



## ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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

*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.*

*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.*

## commentary

The book of Ecclesiastes tells the truth about the meaninglessness of life under the sun. In it, Solomon recounts his life-long search for significance, purpose, and meaning in this life and finds that only by looking outside of this world, will anybody find true meaning. Anything humans pursue in this life and on this earth will only end in disappointment and is madness, like a chasing after the wind. The only way to catch true meaning is through life in Christ. In this passage, Solomon begins to contemplate the sovereignty of God and His purpose for the life-experiences he brings as a place to understand the meaninglessness of life.

**1-8** Solomon begins to portray what happens in life. He does this by listing opposite circumstances in life, both good and bad, that come from the hand of God. He gives this list to show that there is a season for everything and that all of them are not random happenings, but rather they are predetermined by God in His sovereignty. People may wonder why things happen, but Solomon shows that there is a time for everything as God wills it.

A time to be born and a time to die starts Solomon's observance that there is a beginning and an end to everything, particularly our lives. Solomon applies this to agriculture in saying there is a time to plant and a time to uproot. Everything is started,

cultivated, and then sometimes those things become useless or fruitless, so they are “uprooted.” There is also a time to kill and a time to heal. Both are necessary at times to make the world a better place. Sometimes, instead of just killing that thing, person, idea, etc., it is healed, improved upon, or repaired. Old dilapidated and irrelevant things need to be torn down to make space to build new things. Life comes with both mourning and happiness, so they should be accepted as inevitable and not surprise us when they happen. There is a beginning and an end to everything.

The phrase, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, has much debate surrounding. It could refer to the fact that sometimes the way danger was kept away, or someone was executed in those days was to stone them. There is a time to actually defend oneself, but there is also a time to prepare for when that time comes by gathering stones. Another more likely interpretation is that early Jewish scholars understood the scattering of stones to refer to marital intercourse. So there is a time for this to happen, for whatever the purpose is, but there is also a time where one goes awhile without it happening (which seems odd that this would be written, considering the author had 700 wives and 300 concubines).

There is also a time where we embrace those around us and times where we need to refrain from embracing them. There is a time to tear and a time to mend. In those days, people would tear their clothes when they underwent great strife and anguish, and we are likely to have this sort of pain at some point in our lives. There are times when we should speak up, but times where it is more wise to keep our mouths shut. There is a time when we need to express love, but somethings should be hated for their injustice. Whether or not we agree that this is the time for war or not, we need to understand that there is a time for war. Read the Old Testament and it is clear that the only way to cleanse the earth is to eliminate the enemy. God often went to war for such a purpose. Peace is definitely more desirable than war, but sometimes the only way to peace is through war. There is a time for everything and part of knowing God more is to accept the season we are in so we can learn and grow according to God’s purpose.

**9-11** This is reflected in the list he just made of inevitable circumstances. Sometimes God brings hardship so there can be a better day. This, while being from the hand of God, does create a burden for us. However, He has made everything beautiful in its time and so we need to trust that His will for our circumstances is best. Since He orchestrates all that will happen, even when things do not make sense, or we’re tired, or going through pain, we trust that God has a great plan that is unfolding. This, in the midst of any event, should give us great joy. Since God has placed eternity in the hearts of men, we have the notion that there is a greater purpose of eternal significance to what we are experiencing. However, the difficulty in this, which Solomon laments, is that we don’t know that meaning until retrospect. This is where we trust that God and his plan is good.

**12-13** The best thing we can do as a result of knowing that God is up to something good, is to enjoy our life, both the good and the bad and trust that God has things in his hands. This is entirely possible as there is something good to be found most circumstances and all good gifts are from God. In fact, this ability to “enjoy” in the midst of pain is a profound aspect of our spiritual growth. It does not mean we grow numb to the pain, but rather, we enjoy the benefits and growth that results from the pain. The tastes and glimpses of satisfaction we receive from the things of this earth are merely representative of the greater joy to be found in God and the life He brings. We can enjoy even our tragedies when we know that God is not an enemy who seeks to destroy us, but rather that He has

come to give us life to the full in Jesus Christ. There is a time when this life will become apparent, even though we don't see it.

