

Our Times Are in His Hands
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15
Reading: Romans 8:28-39

Bethany Baptist Church
March 10, 2019 (p.m.)
November 27, 2011 (a.m.)

What if your *banker* called you tomorrow morning and told you to *sit down & take out your calculator!*

Someone had just bequeathed you a *wonderful* but *conditional* gift.

Every day, for the rest of your life, this unnamed benefactor will deposit **86,400 pennies** in your checking account. Your fingers are already *dancing* on the *keypad!*

That's **\$864** a day, **7** days/wk, **52** wks/yr, until the day you *die*.

Over **\$315K** yearly. You are already *polishing the fender* of that new car!

Now...did he say – *conditional!* **Yes** – you have to spend it ***all*** every day.

Whatever is left of those **86,400 pennies** at *midnight*, is just *gone!*

You think to yourself – ***no problem!***

Well, let's be a little more *realistic!*

Every day, for the rest of your life, you are the beneficiary of **86,400 seconds** posted to your account. That's **24, 60-minute hours**. **7** days/wk, **52** wks/yr, until the day you *die*.

Spend them *any way you can*, but at the *end* of the day, they're *gone!*

A wise man once day, "***Life is like a coin***. *You can spend it any way you want, but you can only spend it **once!***"

Is your OT opened to Eccl 3? Let's read vv.1-15. God *appoints & super-intends* the *moments* (*seasons, events*) of each man's *life*, and only *God* can give them *joy & purpose*.

Solomon, the *poet of 1005 songs*, dedicates a *ballad* to the *God who orders all things* under heaven:

1. **3:1-8** – We hear Solomon's *ballad sung*.
2. **3:9-15** – We find Solomon's *song interpreted* .

Again, here is the *poet's theme*: God has *prescribed* the days of your life, and only *He* can *enrich* them! ...pray...

Solomon pens a poem about life!

1. The poet *pauses* in the midst of his *quest for fulfillment*, and *reflects* on what he's *found* so far. Even though this poem is a *new page* in Solomon's *documentary*, there is a *connection* to what we've already studied.
 - a. Glance back w/ me at **2:24-25**: *our labors (life); ...our labors are from God; ...our labors only fulfill if He blesses.*
 - b. *Our labors (life) & God's blessings.* Solomon now unfolds the *times & events* of all our *labors* in his timeless ballad.

2. Solomon first *introduces* his song with an unadorned *explanation* of its inspired *theme (re-read v.1)*.
 - a. Don't rush by that word *appointed*. The times of your life don't just *happen*, randomly, they're *appointed*. But *how...by whom?* (More on that in a *few minutes!*)
 - b. Our poem has **14 couplets (2-8)**. Each is comprised of a simple *contrast (opposite)*. As if Solomon is *staking-out the parameters, boundaries, the fence-posts* that *circumscribe* every man & woman's life.
 - c. Some of his *contrasts* can be understand quiet *literally*, but some seem to be *metaphors* (word-pictures) that *open the windows & shine light* on how we live.
 - d. *Glance* back over the poem (**pause**) – care to *guess* what Solomon's *keyword* is? **Time (28x; 30x** including the intro in v.1)!
 - e. There is a *surface meaning* for this sonnet: ***“Consider the stuff of life under the sun!”*** But Solomon's *real theme* is much more wonderful & thought-provoking: *God orders the events of life, and only He can make life worth living!*

3. Let's *unravel* our ballad, **one** or **two** lines at a time... (**Re-read 1-8?**)
- a. *A time to give birth & time to die.* Solomon begins w/ the **two** most *fundamental* events of life: *birth & death*. No one escapes them! The Bible reminds us that God has *appointed* the day of your *conception* & the day of your *death* (& everything *in between!*): **Psa139: 16** – *Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were **all** written, the days what were **ordained** for me, when as yet there was not one of them.*
 - b. *A time to plant & a time to uproot what is planted.* Every farmer & gardener knows there is a right time to *plant*. Plant too early, & *frost* will get you. Plant too *late*, you lose precious days of *sun & rain*. When the time is right, you *harvest*. *Life* is like that. God has fixed a *timetable*. Sometimes He *plants* you. ... *roots you up* (*prunes you*).
 - c. *A time to kill & a time to heal.* Sometimes life is a *battlefield*, & sometimes it's the *aid-station*. **Hos 6:1** [God] *has torn, and He will heal us; He has smitten, and He will bind us up.*
 - d. *A time to tear down & a time to build up.* Kingdoms & cities & homes & *lives* are often *torn down*. But they can also be *rebuilt*.
 - e. *A time to weep & a time to laugh.*
 - f. *A time to mourn & a time to dance.*
 - i. These **two** couplets seem closely bound together. The seasons we've just seen in **vv.2-3** seem to culminate here: *death, killing, tearing down* suggest *loss & sorrow & weeping & mourning*.
 - ii. The Bible also teaches that there are *spiritual seasons* for *weeping & mourning*. We are called to *mourn* over our sins (**Jas. 4**) – *be miserable & mourn & weep*.
 - iii. Sometimes *pain & sadness* have nothing to do w/ *sin*, but God has still appoints them to get *your attention!* **C.S.Lewis** wrote, *Pain is God's megaphone. He whispers to us in our pleasure, but He shouts to us in our pain.* Important things become *clear* in tough times.
 - iv. Life is not all *trials*. *Birth & healing & building-up* suggest *gain & happiness & laughter & dancing* (lit. *skip about!*)

