

### III. Ecclesiastes in Biblical Perspective

#### *From Vanity to Vitality*

“For Everything There Is a Season”

Ecclesiastes 3

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January 27, 2019 • Evening Sermon

We will be Ecclesiastes 3 for this study but I will not cover the whole chapter. I will bring out a couple of thoughts and then build on them in the next study. This is a familiar text to many of you who may have learned this text outside of Scripture. Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 says,

**[1] For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:**

[2] *a time to be born, and a time to die;*

*a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;*

[3] *a time to kill, and a time to heal;*

*a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

[4] *a time to weep, and a time to laugh;*

*a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

[5] *a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;*

*a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*

[6] *a time to seek, and a time to lose;*

*a time to keep, and a time to cast away;*

[7] *a time to tear, and a time to sew;*

*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

[8] *a time to love, and a time to hate;*

*a time for war, and a time for peace.*

Prayer:

Father, give us Your presence and guidance in Your Word as we consider this marvelous, challenging, attractive and insightful text for believers as we learn what it means to look at life with the mind of Christ, through the eyes of Christ, propelled by a heart for Christ. Give us a mind Father, that is informed from Your word and a mind that is inseparably attached to the passions of our heart, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

His name was Pete Seeger and many of you know of his song writing ability. Perhaps you know of the group Peter, Paul and Mary. I actually got the chance to see them perform and then one time when I was flying over to Israel they happen to be on the plane going to Israel to do a benefit concert. I had the wonderful opportunity to talk with them about their life and all that they have done. Many of you are probably aware of the song Turn, Turn, Turn (To Everything There is a Season) that was written by Pete Seeger that takes these 14 couplets and develops them. There is this amazing rhythm that there is a time for everything with this beautiful symmetry of this text. The poetry is astounding and the flow is overwhelming. While Peter, Paul and Mary wrote a song based on this text it really didn't catch on until the English invasion of the music section of our culture came, and the group the Byrds made the song Turn, Turn, Turn famous which was from this text of Scripture.

When you look at what the commentators have to say about this text they really fall into two categories. We are familiar with the phrases in this book that 'all is vanity' and 'all is striving after the wind' and all is a disappointment which run throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. The question also arises 'is there any answer' and the answer this book gets to is

the wisdom that comes from the fear of God and then the heart to fear God that comes from a Gospel message of God's love for us. As you go deeper into the text there are some who say that it's just a statement of futility where a season comes and season goes, etc. Where you have prosperity and then you know in the back of your mind there will come adversity and is there any meaning of this constant recycling of season after season. Yes, it's beautiful poetry but is this not the cynic or the skeptic or the one who just looks at like and says 'it just goes and goes?' The writer of the great hymn with this marvelous lyric captures it to some degree when it says, 'Time – like an ever-rolling stream – Bears all its sons away.'

This past week I was in Seattle, Washington and all it did was rain. When I come to my office here in Alabama to meetings throughout the week I drive on a road that goes over an old bridge which is over the Cahaba River. After we have had heavy rains here I know what I will see when I go over this bridge and that is all kinds of debris that has clogged up right there. Instead of the beauty of this flowing river there is just this debris and then someone will come and unclog it and the next thing you know the river bears it away. And the debris is gone away.

When my wife and I were living in Charlotte, North Carolina we would go to the Atlantic coast for vacations. The place we liked to go was where the Cape Fear River empties into the ocean. I remember looking at it one time as we were about to get into a boat to cross over to an island, and thought 'how many times I've stood at this river and how that river continually flows.' Then I thought of the statement in this text that says 'time like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away' then they're gone. Except for a very few in a very short time in reality they are soon forgotten. Is that the emptiness that is being declared in the text?

Here seems to be order where there is a time for this and time for that. There seems to be a clarity of a fixed season, a season that comes and a season that goes and then we're into something else. There are 14 of these seasons that are constantly at work in our lives as we are constantly observing them as we go in and out of them. Does this mean that we go through all this but there is nothing but meaningless when it's all said and done. I believe the rest of Ecclesiastes 3 gives a clear answer on this but I'm going to go ahead and give my answer here.

