

January 15, 2017

“A Time for Everything”

Focal Passage: Ecclesiastes 3:1-22 (NASB)

Cross References: Genesis 1:26-29, 31; 9:6; 1 Samuel 2:6; Psalm 8:1-9; Jeremiah 17:10; Ezekiel 33:20; Hosea 6:1-2; Amos 5:13-15; Matthew 16:27; Romans 1:16-22; 12:9, 15; 1 Corinthians 15:39; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7-8; Colossians 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 9:27; James 1:2-4; 2 Peter 3:8; Revelation 20:11-15; 21:3-4; 22:12

Lesson Idea: Everything that God allows in our lives has its appropriate time; we should thank God in all circumstances that He is eternally in control.

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Jan 8 Genesis 25-26	Jan 9 Genesis 27-29
Jan 10 Genesis 30-31	Jan 11 Genesis 32-34
Jan 12 Genesis 35-37	Jan 13 Genesis 38-40
Jan 14 Genesis 41-42	Jan 15 Genesis 43-45

Background:

Chapter 3 contains the most famous passage from the book of Ecclesiastes. Its simple message of a time for every purpose under heaven was made even more popular through the song “Turn! Turn! Turn!” by the Byrds which reached #1 on the Billboard charts in 1965.

The message of Ecclesiastes 3, about the appropriate nature of time and every activity, is both timeless and timely. People today need to be confronted by the brevity of life, and to be in awe by the beauty of the eternal work of God. We are reminded again that *“every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows.”* (James 1:17, NIV)

NOTE: from David Guzik, *Ecclesiastes*:

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: This list – describing the different seasons and facets of life – is beautiful. Yet it also casts a dark shadow, because it reminds us of the inevitability of trouble and evil, and of the relentless monotony of life.

“His ceaseless reiteration of the words, ‘A time . . . a time . . . a time,’ are intended to indicate his sense of the monotony of all things, rather than of their variety.” (Morgan)

A time to be born, and a time to die . . . a time to break down, and a time to build up: A bad facet answers each good facet. The Preacher understood that though there are good things in life, the bad things can’t be escaped.

“Birth and death, the boundaries of life under the sun, are mentioned first.” (Wright)...

This list also shows us the need to take full advantage of the time God gives us (Ephesians 5:16, Colossians 4:5).

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

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

2 A time to give birth and a time to die;

A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

3 A time to kill and a time to heal;

A time to tear 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 throw stones and a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.

6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost;

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;

A time to be silent and a time to speak.

8 A time to love and a time to hate;

A time for war and a time for peace.

9 What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? 10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

11 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.

12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God. 14 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. 15 That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

16 Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness. 17 I said to myself, “God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked

man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there. 18 I said to myself concerning the sons of men, "God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts." 19 For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. 20 All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. 21 Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth? 22 I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

DISCUSSION:

- V 1. Who "appoints" the time for everything? Why does he specify that there is a time for every event under heaven? (see 2 Peter 3:8; Revelation 21:3-4)
- v 2-8. How have you seen evidenced in your life that all of the situations in these verses have their proper time? How has God used times like these to help you in your walk with Him? Have you thanked Him for all of these situations? (see James 1:2-4)
- A time to give birth and a time to die; (Hebrews 9:27)
- A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.
- A time to kill and a time to heal; (Genesis 9:6; 1 Samuel 2:6; Hosea 6:1-2)
- A time to tear down and a time to build up.
- A time to weep and a time to laugh; (Romans 12:15)
- 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. (Amos 5:13-15)
- A time to love and a time to hate; (Romans 12:9)
- A time for war and a time for peace.
- V 9. Answer v 9's question: *what profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?*

- v 10. What task has God given with which people occupy themselves?
- v 11. Why is **everything** appropriate in its time? Some translations use "beautiful" instead of "appropriate." How are all things beautiful in their right time? (see Genesis 1:31)
- What does it mean that God has set eternity in everyone's heart? But what about eternity can we not know? (see Ecclesiastes 8:17; Romans 11:33)
- ✓ What should realizing that every person has eternity set in their heart mean for our witnessing and sharing the Good News with others? (see Romans 1:16-22)

NOTE: from Guzik:

Also He has put eternity in their hearts: The Preacher understood that man has an awareness and a longing for the eternal, and that God has put this in their hearts. We can say that eternity is in our hearts because we are made in the image of an eternal God.

