

There is a Time for Everything
Ecclesiastes 3
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 26, 2021

And with that said, in order to begin our sermon, I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Ecclesiastes. That's the book we're in today. So if you're here in the room, or if you're joining us from home online, please open your Bibles to the book of Ecclesiastes. And while you're turning there, this will be an unusual Sunday for us as a church for several reasons. But one is that we are only doing one sermon. Since we only have one service today, I only have one opportunity to preach to you. I usually have two or three. But it's kind of unfortunate, because we're studying a wonderful portion of God's Word and a very deep part. So I almost want a second crack at it today. So if you're not doing anything this afternoon at 12 o'clock, I'm going to try this again. Because there's so much to say about this portion of Scripture. When I read it, you're gonna see what I mean. If you look in Ecclesiastes, it's just the first verse of the book. It says,

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher,
“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

And then if you look down in chapter three, just to give you an example of this vanity that he's talking about, Solomon writes, and he says,

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—

A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.
A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.
A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.
A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.

What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

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.

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

We're going to end the reading there. Just by reading that text, you can see that there's some really deep stuff in here. And not only that, this is a very famous passage, which I'll say a few words about in just a moment. But before we get there, let me just introduce it this way. We're on the front end of a series in the book of Ecclesiastes that we're calling "Memoirs of a Wasted Life," because that's what it's about. This book is about how Solomon, the great king of Israel, wasted his life. And the main point of the book is found in the first few verses where it says,

"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

Some of your Bible translations say, "Meaningless! Meaningless! All is meaningless!" And that's a good way to render it. And he says this because in Jewish writing, the author would often put the most important point first in the book. He would often put the great idea in the front so you can track his thinking. And Solomon does it here to say, "Everything is useless to me, because my life has been lived in sin." The Midrash, or the rabbis' commentary on the Old Testament, said that Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes at the end of his life. It said he wrote Song of Solomon at the beginning, when everything was happy. You can read that book, and it just spills over with happiness. He's in love. He wrote the book of Proverbs in the middle when he was pretty wise, but he wrote Ecclesiastes at the end. Because the point is that as he did this, he says, "I've blown it. The whole point of life, I missed it," because he did it without God.

As I've told you before, Ecclesiastes, it's a hard book to understand, because the message is not very clear at first, because obviously all is not vanity. There's more to life than that, but not if you sin, and that is the message of the book. If you sin, all you get is despair and a life full of nothing. We've all known people that have come to the end of their lives and then just ended it almost in a drunken stupor, or they ended it on some kind of painkillers, because they didn't want to think about their life because their life was a waste. That was Solomon.

And to show you what he's talking about in the first chapter, he begins by giving you some examples of vanity from his life in the areas of wisdom and pleasure. In other words, he said he lived for wisdom, secular wisdom, and found no joy in that, because he camped out at the library. All he did was study, study, study all the time. He read every book he could find, found no joy in that. So then he goes the opposite direction, and he turns to pleasure. And he lives for partying. He parties all day. He drinks and drinks and drinks, every beer that he can find. That doesn't work either. So in chapter two, he turns to work and tries to find satisfaction in money. He becomes a workaholic, spending all his time at the office, all his days at the shop. But he says at the end of this of chapter two and verse 26, he says,

This too is vanity and striving after wind.

In other words, it all put him in the same place. All of that was ridiculous to him. It didn't help. So he says this in chapter three, if you look in the first verse, he says,

There is an appointed time for everything.

