

NEW YEAR'S EVE MESSAGE 2016

TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

INTRODUCTION:

1. The emphasis tonight is on the new year, which is only a couple of hours away.
2. As I get older, time seems to move much more quickly.
3. In Ecclesiastes chapter 3, King Solomon (“the Preacher”) teaches that God controls time.
4. God created time, and God controls time. And God controls the seasons.
5. Genesis 1:14 says, “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.”
6. Ecclesiastes 3 begins with, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (3:1).
7. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says God, “hath made every thing beautiful in His time.”
8. Stephen Olford said, “It is God — and God alone — who winds up the clock of the universe and manages its intricate machinery. This is the only answer which satisfies the Bible, history, and personal experience. He alone regulates time, and He alone relegates time.”

1. GOD CONTROLS TIME
2. GOD REGULATES TIME
3. GOD RELEGATES TIME

GOD CONTROLS TIME (ECCL. 3:15)

1. Whatever happens in this crazy, mixed-up world, the succession of events is ordered by God’s everlasting and unchangeable laws and everything returns in a fixed cycle (cf. 3:14; 1:9). This is because God controls time.
2. Joshua 10:13 says, “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies...So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.” God can make the sun stand still because controls time.
3. We see another fascinating miracle in II Kings 20. In the days of King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet, the LORD brought the shadow of the sun on the sun dial ten degrees backward. God did that because controls time.

4. Daniel 2:21 says God “changeth the times and the seasons.” God has a purpose for time. History is a rotating cycle of seasons, which recur with unchangeable regularity. And God is always in control.
5. William MacDonald said, “Man is locked into a pattern of behavior which is determined by certain inflexible laws or principles” (*Enjoying Ecclesiastes*).
6. The phrase “under the sun” appears 34 times in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is one of the keys to understanding the book. It means that man’s search for truth is often limited to this world and to this life.
7. To the man “under the sun” (or “under the heaven” – 3:1) this seemingly endless cycle of events could seem like a tedious and senseless circle of repetition (cf. 1:4, 5).
8. In his search for truth, King Solomon concluded that God has a purpose for everything, and that the times and seasons are in His hands.
9. God is sovereign and we must trust Him at all times. History is “His story,” and God intervenes wherever and whenever He wants to.
10. Our Lord said to His disciples in Acts 1:7, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.”
11. God controls the times and the seasons (3:15). And God has a purpose for time. God has a schedule and everything is moving along according to His program.
12. Everything that happens, even calamities, is part of God’s plan (Eccl. 3:11).
13. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).
14. The word “time” is found 31 times in Ecclesiastes 3. In verses 2—8, the word “time” is found 28 times. These 28 activities represent the whole round of life, beginning with birth and ending with death (3:2a).
15. The list here in Ecclesiastes 3 is made up of fourteen pairs of opposites – fourteen are positives and fourteen are negatives. “In some ways, they seem to cancel out each other” (William MacDonald).
16. If all the negatives cancel out all the positives, man might ask, where is the profit (3:9)? “Under the sun” there would seem to be no profit (cf. 1:3; 2:11).
17. But we must look beyond the sun (3:11). God has made everything beautiful “in His time” (3:11).
18. Everything is beautiful in God’s world.

*This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears
 All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.
 This is my Father’s world: I rest me in the thought
 Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
 His hand the wonders wrought.*

*This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world: He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.
This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father's world: the battle is not done:
Jesus Who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and Heav'n be one. – Maltbie D. Babcock*

19. It is man's sin that has corrupted and defiled God's beautiful creation. And although sin has entered the world, it has not done away with God's orderly cycles of life (3:2-8).

20. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

21. Man yearns to find these things out but he cannot (cf. 8:17).

22. Romans 11:33 says, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

GOD REGULATES TIME

1. It is God who regulates time. Stephen Olford said, "While time is a human concept, since God is infinite and inhabits eternity, time is nevertheless a gift of His divine agency. Without God there wouldn't be man, and without eternity there wouldn't be time. It follows, therefore, God sovereignly determines that time."
2. Man cannot regulate time. Man can "redeem the time," or man can waste time, but he cannot control time.
3. Its beginning, its duration, and its termination are all outside of man's comprehension and control. The Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne wrote in his diary that he regretted spending an evening too lightly.
4. He wrote, "My heart must break off from all these things. What right have I to steal and abuse my Master's time? The word 'redeem,' is crying to me."
5. Beloved, let us not be guilty of wasting precious time.
6. The early pages of the book of Genesis teach us how God regulates time.
7. The creation story in Genesis 1 tells us that "God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:4, 5).

8. Furthermore, God has divided time into seasons. Genesis 8:22 says, “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” God regulates time.
9. In the providence of God, time is thus regulated for our good and for His glory, and so we have the daily, nightly, weekly, and yearly seasons of time.
10. Thomas H. Stebbins *said*, “Each of us receives an equal allotment of 168 hours per week. The difference is in how we spend it. None of us would throw away bits of money — dimes, nickels, pennies — but all of us are guilty of throwing away five minutes here or a quarter of an hour there in our ordinary day.”
11. Someone said, “Time is a fragment of eternity given by God to man as a solemn stewardship” (Stephen Olford).
12. When we think of the doctrine of stewardship, we usually think of money. We will all have to stand before God and explain how we handled our finances. Some Christians are in trouble because they have been robbing God.
13. But stewardship also includes time – how we spend our time. There are 1,440 minutes in every day. Let’s not waste them.
14. The stewardship of our time needs some careful inventory and perhaps some steps toward improvement.
15. Men need to be saved before it is too late. Soon there will be no more opportunities to be saved. Time is quickly running out. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2).
16. Lester Roloff explained to a man that he needed to be saved, but the man kept putting it off. Finally, the man said, “Okay, I’ll come to church tomorrow, and when you give the invitation I will come forward to get saved.”
17. The man did come, but he had a massive heart attack half-way through the service. Brother Roloff said, “He missed heaven by 45 minutes!”
18. Jesus said, “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35).
19. The harvest will not always be ready for harvest. Time is running out!
20. King David said, “Our days on the earth are as a shadow” (I Chronicles 29:15).
21. Job said, “My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good.” (Job 7:6, 7).

22. And Job said, “Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good” (Job 9:25).
23. James 4:14 says, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”
24. First Peter 4:7 says, “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” “Sober” means, “to be of sound mind.”
25. Because God regulates time, and we will answer to Him for how we spend our time. “God requireth that which is past” (Eccl. 3:15b) means, “God requireth an account of that which is past.”

GOD RELEGATES TIME

1. It is easy to understand how God controls time, and how God regulates time, but it is not as easy to understand how God relegates time.
2. “Relegate” means to move to an inferior position. The Bible teaches that time is relegated (moved to an inferior position) in order to fulfill God’s purpose.
3. The word “purpose” is often translated as “pleasure” or “delight.”
4. Psalm 1:2 says, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”
5. This word “purpose” or “pleasure” or “delight” has to do with God’s design for man. “God requireth (an account) of that which is past” (Eccl. 3:15), and “Moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there...” (Eccl. 3:16, 17).
6. There is a coming judgment in which God will vindicate His righteous ways. The sinner’s “time” is short. God has His “time” and “work” of judgment.
7. There is no recourse for those who reject God’s way of salvation. This is the day of grace, and when it is over nothing but judgment awaits the unbelieving and impenitent.
8. This is why the Bible emphasizes that, “now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2).

CONCLUSION:

1. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, God “hath set the world in their heart.”
2. J. Vernon McGee said, “God has let man put the world in his heart so that he might see that the world does not satisfy — his heart is still empty.”

3. Only God can fill the empty hearts of men.
4. Now is the time to call on the Lord!
5. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2).

*The souls that had put off salvation--
"Not to-night; I'll get saved by and by;
No time now to think of religion!"
At last they had found time to die.*

*And Oh, what a weeping and wailing,
As the lost were told of their fate;
They cried for the rocks and the mountains,
They prayed, but their prayer was too late. – Bert Shadduck*