

# The Times and Seasons Are in God's Hands—Be Glad!

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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## **Introduction:**

Solomon has done much to move his argument forward that there is no meaning to be found in this world under the sun, apart from God.

- He began chapter 1 by showing the endless repetition of this world, and that no matter how hard we try, we never really make progress under the sun...
  - The day soon comes that we die and have to leave it all and soon after that we are forgotten.
  - If this is all there is, it is all vanity—like the breath that you see on a cold morning—it is there and then it is gone.
- We saw how that from here, Solomon sought to find a solution to the emptiness by education—perhaps he could find a way to solve the problems of life...
  - But all he got from his study was more sorrow because he discovered more problems and saw more clearly how insurmountable they were...
    - He saw that we cannot fix ourselves or find true meaning and purpose by education.
- Then at the beginning of chapter 2, he spoke of turning in reaction to folly and laughter in the sense of abandoning himself to frivolous pleasures—
  - living as if there was no tomorrow—but he quickly found that this brought even more grief...
- Then he decided to temper the pursuit of pleasure with wisdom—to pursue things that were lasting in this world—
  - carefully managed enjoyment of the finer things of life—feasting, building projects, gardens, collecting of treasures, ordering of his household, music...
    - But he found that all of this was vanity as well—
      - It made him a bit happier than abandonment to complete folly...
      - but in the end it amounted to the same because it never got him anywhere—
        - In the end, the worldly wise man with all his treasures dies the same as the man who abandoned himself to his vices.
        - He has to leave it all to whoever comes after him and who know what that one will do with all that he has laboured to build?
          - And what difference does it make anyway?

But then in the last three verses of chapter 2—verses 24-26,

- Solomon begins to speak about how wisdom, understanding, and joy can be found in this work...
  - He tells us that God gives wisdom, understanding, and joy to the one who is good in His sight—that is, those who are reconciled to Him in Christ.

- Joy is strongly emphasised in the New Testament as something that God gives to us when we are diligently following Jesus,
  - even when we have great difficulties in this world with deprivation and persecution.
- You see, once we are reconciled to the eternal God, then we are brought into the river of life that flows into eternity...
  - And then everything we do for Him has eternal significance and we can enjoy all of God's mercies that are in this world as harbingers of the good things to come.

That is the happy note that we ended on last time...

- And this week we shall find that Solomon continues with this Godward focus of living in chapter 3.
- He leads us to see that all of the times and seasons of life in this world are totally from God,
  - and are threads that He is knitting together into a beautiful tapestry.
    - It is all going somewhere because God is bringing it to glory—to perfection and beauty...
  - We can only discern its beauty in part, and then only when we are reconciled to Him, and often we cannot see how the season we are personally going through at the moment is of any use to the whole work,
    - But in faith and hope, we are called to offer all of our times and seasons (both the pleasant and the difficult) to Him with joy, knowing that He will bring it all to perfection in His time.

Take a look with me at this wonderful passage—Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-15:** To everything *there is* a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: <sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck *what is* planted; <sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup> a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; <sup>6</sup> a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; <sup>7</sup> a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; <sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. <sup>9</sup> What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? <sup>10</sup> I

have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.

<sup>11</sup> He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

<sup>12</sup> I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives,

<sup>13</sup> and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it *is* the gift of God. <sup>14</sup> I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it.

God does *it*, that men should fear before Him. <sup>15</sup> That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.

May the Lord bless to us the reading of His holy and infallible Word.

**I. Solomon begins here with a poem about the times and seasons of life.**

- You see how he says that there is a time for this and a time for that...

A. He gives us a very comprehensive list that covers all of life.

1. He introduces it as such when he says

- **“to everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.”**
- This is a strong statement suggesting that nothing is superfluous.
  - This is practically the opposite of what he has been saying about life under the sun (apart from God)—that all is vanity...and chasing after the wind.
- Now that he has brought the Lord into the picture he tells us that there is meaning in everything that happens under heaven.
  - Each piece of life is given to us—like an assignment—to be used for God’s purposes and glory—to be used to help us to know Him and to make Him known.
- If ever you say, “Why did I make this gain?” or “Why did I suffer this set back?” the answer is always...
  - That I might know God and that I might honour Him through it.
    - This is how all of life becomes meaningful.

2. The list itself is very complete...covering every part of life...

a. It is in pairs that show the extremes—

- You have birth and death, weeping and laughing, loving and hating.
- Each pair is what is a *merism*.
  - In a *merism*, you use contrasting words to express totality or completeness...
  - The merism includes not only the extremes, but everything in between as well...
    - You have everything from birth on the one extreme to death on the other, from mourning all the way to dancing—
    - Most of the time you are somewhere between these extremes.
    - There is this huge variety that we experience in this world.

TRANS> And the list covers everything...

b. It is notable that there are 14 pairs—which is *seven* doubled.

- In the Bible, a list of seven indicates *completeness* and a doubled seven indicates *complete completeness*.
- Solomon is talking about all of life here with all of its vicissitudes.

