

Seasons in Sovereign Hands – Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Main Idea: God’s time is always right, no matter what time it is for you.

I. What Am I Doing with His Time? | Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Ecclesiastes 3 begins with one of the most familiar and poetic sections of the book. Solomon sets before the congregation of Israel a series of fourteen pairs of contrasting experiences—birth and death, planting and uprooting, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing. These opposites are not meant to be exhaustive, but to capture the natural rhythms of life. They remind us that **human existence is filled with both beauty and tragedy, with beginnings and endings, with joy and pain.** Together they illustrate that life is not random, but that every season comes under the sovereign rule of God. The central truth Solomon presses upon us is that time does not belong to us—it belongs to God. The Hebrew word used here for “time” (‘ēt) carries the idea of divinely appointed seasons. **We often speak of “my time,” but Solomon confronts us with the reality that the time we enjoy is not self-generated or self-owned.** It is God’s gift, and it operates according to His purposes. This means that what may appear to us as chance or chaos is, in reality, part of a divinely ordered plan that stretches from creation to consummation.

To make his point clear, therefore, **Solomon uses sharp contrasts to show the totality of life under the sun—everything between birth and death, between planting and uprooting, between joy and sorrow.** In highlighting such contrasts, Solomon is teaching us that we do not have the power to choose or control every circumstance in our lives. We may try to plan, but there are times and seasons over which we have no mastery. This is meant to humble us, teaching us to fear God and to rest in His providence. **Yet, among all the pairs, one stands out as the most devastating: “a time to be born, and a time to die.”** Here Solomon confronts us with the reality of death as a result of sin. Birth brings joy and hope, but death brings grief and loss. **Death devastates us precisely because it was never part of God’s good creation.** The pain of mourning, the bitterness of separation, the finality of the grave—all of these entered the world only after sin entered through Adam. Before the Fall, there was no weeping, killing, or dying (Genesis 1-2). Death is not simply another season of life; it is a consequence of sin, the great enemy that robs us of what is most precious (Gen. 2:17). This is why Solomon later says that God has “set eternity in man’s heart” (Eccl. 3:11). **We were not made for death; we were made for everlasting fellowship with our Creator. Every funeral, every graveyard, every tear shed over a loved one is a reminder that we were designed for eternity, and that sin has shattered that design.** No wonder we struggle to comprehend death, from the questions of a child to the grief of the aged. Something in us knows that we were meant for more than this, that we were not created to end in the dust.

To Ponder:

1. Why does death affect us so deeply, and how does Ecclesiastes 3:11 (“eternity in their hearts”) explain our struggle with it?
2. How can viewing time as God’s possession change the way we approach our daily decisions?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 does not leave us without hope. If God truly governs the seasons (and He does), then even death is not outside His control. **For the believer, the reality of death becomes the doorway to something greater.** In the fullness of time, God sent His Son into the world to enter our seasons, to take on our griefs, and to bear our death (Gal. 4:4-5). **Jesus Christ, in His resurrection, conquered the final enemy and turned the grave into the threshold of eternal life. The time that once only led to despair has been transformed into hope, for those who are united to Christ by faith.** This passage, then, presses us with a searching question: “What am I doing with God’s time?” If God alone rules time, then the hours and days given to us are not ours to waste. They are entrusted to us for stewardship. We are called to live with wisdom, to number our days, and to invest our time in what is eternal rather than what is fleeting (Ps. 90:2; Matt. 6:19-21; Eph. 5:15-16).

The reality of death ought not to drive us to despair, but to devotion—to live with urgency for Christ, to seek the kingdom first, and to find comfort in the truth that our times are in His hands (Ps. 31:15). Living wisely with God’s time therefore requires us to see our days not as accidents of chance, but as part of God’s sovereign design. **Each season—whether joyful or sorrowful—bears marks of divine appointment.** This means that the moments we often consider ordinary or unimportant are in fact charged with significance. Ordinary work, family responsibilities, conversations with neighbors, and the use of leisure—all fall under the question Ecclesiastes 3 presses: “What am I doing with His time?” As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 5:15-16 that we are called to walk carefully, “making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” **To waste time is not merely laziness—it is ingratitude and disobedience toward the Giver of time itself.** At the same time, Solomon’s reflections free us from the crushing illusion that we must control everything. We are not sovereign over our days; God is. **Many live in constant anxiety, trying to plan every outcome, fearing the uncertainty of tomorrow. But Ecclesiastes teaches us that such anxiety is futile.** The believer can rest, knowing that God has appointed a season for every matter under heaven. This is not fatalism, but genuine faith—a settled trust that the God who rules over birth and death, weeping and laughing, is wise and good in all His ways. As Calvin defines in his *Institutes*, “Ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries, and the highest of all blessings lies in the knowledge of it.”¹

The reality of death also calls us to fix our eyes on eternity. **If our times are truly in God’s hands, then we cannot live as though this world were ultimate.** Every passing hour reminds us of the brevity of life and the certainty of judgment. Yet, for those who are in Christ, death is no longer the final terror but the doorway into the eternal joy of God’s presence. This transforms how we endure seasons of sorrow. We grieve, yes, but not as those without hope (1 Thess. 4:13). **Knowing that Christ has triumphed over death, we can face the darkest seasons with confidence that the One who holds time in His hands also holds our future secure.** Solomon’s contrasts invite us to worship the God who is Lord of time itself. Before there was time, there was God, eternal and unchanging (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3). He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22:13). When we live with this perspective, even the most difficult seasons become occasions to glorify Him. **Seasons of laughter remind us of His kindness; seasons of mourning press us deeper into His comfort.** Every season becomes an opportunity to say with David, “My times are in Your hand” (Ps. 31:15). To live with that conviction is to live with peace, urgency, and hope, knowing that all of life finds its meaning in the One who entered time for us and redeemed it through His death and resurrection.

To Ponder:

1. In what ways does trusting God’s providence free us from anxiety about the future? Can you share a personal example?
2. David chose to focus on God’s goodness rather than his own pain (Ps.31:15). What are some practical ways you can intentionally turn your heart toward God’s goodness when you feel overwhelmed by sorrow or loss?
3. How can seasons of both joy and sorrow become opportunities to worship God even more deeply?

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1.17.11.