

Everything Happens Through Time

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

A Sunday school teacher tells this story.

When I was 25 and teaching a Sunday school class of first and second graders, one morning Steven and the pastor's daughter Karen came into class and Steven announced, "Mrs. Fernandez, Karen and I are going to get married when we're big." I said, "Oh, will you invite me to the wedding?" "Nah," he replied matter-of-factly, "You'll prob'ly be dead by then."

Arlene Fernandez, Chicago, IL. Christian Reader, "Lite Fare."

Perspective changes things . . . the older you get, the more people you see grow up. There is something about time and wisdom that gives us a different perspective.

But the older a person gets; do they get a better grasp on time?

People are busy, busy doing good things, busy pleasing the boss, busy pleasing your teachers, busy pleasing others.

As we look at life, we need to see it from the proper perspective . . . from God's perspective.

Newsweek magazine said . . .

For those of you who've asked that question, a recent poll by Priority Management, Inc., has the answer. In a lifetime, the average North American will spend:

- Six months sitting at stoplights
- Eight months opening junk mail
- One year looking for misplaced objects
- Five years waiting in line.

When it comes to time, we need to get a perspective on it. As we come into a new year it's good to get a better understanding on this important subject.

How do we handle time? Take your Bibles and turn to Ecclesiastes 3. It gives us some great understanding. That wise old sage, Solomon who gives us insight into what is important explains some godly ideas to us.

The first two chapters of this book are excellent. If I were to write Ecclesiastes, I would have stopped at the end of chapter 2. If we want to find ultimate meaning, we can look everywhere, but we won't find it unless we find it in God.

Great conclusion, but unfortunately, or interestingly enough, he has another ten chapters to go. Solomon keeps writing because he has only showed us the tip of the iceberg. It is not as simple as that.

He moves on to Chapter 3 – a poem in the ancient Hebrew that rhymed – a poem in English – made popular by the 60's band the Byrds and written by Pete Seger.

This poem has been understood in many different ways over the years – don’t waste time. Some say it says we need world peace and other different understandings.

Let’s read it this morning in context.

Stand with me – Read 3:1-15

We need to see time as God wants us to see it.
Every event is part of God’s plan (Verses 1-8)

God has a plan . . . and every event is part of it. The good, the bad are interwoven into God’s plan. The word **time** is used 29 times showing that life is full of many different activities. Here is the way life is – it is a series of contrasts. We will be part of many of these things.

Solomon doesn’t care if you are a person or a dandelion . . . there is a purpose for you. From your birth, to death and everything in between.

God has appointed a time for everything that will happen to you. Nothing surprises God. God does not say . . . Just a second, things aren’t supposed to be happening that way . . . He has a plan for everything. He has that perspective and we need to have it too.

A day will come when you find out that a close friend or relative will die . . . and you will weep. There will be a time that you receive a promotion or move into your new home, and you will rejoice. Solomon says life will be like that and you have no control over it.

A time to be born – and a time to die.

We like to think more often about the first and not the last. Sometimes we put it out of our mind and are shocked when it happens. Those life insurance commercials . . . they’re deceptive.

“You don’t buy life insurance because you’re going to die, but because those you love are going to live.”

“Make sure that you are prepared for that unthinkable event that may come your way?”

“Like it will never happen . . . don’t think about it, death.”

Great grandma is 99 years old and she died . . . such a tragedy. I’ve heard people say I never thought it would happen.

Death happens all the time.

This past Friday I did a funeral for a 65-year-old healthy man. On Boxing Day, he didn’t wake up. Died in his sleep, just before waking, his wife tried waking him up, wasn’t breathing . . . no one saw it happening. It happens.

Sometimes people think when bad things happen that it is because of the devil. Sometimes it may be. But, the fact is, there is a curse in this world and all things die. God has an appointed time for it.

There is a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted. This summer I grew a number of tomato plants in my back yard. It was a good year for tomatoes in my yard. But in October, the plants withered and died, I pulled them out of the ground. While I was doing that, I wasn’t thinking . . . God why is this happening . . . this dead plant. I was thankful for the bountiful harvest. Time to uproot.

A time to kill and a time to heal. A madman with a gun going through the streets shooting everything in sight needs to be stopped. A police officer has the right to kill that person to protect the public. A wild fox full of rabies chasing your dog needs to be killed, a pet dog with an ear infection, needs to be healed.

