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“Chasing After The Wind”

It's All In God's Control

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-22

Introduction

1. In chapter one, Solomon told us that our lives come and go like a vapor and that death puts an end to our quest for greatness and gain in life.
2. In chapter two he explained that all to which we give ourselves in our lives, our pursuits and pleasures, the “fruit of our labors”, must eventually be left to someone else.
3. Here in chapter 3, Solomon teaches us to embrace our human frailty and to think clearly about time.
4. In order to live well, you and I must accept two things:
 - a. We are bound by time — what we do comes and goes.
 - b. God is not — “everything God does will remain forever” (3:14).
5. We each are writing the story of our lives, but we must remember that God is the chief editor.
6. How do we do that?

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I. Look Up

A. GOD ORDERS TIME

“There is an appointed time for everything.

And there is a time for every event under heaven—”

(Ecclesiastes 3:1, NASB95)

1. It doesn't matter where you live in this world, "times and seasons" are a regular part of life.
 - a. There is evening and there is morning (cf. Genesis 1:5), the sun sets in the evening and it rises again in the morning.
 - b. We measure time by days, weeks, months and years.
 - c. We expect four seasons every year and the typical weather and events which accompany each season.
2. It is God who has ordained the "natural laws" on which we depend.
3. Not only are there times and seasons, but God has also ordained an overruling providence in His creation.

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B. THE SEASONS OF LIFE

1. Beginning and ending (vv. 2-3)

"A time to give birth and a time to die;

A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

A time to kill and a time to heal;

A time to tear down and a time to build up.

(Ecclesiastes 3:2-3, NASB95)

- a. We each have a time when we were born and when we will die — two events over which we really have no control.
- b. The farmers among us understand that nature works with you only when you work with nature — there is a season in which to plant your crop and a season in which to reap it.
- c. There is time when man kills man, but there is also a time when man heal his fellow man from injury and disease.
- d. There is also a time when God takes life and a time when He heals lives.
- e. We tear down buildings and then build others in their place.
- f. Sometimes, in the heat of anger, we tear down relationships and later

work to build them again.

- g. It is also God who tears down and he builds up.

“It is He who changes the times and epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings” (Daniel 2:21).

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- 2. Sadness and joy (v. 4)

“A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.

(Ecclesiastes 3:4, NASB95)

- a. For each of the events mentioned in verses 2-3, there is an appropriate response.
- b. We express our sadness through weeping and mourning, or our joy through laughter and dancing.

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- 3. Throwing stones and gathering stones (5a).

“A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones”

(Ecclesiastes 3:5a, NASB95)

- a. In Solomon’s day, if you wanted to hurt an enemy, you filled his fields up with stones.
- b. This is one of the things God commanded Jehoram, king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah to do to the land of the Moabites (2 Kings 3:19, 25).
- c. Stones were gathered in preparation for tilling a field or to build fences and houses.

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- 4. Embracing and refraining from embracing (5b).

“A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.”

(Ecclesiastes 3:5b, NASB95)

- a. There are times and places when it is fitting to show affection toward another person.
- b. There are other times when it is inappropriate.

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5. Keeping and letting go (v. 6).

“A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.”

(Ecclesiastes 3:6, NASB95)

- a. All of us have had those times when we have searched and searched for something.
- b. Unable to find it, we finally decided to give it up as lost.
- c. How many of us have those things we have held on to for years, either for sentimental purposes or because we thought we might need it at some point.
- d. At some later time we threw it away, after concluding it was only taking up space.

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6. Tearing and mending (v. 7).

“A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.”

(Ecclesiastes 3:2–8, NASB95)

- a. During a time of grief or repentance, God's people of old would tear their garments:
 - 1) Jacob, upon receiving the false report that his son, Joseph, was dead (Genesis 37:34).
 - 2) Joshua, following Israel's defeat at Ai (Joshua 7:6).

- b. Such times are also a time to be silent:
 - 1) Job's three friends came to him following his great losses and "sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him" (Job 2:10).
- c. There is also a time when the torn garments must be sewn back together, a time when we can once again speak.

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7. Loving and hating (v. 8).

"A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace."
(Ecclesiastes 3:2-8, NASB95)

- a. Solomon said that "a friend loves at all times" (Proverbs 17:17).
- b. "I hate the assembly of evildoers" (Psalm 26:5).
- c. "Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord?" (Psalm 139:23).
- d. As a nation we have gone through many wars — after each one, there is a time of relative peace.

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II. Look Within

A. GOD HAS SET ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS

"What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end." (Ecclesiastes 3:9-11, NASB95)

- 1. After telling us that every activity has its time, Solomon again asks the

question as to the value of our work.

