

Everything Beautiful in His Own Time

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11; Psalm 138:8

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Those who have suffered the loss of someone very dear to them will at times question (or be tempted to question) the love of God, the wisdom of God, the power of God, or the justice of God.

“How could God allow this tragedy to happen if He is love, if He is almighty, and if He is fair? How can God be wise and think that this is good for me? Where was the Lord when this happened to me or to my loved one? If I had the power to prevent that awful event from happening to my child, I would in love have prevented it. How can God be love and have all power at His disposal, and yet choose not to stop such a tragedy?”

These questions and many more like them may flow through one’s mind when the eye of faith is removed from Christ to the trial, affliction, and hardship we are enduring. Now I am not justifying any such sinful thoughts in man’s heart that would cast doubt upon the love, wisdom, power, or justice of God. But I know all too well the sinful infirmities of man (both in myself and in others).

In all such cases of doubt toward God, a very important and life-changing truth has been obscured: hope. We are only looking at our present pain and heartache. We are only considering our present loss. And it hurts. Wow does it hurt! However, what if God took that loss and made it a gain in the future? What if God took that pain you have endured and made it a comfort and blessing to many others? What if in the final analysis, that which appeared ugly was made by God to issue forth into something beautiful beyond imagination? Would not such a hope transfigure your doubt into a living faith and your pain into a present comfort? What makes the pain and sorrow of this life so unbearable is a sense of hopelessness. However, add to the equation that God will make everything beautiful in His own time, and we can press on. We can see light at the end of the tunnel. We can receive comfort, peace, and joy knowing that everything will glorify God and benefit those who trust Him and love Him. How it will all come together, we do not know. But the Lord WILL perfect that which concerns me—of that I can be sure (Psalm 138:8).

Wherever you may happen to be today, you must have a certain hope for the future, otherwise there will be no joy in the present. King Solomon leads us to that hope in Christ today—the only sure foundation for a lasting joy and happiness now and for all eternity. The main points from our text this Lord’s Day are the following: (1) Searching for Joy in the Earthly Toil of Man Brings No Lasting Joy (Ecclesiastes 3:9-10); (2) Searching for Joy in the Eternal Purpose of God Brings a Lasting Joy (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

I. Searching for Joy in the Earthly Toil of Man Brings No Lasting Joy (Ecclesiastes 3:9-10).

A. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Solomon, who had tried everything the world has to offer in order to find an enduring joy and contentment, has led us through a summary of the many varied experiences of life—the ups and downs of life—the good, the bad, and the ugly of life—the blood, sweat, and tears of life. Why? In order to demonstrate to us this all important truth: Life is not static—it is dynamic. Life is not stationary—it is in continual change. And with all of the changes that occur in life, how can we ever depend upon anyone or anything in this life to secure for us a lasting joy and happiness that will transcend these daily changes? Dear ones, just as quickly as earthly happiness comes to us today, it will just as quickly be snatched from us the very next hour, if it is rooted in these changing circumstances and experiences of life. The only One in whom a

sustained joy can blossom and bear fruit now and for all eternity is under the sunlight of God's unchanging character: "Jesus Christ THE SAME yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). And it is this unchanging God who has ordained everything in your life and mine for His own most holy and wise purposes Solomon declares: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

B. King Solomon now draws this conclusion from what he has just noted about the changing world all around him: Searching for joy in the earthly toil of man brings no lasting joy.

1. This is the point of the question Solomon asks in Ecclesiastes 3:9: "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?" This is essentially the same question Solomon asked in Ecclesiastes 1:3.

a. The answer from Solomon the Preacher is essentially this: We can expect NO PROFIT in finding a lasting joy or happiness in such a changeable world, if we hope to find it in anything under the sun.