There are two things here. If the writer of Ecclesiastes is correct in which this is the Word of God therefore he is correct, then there is a season that is fixed, real and will come to an end as another one begins and ends and so on. This will pass and something else will come and life repeats this cycle. Those seasons are in place. Now some commentators say there is futility and meaningless as they come and go, meaning they make no difference. So you harvest and you eat it and it's gone. There is the cycle of going to work, getting the resources of your work, eating, and going to bed and repeating that cycle the next day.

I mentioned this to some friends recently and there are five things in my life that I utterly despise to do because of what I sense as the vanity of it. I do it, I look at it, it's done and then I know it's a short time before I'll be back doing it again. Here are two of them. One is filling the car up with gas. The only reason I do this is because I don't want to walk but I know that I'll be right back at that gas station in less than a week. There will be a time to fill it up and I time to empty it out. Another one to me is cutting grass. I've been married 50 years and I've been trying to convince my wife that pushing a lawn mower in golf shoes is a cardiovascular exercise that also aerates the yard. It never worked. I know there are others who enjoy doing this but I despise it. You could train an orangutan to do this but I know one week from now I'll be out cutting this same grass again. Is this what he means by the futility of the season coming and going, repeating and repeating and then you die? What difference did all of that make anyway?

It is fed by the notion of the introduction of vanity that we covered in Ecclesiastes 1 and 2, but I don't believe that is what the writer is saying. I don't believe he is saying 'see this beautiful symmetry, it's all there because of the sovereignty of time where time has organized itself into this seasonal flow and its meaninglessness, because how can something that is impersonal like time sovereignly create anything that has meaning?' Some translators title this section 'the futility of seasons' but I don't believe that is what the writer is saying here.

Not only is time impersonal and can't create meaning in the seasons, time is unable to create its own rhythms. Time cannot create the week or the month or the season. What he is setting up for you that is going to be abundantly clear is that the seasons are there because a sovereign God has put them there and until you know God the meaninglessness is inevitably what you will encounter but when you know that God those seasons become meaningful for His glory and praise. That is where we'll be headed in the last part of Ecclesiastes 3.

I believe this text sets up for us a number of texts in Scripture that gives us the clue. When the crowds would come and press upon Jesus, it says in Scripture that our Savior would withdraw for His time had not yet come. Is Jesus telling us that time is sovereign and time has not revealed the timeliness of the time until Jesus or is it telling us that the time has not yet come for Him to go to that cross and it's not the sovereignty of time but the sovereignty of God who will reveal the right time? In the New Testament we hear often Jesus saying 'My time has not come' or 'My hour has not come.'

Then comes that glorious moment that we find in the Gospel of John. This Jesus who has come to His people and has been rejected by Him will go to a cross to save a people not only from His covenant nation of Israel but from all the nations of the world. In His last week as He is moving toward the cross He is in the temple and Philip comes and brings a group of Greeks and Gentiles, those who are outside of God's covenant. They come to Philip with this statement that is placed on the pulpits of many churches, 'Sir, we would see Jesus' (John 12:21). That is why you're here. Lead us to Jesus and Philip took them to Jesus. When these people are brought to Jesus in the temple, right then Jesus says "My time has come."

Now is the season for the work of redemption. Now Jesus would go to set up the Lord's Supper and the last Passover. He would go to the Garden of Gethsemane and pray with drops of blood as those capillaries would burst in those hours of prayer. Then He would go to six trials and from there to Calvary. Then He would be laid in another garden and would come forth from that garden raised because the time had come. The sovereign hand of God had revealed to Him this is the time of redemption for My people.

Don't you love it when it comes down into your personal life? *[6] And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:6). God started and began a good work in you. He will not finish it until He finishes it and on the day of Christ you will be with Him.

Perhaps you have experienced this where you come to a derelict building where you can tell someone started the project and then it was just abandoned. Maybe it was a house or an office building? I'm sure there are some of you when you saw something like that you were thinking 'I wonder if I could get that cheap and finish the job?' Others look at it and think 'The Bible says you need to count the cost before you begin the project. Somebody didn't count the cost.' Others are thinking 'My goodness didn't they know what it would cost to get that done? Why did they start impulsively?' I want you to know something.

God sent His Son into this world and at the right time Jesus went to the cross. Then the risen Savior who ascended into heaven sent His Spirit through His church who brought the

Gospel to you. Then the Spirit of God went before the church to prepare you so that you would have eyes to see and ears to hear and He at the right time began a good work in you. And there are no abandoned projects. You and I may abandon the project and may even want to abandon it but He won't. He who began a good work in you, He will finish it to the day of Christ Jesus. None of you who have been brought to Christ will ever be abandoned by Christ.

