

CHASING THE WIND
It's Time! Ecclesiastes 3:1-15
April 30, 2023

INTRO.: Good morning and welcome to the continuation of the series in Ecclesiastes, *Chasing the Wind*. As I think about the theme of *It's Time* from Ecclesiastes 3, I am reminded of the sport I have the privilege of coaching, track (picture of a track). I coach the distance runners: 400 meter (1 lap), 800 meter (2 laps), 1600 meter (4 laps) and two relays (the 4 x 400, where each person on the 4-man team runs 1 lap; and the 4 x 800, where each person on the 4-man team runs 2 laps). It has everything to do with this: picture of stopwatches. It's all about having a faster time than the other person or relay team. Since I coach middle school, they are learning how to run the best pace and, in the end, the best time that they can run. Nobody can sprint the whole race and if you try it will not turn out well. So, one of my goals is to teach them how to determine their pace. We run that pace over and over again at a shorter distance, so they begin to understand what that pace feels like. As they get in better shape that pace will get faster and faster. It's exciting to see them begin to really get it and it makes a big difference in their overall results. The chapter we're looking at talks about time. As we read through these verses together ask yourself, "What does this tell me about time?", and "What does this tell me about God?"

Let's read Ecclesiastes 3 together as it comes up on the screen.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God. 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 men will revere him. Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

Can anybody tell me the name of the song from the 60's that used this Scripture as the basis for their song? It is *Turn, Turn, Turn*. This is a song written by Pete Seeger in 1959 and performed by a group called *The Byrds* (1965). There are only 6 words in the song that are not from this Bible passage.

Some people read these verses and come away with the conclusion that it is very fatalistic and depressing. Yet, I see it as an incredibly encouraging group of verses, but you can't stop at verse 8. So, let's begin with a little background:

TIME...

Man is to take life day by day from the hand of God. Each activity is listed along with its opposite. Up to this point in this book written by Solomon he has spoken of the meaninglessness or vanity of life (vapor, puff of smoke, mist) under the sun, that is, apart from God it is all vanity. Life is like a vapor, a puff of smoke, or breath on a cold winter morning. People come and go and are forgotten. Solomon pursued earthly wisdom and found it to be like chasing the wind, which nobody can catch. Then Solomon pursued pleasure, building projects (houses, gardens, vineyards), wealth, accumulation of possessions (flocks and herds more than anyone else, silver and gold, slaves) to the point that he was far greater than anyone in Jerusalem before him. Out of all this there was a missing piece. What was it, or better yet, who was it? GOD!!! Wisdom and work without God is also meaningless, a chasing after the wind. You take God out of the equation of life and what do you have? NOTHING!!! (zero)

With all that he has pursued up to this point one would conclude that his perspective on time would be very discouraging. Maybe something to the effect of how short a time we have and that we never have enough time to do what we would like to do. The list in these first 8 verses seems to describe just about all of life.

There is a time for everything, a season for every activity under the heavens. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

"time for everything"

"a season:" a fixed time, a predetermined purpose for every activity

"under the heavens:" leaving God out of the picture

Philip Graham Ryken, "So everything that happens in this time-bound universe is under the authority of the God who rules in Heaven. Furthermore, there is a definite orderliness to the way God does things. He is a precise God. Absolute in his authority over space and time, he puts everything in its own time and place. God's sovereignty has a chronology."

Everything described in this list is under the sovereignty of God, yet Solomon didn't mention God in the list or before the list.

"a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate" (God's judgment, the devil), a time for war and a time for peace"

This pretty much covers all of life! Any description of time apart from God is hollow and somewhat depressing.

If we are honest with ourselves the discussion of time comes with somewhat of a tension. How many of us have said things like:

"Where did the time go?", "I just don't have enough time," "There aren't enough hours in the day," "I need to make the most of my time," "When will my time come?"

Verses 9-15 give clarity to what Solomon has described in the first 8 verses. There is clarity because he brings God into the picture. As we go through these verses, I believe they provide 4 reasons how we can trust God with all that is going on in our lives, with time.

TRUST GOD'S TIMING

v. 9-11a

What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Work can be somewhat challenging, can't it? You finish a day's work and then tomorrow comes, and you start all over again. As we saw a few weeks ago, God brings meaning and purpose to work. Verse 11 begins to bring clarity to the issue of time because God is included.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. (Ecclesiastes 3:11a)

"everything:" placed first in the sentence for emphasis and reaches back to the list in the first 8 verses. Its scope includes all the opposites previously listed. (David A. Hubbard)

"beautiful:" this adjective is generally applied to the beauty of appearance. (Michael Eaton) "beautiful" here means "appropriate" (Duane A. Garrett) Something "beautiful" is something good; it is right, pleasing, and appropriate. (Philip Graham Ryken)

God is sovereign over time, and He is good all the time. We may not understand the timing of the events in our lives, and we may not see it as beautiful. God is always on time, and He is never late. Have you witnessed God's timing in your life? Take some time this week to think how God's timing has proven to be the best in your life. Maybe you didn't think so at the time, but you have come to realize the truth of the perfectness of God's timing.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. So, trust God's timing. Secondly,

TRUST GOD'S PRIORITIES

v. 11b

He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. Ecclesiastes 3:11b

Man was originally created to be with God forever. There was no death in the world. Sin brought death. God has set within the heart of every person the need to look beyond the here and now. There is a longing for another world.

