

“A Time for the Present”
Ecclesiastes 3:21-22
(Preached at Trinity, May 21, 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. The Book of Ecclesiastes is a look at life through the eyes of Solomon. Fifteen times we read the repeated, “I have seen . . .”
Solomon's conclusion in all his observations 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."
2. **Chapter 3** has maintained a focus on God's sovereignty. God has a time and place for everything that happens upon the face of the earth. There is a time for every season in the human experience. We pass from one season to the next.
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.”¹
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."
3. There are constant seasons of change, but we need to understand the hand that controls each season of life.
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"
 - 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.

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

- B. 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.
1. 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"
 2. 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.
4. Now, as we come to the close of **Chapter 3** Solomon concludes by reminding us to keep time in its proper perspective. Both the present age and the age to come have their proper place. 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.”²
5. **Verse 22** corrects some of the faulty thinking of well-meaning Christians with regard to this present life and our eye upon eternity.
- I. We all know, Christians should maintain an eternal perspective
- A. Solomon says in **Verse 11** that God has put eternity upon our heart
Ecclesiastes 3:11 NAU - "He has made everything appropriate in its time. 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."
1. This is consistent with Paul’s teaching in the New Testament
Colossians 3:1-2 NAU - "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."
 2. In fact, Paul warns against those who place the chief interests upon their earthly affairs.
Philippians 3:18-20 NAU - "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"

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

B. Life on earth is temporary and fleeting

1. As Christians we know this earth is not our final abode. We must never make this life our chief treasure. Since we know our sojourn here is only temporary we must not set our roots too deeply.
Hebrews 11:13 NAU - "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."
2. In Ecclesiastes Solomon often speaks of the brevity of this life.
Ecclesiastes 6:12-7:1 NAU - "For who knows what is good for a man during *his* lifetime, *during* the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun? "
3. Solomon's conclusion is if this life is all you have it is all futility.
Ecclesiastes 1:14 NAU - "I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind."
Ecclesiastes 2:11 NAU - "Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun."

II. On the other hand, we should see our life on earth as significant. This is our time. "for that is his lot"

Ecclesiastes 2:24 NAU - "There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God."

Ecclesiastes 3:22 NAU - "I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?"

A. Solomon is saying in everything there is a time and season. This is the season for living.

1. We have our earthly vocation, our calling through which we find great joy. "I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot."
 - a. We should see our work as our Divine appointment.
 - b. We should find joy in our work, a sense of purpose.
Ecclesiastes 2:24 NAU - "There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God."
Bruce Ray describes the importance of work to human welfare – "We live in a world where people think that the less work you can do, the better off you are. But God, who made the world, says that the meaning of our existence is inseparable from the work we do. To deny the importance of work is to deny ourselves and eventually to destroy ourselves."³

³ Bruce Ray, *Celebrating the Sabbath*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing), 2000), 18.

2. Keeping an eye on eternity does not mean we abandon life.
Nor does it mean that earthly joy or earthly pleasure is sinful.
- B. God has provided for us not only to work but also to enjoy times of leisure.
Technically, anything that is not work is leisure.
 1. Leisure is not the same thing as idleness. It is not the absence of activity but the promotion of activities that have their own reward—i.e. mental, physical and spiritual refreshment.
 2. God has provided the Sabbath as a form of leisure and we should delight in it. It is a means of finding delight in God.
Isaiah 58:13-14 NAU - "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, From seeking your *own* pleasure And speaking *your own* word, ¹⁴ Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
 3. God means for us to enjoy life. God did not make creation for only strict utilitarian use, but also a place of beauty to be enjoyed.
Woe to those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, but that doesn't mean we are to be bereft of all pleasure.
 4. We find Christ enjoying times of leisure. He attended a wedding celebration where wine was served for the enjoyment of the guests. He did not condemn the celebration as a carnal or sinful activity.

Conclusion:

1. Solomon is saying there is a time for everything. There is a time for living. This is the only time we know.
We don't know what will occur after our life, either on the earth or in heaven.
2. We won't know the earth's affairs after we depart. Nor would they occupy our chief attention if we did. There is no Biblical justification for those who pretend their departed loved ones are watching over them or worse, praying for them.
The time for directing our attention to the affairs of this earth is now. This is our time.
3. The Christian's whole life should be under God's dominion. By "activities" Solomon is referring to everything that occupies our time. Nothing is better than to find joy in what we do.
4. The Christian has discovered true life.
 - A. He seeks to know Christ more in all that he does.
 - B. The Christian learns to enjoy Christ in the excellence of his vocation.
Putting out a truly great product manifests the splendor of God who does all things with perfection. A Christian craftsman of old might spend a whole week laboring over a single pair of shoes so that the finished product might be as perfect as possible.
 - C. We should also seek to know Christ more in our leisure.
It might be in pausing to gaze upon the wonder of God's creation.
It might be in pondering over works of art as they reflect the mark of our Creator reflected in human creativity.