b. Of course, Solomon is not saying that there is no profit (in any sense) from the labor and hard work that man performs in this life. For, dear ones, he extolled the benefits of diligent labor earlier in Ecclesiastes 2:24, as well as Proverbs 6:6-11. God gave Adam work to do even in his sinless perfection there in the Garden of Eden. The Sabbath (one day of rest out of each week) was authorized by God and given to us before the fall of man. In fact, the keeping of the Sabbath rest is set forth in the Fourth Commandment against the backdrop of the good and lawful work we should do on the other six days of the week: "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work" (Exodus 20:9-10). It is a serious sin to be lazy and slothful. To procrastinate about taking care of our duties and responsibilities leads to misery not to joy. The specific kind of labor Solomon has in mind is that which one exercises for the express purpose of making him happy. We are to find joy in our labor (as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 2:24), but our labor, or people, or the things of this life are not the source of our joy.

c. Nothing in this world is so dependable and so reliable as to ensure a lasting joy and happiness. The people, possessions, and pleasures of this life will either perish or disappoint us. Dear ones, we will fail to meet the expectations of others, and others will fail to meet our expectations. And the closer we look at others, the more we will see their sins, weaknesses, and imperfections. We may look great from a distance. But take a real close look for a period of time, and you will surely find many things in my life and yours that will disappoint others. And if anyone believes that is not the case, let me say in love, you are simply deceived.

d. I have found that specific truth (when practiced in my life) to be one that sets me free from an unrealistic expectation that my joy and happiness depends upon people (even those closest to me). Others cannot make me truly happy. I should not expect them to do so. For they are finite, changeable sinners just like me. Now obviously that doesn't mean I should condone their sin against God or against others. However, I should not be shocked when others fail God or disappoint me by their sin. If I am on that roller coaster where my joy in the Lord depends upon how others treat me, then I will never ever know the joy of the Lord in this life.

e. Now that's not a pessimistic outlook on life. That is simply a realistic outlook on life—a biblical outlook on life. That doesn't mean we are to hate and despise that person because he/she is not perfect, any more than he/she is to hate us because we are not perfect. Beloved, we are commanded to love one another with the same kind of love that Christ has shown to us, who are undeserving sinners, in laying down His life for us (1 John 3:16). Not because we see one another as worthy of that love, but because we are to love even the unworthy, as Christ has loved us who are unworthy.

f. The “seize the day” approach to life (or “go for the gusto” approach to life), wherein we believe joy and happiness consists in our enjoying everything life has to offer apart from Christ, may yield some temporal short-lived benefits. But that approach to life will fail. For, dear ones, God never intended the people or things of this life (that are changeable and perishable) to be that in which our joy and happiness consists. We are to enjoy the people and the things of this life as aids and helps to our joy, but not as the source of that joy. Only Christ, who never changes, is the source of our joy. So that even if every person, possession, and benefit in this life should be taken from us, we might still know and experience the joy of the Lord. And when we know and practice that truth, we will be able to enjoy rightly everything He has given to us in this life. Dear ones, this truth is really an incentive to growing in our knowledge and love of Christ. Our joy is Christ. We will be proportionately more miserable to the degree that we do not enjoy our Savior and the perfection of His blessed character and nature. What makes heaven so enjoyable to the saints there? There joy is made full because they are growing in their knowledge and love and enjoyment of who Christ is and all that He has accomplished for them. Take that away and you take away the joy of heaven.

2. Solomon then continues with his conclusion, that searching for joy in the earthly toil of man brings no lasting joy, when he explains in Ecclesiastes 3:10: “I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.”

a. In other words, Solomon is saying, “The conclusion I have drawn, that searching for joy in the earthly toil of man brings no lasting joy, is not one I read in a philosophy book or learned in a philosophy class. It is a conclusion I came to based upon what “I have seen” and observed in the pursuits of men to find a lasting joy and happiness (no doubt his own pursuits as well as those of others).

b. Note how Solomon states that the “travail” or hard labor exercised by man is given to man by God (“which God hath given to the sons of men”). In other words, man sinfully tries to find joy in his work rather than in Christ, and the Lord ordains man to work feverishly in such a way so that man may see the utter futility of searching for a lasting joy in the people and things of this world. It is God’s work to bring you and me to that sense of hopelessness in finding joy in the people and things of this world. Why? So that we might find our true enjoyment supremely in the Lord who never changes—so that the beauty of His holiness, wisdom, love, and power might be our chief delight—so that the works of creation, providence, and salvation might be our constant praise and thanksgiving—so that His promises, which are ever faithful and true, might be our certain hope.

