

A Time for Everything
Eccl 3:1-13

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. In an lifetime, the average American will spend: Six months sitting at stoplights, eight months opening junk mail, one year looking for misplaced objects, two years unsuccessfully returning phone calls, four years doing housework, five years waiting in line, and six years eating.
- B. It is quite true that time escapes from the best of us at an alarming rate.
 - 1. Someone once aptly said, “We master our minutes, or we become slaves to them; we use time, or time uses us.”
 - 2. If you are anything like I am, the New Year is a time to ponder where time has gone. When I was a child, it seemed as though time ebbed so slowly; now it seems that time absolutely flies by.
- C. In tonight's text, Solomon is doing a good bit of pondering where time has gone.
 - 1. He has observed a generation of people: “A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever” (1:4).
 - 2. Now, Solomon, guided by the Spirit, puts his observations to paper: READ TEXT.
 - a. There can be no doubt whatsoever as to the beauty of these words. These words have been adapted into songs & various other literary works.
 - b. However, we cannot get so caught up in the pure beauty of these words that we cannot see the truth God desires us to see.
 - 3. That truth relates to Solomon's observations of generations. Solomon observes God's Administration & Man's Abandonment.

II. GOD'S ADMINISTRATION.

- A. These verses demonstrate God's administration of the universe.
 - 1. Throughout this book, Solomon writes about God's control over the universe.
 - a. “I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with” (1:13).
 - b. “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God” (2:24).
 - c. “To the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to the one who pleases God” (2:26).
 - 2. Now, Solomon turns his attention to demonstrating that administration in every day life.
 - a. If you notice the list, the activities Solomon list were common occurrences in the ANE: planting & plucking up, tearing & sowing, and war & peace.
 - b. While planing & plucking and war & peace may not be every day life-and-death matters for us, they certainly were for the first readers of this passage. They surely would have understood this as God's governance in everyday, common occurrences.
 - 3. These verses show God's **total** control of the universe.
 - a. Solomon gives a list of seven polar opposites.
 - (1) Seven is the number—that, in the ancient world—signified completeness.
 - (2) The use of polar opposites in poetry signifies totality.
 - b. The point is that nothing happens without the governance of God.
 - (1) “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (Mt 10:29).
 - (2) Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul writes, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (Col 1:15-16).
 - 4. We must not think in terms of predestination.
 - a. Muslims teach total predestination—i.e., that everything that happens has been predetermined by God. E.g., if a mudslide comes down and destroys a house, it was because

- “allah” willed it so.
- b. Even Ecclesiastes teaches quite differently.
 - (1) Solomon saw that not everything occurs according to preordination:
 - (a) “I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all” (9:11).
 - (b) There is according to this passage, a very real thing such as luck—whether that luck be good or bad. Somethings happen to us because we are in the right place at the right time & other things happen because we are at the wrong place at the wrong time.
 - (2) If all has been predetermined by God & we can't change anything, it seems odd for Solomon to conclude his work with these words:
 - (a) “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13).
 - (b) If I have no control over whether or not I will fear God, why instruct me to do so?
5. If this text doesn't teach total predestination, what does it teach?
- a. God has established proper order to the universe.
 - (1) Notice that Solomon says that there is “a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted” (v 2).
 - (2) God established the time for planting & harvesting: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Gn 8:22).
 - (3) I don't have to plant when it's time to plant: I can go out & plow a garden & plant right now if I want to. But, because that's outside of God's time, it's not going to succeed.
 - b. Even time & circumstance work toward the purposes of God.
 - (1) Notice what Peter says about the crucifixion of Christ: “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23).
 - (a) God had a plan, but the Jews acted lawlessly out of their freewill.
 - (b) God was able to accomplish his purposes even with the freewill of the Jews.
 - (2) “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rm 8:28-29).
- B. In his governance of the universe, God has given time to man.
1. At the Creation, God created time.
 - a. “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day” (Gn 1:5).
 - b. On the fourth day, “God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years'” (Gn 1:14).
 2. Because God has given man time, man needs to be careful how he uses that time.
 - a. “Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12).
 - b. “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:15-16).
 - c. How well are we using the time that God has given?
- C. In his governance of the world, God has established the right time for man's activities.
1. Notice the affirmation at verse 11: “He has made everything beautiful in its time.”
 - a. That statement is quite reminiscent of Genesis 1 where God beheld the beauty of his Creation: “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gn 1:31).
 - b. Just as every physical thing God created was very good, the orderliness God established is beautiful.
 2. However, as you look over this list, there are multiple activities which do not seem beautiful at all?
 - a. How can death & war, for example, be beautiful in their time? Let's use those two activities