- g. *A time to throw stones & a time to gather stones.*
- h. *A time to embrace & a time to shun embracing.*
- i. Swindoll suggest these **two** pairs are tied together, & that they speak of *confrontation & affirmation*. Sometimes we must *admonish* one another (*stones are carefully thrown*). But then we are called to *reconcile* (*embrace, to gather up*).
- i. *A time to search & a time to give up as lost.* Life is filled with *dilemmas & very hard choices*. Sometimes you have to *cut your losses*. Beloved, sometimes you need to reevaluate your *pursuits & your priorities & give up on lesser things*, so you can *focus on the eternal*.
- j. *A time to keep & a time to throw away.* This guy's been looking in my *garage!* Another call to set *eternal priorities*. Maybe your life has a little *excess baggage*.
- k. *A time to tear apart & a time to sew together.* Sometimes a *seamstress* has to *pull out* a seam, in order to *stitch it up* right. Christian, has God ever *mended* your life like that?
- l. *A time to be silent & a time to speak.* The Bible has so much to say about *speech*, and here is a *huge lesson*. We always need the reminder to *silence*. To simply *forebear*. To refrain from saying, "*I told you so.*" To stop *criticizing & complaining*. But there *is* a time to *speak*. To *encourage*. To *comfort*. To *speak-up* to defend the *right & the truth*. Paul, in chains, asked for *prayer* in **Eph 6**: he wanted boldness to speak of the cross: *Pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known w boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*
- m. *A time to love & a time to hate.* The Bible teaches that *we love* because *God first loved us*, then demonstrates that love in the *death* of Christ in the *place* of sinners. But Solomon's **second** statement makes us *squirm*. Is there a *time to hate*? Beloved, this truth is all over your Bible – read the (**e.g.**) *psalms!* Christians, *holiness means to love what God loves & to hate what God hates.* (2x)

- n. *A time for war & a time for peace.* Who doesn't want *peace*? But *peace* isn't free. There are *just & necessary* wars. But the king's final *statement* is his *crowning statement*, & the *goal* of every just war: ***peace***. Jesus taught, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.*"

Times. Seasons. Life. God has appointed a time for everything...every event under heaven.

What does the poet's ballad mean? There more here than a catalog of man's beginnings & endings, and highs & lows!

→

1. I have a *confession* to make that is sure to *date* me. I can't *read* Solomon's *ballad* w/o hearing a *noise* in the back of head. It's the sound of a *jangly guitar & questionable harmony*. In **1965** a folk-rock band called *The Byrds* did a *cover* of Solomon's song – "*Turn! Turn! Turn!*" The problem is, *The Byrds* *lifted* all of Solomon's *poetry* w/o offering any of his *explanation*. But as we come to **vv.9-15**, Solomon does *better*! **Let's re-read vv.9-15.**

2. On the surface, Solomon's poem catalogs *life's boundaries*. When the Preacher refers to *toil & to task* in **vv.9&10**, he is looking *straight back* at the *times & events* of **vv.1-8**.
 - a. Immediately, he strikes a familiar cord: *what profit is there?* We've seen this term, *profit*, already (**1:3**). Solomon keeps reminding us that *fulfillment & making a difference* are bound together.