Now, what does that mean? I mean, he's talking about pleasure, he's talking about wisdom, he's talking about work. What does time have to do with that? Well, your life is wasted in time, isn't it? That's how you blow it. You do it moment by moment. So he starts musing on that now. And if you look in version nine, here's the conclusion of what he says. We'll go into all this stuff about a time to give birth and a time to die in a moment. But if you look in verse nine, here's the conclusion he comes to. He says, "What profit is there in it?" In other words, there's a time for everything, a time to give birth and a time to die. But so what? It can't do me any good. I can't do anything about it. There's a time to kill and a time to heal, there's a time to tear it down and a time to build up, but who cares? I'm still going to die. So I might as well just give up. I mean, all this sounds so beautiful and lovely. But Solomon says it doesn't change anything, because time just keeps going. The big wheel keeps spinning around. The seconds on the clock keep ticking, and there's nothing I can do about it. Ecclesiastes three is one of

the most popular passages probably in the whole Bible. You all are familiar with this text. He really strikes a chord with some people because it's read at funerals to give people hope. It's used as a sign of encouragement. But that's not the way Solomon writes it here. What he's saying here is that there is no hope.

He's getting to a point in his search for meaning when he says, there's nothing to live for because I can't find it. He says this because he's embracing a philosophy. From the first part of this chapter, he is embracing a philosophy that's known as fatalism, which says that all of life is determined by fate. It's controlled by meaningless destiny. So it doesn't matter what I do. We've all heard of "the hands of fate" and "the chords of destiny." Does that sound familiar? That's where this is coming from, because he said, I've tried trying, but now I want to try not trying. I want to give that a chance. I've tried caring, but I want to do something else. I don't want to care anymore. It's the only thing that makes sense to me. Now everything's a wash.

And I say this because I'm afraid a lot of people can relate to this. And Solomon doesn't stay there, by the way. He's going to give you hope as he goes on. But that's where he's at in the first part. And we all know people who do this, because how many of you have talked to someone who has said, "I don't care what happens to me, because what will be, will be." Anybody heard that before? "When my times comes, I'm ready." Or how many of you know someone who's come gotten sick and come down with cancer? And they said, "I'm not worried, because when my number's called, it's called." "When the universe wants me, it can have me." Not because they care, but because they don't care. Not because they're being spiritual and godly; they're being apathetic. If you've heard someone like this, I want to tell you that that's not a Christian idea. It's a pagan idea. It comes from the world of heathen philosophy. Which means that people who say that are not acting like believers. They are acting like lost people.

In fact, this type of thinking is found in several religions today like Buddhism, and it's a type of thing that people believe when they get their palms read at the circus, and they look at the horoscopes and those who follow stars. Every time you open up a newspaper and you see the zodiac signs which tell you what will happen to you if you're Aries or Libra or something like that. This is what they believe. It's like the person that has the crystal ball. It's not found in Scripture. I've told you before, one of the goals of Hebrew poetry is to shock you. It's not written to rhyme as much as it's written to get your attention, and here, it does this by saying, "This is what happened to Solomon in his life. He became so bleak and so dark and so desperate and so cold that he said, 'I want to give up on everything. Nothing matters anymore.'" He's like Ernest Hemingway, who said, "Life is a cruel joke that leads from nothing to nothing."

Several years ago, a friend of mine turned me on to the books of Francis Schaeffer. I don't know if you've heard of him before. But he was an author in the 1960s who spent a lot of time defending Christianity. And one of his books was called *Death in the City*. And he said, this is kind of a long quote, but I think it's helpful here. He said, "Imagine a room where the curtains are pulled back and the doors are locked. And let us suppose that this room is the only universe that God has made. There's nothing outside of it, absolutely nothing. And now suppose we have two chairs in the room and that sitting on these two chairs are two men, the only man in the universe. And one is a materialist. As far as he is concerned, the universe is made up of nothing but mass, energy in motion. And that's all there is to it. And on the other chair sits a Christian who believes in the Bible. And these two men are facing each other in a universe where they're alone. Now, after they've looked at each other for a while, the materialist says, 'I'm going to explore our universe.' And the Christian says, 'Go ahead.' So the materialist begins to analyze everything. He goes through all the scientific processes that we use. He uses the science of chemistry, biology, physics, he goes back to the periodic table and behind the periodic table into the atom. And finally he comes to the Christian and he brings him a set of books. And he says, 'Here is everything we know about the universe.' So the Christian reads them. He takes a number of months, even years to study the books. And finally, when he's done, he turns to the materialist, and he says, "This is a tremendous thing you've done. You've really told me a lot about the universe. However, it's not complete." Shocked, the materialist says, "What do you mean?" And the Christian said, "You've missed the Bible. It's a book that tells me things you don't know. It tells me the origin of everything. Your scientific investigation can't do that. Furthermore, I know from the Bible that there's more to the

universe than you have described. There's an unseen portion as well as the seen. There's a spiritual reality as well as the physical. You're unbalanced. Like a man who only sees half an orange, you only see half of this world,”