- to illustrate how all can be beautiful.
- b. How can death be beautiful?
 - (1) God never intended for man to die & death is God's last great enemy (1 Cor 15:26).
 - (2) However, for the Christian, death is a beautiful event.
 - (a) "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Ps 116:15).
 - (b) "I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'" (Rv 14:13).
 - c. From a Christian worldview, death is likely seen as beautiful much more easily than is war.
 - (1) How many families have suffered untold terror in the two wars this nation has fought since 2001?
 - (a) The first American soldier to die in Afghanistan was a NT Christian.
 - (b) How many children in the middle east have gone hungry or been maimed because of the war?
 - (2) In 1946, Dwight Eisenhower declared, "I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its stupidity."
 - (3) Why is there war on this earth?
 - (a) Scripture provides an answer: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, because you do not ask" (Js 4:1-2).
 - (b) That may seem simplistic since James speaks of fights within a church & not between countries. However, I'm convinced that all fights come from passions within us.
 - Why did Saddam Hussein invade Kuwait? Was it not that he coveted?
 - Why did the world fight World War II? Was it not partially because Hitler has a lust for power & desired to rule the world?
 - (4) So, how can such destruction arising from sin be beautiful?
 - (a) Simply because war serves the purposes of God.
 - (b) Let me give a couple examples:
 - When the Israelites went into Canaan, there was war. But, that war served the purpose of God's giving the land to the descendants of Abraham.
 - In 1 Kings 22, the war that Ahab started served the purpose of carrying out God's judgment upon Ahab.
3. God's purposes cannot be thwarted, for he has made everything beautiful in its time.

III. MAN'S ABANDONMENT.

- A. Man has abandonment in the face of God's governance of the world in that man has no such governance of the world.
- B. Man can do so very little in the face of all that God can do.
 1. Solomon says that there is a time to be born & a time to die.
 - a. We have no control over the day of our births.
 - (1) There is not a one of us who decided to be born & there isn't a one of us who had any control over when & where we'd be born.
 - (2) Not even an expectant mother can control when & where she'll give birth.
 - (a) Speaking of the birth of Christ, Luke records, "While they were there [in Bethlehem], the time came for her to give birth" (2:6) – Mary had no choice in the time when the Christ was born.
 - (b) How many babies have been born in the back of cabs or on airplanes, because their mothers were not expecting so soon a birth? On New Year's Day, a baby was born on a flight from the Netherlands to Boston.
 - b. Neither do we have any control over the day of our deaths.
 - (1) "No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death" (8:8).
 - (2) Granted, with medical technology we can greatly delay the day of death. Yet, it is going

to come & we do not know when it shall come.

2. Furthermore, Solomon says that there is a time to plant & a time to pluck up what is planted.
 - a. Man has no control whatsoever over the seasons of the Earth.
 - b. With the help of modern technology, we can grow just about anything in a greenhouse all year long, but you'd better not try that outside.
- C. We've hinted at this truth several times this evening: Simply because God has established a set time for all things does not mean that man cannot do as he will.
1. God has provided man freewill & man can determine how he will respond to the times God has ordained.
 2. In fact, the placement of this poem in the Book of Ecclesiastes establishes this truth.
 - a. Through the years, several biblical scholars have said that this poem is out of place in the book. That this book is extremely disjointed at this juncture.
 - b. However, these verses are an extension of the end of chapter 2.
 - (1) In v 26, Solomon speaks of the righteous & the sinner: "To the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God."
 - (2) Thus, the one who is righteous attempts to live life in accord with God's appointed time & the sinner does not attempt to live life in accord with God's appointed time.
 - c. Being sinful, men often do not act according to God's appointed times. Solomon says, for example, that there is a time to keep silence & a time to speak.
 - (1) How many people speak when they need to keep silent or vice versa?
 - (a) Job's friends spoke when they should have kept silent.
 - For a week, Job's friends kept silent (Job 2:13); it was then that they did the most good.
 - They then open their mouths & begin to declare that Job is suffering because he is evil when that is so far from the truth. They spoke when they should have kept silent.
 - (b) "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent" (Prov 10:19).
 - (2) Shall we be careful to speak when it is time to speak?
- D. Man also does not understand the ways of God.
1. Solomon says that God "has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from beginning to end" (v 11).
 2. Is there any way at all to comprehend what God has done from the beginning of time?
 - a. In Scripture, we have a recording of the acts of God.
 - b. However, we surely do not believe that Scripture tells us all that God has done.
 3. Furthermore, we have absolutely no idea how God uses his providence to accomplish his purposes.
 - a. How is it that the Jews were free to decide what to do, yet they chose to crucify the Christ according to the will of God?
 - b. Yet, of course, we don't need to understand the way that God works for him to accomplish his work on this earth.
 4. We also do not know all the purposes of God.
 - a. I know that Jesus died according to the will of God, for Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, declared such at Pentecost.
 - b. Yet, because direct revelation has ceased, we do not know what all God may be doing to accomplish his final purpose of the glorification of his Christ.
 - (1) However, all history is moving toward that final glorification of Jesus Christ: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).
 - (2) Are you ready to confess that truth at this appointed time & fulfill the divine purpose for your life?