**14** There is nothing we can do to surprise God or convince Him he's wrong. We can't reverse what we assume to be God's "mistakes" (even though everything he does is perfect), and so we simply take life as it comes. The great promise is that what God accomplishes is for eternal affect. We can't improve on it because it is already entirely the best. We cannot take away from what God accomplishes, such as our attempt to diminish pain, because what God does through the pain has lasting results that we cannot begin to comprehend or envision. We are stuck in the human realm of understanding and time, but God is outside of time, working in our lives to mould us into what He wants us to become.

Why does God do all of this? What is his purpose? Is it just to toy with us? Is He some sick-minded, twisted God who has nothing better to do than cause us to suffer like young boys who like to scorch ants on the sidewalk with a magnifying glass? Is there any reason to why God allows us to have pain? Can't he just give us a good time? God's reason is an entirely selfish one. God demands our reverence for Him. In this is where all meaning and purpose is found. We might look at this and say, "It is not fair," or how could God do this to me?" or "If that's how God works, then I don't think he is a God of love at all." But the fact of the matter is that God loves us too much not to give us a taste of both pain and joy in this life.

Everything we do during our time on earth determines what becomes of our eternity. The taste of joy can either leave us wanting to experience more of the pleasure or satisfaction found in earth, or it can cause us to understand that it is a glimpse of the Lord with whom, through faith in Christ, we might be drunk with for eternity. Little shots of joy we experience can either become the greatest thing we ever see, or it might be a morsel by which we sample the greater feast to be had in heaven. So it is with pain. God allows us to have pain in this life. We either respond to our pain by sulking and wishing for a better circumstance, a better life; or, the pain can point us to greater dependence on the God who has a far greater plan for our pain beyond us merely enduring it. Pain can be the catalyst God uses in this life to shape our faith, ensuring that our pain here is the greatest pain and only pain we will experience for eternity; or, if we are so hard-hearted and embittered toward God for putting us through such hardship, it is merely another experience by which we are burned and we are left angry with God and others, unable to surface from the misery we've brought upon ourselves by ignoring the goodness God may intend by the pain. In this sad case, the small fire we are put into in this life to test our faith becomes for us not a refining fire that will purify us into something pure and holy, but rather is a brief glimpse into an eternity of hell, like a small spark from flint striking a cold stone in comparison the back draft of a great wildfire enveloping everything around it in fatal heat. God loves us too much for us to be this self-absorbed to only desiring good in this life. His purpose for pain and joy is that they might cause us to revere Him more. Instead of getting caught up in hedonistic desires or the misery of self-pity, God's desire is that the life circumstances He gives us would be the seasonings of the great meal we consume in His glory.

**15** Solomon is saying with all of this in mind, nothing ought to surprise us. This seemingly circular meaninglessness we life day in and day out is where God meets us. He uses history to teach us the same lessons he taught people before us. How will we respond to not only the monotony of live, but also the pain and joy that surprises us?

## personal reflection

**Sunday** - How do you respond to today's message? What changes does God want you to make? How does he want you to grow in your knowledge of him?

**Monday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Which season(s) are you in right now? Is this difficult to accept? Why or why not?

**Tuesday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 3:9-10. Take time to contemplate and answer Solomon's question in verse 9. Take into account the rest of the passage.

**Wednesday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 3:11. Is there any area of your life where you're having a difficult time believing God can make it beautiful? How are your feelings related to the rest of this verse? How might you trust God more through your situation?

**Thursday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 3:12-13. What can you enjoy in life right now? How can you thank God for the good things? What might be God's good purpose for your trials right now? Take time to pray for God's guidance as you consider these questions. How does knowing Jesus give you a right perspective in this?

**Friday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 3:14. How might what God is doing in your life right now have a lasting eternal effect? How might your current life experience be used to give you more reverence for God?

**Saturday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 3:15. Why do things repeat? Why do the same lessons need to be learned? Why does history repeat itself? How is Christ an end to all of this?

## group discussion

- Ice Breaker: If you could live in any other time period than this one, which one would you like to live in?
- Discuss this question: Does God know and orchestrate everything that happens? Why?
- Now read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15. Does this change your answer to the previous question?
- How is pain a part of God's plan? What about joy & happiness?
- What is the end goal for any of our experiences? Where do we have a hard time having this perspective in certain circumstances? Hint: look at vs. 9-11.
- Share two painful experiences circumstances with the group - one that embittered you and one that gave you joy.
- Why does Solomon say we have nothing better to do that enjoy life?
- Considering the last question, how does God enable you do this?