That was well said, wasn't it? Schaeffer's point was that the only person who truly understands the world is a Christian. He's the only one who gets it because he has a Bible. It sounds so popular today to say “only believe in science,” but that doesn't work because there's more to life than science. There's good and evil, there's light and darkness, there's heaven and hell. And if you don't believe that, this world will not make sense to you. You're going to be like a blind man in a dark room. That's what fatalism is. That's what secularism does. It's why it's so dangerous.

I mean, this is some deep stuff we're talking about today. Because Ecclesiastes is a deep book. It really stretches the mind. But the message is clear. And that is that fate doesn't rule over everything; God does. The universe doesn't run itself; God runs it. Which is a comforting thought, because it means you don't have to sit around all day waiting for something bad to happen, which is what so many people are doing right now. With the Coronavirus or with the pandemic or with anything right now, people are just going crazy because they think it's all so random. They think everything's out of control. It's not out of control. It's under the control of God. Amen? It's not going crazy, so you don't have to freak out about it. This world is under the care of a good and loving father, and it won't end until he's ready. You're not gonna wake up tomorrow and find some asteroid hit the Earth and [think] “Oh, no!” I just destroyed half of all the Hollywood movies that are going to come out next year, didn't I? As a Christian, this needs to be a settled thing in your heart. This is what separates a believer from an unbeliever, by the way. It's not just that we know there's a God, but we take comfort in it. We rest in that fact. We don't go crazy every time the world goes sideways.

I remember, several years ago, talking to a family member who told me that he believed in destiny. He was a fatalist. And it was right after 911 when the terrorists flew the planes into the World Trade Center. So I asked him, “How do you explain that?” And he said, “I can't. I can't explain that.” I said, “Does it bother you?” It should. It should drive you crazy. There's no hope in that at all. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning, because this morning, I want you to see three problems of fatalism in this passage. That's what we're talking about today. That's our sermon. If you're taking notes in Ecclesiastes three, we're going to look at three problems of fatalism in this text. And we're going to do this because there are a lot of people that have swallowed this idea today. It's a very popular one. In fact, it's even made its way into the church, because I've had several members of our church tell me they grew up in a denomination that said, “If God's going to save you, then God's going to save you, and there's nothing you can do about it. If you're elect, then you're elect, it doesn't matter. So stop trying. You know, let go and let God. Sit back and wait for a lightning bolt to strike you from the sky.” And I'm here to tell you if you've been taught that, it's wrong. The idea is not in the Bible. We come up with all kinds of terms for it, but it's not in Scripture. The Bible says God is sovereign. It says that he maintains a providence over this world, but it says our actions matter. If you believe in Jesus, you'll be saved. If you don't, you're going to hell. But either way, you're not a robot. You're not a machine just waiting to get off the factory. I read a cartoon this week that said, “I can't change everything. But that doesn't mean I can't change anything at all.” And that's the idea here. And that's the conclusion Solomon comes to in this chapter. Again, he starts off in a terrible place, but he doesn't stay there.

And I want you to see the three problems of fatalism in this passage, and the first one is that it is profitless. The first problem of fatalism in this passage is that it's profitless, which means it doesn't amount to anything. While it sounds so deep and scholarly, at the end of the day, it's a very shallow way of thinking. It doesn't take a lot of effort to just give up in life does it? And I won't read all this again for the sake of time, but as Solomon is philosophizing over his life and writing out his memoirs, he tells us what his life has come to, and he says, “It's all vanity.” We just saw that. “It's all empty.” And then he says this in chapter three, verse one. We just read it, but let me read it to you again. He says,

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.

