

Ecclesiastes

Part 3

Ecclesiastes 3 – A Time for Everything

¹ *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:*

² *a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,*

³ *a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,*

⁴ *a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,*

⁵ *a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,*

⁶ *a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,*

⁷ *a time to tear and a time to mend, 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 do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.*

¹⁵ *Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before;*

and God will call the past to account. ¹⁶ And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there. ¹⁷ I said to myself, “God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.

Solomon has set out on a quest to understand this world and his place in it. He does a very thorough job, contemplating all the dimensions of existence and how we fit into them.

In chapter 3 he talks about time. Space matter time are the 3 pillars of the universe, without any one of these the cosmos would cease to exist. If you have matter and time but no space, where would it exist? If you have matter and space but no time, when would it exist? If you have time and space but no matter, what would exist?

In the first chapter Solomon talked about space – the vastness of the earth, that has always been and will always be. In the second chapter Solomon spoke about matter, all the material pleasures and goods he sampled and in the third chapter he turns his gaze to time.

This passage has shaped our language about the church and the faith. So often we speak of seasons. For a season we did this ministry in church; in my faith I when through a season of hardship; etc. The very notion Solomon explains so well here, and give us this vocabulary.

In life there will be seasons; some seasons are good, where things go well; there will be a time to heal, build, laugh, dance, mend, love, find peace.

Some seasons are bad, where life will be hard: there will be a time to die, to kill, tear down, weep, mourn, tear, hate, war.

Because there is nothing new under the sun – all things happen in their time and in their time they happen. This oscillates between the 2 poles, each line is balanced between the 2 extremes – heal kill, birth death, love hate – giving the feeling that life is this constant wavering between these extremes.

One commentator calls this passage the tyranny of time. That is what Solomon is describing here. This constant push and pull of life, knowing there is a time for all things and it the timing that makes them right or wrong... yet we don't always know the right time. There is a time to tear down and to build, but the timing makes it moral. But if I tear down a local school, and the kids have nowhere to learn... that's not moral. All the things listed are morally right in the right time, even killing, This is a bit of a tricky verse in our modern world because we have come to a place where we believe that all killing is wrong – even the worst criminals, even the prisoners of war.

Remember the movie A Time To Kill... straight from Ecc 3. A man defending his family kills the attacker, and the whole question of the movie is: Is there a time to kill, is there a time where its justified?

So what do we say to a verse that says there is a right time to kill?

Well firstly we say it's not giving us a blank cheque to bump off anyone we don't like. But even in the most extreme case of killing. In the most extreme circumstance – be it to save your life or your family's life or whatever – there is a time.

Yet that time is very hard for us to pin point. Even when we think we did the right thing, where not quite sure... the right time, God's timing is a mystery to us.

Yet you will notice that there are many things left off the list: there is no time for injustice or wickedness; there is no time for cruelty or intolerance.

So there is an inherent morality in the list of things mentioned. Yet in many cases what makes something wrong or right is time – the right and the wrong time.

Have a look verse 11:

“¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end”

God has put eternity in our hearts. We know we are a small part of something much bigger. The eternity of God and the salvation of his people is planted with in us. Yet we are far too small to understand it.

This moment in time is small and fleeting, time will march on long after were gone. Yet we know we are part of that eternity, made in God's image, we just can't see how. It's like we are in a giant mosaic made of people – from the air you can see the master plan, the grand design, the eternal beauty but from the ground you just see a crowd. You know there is something special going on, and you're a part of it but you just don't know how.

Solomon laments on this that he knows God eternal plan, that this life is part of it all yet he is too small to understand it and he is left unsatisfied at his lack of ability to grasp the meaning of it all, and his place in it.

But he knows enough to know how much better off he is than the non-believer because they have to labour and toil away, without eternity in their hearts; in the void of meaninglessness, not knowing that God's grand designs are at play.

Time is defined by movement – that’s why we say time marches on. And how true is that, you can’t go back and have that moment again. You can’t get time to stop for you to finish something left unfinished. Time marches on by its very nature, it is like a boat leaving the harbor, it can’t be stopped.

Solomon is resigned to the fact that God is the creator and ruler of time. God exists outside of this time – he has to for him to have been able to create it. Yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end (verse 11). Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account (verse 15). Past present future, the 3-fold nature of time, our 3-fold God rules it all. What has been, what will be ... God will call it into account.

This is a hard reality to that God’s judgment on the wicked of the world will be in his time. God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed” (verse 17). No Action in this world, throughout all of space and time will escape the eye of God.

I heard this story of a minister from South Africa. He was the minister of a white church during the overturning of the apartheid Government and there was a lot of hostility between the black and white communities.

One morning during worship, a few men broke in, threw, explosives, fired guns at people and killed and wounded number of people in the congregation. They then had to go through performing all the funerals for the dead. The politics of the time meant that the men responsible would likely go unpunished. They met again as a church a few weeks later, and the only comfort they had was that God was the ruler of all time, his judgment goes beyond this life. Injustices will be put right, those who get away with it won’t.

God is in complete control, even when it doesn’t feel like it, and nothing will escape his judgment.

I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him. Verse 14

And the fear of God is the beginning of all knowledge. With our God nothing escapes him, nothing will be added as new, nothing taken away. And yet God has put in us the seed of eternity. In our heart God lays the knowledge of eternity. We are not lost in the dark... we might not understand it fully; we might be frustrated by the fact that we know enough to know we don’t get it.

Many people start to leave Jesus, because his teachings are hard to hear so he turns to the disciples and says:

⁶⁷ “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. John 6

In Christ we have the seeds of eternity. The words of eternal life are there for us to have. Time has no power over us... its control is gone. In Christ eternal life give to us through grace by faith.

In Christ Solomon’s question is answered:

Where else have we to go when you alone have the words of eternal life