

ECCLESIASTES 3

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

The litany of “times and seasons” which open this chapter seems to be intended to point back to the question which Solomon asks again in verse 9: “What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?” Deeply impressed as he was with a sense of the vanity of earthly things, he utters his conviction that man cannot – even by the most strenuous toil – acquire from these things a happiness which will truly satisfy his nature. He records the experiments which he himself had made in his search after the chief good of life. He had tried the acquisition of knowledge; he had tried the pursuit of pleasure and luxury; he had tried the amassing of wealth; and he had found each, in turn, to be vanity and a feeding upon wind. His great knowledge brought him great grief; his pleasure brought weariness; his wealth brought anxiety and apprehension. None of these things could bring him the satisfaction and enjoyment which he craved.

And now, in this catalog of “times and seasons,” the Preacher produces another consideration which shows how greatly man is restricted in his most strenuous endeavors to make himself happy. These various kinds of “times” all indicate that human actions and their outcomes are subject to the controlling influence of a Divine Order which runs through human life. Sometimes this order manifests itself in events which are simply inevitable – before which, the will of man is utterly powerless. Thus, circumstances over which he himself has not the slightest control may bring him to his “time to weep” or his “time to die.” At other times, the Divine Order manifests itself in certain arrangements which man cannot alter; but he may easily recognize them, and use them to his own advantage. There is a “time to plant,” and a time to gather and harvest the fruits of the earth; but if a man attempts to get his harvest at seedtime, he will fail (obviously!). Then, again, there is an order that is not so easily discernible, according to which the outcomes of human action do not always correspond with the opportuneness of such action. A man may be “breaking down” at the time when he ought to be “building up.” He may be “keeping” when he ought to be “casting away.” He may be “silent” when he ought to be “speaking.”

What are some lessons that we may draw from this portion of the chapter? In the first place, God is a Sovereign King, Who works all things according to His own eternal plan. We are surprised at sudden and unexpected events; but He cannot be surprised, for all things are always present to His mind. This is a consoling truth! Is it not much more comforting to believe that God so arranges human affairs that they cannot be changed to be any better, than to imagine that the universe is a mighty maze without a plan? In the arms of such a God, we may

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *The various situations in life are all controlled by the Lord's hand – verses 1-15*
- ❖ *Solomon speaks of the certainty of mortality, and of a future life after death – verses 16-22*

repose in safety; for such a Father will uphold our footsteps in the hour of danger!

Second, everything is beautiful in its time; for all things are managed by the Lord for some great purpose, and He has appointed them for a glorious future. To us, many objects now seem to be anything but beautiful. The storm that destroys the forest and desolates the city is sublime in its terrific grandeur; but to us, it is not beautiful. Sickness, epidemics, tears, woe, and death have no beauty for mortal eyes. But as we look upon the toils, crosses, and tears of our loved ones, we see the precursors of their elevation in robes of white which are washed in the blood of the Lamb. If we could only see the entirety of God's Providence, instead of a part thereof – then the dark cloud would be tinged with rainbow beauty!



Third, we must avail ourselves of the right time to do the work of that time. Not only has God made everything beautiful in its time, but every person also has his time in which he is to do his work and make it beautiful. "There is a time for every work under heaven" (verse 1). The Lord has done all His work at the right time. The Creation of the world, its destruction by the Flood, the call of Abraham, the coming of the glorious Messiah, the Reformation, the discovery and opening up of the New World, all of the revolutions recorded in history, and the spread of the Gospel – all of these have been in the right time! But God has called on us to do our work in the right time also! We must sow in seedtime if we wish to reap a harvest. Before he closes his sermon in this Book, Solomon tells us what is the right time to serve God: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth!" Jesus *now* stands at the door, and knocks. "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation!" It was Noah's time to enter the Ark when it was finished – and before the door was shut. It was also the time when others ought to have entered. It was Abraham's time to believe and to sojourn in the land of promise, when God called him. When Jesus said, "Follow me!" – then it was the time for Peter, James, and John to arise, leave all, and follow Him. If they had refused, the great mercy of being His disciples and sharing in His glory would have been for others, and not for them. It was the time for Lydia and her family to have their hearts opened, when Paul proclaimed the message of salvation in the little prayer meeting on the banks of the river. It was the time for blind Bartimaeus to receive his sight and follow, when Christ was passing by. To the readers and listeners of these words, Jesus is *now* offered! *Now* is the accepted time, and *now* is the day of salvation! This could very well be the last opportunity for you to believe and be saved. "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts!"

Lord, we repent of hardening our stubborn hearts against the light of the Gospel. We pray for grace to believe on Jesus when He is now offered to us, for now is the accepted time and the day of salvation! Amen.