Which means that this is why my life is vain now, because you can't trick father time. No matter how hard you try, you can't fool him because you can't turn back the hands of the clock. You can't go back and fix your mistakes. The word time is repeated, like, 20 something times in here. That's a theme of it, because Solomon gives you 14 examples in here of the tyranny of time, starting in verse two. And there's too many to go through all these together. They read very beautifully. It's the most beautiful passage, maybe in the whole Bible. We can only mention a few of these. But each one has a point and a counterpoint. There's a thesis and an anti thesis.

But he says, "There's a time to give birth and a time to die," which means you can't stop life and death. It's common sense, right? You don't really have to explain that. You can't change the fact that some people are going to live and some people are going to die. Some make it; some don't. Which is a strange way to start the list. And it's ironic because it's often forgotten today, because some people think they can stop life by having abortions or taking the morning after pill. Or they think they can stop death on the other side of things by eating right and taking your vitamins. Solomon says you can't. Even if you do that, you're still going to die. You're just gonna make a healthy corpse, right? You're just going to look good in the casket, that's all. So you got to stop pretending. Solomon is getting very real in here. This has been called his great reality dose, reality pill.

He says, "There's a time to kill and a time to heal." And that doesn't refer to murder as much as it refers to chance. Because again, he's talking about the natural flow of things. And Solomon now says that when sickness comes, some pull through and some don't. Some get healed. Some get killed. We don't know why. Can't explain it. As any doctor in the room will tell you, two people can come down with the same disease. They can both catch the Coronavirus. One recovers and the other one ends up in the ICU. Why? That's a mystery. That's why we're "practicing" medicine. It's a practice, just trying to figure it out.

He says, as a result of these things, "There's a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. There's a time to throw stones and a time to gather them." Which sounds strange to our modern ears because we don't throw stones at each other; at least, I hope you don't. But Israel was a rocky place, so they had stones everywhere. They used them for all sorts of things because they would throw them when they're mad. You can read in the Bible about the Jews stoning people. Well, they stoned them because there were stones everywhere. And they would gather them up when they were happy and put them in a pile and make a memorial out of them. Several times you read about that in the Old Testament. Solomon says that's a metaphor for life. Because life is lived in moments like that. It's seen in flashes of great anger and celebration, high times, low times, right? But you never know which one's coming. And that's the point. You don't know which one you're going to get. You wake up today, you don't know if it's going to be a good day. You go to bed at night, you don't know if it's gonna be a good week. Because what he's saying here is life has a certain rhythm to it. It has an ebb and flow that can't be changed. So you need to stop trying to do it. You need to stop trying to change it, and just let it run its course.

And in fact, Solomon is so bleak at the end of this, that in verse nine, as I showed you, he says,

What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?

And the word for profit is an important word here because it's the Hebrew word *yitrôn*, and it means benefit or gain or profit. Because he says, "What gain is there when you work?" If all of this is true, then what's the point of getting up and going to your job every day? Because you can't keep these things from happening. You can't stop life and death. You can't make yourself happy or sad. So what's the use in toiling? There was actually a school of thought around this time, or actually a little bit later, that was called stoicism that taught this. But the stoics said that life was pre-determined by the gods, so you should be stoic about it. We've all heard that phrase. You shouldn't get emotionally involved. And there's stories of Stoic philosophers getting caught in a shipwreck and going down with the ship rather than trying to get off it, because they were resigned to their fate. That's what Solomon is saying. If the ship goes down, just go down with it.

But fortunately, he doesn't stay there. Because if you look in verse 10, he says,

I have seen the task which God has given the sons of man with which to occupy themselves.