c. Dear ones, our frustration over the way that our plans do not work out (even if those plans are good plans) is God’s way of showing us the futility of our own work in bringing a lasting joy. It is God’s way of turning us to Himself, whose plans always work out, who is never frustrated, who is never caught by surprise, who knows all things, and ordains all things for His own glory and for the good of them who love Him. God ordains your frustration with people, plans, and life in order to show you ever so clearly that a lasting joy and happiness cannot be found there, but must be found in Christ alone. Are you learning from your frustration what God is teaching you? Just as pain should tell you something is wrong that needs to be fixed in your body, so frustration should tell you something is wrong that needs to be fixed in your soul. The remedy to your frustration is Christ, for He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He wants to make your joy full more than you want your joy to be full, dear child of God.

II. Searching for Joy in the Eternal Purpose of God Brings a Lasting Joy (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

A. Whereas Solomon declares the search for joy in the labor of man yields no profit, he yet explains the search for joy in the eternal purpose of God yields great profit: “He (that is, God) hath made every thing beautiful in his time.”

1. Here is the cure to the frustration of man, whose hard work and diligent plans seem to

be foiled and spoiled at every turn. God by His inscrutable wisdom has made all of the events that occur in your life and mine (even those that are most ugly to us) beautiful in His time. The verb in the English version “hath made” is in the Hebrew perfect tense which carries the sense that it is already accomplished (that is, He has already made everything beautiful in His time). In eternity, dear ones, before creation, God perfectly knit together His plan for your life and mine in such a way that every detail of it will bring Him glory, and would ultimately bring us profit as the children of the living God. Nothing in our lives will be wasted or be unnecessary. Nothing in our lives as viewed from a heavenly perspective will ultimately be ugly. No trial, no heartache, no affliction, no delay, no set back, and no offense will accidentally appear on the Divine radar screen of our lives. There will be an ordained purpose for it all. And there will be a good end for it all in glorifying God and in benefiting His people. And obviously, because God has already made all things beautiful from eternity, then He shall yet make them beautiful in the future.

2. I believe it is impossible to find an enduring joy in this life apart from resting in this truth. For how can you find joy in this life if there is neither rhyme nor reason for all the ugly events that occur? There, my friends, is a certain formula for hopelessness and despair. But where there is confidence and hope in a most wise and loving God who has ordained beauty and shall bring beauty out of ugliness, bring glory out of shame, bring hope out of despair, bring rejoicing out of tears, bring thanksgiving out of criticism, bring leaping, and shouting, and praising God out of pain and misery, and bring a trophy of His grace out of the chief of sinners, there will you find a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

3. We may not live to see all wrongs righted and all ugliness made beautiful. But in God’s time (whether now or in heaven), we will see it. When we reach that heavenly shore, we will have heaven’s perspective on all the miseries of this life. Then we will see the beauty of God’s wisdom in ordaining what He did in our lives. Then it will all make sense to us. Then the veil will be lifted from our eyes. But in the mean time while we now see only dimly, let us strive to grow in having heaven’s perspective. Let us cling to the truth that God has already made that illness, that death, that besetting sin, that divorce, that separation, that offense, that poverty, that set back beautiful in His time. Our comfort, our peace of mind, and our contentment in the midst of the greatest miseries of this life, dear ones, rest in the fact that our loving God has made and shall make it all beautiful in His time. To the degree that this is our conscious hope, to that degree we will know the joy of the Lord.

