

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 6TH, 2019 // BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING (ECCLESIASTES 3:1-11)

This first part of chapter 3 is perhaps the most recognizable and famous section from the book of Ecclesiastes. In this list of 14 opposite life events, we get this complete picture of reality and life on the earth. It's a picture of the nature of life that gives us the full range of human experiences.

- **Birth & Death** (vs. 2) **Planting & Plucking** (vs. 2) **Killing & Healing** (vs. 3) **Casting away stones & Gathering stones** (vs. 5) **Embracing & Refraining from Embracing** (vs. 5) **Seeking & Losing** (vs. 6) **Tearing & Mending** (vs. 7) **Loving & Hating** (vs. 8) **Peace & War** (vs. 8)

There's a few ways to interpret this poem- the first is that this poem is a quaint reflection on time and the appropriateness of certain actions.

- The 2nd is that this is a cynical, fatalistic commentary on just how helpless and transitory life actually is "under the sun".
- Our "life cycle" as humans is just as unimportant and insignificant as the life cycle of an insect- and we have no say in anything that happens to us.

But perhaps the best way to interpret this list poem is to consider what Solomon has to say after the poem in vs. 11- "He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time".

- What he's saying is that there are times and seasons in this life completely outside of our control, and yet there is an overruling providence in our lives.
- It's either completely meaningless, or completely meaningful.

From before our birth to the moment of our death, God is accomplishing His divine purposes, even though we don't always understand what He's doing.

- In these 14 statements, Solomon affirmed that God is at work in our individual lives seeking to accomplish His will.
- All of these events come from God, and they are good in their time.

To a person who only lives "under the sun", this is a list of random events you can expect in life.

- But to a person of faith, this is a list of things that God sends and orchestrates to achieve His purposes for your life in your allotted time.
- We wish it was a list of things we could pick and choose, but that's not how it works.
- It's a mixture of ingredients that brings about the beautiful purposes of God in our lives.

Solomon reminds us that life is a gift from God (vs. 10).

- In view of the burdens and sorrow we often experience from day to day, it seems like a strange gift, but it's a gift nonetheless.
- If we believe it's gift, we'll have a better attitude about the burdens that come our way.
- We'll understand that the sorrows and pains aren't meaningless- they're part of the gift.

Man's life is linked to eternity (vs. 11)- we've been made in the image of God, so we're different from the rest of creation.

- We have eternity in hearts so we're linked to heaven and therefore none of us can be fully satisfied with our endeavors, achievements, or the things of this world.
- This is the burden God has placed on us so we're not satisfied with the things of earth.

So that burden of dissatisfaction is designed to bring us to a place of desperation where we cry out to God- and He lifts our burden by showing us that we were created for Him and for eternity.

- And yet there's still always mystery- "...he cannot find out what God has done from beginning to the end." (vs. 11b)
- You and I will never fully know WHY- we will never know it all because mystery is a necessary ingredient for faith.

ACCEPTANCE (ECCLESIASTES 3:12-15)

When we get to place of trust in the providence of God and His ability to "make everything beautiful in its time" (vs. 11), we can then start enjoying life as it is.

- Again, this is not pagan hedonism, but rather the practice of gratefully enjoying God's gifts as the fruit of one's labor, no matter how difficult life may be.
- Enjoyment as an act of trust & worship.

Life appears to be temporary and transitory, but whatever God does "endures forever" (vs. 14), so when we live for Him and let Him have His way, life becomes meaningful and manageable.

- Vs. 15 is a bit of a mind bender it's basically telling us that there are no surprises to God, He's always sovereign, and He knows and is in control of the future. Some of us wonder then, "why try?"

If "that which is to be, already has been" (the future is predetermined), doesn't that make my choices artificial and meaningless?

- There's no doubt that this passage is telling us that God is completely in control- yet the Scriptures also portray God so great and wise enough to have a world in which the choices we make be authentic, yet they're never a surprise to Him.

Is God sovereign over all that happens? YES!

- Are we responsible for making wise and Godly choices in this life? YES!
- There is freedom and peace in knowing that God is fashioning a plan and purpose out of the seemingly "random" events in our lives and in our world.
- And the fruit of that trust in our life produces two great characteristics that can't be faked.

1. **Humility**- an acknowledgment that we're not as in control or powerful as we try to imagine we are, and we can't be solely credited for all the good things and blessings we enjoy in our lives.
2. **Security**- we can rest in the storms, trials, burdens, and pains in this life because we know that even when we can't understand, we know God is making everything beautiful in its time.

DUST TO DUST (ECCLESIASTES 3:16-22)

If God is working everything in our universe out for His beautiful purposes and plan, than what about the injustices in our day? (vs. 16)

- How can a good God be in control when there is so much evil in our world?
- God has a time for everything, including judgment (vs. 17), and God is STILL working out His purposes in and through the deeds of humanity, even the deeds of sinful humanity.

We all want justice and we want things to be set right, but what about our part in the injustice?

- When someone wrongs us we demand justice.
- But when we break the law and get pulled over for speeding, we want mercy.
- We want justice for others and mercy for ourselves.
- And yet God is in the business of providing both according to His appointed time and plans.

There is an appointed time, but Solomon reminds us that God is judging now (vs. 18).

- God is "testing" man- God is revealing what man is really like, for when a person leaves God out of their life, they become like an animal.
- They live like a "beast" and they die like a beast.
- We have to be careful with verses 19-20- Solomon isn't saying that there's no difference between people & animals.

He's simply pointing out that humans and beasts have two things in common: they both die and their bodies return to dust (Gen. 2:7).

- We're made in the image of God, so we're definitely not the same as animals, but when it comes to the reality of death, humans have no special advantages (vs. 19).
- They die, they're buried, and their body decomposes just like an animal's.

Without God in our lives, death is simply the end, but Solomon also recognizes the mystery of the afterlife in vs. 21.

- We all deep down know that there HAS to be life after death, but if it's just life "under the sun", who knows?
- Maybe it's just like the animals, or maybe "the spirit of man goes upward" (vs. 21).
- Without God, it's just one giant mystery.

The Preacher ends this section by reminding us to accept life from God's hands and enjoy it while we can (vs. 22).

- Nobody knows what the future holds; and even if we did know, we don't get a 2nd chance to enjoy the life we've been given.
- When we know that God is in complete control of life, of death, and of judgment- we can submit to Him and be at peace even in the absurdities & inconsistencies.

UNDERSTANDING THE MOSAIC

If you've not acknowledged the burden- the meaninglessness and purposelessness of life apart from God- that's your first step.

- If you've acknowledged it, but you've tried to cover it up with distractions and escapes, it'll only get worse.
- It's only when you surrender that burden to the one who gave it to you in the first place that you'll find rest.

If times are good, don't look for bad times.

- If times are bad, don't try to build up false hope by promising yourself things are going to change immediately, but rest assured that there's a season for everything.
- Be present- enjoy what you have now and let go and accept this as a part of His plan for you.