That can be taken two ways. On one hand, it can be taken to say, I have seen the fruitless task which God has given the sons of man. I've seen the profitless task. But another way to take it is this. Solomon says, there's more to the story than this. While life is gloomy, and you can't stop time, you shouldn't worry about it so much, because God has given you a task to do. You have a job. We all have employment, so you need to get to it. He says, stop worrying about things you can't change. Stop spending all your time trying to figure out things you can't figure out, and get busy with your work and see what God will do. See how he'll bless it. The word occupy here means to engage your mind, and Solomon uses it to say, while you can't figure all this out, God has given you a way to keep your mind busy with something else. And that is your work.

So if you're a doctor, get to doctoring. Don't worry about the existential questions. Don't try to wrap your mind around time and the ontological nature of it. You can't. So pick up your stethoscope and go help somebody. If you're a farmer, get to farming. Milk the cows. Feed the chickens. Rake the hay. If you're a teacher, get to teaching. If you're a plumber, get to plumbing. If you're a mom, get to momming. But whatever you do, spend your time on something useful, he said. I was a philosophy major, and I'll promise you, nobody ever put food on the table by studying philosophy. Philosophy helps you to think deep thoughts while you're broke. That's what it does. Nobody ever did it by asking questions you can't answer, staring into a crystal ball. You need to remember that today. There was a song written several years ago by a secular band, and the song was called "Someday Never Comes," and it actually had a lot of wisdom in it. Because it was written about a boy who asked his father the meaning of life. And the father said, "Someday you will know. Someday you'll figure it out." And as the song goes on, the boy said, "As I got older, I found out something, and that is that someday never comes."

You'll never know the answer to some of the deep questions. You're never going to wrap your mind around all the riddles of the universe. God keeps his mysteries, and so you need to understand what the Bible tells you, and then go to work. I've talked to people who were unemployed, because they told me they did not agree with socialism. They didn't like collectivist nature of the Canadian economy. I said, well, that may be, but you're still unemployed. You need to get a job. Put the socialism on hold for a minute and go down to the office. I talk to other people who are in the same place because they watch Fox News all day. And they got all into politics to the point that it paralyzed them, consumed their minds. Solomon says the answer to that is that God has given a task to the sons of men. He hasn't given you all of the answers. He's given you that. There's a story of the time an old Quaker had a mule who wouldn't work because he kept getting distracted, getting his mind on other things. And so the Quaker told him, "You know, I can't beat you because of my principles. But if you keep this up, I'm going to sell you to the Baptist down the street, and there's no telling what he's going to do to you." Solomon says you shouldn't do that, as a believer. You shouldn't get your mind so distracted. Focus on the things in front of you. God has given you this much influence in the world. And then move on. Which leads us to another point to consider. I told you, we're gonna get deep this morning, right? I warned you already. This is some serious things. But it's really good.

But that leads us to another point to consider, another problem of fatalism in this passage, and that is that it is short sighted. First, it's profitless. It doesn't amount to anything. It really doesn't impact your life in any major way. The reason so many people like fatalism is because they already live like that. They're just doing what they already do. That doctrine doesn't challenge them in any way. It doesn't make them any different. One sign that a doctrine is true is that it impacts your life, and this one doesn't. So you need to throw it away. But a second problem of fatalism is that it's short sighted, which means it doesn't keep eternity in mind. It only sees time through the window of time. He can't see past the nose on his face. And if you read on in verse 11, Solomon writes this now, and he says,

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.

If you notice, this verse starts out very similarly to the first verse in the chapter. Because in verse one, Solomon says, "God has appointed a time for everything." Now he says, "God has made it appropriate." Not only is there a scheduled moment for everything, but God has arranged the schedule in an orderly fashion. It looks random to us, not random to God. The word appropriate here is the Hebrew word *yāpê*, which means attractive or lovely. Some of your Bible say, "God has made everything beautiful in its time," and that's a good way to look at it. One author said, "There's nothing beautiful about Ecclesiastes three verses one through eight." There's nothing attractive about a lot of the stuff we just read, because an atheist could have written that. That's why lost people like the first part of this chapter. They don't like this part, because this part says that there's a God involved. There's a time to be born and a time to die, yes, but it's all according to God. There's a time to kill and a time to heal, but God knows that. He understands. And he lays it out just the way that he wants on the timetable, which makes it beautiful.

