

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Date: Sunday, 4 October 2020

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Sermon: When Life Doesn't Make Sense

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Passage

Eccl. 3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

Eccl. 3:2 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.

Eccl. 3:9 What gain has the worker from his toil? 10 I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 11 He 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 the beginning to the end. 12 I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

Eccl. 3:14 I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. 15 That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Eccl. 3:16 Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. 17 I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. 18 I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. 19 For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. 21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? 22 So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

Transcript

Hashtag Blessed

Have you ever heard of the term #blessed? Maybe you have, maybe you haven't. I thought I'd try explain what it is. It's a term that people use on social media, like

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. So say on Instagram, you might take a picture of yourself at the beach on a nice sunny day, and then you write at the bottom of your photo, "Enjoying myself, life couldn't be better." #blessed. You tend to use the term only when it's a good thing or if you want others to be jealous of you.

But it got me thinking about how our #blessed events relate to our relationship with God. When things are going well for you in life, what does it say to you about your relationship with God? What's going through your mind? Are you saying, God must like me today? Or, God must have blessed me today? The trouble begins when you go through the not so good days, the difficult days, the rough days. What then do you say about your relationship with God? Do you feel like God sees you as a failure? Do you feel like God sees you as his enemy? Do you feel #notblessed by God? Maybe we won't be so bold to admit it, but these are really big issues. The voices in our head provide a commentary on the days of our lives, and how we see God. Or rather how we see God see us!

Today, in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, Solomon provides us a look into the days of our lives. The Preacher helps us to understand the good days and the bad days. To help us when life doesn't make sense. I want to draw your attention to three things that we can see from the passage. I want to show you the following:

1. We are not in control
2. We are being taught to fear
3. We hope beyond death

We are not in control

Let's have a look at each of these points. Let's look at the first point, that we are not in control. The preacher in chapter 1 was helping us to see that life is a breath, the Hebrew word Hebel. Life is short, it is transient. In chapter 2, the preacher wanted us to see that in the pursuit of significance in our life's goals, we will not find ultimate satisfaction. Life is going to be a disappointment, it is futile because we all die.

But here in chapter 3, we come to an often quoted passage. We often hear it in a funeral, especially the first eight verses. Because taken on its own, it sounds quite nostalgic. That there is a time, there is a season for everything. There is a season for

life and death, there is a season for love and hate, there is a season for laughing and a season for dying. And if we were to hear it at a funeral, we would agree with the words of the preacher. When we reflect on a loved one's life, we can say yes, there were great moments, and there were difficult moments.

It's kind of like the Lion King, that opening song, the Circle of Life.

It's the circle of life

And it moves us all

Through despair and hope

Through faith and love

'Til we find our place

On the path unwinding

In the circle

The circle of life

Doesn't that sound good? The seasons, the times. There is a time for everything. It might seem like a positive thing, but that's because we're reading the preacher out of context. Because it's actually a bleak message, especially when we read the very next verse.

What gain has the worker from his toil? Ecclesiastes 3:9 (ESV)

It's a theme that we've seen, haven't we? What gain do we have when we will all end up dead? When the preacher looks at the seasons, a time to be born and a time to die, he's actually being bleak, what profit is there? Nothing is permanent. The preacher is making the point that you and I are not in control. He goes on.

"I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He 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 the beginning to the end." Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 (ESV)

As human beings, we have eternity, we seek for eternity, we seek for significance, we seek for gain, and ultimate satisfaction. But the preacher tells us we can't. We

cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. We can look at the sun rising and setting, we can feel the wind, the rain, observe the rivers emptying into the seas, and they're all beautiful, but we cannot see beyond what God has given us.

I'll give you an example, put your hand up if you know what you're going to do tomorrow? Most of us have put our hands up, now keep your hands up if you know how tomorrow will play out? I suspect most of our hands will go down. Because we can't even see beyond today, we may make plans but we don't know for certain what will happen. Life is a gift from God, that's what we saw last week. What we see today is we're not in control. The preacher is making us aware of a truth that we sometimes forget, we're not in control of the seasons, but rather we're told that God is.

I want to ask, as a personal application, this question. How much do you worry? I must admit that in the past I've been overly worried over many things. Money, career, relationships. The preacher is helping us understand that we are mere human beings, we are creatures, and we are not the ones who are in control.

We are being taught to fear God

This brings us to our second point, the point that the preacher is making about the times and seasons is that we are being taught to fear. We are being taught to fear God.

If we don't believe in God, then the preacher's words are rather depressing. In fact, we can take to heart what he says in verse 12 and 13.