4. We have certain examples in Scripture in which we see the trials and miseries of life transformed into something beautiful. Joseph was hated by his brothers and sold into captivity, but was made the governor of Egypt to save the very brothers who hated him. Naaman, the Syrian general, contracted the dreaded disease of leprosy, but was humbled and made whole by God so as to take the salvation of God back to his people in Syria. Job was severely afflicted and tried, but was upheld by the Lord, healed, and restored two-fold of all that he previously possessed. The cruel torments of the Lord in suffering the wrath of God and of man became our salvation from sin, death, and hell. There are many such examples in Scripture that are given for our encouragement to cling to the Lord, who has made and shall make everything beautiful in His time. Joseph’s bondage, Naaman’s leprosy, Job’s miseries, and Christ’s suffering did not seem beautiful at the time from man’s perspective. But from heaven’s perspective they were all beautiful. For God had already made them beautiful from eternity. Are you resting in that truth today? I am not saying that we should not see the ugliness of sin and the misery of sin within us and all around us and should not mourn the effects of sin. What I am saying (and what Solomon is saying by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) is that joy in this life must look beyond this life to Him who has made and shall make all things beautiful in His time.

B. Let me quickly note that Solomon adds to his conclusion two thoughts in Ecclesiastes 3:11.

1. The first thought is this: “Also he hath set the world in their heart.” I would submit that a better and more accurate translation is, “he hath set eternity in their heart.” This Hebrew word (*olam*)

carries the meaning of “eternity” or “forever” almost always in its use in the Old Testament (particularly here in Ecclesiastes 2:16; 3:14; 9:6). There are a few times when this Hebrew word (*olam*) is translated as “world” (Psalm 73:12; Isaiah 14:17; Isaiah 64:4). However, here in Ecclesiastes 3:11, I would submit the word should have its ordinary meaning of “eternity.” God has placed eternity in the hearts of men. What does that mean, and how does that fit in with what Solomon is concluding?

a. Solomon means that God has created man with knowledge of eternity, so that all men know in their heart of hearts that this world is not all there is to life. There is in all men an implanted, innate knowledge of the eternal God. That is why man seeking joy and happiness in only that which is temporal and earthly can never find that for which he searches. He is fighting against himself. From his innermost being comes the truth, that he must seek joy in the everlasting God, but man suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (according to Paul in Romans 1:18-20). Thus, man argues himself out of the true joy that he seeks. Such is the corruption of sin within all men until God sets us free to embrace the eternal Son of God, who is the joy of man’s inner most desiring.

b. How does this truth fit in with the fact that God has already made everything beautiful in His time? Solomon states there are two things God has accomplished that show us the earth is not the source of our joy: (1) God has from eternity made everything beautiful in His time (which ultimately is fulfilled in heaven); (2) God has from the beginning of creation given to man knowledge of the source of true joy—the eternal God. Thus, man will never find true joy in that which is perishable and changeable. Dear ones, let us not fight against ourselves. For we each one know the bitter struggle of seeking to find a lasting joy in the things of this world. But we know within, it cannot be found there. God has given us that innate knowledge. He has created us with that knowledge. Let us not fool ourselves or deceive ourselves or lie to ourselves when we know in our heart of hearts that it cannot be so.

2. The final thought in Ecclesiastes 3:11 is this: “so that (or even better “yet”) no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.” In other words, although an innate knowledge of the eternal God is implanted deep in the heart of every person, yet no one can fully comprehend the eternal God or His eternal purpose. Certainly, no one can stop fighting with himself, stop deceiving himself, stop lying to himself about God and His eternal purpose, for we are all dead in our trespasses and sins. We by nature hate the light of God’s knowledge within us. We despise this true knowledge of God and of our own sinful corruption. So we exchange the truth of God for what makes us feel good, so that we make ourselves to be god. Thus, people do not find out the work and purpose of God due to their sin. But people also do not fully comprehend the work and purpose of God due to their finiteness, their own human limitations and boundaries. God’s grace alone removes this hostility to the eternal God and to His truth. And in this life, it is our privilege to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. But neither in this life (whatever degree of sanctification to which we might attain), nor in the life to come, shall we ever fully comprehend the eternal God and His eternal purposes. There will always be a cloud to some degree, because the finite (even the perfected finite in heaven) cannot fully comprehend the infinite God. But what we will know and understand about our God will be to us an ever increasing source of everlasting joy and happiness. Dear ones, you were created to know the eternal God and to find your joy in Him.

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