Fatalism is ugly. It's a bleak, ugly, dark, nasty doctrine. Evolutionism, ugly. Secular philosophy, it's all ugly. Solomon says the universe rests in his sovereign hands. I don't have to tell you that a lot of people are discouraged today because they don't believe that. They don't think the universe is in God's hands. According to the latest statistics I could find, suicide was the ninth leading cause of death in Canada, right behind Alzheimer's disease. And it's not hard to figure out why, because if you tell people all day long that there is no God and you're nothing but an evolved animal on the same level as an insect, they're gonna want to kill themselves. Why not? Bugs kill themselves. Why can't we? But Solomon says here, you shouldn't buy into that, because there is one who rules over this universe.

And furthermore, if you notice in verse 11, he says, "He has set eternity in your heart," which means that this is why God can do all of this, because he sees things from the standpoint of eternity. He looks at time from a heavenly perspective. And not only that, but he's allowed you to do the same thing. Because it says he put eternity in your heart, which means he didn't put it out there; he put it in here. He didn't put eternity far away where you couldn't find it. He put it close by so you could find it. Because eternity is part of your nature now. It's another reason why people are so miserable, because when they believe in evolution or secular philosophy, they're going against their nature. And this is a doctrine that's not talked about a lot today. But it's called the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, or the image of God, which says that man was created in the image of God. He's not an accident. He's not a mistake. He was made in his likeness so that he's eternal, just as God is eternal. There's some differences because we were actually born in this world, and God was never born. But you will die, and you will spend eternity somewhere. Your soul will go on in heaven or hell. Animals can do that, and neither can plants. Bugs can't do that, which is why you never see a bug going to church. You don't see him reading a theology book, because this is something man alone can do. This is why human life has meaning to God. It has dignity.

But the point is that God is sovereign over time. He rules over it. And he's given us the ability to understand that, because he's put his image in our heart. If God didn't do that, we would be helpless. Because this life really is miserable at times. It's very uncomfortable. But if we know there's something better to come, there's something to live for. You know, like many of you, I started working in high school at an early age for a company called the Furniture Barn, and one of my tasks was to clean the rugs. And it was a pretty filthy task because you had to beat them out, and all the dust would fly everywhere. But I'll never forget how ugly a rug looked on the back and how beautiful it was on the front. You guys know what I'm talking about? It was the strangest thing because when you look at the back of those things, they're hideous, a bunch of knots and tangles and nothing matches, but if you turn them over, it's beautiful. It's a work of art. Solomon says life is like that. It's ugly at times. It's hideous on one side of it, but when you turn over and look at the other side of eternity, it's beautiful. You see how the pieces fit together. And you have to keep that in mind or else you'll go crazy.

He writes in the next verse that “he has also set eternity in their heart,” (or in the same verse, excuse me), “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.” And that's a little tough to read. But the idea is that God has set eternity in your heart, but not all of it. He has told you what he intends to do in this world, but not everything. God keeps his secrets. But he's told you enough, and you need to be content with that. One reason people are so upset nowadays is because they want all their answers from God now. They want to know all the mysteries today. Well, you don't get to do that. God is God, and you are not. So you have to be happy with what he's told you. James Montgomery Boice says it this way. He says, “God is in charge, and when he puts things into our lives, they're not an accident. It's not as if God somehow forgot what was going on, because nothing slips by him. He never forgets anything. And an important question to ask is that if God does something in your life, would you change it? If you would, you would make it worse, because you are not God.” Isn't that encouraging? God gives you exactly what you need.