 - b. You can't miss the king's *troubled* tone. A question of *profit* is not so far removed from Eccl's theme of *vanity*. If these things, *high & low, first & last*, are all there is to life, then *what's the point?* Indeed, this seems to start w/ an *echo* of **1:13** – *It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.* (*grievous* → The Fall)

3. But then, Solomon *directs* our thoughts *above the sun*, and above a *superficial understanding* of his sonnet, and reminds us that God is in *control* & God gives *meaning to life*.
- a. *He has made everything appropriate in its time (v.11)*. That's how my **NASB** translates the Hebrew, but every commentary agrees, a better rendering is *beautiful* – *He has made everything beautiful in its time!*
 - i. You could say that this *single declaration* captures Solomon's *entire ballad!* The “everything” of **v.11** sums up the *times* of **vv.1-8**.
 - ii. Not that everything always *seems* beautiful, but God *makes* it so. Similarly, **Rm 8:28** teaches that *God causes all things to work together for good, for those who love Him & are called according to His purpose*. **Eph 1:11** promises that *God works all things after the counsels of His will*. These are declarations of God's *sovereignty* - God is in *control*.
 - b. God works in the *seasons* of our lives, and God has worked in *us*. Solomon says God *has also set eternity in their heart*. Do you understand? You have a *conscience*. You have a *spirit*. God's witness is *evident w/in you (Rm 1)*. God's law is *inscribed in your heart (Rm 2)*. You understand that *death* is not the *end*, and God is *Judge*, and *eternity is real!* God gives us the capacity to see things from an *eternal perspective*, & that's the key to *meaning*.
 - i. That does *not* mean you'll understand *everything* you experience. There are many *difficult & troubling* times in each man & woman's life. Times that don't seem *right or good*.
 - ii. You will be tempted to either *accuse or defend* God. God doesn't need a *lawyer!* Here is His *answer (Dt 29:29)*: *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us & to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law*.

4. Solomon wraps up his poetry explanation w/ **two** lessons; he introduces each w/ the expression *I know* (v.12, then v.14).
- a. **V.12 (Lesson 1) - *I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice & do good.*** Here is a huge step towards *fulfillment* in all the times & events of life. *Rejoice in each season! Do good as God prescribes! Do more than exist - appreciate your **labor** (work is not a curse) –life’s tasks & times are God’s gifts for your good!*
 - i. Here is Solomon’s point: only God gives the gift of *fulfilling labor*.
 - b. **V. 14 (Lesson 2) - *I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it & there is nothing to take from it.*** The correct focus in Solomon’s *poem*, as in *life*, is on *God*, not *man*.
 - i. Did you catch that word, *everything*, again (cf. v.11 → vv.1-8). ***Everything*** God does is *beautiful, eternal, complete, unchanging*.
 - ii. The result is to create a *holy fear* of God in the *life* of man. The *fear of God is beginning of wisdom*. Godly wisdom points the way to *meaning...fulfillment*.
5. Bible teachers *puzzle* over the translation & meaning of **v.15 (read)**. Solomon has already talked about this. *Nothing new under the sun!* Not in *your life*, nor in mine. That’s why we all *identify* w/ Solomon’s ballad!
- a. Finally, *God seeks that which is passed by...* (?) One teacher says, & I think it works, that ***life’s lessons*** are never really *new*. If necessary, God will arrange life so you’ll *repeat* the lessons you are *slow to learn* or *quick to forget!*

Here is Solomon’s ballad: God controls (appoints) the affairs of men, and only God gives the gift of *lasting fulfillment*.

Solomon has set some very *fundamental & eternal truths* to verse!

Our times are appointed by God. His *sovereignty* (rule) is the fundamental truth that undergirds Solomon's song.

Our times ("everything") are made *beautiful* by God! Solomon's words are the OT version of the NT promise that *God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

We are *spiritual* creatures. We aren't *animals* – we are made in *God's image*. We have an intuitive sense of the *eternal*.

We *won't* understand everything God does. Yet, Scripture boldly asserts that *God is good & does good*. You have to *trust* God. *For w/o faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

We won't experience *fulfillment* (meaning, make a difference, joy) w/o a relationship w/ God. We don't have the instinctive ability to *enjoy life* for long (*contentment*). **V.13** – *To see good in all [one's] labor ... is the gift of God.*

Our lives are a lot *alike*. Our *highs* & our *lows*. That's why we all *resonate* with Solomon's ballad! Beloved, our *shared experience* should encourage *understanding & sympathy & love!*

...pray... There is an appointed time for everything because you are our King!
You are good & do good.
Help us to trust you.

Your days are *appointed* (→ *numbered*)! There is a powerful emphasis on *time & eternity* in God's words.

Are you *reconciled* to God? The Bible declares that Jesus Christ is the *only* way to experience the gift of *abundant life* God offers. His death on the cross *paid for sins*. His resurrection from the dead *guarantees eternity is real & available*.

The only condition is your *faith & repentance*. Are you *in Christ*?

Can I share the Gospel w/ you? Come *speak* w/ me. *Call* me. *Text* me. **FB** me!