‘Eternity’ was important in Israel’s heritage. An eternal life had been lost (Gen. 3:22), an ‘eternal covenant’ inaugurated (Gen. 9:16) by an eternal God (Ps. 90:2). An eternal priesthood (Exod. 40:15) and an eternal kingdom (2 Sam. 7:13) were bestowed by a God eternally merciful (Ps. 111:5), giving his people eternal joy (Isa. 35:10). The eternity of God’s dealings with mankind corresponds to something inside us: we have a capacity for eternal things, are concerned about the future, want to understand ‘from the beginning to the end’, and have a sense of something which transcends our immediate situation. (Michael Eaton)

The incarnation occurred with eternity in mind. Look at just what the Apostle John records in his gospel.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

John 4:14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

John 6:47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

John 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

God has eternity in mind as He directs the affairs of our lives. He has put that void in our lives that can only be met by Him. Yet, none of us here can put all the pieces together. None of us can “fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

I have been reading through J.I. Packer’s book, *Knowing God*” once again and I almost feel like I haven’t read it before. I was struck again by the fact that God has created us for relationship and first and foremost for relationship with Him for eternity.

Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life’s problems fall into place of their own accord. *J.I. Packer*

You and I look at time as linear but God is outside of time and has an eternal perspective. Are you thankful that God has put eternity in your heart and mind? I am grateful that He put a longing in my heart for eternity, a desperate need and desire to know where I was headed beyond this life. This life is such a small part of forever. Have you trusted in Christ for your eternal destiny? Know that God has a plan for His children. The here and now is preparation for eternity.

Romans 8:28–29 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. **29** For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

God’s priorities are far beyond the here and now. You and I can Trust God’s Timing, we can Trust God’s Priorities, and we can:

TRUST GOD’S GRACE

v. 12-13

Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. **13** That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.

Not only does God have eternal priorities but He also pours His grace on us now. These verses speak of enjoying a good and happy life. Remember, that in chapter 2 Solomon talked about pursuing pleasure and possessions with the result being an empty and meaningless life. Work also proved to be void of meaning. God was missing in all these pursuits. When you and I rest in the sovereignty of God we can enjoy what He has given us to do. We can recognize that it is from His hand. The ability to enjoy life and God’s provision is all due to His grace.

The basics of life: food and drink and work are tokens of God's grace. Enjoy them from His hand and use them wisely. Thank God regularly for His provision. Our time here on earth, where we live, work, go to school are part of his plan. He has given each of us something good to do for Him. A few weeks ago, we talked about this thought: *'we get to.'*

We are saved by God's grace, but it is also His grace that that gives us meaning and purpose to our lives today.

Ephesians 2:8–10 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **9** not by works, so that no one can boast. **10** For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

"we are:" present, active, indicative

"God's workmanship:" special creation, work of art

"prepared:" aorist, active, indicative

We are to take nothing for granted and we look at every provision as an opportunity to speak of God's amazing grace.

Trust God's Timing (He makes everything beautiful in His time), Trust God's Priority (He has put eternity in the hearts of each one of us), Trust God's Grace (work, food, and drink are evidence of His grace) and finally:

TRUST GOD'S GOAL

v. 14-15

Ecclesiastes 3:14 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 men will revere him.

"everything God does will endure forever:"

"nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it:"

God will accomplish His purposes, and nobody can thwart His plans. Our security is found in God and His sovereignty over the affairs of all. The fact that we can't totally comprehend God's plan from beginning to end and eternity reminds us how much we are unlike God.

"God does this so that men will revere Him:" other translations have the word "fear"

The right response is to fear God.

Philip Graham Ryken: To fear God is not to give up on finding meaning in life, but to rest our lives on the only solid foundation for time and eternity. To fear God is to trust in his foreknowledge, believing that he knows all things, including our present joys and trials. To fear God is also to believe that he is still in control, even when we cannot see (or do not understand) what he is doing.

Psalms 19:9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

Psalms 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

Proverbs 8:13 To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

Proverbs 19:23 The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble.

Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

God is working the course of events in our lives to drive us to Himself, to recognize our separate need for Him, to honor, worship, and obey His as the ruler of our lives. To truly fear God means that there is a change in my behavior. I desire to obey His Word and be more like Him.

Michael Eaton, "The fear of God is not only the beginning of wisdom; it is also the beginning of joy, of contentment and of an energetic and purposeful life."

Verse 15 reminds us that God has the last word.

Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

Solomon wants to drive his audience (this includes us) from trusting in wealth, possessions, pleasure, human wisdom, and our own short-sighted judgments to trusting in the eternal, gracious, loving, purpose giving, eternity minded God who is totally sovereign over our lives. *Time* reminds me of the need to worship and obey God.

SO WHAT???

I want to go back to my opening illustration of coaching track. The day before each meet the coaches go over with the athletes the events in which they will participate. The day of the meet we remind them to listen to the public address system to hear the call of their event. There is a first call to report to the event, a second call, and a third and final call when they are ready to have the event begin. I also carry around this list which is the order of the events on the track. There are also field events which include shot put, discus, long jump, triple jump, and high jump. Somebody came up with this order and every meet is run with the same order. If you are not at your event after the third call, they won't wait for you to begin the race. There is a plan for every race. There is a time to run the race.

God is the author of time. He is sovereign and without Him there is no true meaning and purpose to life.

*When questioning what is happening in my life and where God is, remember I can trust God's timing. How have I seen God's timing in my life after the fact?

*How have I seen, in my life, that God is concerned about eternal things. Spend some time thanking God.

*When tempted to complain about work, school, or what I have remember that they are all a gift from God, a reminder of His grace.

*One of God's goals for my life is to recognize Him as the sovereign ruler of the world and my life and to respond in worship and obedience.

