

A NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE—TIME

The following is more personal musings concerning time than a serious treatise on time; maybe something more serious in the future.

This month is a reminding of the passage of time and man's inability to control time. In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher makes a statement about time that has become well-known. He speaks of time and its proper use.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. 9 What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? 10 I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.*

With two statements worthy of our attention, the Preacher opens his dissertation about time:

First, *To everything there is a season...* Like so many other statements in Scripture, this must be taken in the context of the entire revelation from God: there is a time for everything, but there is never a time for sin.

Second, *a time for every purpose under heaven.* Nothing avoids time. *Every purpose under heaven* has a proper time which is established by the God of heaven.

The Word of God clearly tells us that the Tri-une God created time out of eternity. Furthermore, the Book of Ecclesiastes plainly tells us that the Lord is the One in control of all time—time answers to Him—and He can change time at His will. (Joshua 10, 2 Kings 20:11, Isaiah 38:8) One of the hardest facts for man to face is that he cannot control time in any way; all he can do is learn to live in subjection to time. Ecclesiastes 3, however, is more specific than just time in general. Who can deny that time moves according to God's eternal purpose?

Vv. 2-8 speak in specific terms. 26 times the phrase, ***A time to***, and 2 times, ***A time for***, is used. Then the rest of the book develops the fact that God controls "**What time it is.**" The 28 events listed in vv. 2-8 cover every area of life, showing that the Lord controls the timing of all events that come upon the world, and that come into our lives. (Acts 15:18)

These verses tell us that no event takes place apart from God's timing. Men can complain about the timing of events; they can make every effort under the sun to change or control God's timing of events, but all such efforts are vanity. As we shall see, His people are instructed to pray for the Lord to move in time and to control events which will accomplish their particular requests. (Philip 4:6)

We will examine the 28 TIMES listed by the Preacher. We will only look at a point and some sub points. The goal of this short essay is **to remind us that the Lord controls time**, and man can only subject himself to time and learn to use **his** time effectively. Man can either **be grateful** for God's timing of events, or man can fuss and complain over the Lord's timing. Either way, man can do extremely little, if anything, about the timing of events.

NOTICE the first mention of "*time to*" is v. 2. First mention establishes the absurdity of man thinking he has free will with which he can control his own destiny and be his own god. *A time to be*

born is an event that is completely beyond the control of any man. No man controlled the time of his birth, his parents, his family heritage, his name, his hair or eye color, his gifts, &c. However, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, controlled every detail of His birth. V. 2, *a time to be born* is the basis for the rest of the “**time to**” showing that those times are all controlled by God alone. Starting with *A time to be born*, there is not one event among the 28 listed where man can control the **time**. According to the Preacher, God even brings about *a time of war...* (Dan 4:35, Rom 11, &c.)

Man’s rebellion against God’s control of time is seen in the escalating suicide rate. Death is the only event that rebellious man thinks he can control, which is why suicide doctors are sought. Suicide is man’s final attempt to control his own destiny.

Man does not control his birth nor death; **there is a time established by God to be born and to die, and he will not be early or late for his appointed time for either event.** Man might think he controls planting, but man cannot control the time to plant. God established the seasons and controls the weather that permits planting. “Well, man controls weeping.” That is not what the passage says. The passage says, *A time to weep*. Example: Weeping is something with which we can all identify. The word of God establishes the time to weep and time to refrain from weeping.

Romans 12:15 *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.* **James 4:9** *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and [your] joy to heaviness.* **5:1** *Go to now, [ye] rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon [you].*

The Lord is the One Who controls the time and events that come together, and that call for weeping or rejoicing. (Passing into heaven is a time to rejoice.) We can say the same thing about all of the 27 other events. The Lord controls the timing of the events that bring about man’s response of weeping, dancing, rending, speaking, loving, embracing, warring, gaining or losing wealth, &c.

Example: How many times have we worked to bring about certain events of joy only to have all those carefully laid plans come to naught? We did our best to control the proper time, but in the end, time refused to be controlled.