2. You and I should expect the same answer as before, “there is no profit (gain, advantage)” (cf. 1:3; 2:11).
3. After examining man’s activity (“task,” “burden”), Solomon makes three observations:
 - a. God “has made everything appropriate (Lit. “beautiful”) in its time” (v. 11a) — God, in His providential care and control, has an appropriate time for every activity.
 - b. God has put eternity in our hearts (v. 11b).— we each have a longing or desire to know the eternal significance of ourselves, our deeds or activities.
 - c. We cannot know the works of God from beginning to end (v. 11c). — we cannot know the sovereign, eternal plan of God.
4. You and I are at a loss to know how God, from His eternal perspective, evaluates the appropriateness and significance of our activities.
5. Does our labor here have an eternal value or is it only for the here and now?

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B. ENJOY LIFE AS GOD ENABLES

“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.” (Ecclesiastes 3:12–13, NASB95)

1. With this in mind, what is Solomon’s advice to us?
2. It is that we “rejoice and . . . go good” in our lifetime.
3. In 5:18, he puts it this way, “Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his

reward.” (Ecclesiastes 5:18, NASB95)

4. Solomon wants us to know that our ability to eat and drink and see good in what we do is “the gift of God” (v. 13).
5. Another way to say it is this, “If any man eats and drinks and finds satisfaction in all his toil, it is a gift of God” (Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs and Choheleth*, pp. 311-2).

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C. GOD’S PURPOSE IN ALL THIS: THAT WE SHOULD FEAR HIM

“I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.” (Ecclesiastes 3:14–15, NASB95)

1. God’s work is . . .
 - a. Eternal — it “will remain forever” (v. 14a).
 - b. Perfect and unchanging — “there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it” (v. 14b).
2. Notice what Solomon says in verse 15: “That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.” (Ecclesiastes 3:14–15, NASB95)
 - a. The last part of verse 15 is translated by the NASB95 as “God seeks what has passed by.”
 - b. The ESV renders it as “God seeks what has been driven away.”
 - c. The imagery is of a shepherd who deliberately seeks out the sheep that has fled the fold in order to bring it back.
 - d. All the events of human history which seem lost to us forever, are not lost to God.

- e. He has the ability to bring the past into His present and bring it to account.

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III. Look Ahead

A. GOD WILL JUDGE BOTH THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

“Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness. I said to myself, “God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,” for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.” (Ecclesiastes 3:16–17, NASB95)

1. In these two verses (vv. 16-17), Solomon brings out a problem which causes great pain in our world — the problem of injustice.
2. You and I are hardwired for justice.
3. When we see someone’s rights trampled upon or when a person guilty of a heinous crime seems to get off scot-free, we are quick to cry foul.
4. Solomon saw this same problem in his own day.
5. In the very place where justice ought to reside there was “wickedness.”
6. In place of righteousness, only wickedness was found.
7. However, Solomon reassures us, “God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man” (v. 17).
8. “Every single deed that has ever broken God’s holy law and tarnished his perfect world and damaged his image bearers” — every single one of those moments will be brought back and will be answerable to God.

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B. DEATH IS COMING TO US ALL

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“I said to myself concerning the sons of men, “God has surely tested them in

order for them to see that they are but beasts.” For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?” (Ecclesiastes 3:18–21, NASB95)

1. Through these injustices, God shows us that we are like the animals.
2. Solomon isn't saying that we are nothing more than animals, with no eternal souls, but that we like the animals, die.
3. In Psalm 49:12, one of the sons of Korah wrote, “man in his pomp will not endure; He is like the beasts that perish.”
4. We have a common mortality:
 - a. “As one dies so dies the other” (Ecclesiastes 3:19).
 - b. “All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust” (Ecclesiastes 3:20).
5. In verse 21, he asks a rhetorical question: “Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?”
 - a. In other words, what living person can demonstrate a difference between people and animals by watching them die.
 - b. The answer is “no one.”
6. The only way that any of us know we have an eternal soul and that death is not the end of our existence is through the teaching of God's Word.

Conclusion

1. What is Solomon's advice for us tonight?

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2. We find it in the last verse of this chapter, verse 22:

"I have seen that there is nothing better than for a person to enjoy his activities because that is his reward" (Ecclesiastes 3:22a, HCSB).

3. Why should we enjoy our activities here and now? Solomon tells us at the end of verse 22:

"For who can enable him to see what will happen after he dies?" (Ecclesiastes 3:22b, HCSB).

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4. Many years ago, Ira Stanphill penned these words to a hymn which should serve as our guiding light in the days before us:

**I don't know about tomorrow,
I just live from day to day.
I don't borrow from its sunshine,
For its skies may turn to gray.
I don't worry o'er the future,
For I know what Jesus said,
And today I'll walk beside Him,
For He knows what is ahead.**

Refrain:

**Many things about tomorrow,
I don't seem to understand;
But I know who holds tomorrow,
And I know who holds my hand.**

5. Are you willing to let Jesus guide you through the seasons of your life?
6. If so, you will find the burdens you now carry will soon become lighter.