such as Auschwitz, Planned Parenthood clinics and so-called "right-to-die" laws. At the individual level, men and women begin to gauge their worth only by whether they achieve lofty goals, goals that are sometimes unrealistic.

There is another view of your worth that is not often heard today, though it should be shouted out from every church and from every Christian home. You are of inestimable worth. You are so highly valued that God sent His Son to take your punishment upon Himself. He is "the Son of God, who loved [you] and gave himself for [you]" [see **GALATIANS 2:20b**]. Christ Jesus "gave Himself as a ransom for all" [**1 TIMOTHY 2:6a**].

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<sup>6</sup> Kheriaty, *ibid.*, accessed 24 March 2018

What a powerful statement is given by the Apostle of Love when he writes, “This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” [1 JOHN 4:10 ISV].

The Master challenges each individual to think carefully of the value of life when He says, “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 will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul” [MATTHEW 16:24-26]?

Perhaps our world has not done us a favour by stressing the utilitarian point of view concerning worth. Each of us will be well-advised to hear the words of the Master, who said, “I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” [MATTHEW 6:25-33].

You who hear me at this hour are of great worth, and the evidence that this is so is that Christ the Lord gave His life so that you might be free from all doubt, free from all guilt, free from all condemnation. From a practical point of view, young women do not need to exchange their bodies for love—they are loved by God for who they are. Young men do not need to debase themselves in order to prove their value—they are of great worth in the sight of God. The Faithful have a message that can set people free, and we need to shout that message throughout our world, calling people to find rest in God’s Son. There is life—real life—for all who come to Him, receiving His sacrifice in their place.

It is essential that we make this offer to all who are willing to receive it. God promises, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation” [ROMANS 10:9, 10 CSB]. That Scripture concludes by citing the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:13]. Believe Him and be saved today. Amen.