An illustration of man’s response is in Ecclesiastes 8:5, 6. A wise man will keep the command-word of God, and be delivered from the problems which come upon the disobedient and rebellious. The wise man knows that there is a **time of judgment coming** when all will be made right.

Note what David said, Psalms 31:8.

Spurgeon places this psalm at the time of Absalom, v. 1. David talks about the efforts of his enemies against him as he pleads for the Lord’s assistance. V. 8, David tells us that the Lord protected him from his enemies. To me, the key phrase is *My times are in thy hand...*, v. 15.

As we think of David’s situation with Absalom, we remember that several times over, David saw what was happening just in time to flee for his life. David faced many grievous situations concerning Absalom’s efforts to overthrow the throne and kill him. Those events and their timing were totally out of David’s control, but they took place in such a timely manner that David’s life was spared.

In other words, the Lord controlled the timing in such a manner as to spare David and his throne. David faced a time of war, but the Lord controlled the timing of war.

Throughout his book, the Preacher develops the 28 “TIMINGS” that are found in vv. 2-8. The Preacher starts by developing the time of one’s birth. He points out that God determined the time, place,

surrounding events and the parents of one's birth. In the Preacher's case, the result of God's timing for his birth was a time of great military might and wealth and all that went with it.

Chapter 6, the Preacher laments that without the inner good and the peace of God with the wealth, it would be better to be born at another time apart from the wealth, for all go to a common place, the realm of the dead. The inner good and peace is better than the wealth with trouble which might be brought about by God's timing of one's birth into great wealth. Many things about time are developed throughout the book.

I. The timing of events in our lives is of the Lord, and our responsibility to discern the timing and act properly in that time. We could call the following, God's Providence at Work.

A. God was in control of the timing of events that brought things to a head so they had to be dealt with in our lives.

B. God controlled the timing of events that may have caused us to lose our job.

C. God controlled the timing of events that brought a particular man and woman together and later married.

D. God controlled the timing of events that caused us to lose the money, or miss the good deal.

I knew a man in Louisiana who was always in the right place at the right time. He was retired AF, and he made a good extra income by being at the right place at the right time. He could buy what **we might consider a piece of "junk,"** tinker with it, paint it, park it beside the road, and double his money. The Lord gave him the talent to take that "junk" and make something of value of it. The Lord also worked the timing of events so he could get the "junk" at a good price. The man could have ignored the timing of the events that made the "treasure" available, but it would have cost him the reward being provided by the Lord.

God controls the timing of events that permit one to get the good job, or that permits one to find the good deal on a particular item. He is the One Who sees that one is in the right place at the right time.

E. God controlled the timing of events that forced us to make a decision which we may now look back on with regret. Each of us can look back over our lives and see how the timing of events was completely out of our control. But that series of events is what brought us to the present point in our lives. We can get even more specific: many times, the timing of events was right down to the split second. If the event had taken place 1/2 second either way, we would not be here today. Years ago, a motorcycle pulled out in front of me, and my split-second decision spared both our lives.

F. Sadly, He is the One who controls the timing for us to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and we lose our "shirt." How many tens of thousands of dollars have we lost by being at the wrong place at the wrong time?

Proverbs 16:33 *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof [is] of the LORD.*

There are no coincidences in life, so we must say here with David, ***My times are in thy hand...***, we are not left a helpless victim of time.

II. Note what Daniel said in 2:20-22.

*Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: **And he changeth the times and the seasons:** he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise,*

and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what [is] in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

In addition,

James 5:16-18, *Confess [your] faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*

Through God's command to pray, Elias changed God's timing of planting and reaping by withholding rain upon the wicked.

God's word assures us that the prayers of a righteous man do not go unheard. Man is to pray that God would control time, or even change the timing of events and to work events for glory of God.

At what point are God's times, as recorded in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8, firmly established and cannot be changed? We have no way of even speculating. All we know is that the God Who established time hears and answers the prayers of His people. In God's answers, He works time according to what pleases Him and according to what is best for those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose. God always works time according to His divine purpose and for the good of the Elect.

