

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Lesson 3: A Time for Everything Under Heaven -- Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Slow down for a moment and listen to the rhythm of your own life. There was a morning you stood in a hospital hallway and heard a first cry, and there was an afternoon you stood beside a bed and watched a last breath. There were seasons when everything in you wanted to build, to plant, to gather, to hold on tight. And there were other seasons, just as real, when the hard work was to let go, to grieve, to be silent, to release what you could no longer keep. Solomon hears that same rhythm and sets it to poetry: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot. He is not being morbid. He is teaching us to see that our days are not a chaos of random events but a tapestry woven by a steady, patient hand.

Read the famous lines slowly and you start to feel something settle in your chest. Fourteen pairs of opposites, twenty-eight moments, and not one of them surprises God. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to keep silence and a time to speak. A time for war and a time for peace. You and I cannot make it always be harvest. We cannot freeze the good times or fast-forward the painful ones. But the One who appointed the seasons is not pacing nervously above the clouds. He set the sun and the rain on a schedule we did not write, and He has folded our small calendars into His great one.

Then Solomon says something that changes everything. God has made everything beautiful in its time, and He has put eternity into the human heart (3:11). There it is, the reason a sunset can make you ache and a song can make you homesick for a place you have never been. We were built with a horizon larger than this world. That is why a bigger house, a fuller bank account, a longer vacation, none of it finally satisfies the deep hunger inside you. You were made for more than the calendar can hold. And the God who set that longing in you also tells us, plainly, that He will one day judge the righteous and the wicked (3:17). The clock is moving toward a meeting.

So what do we do with our handful of years? Solomon's answer is surprisingly down to earth. Eat your bread, enjoy your work, receive the ordinary day as a gift from God's hand, and fear Him because His work stands forever (3:13-14). This week your seasons will keep turning. There will be a phone call you did not want and a hug you needed. There will be something to plant and something to release. The question is not whether the seasons will change; they will. The question is whether you will walk through them trusting the God who holds the calendar, doing the next right thing, and keeping your heart fixed on the eternity He placed inside you.

Group Discussion: Read the poem in 3:1-8 out loud as a group. Which one of these 'times' is the hardest season for you to accept as being under God's good ordering, and why?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life right now are you fighting against the season God has actually given you, wishing it were a different one, and what would it look like to trust Him inside the season you are in?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–22

Study Questions

1. In 3:1–8 Solomon lists fourteen pairs of 'times' that come to every life. What does this poem teach us about God's sovereign ordering of time, and how is that different from saying life is random or merely up to us (compare Psalm 31:15; Acts 17:26)?
2. Look honestly at the pairs in 3:1–8. Which 'time' have you handled poorly in the past, speaking when you should have stayed silent, holding on when you should have let go, and what did you learn?
3. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says God 'has put eternity into man's heart.' What does that phrase mean, and how does it explain why nothing 'under the sun' ever finally satisfies us?
4. When have you most strongly felt that ache for 'eternity,' the sense that this world is not enough, and how have you typically tried to fill it?
5. In 3:12–13 Solomon calls the ability to eat, drink, and find enjoyment in our work a 'gift of God.' How does receiving daily life as a gift differ from chasing pleasure as an idol (compare 1 Timothy 6:17)?
6. Think about your ordinary work and daily routine this past week. Did you receive it as a gift from God's hand, or merely endure it? What would change if you saw it as a gift?
7. Ecclesiastes 3:14 says whatever God does endures forever and that He works 'so that people fear before him.' What is the difference between this reverent fear of God and being merely afraid of Him, and how should it shape our worship and obedience?
8. When you consider that God's work 'endures forever' and your works often do not, how does that humble you and yet also give you peace?
9. Solomon makes two observations that must be held together: in 3:17 he says 'God will judge the righteous and the wicked,' and in 3:18–21 he notes that, to the eye under the sun, man and beast seem to share one breath and return to one dust. How do we read 3:18–21 rightly without turning it into a denial of the soul, the resurrection, or final judgment, and how does the fuller revelation of Christ answer the question Solomon could only raise (compare John 5:28–29; 2 Corinthians 5:1–10; Hebrews 9:27)?
10. Name one specific way this chapter is forming you to walk with Christ this week, whether it is trusting His timing in a hard season, receiving an ordinary day as His gift, or living now in light of the judgment and resurrection He has secured.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 31:15, our times are in God's hand, the same trust Solomon's poem invites; Acts 17:26, God appoints the seasons and boundaries of every people and life; John 5:28–29, Christ's words on the resurrection of the just and the unjust that answer 3:18–21; Hebrews 9:27, it is appointed to die once and then face judgment, confirming 3:17; Romans 8:18–23, the creation groans for the redemption that satisfies the eternity God set in our hearts

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