A time to break down, and a time to build up. An old house with a crumbling foundation needs to be torn down. A new house needs to be built for people to live in.

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together. In military campaigns there is a time to throw them and destroy or the building of a defensive wall.

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. Making peace with someone, you embrace them and when at war, you don't embrace . . . Zelensky and Putin are not embracing anytime soon.

A time to seek, and a time to lose. Search for your lost wallet – can't find it after two weeks, give up.

A time to keep, and a time to cast away. If you ever move . . . you tend to cast away . . . but there are some things to keep.

Time of pain and agony. That you want to tear your clothes and a time to sew them up again.

A time to speak your mind and a time to be silent. Many people get that way out of balance.

Time for love and a time for rejection.

A time for war and a time for peace.

As we see these contrasts . . . we also know there is a tension we live in. As Christians we need to be people of who manage this tension with wisdom. With our children there is a time to protect, and a time to push them.

In teaching – a time for correcting, a time for teaching.

In the church there is a time for evangelism and a time for teaching the Saints. If you swing from one extreme to the other . . . usually you will find that person in a wreck in the ditch on the side of the road.

Solomon says there is a time for everything . . . be prepared. God will bring those times to you one day. So, this may lead to a question.

If everything is planned . . . Why do anything? (Verses 9-11)

Solomon is like the “devil’s advocate” asking the question, why bother? Why toil? Life can be a real burden. And God has given us those burdens to live with. And we can’t understand why he has done this.

He doesn’t leave us here . . . He gives us some answers.

Four main things we need to understand (Verses 11-15)

1. God's plan is wise, God is wise (Verse 11)

He told us to get a perspective . . . **He has made everything beautiful in its time.** There are times for these things. In the first verses. For the most part we like one over the other. Most of us would rather celebrate a birth than death, or heal than kill, build than tear down, peace than war. But the fact is you can't have one without the other.

The Truman show was a movie with Jim Carey.

Its main character, Truman Burbank – played by Jim Carey, had lived his entire life, since an infant, in front of cameras for the show, though he himself is unaware of this fact. Truman's life is filmed through thousands of hidden cameras, 24 hours a day and broadcast live around the world. The ultimate reality show. But everything was staged except for Truman. As you watch the movie . . . everything is perfect - no difficulties, everyone is happy and pleasant, everything works out well in the end. Life was boring.

Then things started to unravel. There was no evil, no disappointments, no heroism, no real friendship, no real love, nothing worth living for.

You need to watch the movie to see what happens.

2. Bad things have a purpose.

Tough things have a purpose. I love the view from the top of a mountain. But to get to the top you need to climb it . . . it is tough. But if you didn't have a tough climb, you would never appreciate the mountain. Mountains add beauty to the countryside, yet geologists could say it is a scar on the earth's crust.

I hate the smell of rotting compost – the bacteria and fungus are gross too – and dirty. But without those things we would never have the nutrients to grow new things in this world. Those things have a purpose.

God's plan is wise – and he is wise.

3. God's plan is mysterious (v11)

He has set eternity in the hearts of people. We are the only living things on this earth who stop and think what life is all about? Animals don't. Cows don't contemplate life, fish don't ask is there a God?

Why is there pain? God has put eternity in our hearts – he has made us in His image – to be made in His image means that we ask these questions. We think about the future. We create things. We appreciate the beauty of creation. Because He has put eternity in our hearts . . . He has made us in His image to think this way.

Throughout the Bible we see people asking God why bad things are happening. What's the purpose of this?

Jeremiah 15:18, "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?"

Or Job – when everything around him crumbles, he asks why? Why was I born for this?

Sometimes we don't get the answer to these questions. God's way is mysterious . . . we don't know what the future will hold. Good or bad....why some things happen.

But it doesn't mean we don't know God's will. We don't sit around and live our lives mysteriously or aimlessly.

The Bible shows us two wills of God.

a. Moral will – know it – do the right things.

Romans 12:1-2, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Be a living sacrifice. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world and be transformed.

How do we know God's will by not conforming and being transformed – by God's word.

Colossians 3:5-10, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry . . . But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

Making the right choices in life . . . we need to ask is it right or wrong in God's eyes? - If it is right do it, if it is wrong don't do it.

Pretend for a second . . . you need a new car . . . the right thing to do would be to save up and buy it. The wrong thing would be to steal it. It goes against God's word.