The Book of Job clearly shows us that the Lord controls the timing of all events that come into our lives. The Devil himself may bring the events to pass, but he only operates within God's timetable.

Yes, the timing of events may seem very poor: "If only the timing would have been a little different, I would not have missed out on the good deal." Or, "If only these two events had not taken place at the same time, things would be different."

But look at the other side:

"If the timing had been different, I would not have met the one I am married to," or "I would not have the job I now have," or "I would not be converted." The list is endless as we think back over the timing of events.

The Preacher tells us that it is a vain thought to think we can control time, and make events turn out according to our plans. Thus, all is vanity. Another thought also surfaces: "If the only reason for working and making money is to enjoy life because one cannot take it with him, then what is the use?" James also tells us that it is vain boasting to think we can control the timing of things we plan. **James 4:11-16**.

If one does not follow the book of Ecclesiastes through, he will miss the whole point the Lord is making with the apparent vanity of all things. In fact, as I read the book through, I must keep the end in mind, or I would quit. Yes, God controls the timing of all events, or He would not be God. Our responsibility is not to fret over the timing of events, either past, present or future. We cannot change God's time, for He alone determines what time it is. Is it time to plant? If so, He brought that time about, and we will be held accountable for our faithfulness of using the time properly to plant. We are commanded to pray for God to work time for His glory. If one waits for the perfect time to do something, that something would never get done. I have perfected the art of procrastination, so if you need a few excuses, let me know.

Time is God's creation; time moves in perfect obedience to its Creator. Man can understand neither God's timing nor His use of time to accomplish His glorious purpose in our lives and in history. It is impossible to see events from His perspective, so most of the time, there appears to be neither rhyme nor

reason to the timing of events. So, what option is left for man? Is all vanity as this book appears to teach? Is every effort of life vain because the same thing happens to all men and the timing of events is out of man's control? This book, which seems to paint a very grim picture overall, does not leave man hopeless.

In conclusion: Though there are many statements scattered throughout the book that answer the difficulties of vanity and time, we will only look at two:

1) Ecclesiastes 8:5 *Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. 6 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man [is] great upon him.*

The wise man will understand what time it is. He will not try to reap in the time of sowing; he will not laugh in the time of mourning, nor will he mourn in the time of laughing. The discerning person will not try to hang on when it is time to let loose; nor will he love when it is time to hate nor make war when it is time for peace.

In our day of prolonged life due to what God has provided through medical science, we especially need God's discernment concerning proper time. All 28 times must be viewed as a responsibility to discern the time because we will be accountable to God for its proper use.

2) Ecclesiastes 12:13 *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man. 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether [it be] good, or whether [it be] evil.*

At God's proper time, we must sow, make war, laugh, mourn, kill, heal, repair and rend. The list is quite extensive, and the Spirit of God gives us the discernment to know what time it is.

1 Chronicles 12:32 *And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do;*

As the Preacher told us, life can be empty and vain to the rich and poor alike, for all go to the same place when life is over, so what's the use? All is vanity.

No one can understand God's working in time; we are not required to understand those things that are as high above us as the heavens are above the earth. But we are most certainly given a responsibility within the time God has provided: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism was agreed upon in 1648. Its first question is,

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, [a] and to enjoy him for ever. [b]

[a]. Ps. 86:9; Isa. 60:21; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31; Rev. 4:11

[b]. Ps. 16:5-11; 144:15; Isa. 12:2; Luke 2:10; Phil. 4:4; Rev. 21:3-4

(All Reformed Catechisms pretty much follow the Westminster Catechism.)

Our times are in the hands of the Lord; therefore, we are assured that He works the timing of all events that come into our lives for our good and for His praise, honour and glory. **Our responsibility** whether we eat, drink, drive, work, play, preach or whatever we do, **is to use** our short amount of time to glorify God by keeping His commandments, or our time on this earth will have been in vain.

Bro Need