Which brings us to one more thing to talk about this morning, just one more problem of fatalism in this passage. Just to review the other ones. The first one is that it's profitless. And second, it is short sighted, which means it doesn't keep God in mind. It's such a confusing thing, because it only sees things down here. It doesn't see things up here. When you have this perspective of, “What will be, will be,” and that sort of thing, you don't see things from a higher level. But you need to do that. By the way, that's why you need to come to church, isn't it? Do you ever forget all of this? You ever forget there's a God throughout the week? It's why you have to focus on these things. And it brings us to one more point to consider, one more problem with fatalism in this passage, and that is that it is joyless. A third problem to fatalism in Ecclesiastes three which ties it together is that it is joyless, which means it really is a miserable doctrine. Which is why Solomon had so much trouble here in the book of Ecclesiastes. But if you look in verse 12, he goes on and says this, he says,

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

Now there are a lot of thoughts in there, and he's covering things from different angles. But after dealing with all these deep things, Solomon reminds us again to take delight in our work in the first few verses. And then he says in verse 14, “I know that everything God does will remain forever.” Now that's important. Because if you remember, Solomon is dealing with things he doesn't know in this passage. He's talking about things he doesn't understand. And he says here that “I know this: everything God does, will remain.” In other words, the things I do don't seem to matter in this life. They seem to come and go and disappear. But the things God does are different because they remain forever. Even though there's nothing to add to it, and nothing to take away, even though I can't change God's plans. That's okay, he says, because “he has so worked that men should fear Him.” And again, that seems to be disconnected, but what it means is that God is the one in charge, not fate. He's the one calling the shots, so I need to fear him above all else. He says God has worked for this. He set things up this way. Because all this work of running the universe was for this end: so you would worship Him.

The Westminster Catechism says, “What's the chief end of man?” “To glorify God and enjoy him forever.” That's what Solomon is saying. A lot of Christians today think they're being smart when they fear the Coronavirus above all else. But they're not because it doesn't deserve your utmost fear. God does. In fact, a church in Washington State put a sign in its front yard that said, “Here's how you should handle the virus: fear God and wash your hands.” And that's a good way to say it because you need to wash your hands. I mean, you need to be responsible and stay home when you're sick and take care of yourself, those types of things. But before you do that, you need to trust in God, amen? Before you go there, you need to give him all the glory. That's where your joy is found. You don't find any joy in panicking. You don't find any joy in thinking you're alone in the universe, left to chance. You do it by trusting in God. And Solomon gives you one more nugget of wisdom in verse 15. With this, he says,

That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

That last phrase is the most important one there. That means God seeks what has passed by in time. God finds what the clock has missed. If you think about it, a lot of things in time seem missed, don't they? They seem wasted. Time loses a lot of things, like your hopes and dreams. Time can lose your health and wealth and happiness. Time can lose your career. Time can lose a house. Time can lose your family. But Solomon says that's okay, because you have a God who can restore all that, which is why you find your joy in him. He can pick up the missing pieces in your life. If you remember, Moses said a similar thing in Psalm 90, which is why we just read that, but there Moses was wandering in the wilderness. He felt like life was passing him by just going from place to place in the desert. And so he said this in Psalm 90, he said, "Lord, please establish the work of our hands." In other words, make it count for something. Please don't let us waste our lives out here. Some said that everywhere Moses left in the wilderness, if you had 2 million Jews and an entire generation died in 40 years, then everywhere he left in the wilderness, he would have left a graveyard behind. It would've been been dead body after dead body. He says, Lord, please don't let me blow this. He also says in that passage, "Teach us to number our days," because they pass by so quickly. You blink and it's gone. You fall asleep and it's over. But not if you give it to God, and that's the point. Your life can amount to something if you put it in his hands, and that's what you need to do.