"God made man in his own image; and nothing more surely attests to the greatness of our origin than those faculties of the soul which are capable of yearning for, conceiving, and enjoying the Infinite, the Immortal, and the Divine. . . ." (Meyer)

The well-known missionary and author Don Richardson used the phrase eternity in their hearts to describe the phenomenon of redemptive analogies in most all aboriginal cultures. Almost every culture has traditions, customs, or ways of thinking that reflect basic Biblical truth, and these can be used by missionaries to explain the gospel.

Except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end: Though God has given man a long for and awareness of eternity, God has not revealed very much about His eternal work. This keeps the yearning for eternity alive in the heart of man as a yet-to-be-fulfilled longing.

"The Preacher's vast researches have found nothing in the finite earthly realm which can satisfy the human heart intellectually or practically . . . This is the nearest he comes to Augustine's maxim: 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you.'" (Eaton)

- v 12-13. What is the best way to live life? What is the gift of God concerning everyday life?

- v 14. What do we know about the work of God? (see 1 Corinthians 15:58) What should the completeness of God cause all people to do?
- v 15. Why is the recurring nature of time a recurring theme in Ecclesiastes? **NOTE:** the NIV translates the last phrase of v 15: *God will call the past to account*. How does God do that and why?
- v 16-17. What else had Solomon noticed about life, and what did he say God would do about it? (see Jeremiah 17:10; Ezekiel 33:20; Matthew 16:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7-8; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:12)
- v 18-20. How are people and animals alike when it comes to life here on earth? (see Psalm 49:20)
- v 21. How are men and animals different? (see Genesis 1:26-29; Psalm 8:1-9; 1 Corinthians 15:39; Colossians 3:10)

NOTE: from Guzik:

Concerning the condition of the sons of men . . . they themselves are like animals: Solomon compared life between humans and animals, and also compared their deaths – doing so in *under the sun*, absent eternity terms. On this basis, he could say that there is little difference in the life and destiny between humans and animals . . .

“In their context these verses say that God makes all sensible people realize that they are as much subject to death as is the animal world.” (Wright)

As one dies, so dies the other: The Preacher thought of an animal dying and its body decomposing. Then he thought that by all outward appearance, the same happens to a human body. Therefore, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity.

“The distinction between man and beast in annulled by death; the former’s boasted superiority, his power of conceiving and planning, his greatness, skill, strength, cunning, all come under the category of vanity, as they cannot ward off the inevitable blow.” (Deane)

This is no argument for the doctrine of annihilationism, the idea that the unrighteous dead simply cease to exist, either immediately or after some time of punishment. It is no argument for two reasons. First, Solomon spoke here as a man unconvinced of eternity and the meaning it brings to life. Second, we believe what 2 Timothy 1:10 says:

that Jesus brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. The understanding of the afterlife is cloudy and uncertain in the Old Testament, but not nearly as so in the New Testament.

Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? We sense that the Preacher hoped there was a different destiny between people and animals. . .

“The Teacher is speaking phenomenologically, i.e., as things appear to the senses.” (Wright)

- v 22. What was Solomon’s conclusion about mankind’s physical and temporal life? Who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

APPLICATION:

- ✓ Do you view all the “times” in your life as beautiful and appropriate? why or why not?
- ✓ How can you give thanks to the Lord in all circumstances this week? (see 1 Thessalonians 5:18)
- ✓ Knowing that your time here is short, how will you invest your days this week?

Lesson by Bro Stan