That doesn't mean if you grieve the Holy Spirit there won't be seasons where He is a long way away from you, because you have callously embraced sin. Part of His doing in finishing the project is to remove His felt presence. He doesn't remove His presence for He is with you and sealed you but He'll remove His felt presence to create that hunger and we need to say 'God, what is it that is breaking my fellowship with You?' Even that will be a part of finishing the project in you. He never abandons that project. You will all be brought to completion. He began it at the right time and He'll finish it at the right time.

Time is not sovereign. Time does not arrange itself. Time does not create its own seasons but there is a God who created the beginning, who has ordained the end and He will always finish it. That includes His work of redemption in this world. I love the song lyric that says 'The earth shall soon dissolve like snow' or even the language of Hebrews 1 when it says 'will be rolled up like a garment and then will roll out a new heavens and a new earth for His people' and as He finishes that to accommodate them with Him as He finishes us for that new heavens and that new earth.

I'd like to look now at Romans 5. It is my favorite book and I hope Lord willing to soon preach through the book of Romans. Romans 5:6–11 says [6] *For while we were still weak (vanity), at the **right time** Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that **while** we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if **while** we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

This passage reminds me of the text in I Peter 3:18–22 where you have the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Christ and here Paul is saying the same thing. Paul is telling us that when the season was right, at the right time, Christ died for His people. The season wasn't that you had gotten better so that He died for you, but the season was that you were a sinner and when the Father gave the time He sent the Son who redeemed you at the cross. You were justified by His blood because His blood was the declaration that He had poured Himself out for you and me to pay for all of our sins for all of eternity. So I am forgiven and am entitled to the presence of God in eternity through what Christ has done.

Then he says that if we have been justified by His blood then how much more shall we be saved by His life. Oh how I love that! He has risen. He is ascended and He is the Potentate of time. He rules it. He reigns over it. We are not the victims of impersonal time. We are victors in Christ. I love the hymn Come Praise the Lord; Potentate of Time. In the words of I Timothy 1:17, [17] *To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.* He is immortal, potentate of time, the One who made time, the One who will end time, the eternal One, who at the right time sent His Son, and at the right time went to the cross. It is God who declares the seasons. When that God has done His timely work in you, He

will finish the project and at the right time He will bring you home. That is the One who is lifted up in Ecclesiastes 3.

Without Him it is a meaningless flow of seasons, with Him it is rejoicing. Our God is always on time, at the right time, for all time. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the time we could be together in Your Word to enjoy you and each other. There is none that is like You. You O God, are always on time. You are always timely. You always do all things at the right time. My supposition is that most who are reading this know Christ because Christ not only at the right time died for you, sent the Holy Spirit to begin a work in you, will never the abandon the project of you and at the right time will He will bring you to be with Him. At the right time He will come again and bring us to that which He is now preparing for us. So for those who know Him spend a few moments in silent prayer and as you do declare to Him He is the King, Potentate of Time and you trust Him with all of the seasons of times of your life – in adversity, prosperity, planting, harvesting, speaking, and listening. All of those 14 declarations of time that aren't meant to be exhaustive but only to attract you and inform you, tell Him you trust Him and thank Him for being on time all the time in your life. Then I would encourage you to take the time He has granted to you and redeem the time and seasons of life for Him. What are the right cycles? Do you have a time to meet Him in the morning or the evening? A time to tell others of Him? A time to worship Him? A time to rest in Him? A time to work for Him? What does it mean to put Him over all of your time? Bring it all to Him. Then there may not be many reading this that don't know Him but God has brought you to this. Could it be the timely season of His work for your salvation? So to you I would say now is the right time, today is the day of salvation. We are here gladly giving our time that you may know the Potentate of Time, the Redeemer of your soul. We would bring Him to you. If you want to talk or pray with us don't hesitate to call us at (205) 776-5200 and seek any of us out. We're here because this is the time the Lord is seeking you out. You come to Him. O God our God, thank You for the right time that Christ died for the ungodly, while we were still sinners He saved us with His blood and while He has redeemed us He will lift us up and we will rise because of His resurrection. He lives and we live and we live for Him who is our life, all the time, in Jesus' Name, Amen.