"I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man." Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 (ESV)

It's a message that the preacher has given us. If this is all that there is to this life, then we might as well enjoy ourselves. The youngsters call this #yolo. You only live once. Rachel looked up some posts on instagram with #yolo, and here are some of what she found. "Last night's view from our terrace in Santorini." #yolo. Why not splurge all your money if you only live once" or "I'm the captain of my own ship."

Says a young man who is pictured posing on a ship they just purchased followed by the hashtags, #yolo and #blessed.

Eat, drink, enjoy work. That's it. Don't we see that? Maybe the way that others around us just eat, drink and enjoy work, enjoy life. And yes, life is a gift from God. But the preacher expands his perspective and he sees that there is a purpose to the seasons of our lives. Whether we go through the good times or the bad,

"I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away." Ecclesiastes 3:14-15 (ESV)

We learn that we are not in control, because it's God who is in control. He is the one who sets the boundaries, he is the one who ordains for things to happen. We're told nothing can be added or taken away from God. We need to remember that God is God and we are not, and we need to humble ourselves before Him. God is in control of the seasons that we come through. The suffering, the joy. The valleys and the mountains.

But do you notice what verse 14 says? God has done it, so that... and this is the reason that we're given, that we may fear before him. That we may learn to fear God. Earlier I asked you, whether you think your circumstances reflect your relationship with God. If things go well, do you feel that you have God's blessing? And when things go terribly, do you feel that God doesn't like you? Solomon tells us that is not the case. The reason why we go through both difficult and easy times is not because God hates you or because he has it out for us. No. It's because he's teaching us to learn to fear him. He's teaching us that fear of Him is a wise and good thing to do. It's so we learn to love God.

There is a purpose for each and every single season we go through. Even when we don't understand why it is we go through what we go through. And here's a personal challenge for each one of us. Let me ask this, "If God is in control of each season in your life, how willing and humble are you to surrender yourself to his wisdom, love and care?" Are we people who seek to surrender our control when to God or are we people who are proud and seek to grasp control in all that we do when in reality we don't even know what tomorrow will bring? It's like that hymn, I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender

Humbly at His feet I bow

Worldly pleasures all forsaken

Take me, Jesus, take me now,

How willing are you to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, to learn to fear him, because you know that he cares for you and he will exalt you at the proper time? Learning to rest in God, not being overly anxious. As one author puts it, learning to grow small. Since we can't see the bigger picture, we can learn to trust God in all that we do.

We hope beyond death

There's a third and final point that Solomon makes that we need to understand. And it's the fact that we hope beyond death.

It's a point that Solomon makes through this chapter. That we can live our lives but we cannot see beyond death. God has placed eternity on our hearts but we cannot find out what God has done (v11). And later in verse 17 and 18.

"I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts." Ecclesiastes 3:17-18 (ESV)

Solomon sees injustice, wickedness. And he makes the point here again about death. That we cannot see beyond death. And Solomon hopes beyond death. Solomon hopes that God would judge the righteous and the wicked. Isn't Solomon so real? Isn't Solomon speaking what many of our hearts have asked or are even asking at this moment? We look to this world and we see the ways that it is wrong. When we attend a funeral of a loved one, our hearts mourn partly because we can't see them again. Solomon struggles, because like us, we can't see beyond death. We wonder what happens beyond death.

"Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?" Ecclesiastes 3:21 (ESV)

Death is the impenetrable wall, that we can't see through. Solomon can't see through it. And he hopes that God will make things that are wrong, right. It's what he struggles with, what happens after I die? That's the struggle we have.

If we were to only read Ecclesiastes, it would leave us hopeless. Just like Solomon.

But that's where we have an advantage over Solomon. Solomon didn't know what would happen after death. He couldn't see through death. But we have one who went through death and out the other side. We have the Lord Jesus. The one who was able to raise Lazarus even though he was in the tomb for four days. The one who calls himself the resurrection and the life. The christ, the son of God.

Jesus Christ. The one who himself went through the impenetrable wall of death. For three days he was under the power of death, but death could not hold him down. We know the gospel, and the one who walks with us even through the valley of the shadow of death. We have the advantage over Solomon, because we see Christ. The #yolo rings some truth to a certain extent, but it implies that life ends at death, forever. But we have hope, a certainty beyond death.

Rachel and I, in our time off, watch Korean dramas on Netflix. And because these tv series are so long, I'll generally read the ending of the series before we start. Because if it's not a good ending, then I can't be bothered watching. So read to make sure it ends well. So that no matter how bad it gets during the series, we'll know there's a good ending. Maybe you do that with books.

The Christian life is like that. We know how our lives will end. Death, but resurrection. Because of what Christ has done. And it means that no matter how out of control life is, no matter the seasons of suffering and difficulties we may go through, we know that it is God who is in control. Not us. We know that he is using it to draw us closer to him. And we know how our stories will end. Let's hold onto Christ, through death and out the other side.