And I mention this because I don't know where everyone's at on this issue today. I don't know what goes through your mind when you think about the word "time". But I know this is a sore subject for a lot of people because time has been hard on them. It's given them their share of disappointments. And it's caused them to take it out on God. I mean, I've sat down and counseled with people that were so mad at God that they would shake their fist at the heavens and say, "Why did you do this to me, God? I hate you!" And friends, if that's you this morning, I want you to understand what this passage is saying. It's saying you shouldn't do that, because you don't know the full picture down here. You shouldn't get so mad at God and shake your fist at him because your story is only part of the story. When trials come and heartache occurs, there's more going on here, because God has an entire world to look after. He has an entire universe to run. And you're only a small piece of the puzzle. And the good news is that you are a piece of the puzzle. The hope that you have is that you are part of the picture. But this world doesn't revolve around us. And we have to get our minds around that and be humble.

I did some research on it this week, and I found that the average person in Canada lives for 79 years. A couple of weeks ago, Richard said it was 80 years. He was actually wrong. It's 79 years. Which comes to about 4000 weeks, 30,000 days, and 700,000 hours. That's how much time you get. You get 700,000 hours, and a lot of it is wasted. If you break that down, a lot of those hours are spent eating and drinking and sleeping and watching TV. According to one survey, Canadians watch up to 23 hours of TV every week, which makes a lot of people mad. When they look at their schedule, all that wasted time really bothers them. But it only bothers you when you lose sight of God. It only upsets you when you don't see the bigger picture. Because when you see the bigger picture, you understand that God can redeem your wasted time. God can rescue all your mistakes. Even though he has a whole world to look after, he is big enough to take care of it. And you need to trust him today.

This is something you see a lot in the Bible. We think we're the first culture that wastes time. It's not true. When you look at the Bible and take a survey, you find that Joseph waited 13 years before he became leader in Egypt, and Abraham waited 100 years before he had a son. Can you imagine Abraham going around Canaan telling people that he was going to have a great dynasty, when he's 100 years old, and he had no kids? What are you going to have a dynasty of Abraham, cats? You don't have any descendants! 100 years. Moses waited 40 years before he could help Israel escape from Egypt, and then he waited another 40 years before they got into the promised land. Daniel waited a night in a lion's den. Jonah waited three days and three nights in a fish. Jesus waited 30 years before he began his ministry, and he's been waiting 2000 years to finish it. He's still waiting. The Lord has not finished waiting. And I'm sure that all those people probably felt at times as if they were wasting

their lives. It was just futile. But it wasn't when they remember that God is faithful in their lives. He will take care of you. And I hope you can see that in our text today.

The story is told of the time a young lady came down with a brain tumor, and she was only given a few months to live. But when she was asked why she received the news so well, she said, "I guess it was because God decided to heal me at some other place and some other time. This is his schedule, and it's good enough for me." And friends, let me ask you this question this morning: Is God's schedule good enough for you? Do you believe that he will heal you some other time, some other place? You should. That's what Solomon wants you to do. And let me pray for God's grace in our lives that we would wrap our mind around these things. Let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we have studied things this morning that are too deep for us to know. We have plunged into the mind of the most brilliant man who ever lived, and we've come up saying that we only have just a mouthful of the truth that's in here. And yet, Father, it's enough for us to be encouraged this morning. As we talked about earlier, as was prayed over earlier in our service, we live in a world that is so distracting. It's so chaotic. It's just such a mess sometimes. So we need to remember that we have a God who stands over this world. Lord, thank you for a picture of that in the book of Ecclesiastes. Thank you that, in a book that is covered with vanity from end to end, there are glimpses in here of the true meaning of life. And that's found in you and your glory. And Lord, I pray for those who are here this morning, that they would be reminded of this. We don't come together as a church for political reasons. We don't come here for social reasons. We come here to remember our God. And may we walk away this morning with a taste of that. Father, thank You for scripture. It's such a deep book. Everything we cover, we could cover again from other angles. We never plumb the depths of it. And yet at the same time, it gives us so much encouragement and hope. I pray for those who are here that don't know Christ, that this would be a reminder that they need to know a savior to bring them out of the abyss of fatalism. There really only are two options at the end of the day, and that is Christ or nothing. So please draw them to him. And as we take the Lord's Supper, may you be glorified as we remember what our Lord has done, and we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.