

“An Appointed Time”  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15  
(Preached at Trinity, April 30, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Thus far in Ecclesiastes Solomon has investigated the activities of human existence in a fallen world. In particular, he gives an appraisal of life without God.  
**Ecclesiastes 1:2 NAU** - "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."
  - A. He has examined the labors that fill our lives.  
**Ecclesiastes 1:3 NAU** - "What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?"  
What "advantage?" What "profit?"  
It is a rhetorical question with the expectation of a negative answer.  
There is no value, all is vanity.
  - B. Then Solomon called attention to the brevity of life.  
**Ecclesiastes 1:4 NAU** - "A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever."  
There are countless generations of men.
    1. People come and go and are soon forgotten.
    2. Of all our pride in the things we accomplish is vanity. Without eyes fixed upon God with a hope of eternity, all is vain.  
"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity"
  - C. Solomon then explored the depths of human wisdom. Again, it is all futility.  
**Ecclesiastes 1:13 NAU** - "And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven."  
It was the same conclusion:  
**Ecclesiastes 1:17 NAU** - "And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind."  
**Ecclesiastes 1:14 NAU** - "all is vanity and striving after wind."
  - D. What about pleasure? Surely pleasure would provide meaning and purpose in life.  
**Ecclesiastes 2:1-2 NAU** - "I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility. <sup>2</sup> I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?"
2. Solomon's point in this Book is that life only has value when we live with our focus on God.  
**Ecclesiastes 12:13 NAU** - "The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person."  
**Ecclesiastes 12:13 KJV** - "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man."

3. Now we come to **Chapter 3**. We find words that have often been repeated. Pop songs have been recorded. Most know the well-known song written by Pete Seeger and then popularized by the Byrds that was inspired by this poetic chapter – “Turn, Turn, Turn.” – “There is a season, turn, turn, turn.”
- A. Paul’s point here is the flipside of what we saw in the first chapter. Paul previously lamented that nothing changes. There is nothing new. The labors we do today have been repeated over and over throughout history.  
**Ecclesiastes 1:9 NAU** - "That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun."
- B. Now, we find that the opposite is also true. We live in a world of change. There is a continuous cycle of events, each occurring in their own predetermined time. Matthew Henry: “We live in a world of changes, that the several events of time, and conditions of human life, are vastly different from one another, and yet occur promiscuously, and we are continually passing and repassing between them.”<sup>1</sup>
- I. First, we observe the seasons of life in poetic form – Solomon puts our mutability on display. He is describing life in our fallen world. There is a time for every season in the human experience. We pass from one season to the next.  
**Ecclesiastes 3:1 NAU** - "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--"  
**Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAU** - "He has made everything appropriate in its time."
- A. First, we find the ultimate – the beginning and the end.  
"A time to give birth and a time to die;"
1. Since the fall of Adam death has been the condition of humanity
  2. We are born, we die. There is an appointed time for each of us to die. Each of us have an expiration date.
- B. We find the productivity of our labors, but also the breaking down of what we build. Again, it describes life in this fallen world.  
"A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted."  
"A time to tear down and a time to build up."  
"A time to tear apart and a time to sew together"
- C. We find the continuous cycle of human sin and brutality, war and peace.  
"A time to kill and a time to heal"  
"A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones"  
"A time for war and a time for peace."
1. This doesn’t mean that all killing is evil or all war is evil  
There is Biblical justification for capital punishment.  
And there are Biblical principles for just war.
  2. But death and war and execution are all in the context of a fallen world.  
Words like kill and weep and mourn and hate and war are all given in the context of sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1034.

- D. We find the endless of cycle of joy and sorrow.  
 “A time to weep and a time to laugh”  
 “A time to mourn and a time to dance”
1. Life is filled with both laughter and weeping.
  2. Surely, laughter is to be preferred. But Solomon declared that apart from God even joyous times are empty:  
**Ecclesiastes 2:2 NAU** - "I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?"
- E. Solomon describes the endless cycle of loss and discovery, of keeping and of throwing away.  
 “A time to search and a time to give up as lost”  
 “A time to keep and a time to throw away”
- F. Finally, we find the endless fluctuation of the fickle human heart in a fallen world  
 “A time to be silent and a time to speak.”  
 “A time to love and a time to hate”  
 “A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.”

- II. There are constant seasons of change, but we need to understand the hand that controls each season of life.  
**Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 NAU** - "I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. <sup>11</sup> He has made everything appropriate in its time."
- A. God’s purposes are fixed and unchangeable
1. There is an appointed season for everything  
**Ecclesiastes 3:1 NAU** - "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--"
  2. It refers to a fixed time, a specific time.  
 The word “time” occurs 30 times in **Verses 1-8**  
 God is the God of time but nothing is random or arbitrary. God determines every moment of time that passes. Solomon declares there is a season for everything that happens.
  3. God determines everything. No one can change God’s sovereign purpose  
**Ecclesiastes 3:14 NAU** - "I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it"
- B. From our perspective God’s purposes are secret
1. Who can know the mind of God? There are things He does not permit us to know.  
**Acts 1:7 NAU** - "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;"  
**Deuteronomy 29:29 NAU** - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."
  2. God has made us inquisitive about eternity but who can comprehend eternity?  
**Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAU** - "He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end."

3. God's purposes are beyond our control. It humbles us. In a world where fallen man thinks he is in control, God continually reminds us that He reigns.  
1689 London Baptist Confession –  
**Chapter 5: Of Divine Providence**  
*1. God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.*
4. What we do know is that God's ways are perfect.  
**Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAU** - "He has made everything appropriate in its time."  
Literally it reads: "Everything is beautiful in its time."

III. Finally, beginning with **Verse 12** Solomon once again makes the contrast between life without God in this fallen world and life before God – life Coram Deo, in the presence of God.

- A. There is nothing better than to live out their days in the light of God's pleasure.  
**Ecclesiastes 3:12 NAU** - "I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime"
  1. The expression "to do good" should be seen in its moral sense, that is, good as God's sees good, good as God defines good. It is at the heart of holiness.  
Goodness is that which flows from a redeemed heart.  
Goodness is impossible for the unregenerate.  
**Romans 3:10-12 NAU** - "as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."
  2. The word "rejoice" carries the idea of genuine happiness.
  3. Solomon is telling us there is nothing better than to be holy and happy.  
This describes man before the fall.  
Question 21 of the Children's Catechism:  
Q. In what condition did God make Adam and Eve?  
A. He made them holy and happy.
- B. In light of the all-encompassing sovereign rule of God He deserved all reverence.  
**Ecclesiastes 3:14 NAU** - "for God has so worked that men should fear Him."
  1. To fear God is to rest in Him, to trust His sovereign direction, to live before Him in reverence.
  2. To live life before God is to live life for His glory. We don't know the details of tomorrow but we can trust Him and give ourselves to laboring for Him.
  3. Paul described time as a commodity that needs to be carefully protected.  
**Ephesians 5:15-16 NAU** - "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of your time, because the days are evil."

**Conclusion:**

1. It takes great wisdom to navigate the many seasons of life. God has a time for everything. But not having the omniscience of God's perfect knowledge we must continually seek His divine direction. God, help me to do the right thing at the right time.  
**Proverbs 3:5-6 KJV** - "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. <sup>6</sup> In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."
2. Today is our time. We must labor today. Puritan, Thomas Boston told his congregation: "Each generation has its work assigned it by the sovereign Lord; and each person in the generation has his also. And now is our time. We could not be useful in the generation that went before us; for then we were not: nor can we [be useful] personally in that which shall come after us; for then we shall be off the stage. Now is our time; let us not neglect usefulness in our generation."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 95.