You love this person and want to spend the rest of your life with them. The moral will of God is not that you live with them and not make that commitment. The moral will of God is to make the marriage commitment and then live with them.

We know His moral will for our lives and if we go against His moral will. We can easily figure out His sovereign will for our lives too.

If I become a thief and a liar . . . in God's sovereign will, eventually will be problems - jail, poor relationships and more problems. But the interesting thing is we have no idea what would be in store for those who do what is right.

With the commandment of not making idols . . . this is what God said to the people...

Deuteronomy 5:9-10, "You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

We have no idea what would be in store for those who do what is right.

Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

These people decided to live a righteous life. Those who live under the moral will of God will be blessed.

b. Sovereign will – don’t know it except at the end.

We don’t know what tomorrow will bring or next week or next year. Only God does... and typically what we act like today will bring the results tomorrow. But one day it will all end. We will all go into eternity as we die, or we may go into eternity when Jesus Christ returns.

But His sovereign plan is eternity for everyone. The question is do you know where you will spend eternity? Will you spend it with God because you know Him personally and you surrendered your life completely to Him or will you spend it eternally separated from God away from Him? You can accept Him as your Saviour and follow His will or reject Him. Are you prepared? We are only promised – right now!

God’s ways are mysterious as time goes on ... but if we know Him personally, our eternal future will not be a mystery.

a. We can’t let what we don’t know destroy what we can enjoy. (Verses 12-13)

Solomon says there is nothing you can do about what will come your way. So, while you live - enjoy it! Enjoy life to the full! Reality is; pain and death will come but right now live life to the full!

Do everything to the glory of God...

- Go to school, live life, have fun – do it for the glory of God.
- Do your job – to the glory of God.
- If you are married and have children – live in those relationships – to the glory of God.
- Yes, come to church and worship, get involved with good fellowship in growth groups – we need to live out God’s word for his Glory.

He is saying there is nothing wrong with enjoying everything in this world that is good ... to the glory of God. Live life to the full enjoy all of his creation.

Attending celebrations – enjoying life ... don’t feel guilty for these things ... enjoy them.

b. Rest in the sovereignty of God. (Verses 14-15)

God’s sovereignty is not meant to trouble us ... it is meant to comfort us.

You know when you read a book or watch a movie ... the story can get pretty gruesome ...messy. You might need to fast forward the movie or just jump to the end of the book to see what happens in the end to see who wins.

With Jesus as our Saviour, we know who will win in the end. He has shown us His sovereign will, with no more tears or sorrows – everything will be perfect.

The reality of life is that we will have times of difficulty and eventually death . . . but in between these times . . . God has a great plan for us – for those who call themselves believers.

c. Taking this Home – a story . . .

Could you all pretend with me for a moment?

Suppose you get a phone call from your bank manager tomorrow and she says, someone has just deposited \$1440.00 into your bank account. I don't know who the person is, but they just did it.

You think this sounds too good to be true – and you ask what is the catch? She said there is a catch - the catch is you must spend that \$1440 dollars today. There is no other catch, you can spend that \$1440.00 on anything to pay down your mortgage, to take many friends out for dinner, to buy decorations for your house or you could even give it away. But the deal is you need to spend it.

You have absolutely no problem with that and it happens. The next day you get a phone call again from the bank manager saying someone has deposited another \$1440.00 into your bank account today. And it is the same as yesterday . . . you need to spend this \$1440.00 anyway you can for today. You go wow . . . once again? Again, no catches, other than you need to spend it. No problem.

The next day . . . the same phone call and message. You are given \$1440.00 but you need to spend it. You say to the bank manager . . . will this stop? The bank manager has no idea. She says she gets the money wired to the bank with these specific instructions to give it to you to spend. She doesn't know where it comes from and if it will continue.

You feel like you are the luckiest person in the world. Day after day after day you get this money . . . with one stipulation . . . it must be spent.

I think you may be connecting the dots with this story . . . we all have 1440 minutes in one day.

God has given each of us that time . . . what are you going to do with that time? We need to bring Glory to God? We need to see it as God wants us to see it.

I don't know what this next year will bring for you, but I want to encourage you to make it your ambition to seek God in every aspect.

We're only promised right now – not the next minute – what will you do to bring Glory to Him?

It's not about being busy, it is about living in the tension between the one extreme and the other and using wisdom at the right times for God's glory.

May we all seek His great wisdom this next year, living our lives for His Glory.