B. The times and seasons are clearly not in our hands.

1. Certainly you can see that in the first and second pair...

- Not one of us decided the time that we would be born—and just think what a huge thing *that* is—

- that you, an eternal, immortal soul came into being even though you had no say in the matter as to what you would be, when you would be or where you would be...
    - All that was given to you!
    - Clearly, if you are not in control of that, you are not in control of anything!
  - And neither do we bring ourselves into the season of death...
    - Someone might say, “Well what if I kill myself?”
      - Indeed, you might be able to do such wickedness, but you did not bring yourself into the season in which you wanted to do so.
      - The season came upon you, and so did all the seasons in between.
  - And what about the second pair... a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted...
    - We do not determine these times—they are given to us and we have to work with them.
      - A farmer can’t decide to plant his corn *now*—he has to plant in the season of planting.
2. It is true that with some of these events you might have some say as to what you do and you might not do what the season calls for...
- I guess a farmer *could* plant corn now, but that would not make it the season for planting.
  - Like a fool, you may laugh when the time is the time for weeping—and you may weep when laughter would be appropriate...
    - The Lord complains at Edom for rejoicing when Israel was brought to destruction; it was a time for mourning, not rejoicing...
    - I have seen unbelievers go into mourning when a member of their family is saved—it is a season for rejoicing and they do not change that by doing the wrong thing.
  - The same may be said of war and peace...
    - We may declare peace when the time is a time of war, and we may declare war when the times are times of peace...
      - but the times and seasons are still what they are, regardless of what we do.
      - We do not control the seasons.
3. Indeed, if we did have control of the times and seasons, many seasons would never come at all.
- Who would bring upon himself a *time to lose* if he had power to make it so that for him it was always *a time to gain*?
    - Take the stock market...
      - Doug Wilson aptly says:

- The commotion of the stock market reveals the hubris of man better than few other things. We believe we can pump up the Dow forever and make money at a fine clip forever . . . but we cannot. The cycles ordained by God for everything in this fallen and silly world will come round again, and many a millionaire will go white in disbelief. “How could this happen?” Friend, look at the world. How could it *not*?

➤ Clearly, we do not control the seasons of life.

- So what does this mean about the times and seasons of life?
  - If we have no control over them, are they just arbitrary?
  - No indeed!

C. The times and seasons of our lives are determined by God!

- He gives them to us as opportunities for us to know Him and honour Him.
- 1. Verse 10 explains that our labour in this world is the “God-given task with which men are to be occupied.”
  - He is the One who appoints the times and seasons for us.
  - They are not random and arbitrary at all!
  - They are God-given assignments—tasks that He has given to us to be occupied with in this world—work that we have been given to do.
- 2. And make no mistake, the true God is not a God who only gives us one side of these pairs...
  - He determines our day of birth, but He has also appointed the day of our death.
    - He sends seasons of joy, but He also sends seasons of sorrow.
    - He indeed makes wars to cease, but He also raises up enemies to punish us or to test us.
  - If your god is a god who only sends soft bunnies and sunshine, your god is not the God of the Bible...
    - You have an idol and you need to cast it away.
    - In Isaiah 45:6-7 He says:
      - **Isa 45:6-7: That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that *there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; 7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.***
  - He is the God who blesses, but He is also the God who curses.
    - He is the One who brings about all the changing seasons of our lives.
    - He gives you the power to get wealth;
      - He also sends the locust and the blight and curses your basket and your store when He so determines.

3. This means that you need to recognise that every season of life—both the pleasant and the difficult—is from Him.
  - He assigns you a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; a to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up...and so on...
  - You must take life from Him as He gives it!
    - It is your God-given task with which you are to be occupied!

## **II. But whatever are all these seasons for? Why does God give us these times and seasons to be occupied with?**

### **A. Solomon asks in verse 9, “What profit has the worker from that in which he labours?”**

1. What is accomplished in a time of gain if it is only to be followed by a time a loss?
  - What good was it for Abraham to go to Canaan when God gave it to him only to have his descendants end up as slaves in Egypt for 400 years?
  - What good was it for David to build up God’s kingdom only to have Rehoboam and Jeroboam tear it down?
2. What good are the seasons of our church’s life?
  - We laboured in prayer years ago and we saw a great revival—many were saved...but now we are seeing loses to apostasy and indifference...
    - This very week I was I was lamenting about this and feeling very discouraged.
    - There are many people in our congregation who are not walking with the Lord—the decline started over a year ago...when I saw it and preached about in in August 2012.
      - And this past week I felt like giving up...
      - There are problems in the church and there are several extended efforts at evangelism that have come to naught...
      - I was discouraged as one negative report after another came.
  - I suppose God was preparing me to preach this passage!
    - If He gives us a season of decline and loss, that is His doing.
    - It is my business to be occupied in every changing season that He sends.
    - It is my business to labour as each season requires and to trust Him for the outcome.
      - Yes, I may need to do some repenting inasmuch as I have been neglectful.
      - I need to repent of that...
        - But the seasons are from God, including my own failure to pray and labour as I ought, and we need to trust Him.

TRANS> But what are all these seasons for?

- Yes, we are to serve Him in them, but what does God do with these changing seasons?

- B. He takes them all and weaves them together into a beautiful tapestry!
- You know what a tapestry is—a beautiful work of art that is made by weaving threads together to make beautiful images.
  - In verse 11, Solomon reminds us that this is what God has done with the seasons all through history:
    - **Ecc 3:11: “He has made everything beautiful in its time.”**
1. We can see this when we look back at God’s mighty works of redemption...
- a. We can see how He gave Jacob’s favoured son Joseph seasons of embracing and joy in the house of his father...
    - that were soon turned to seasons of rejection and grief and loss when his brothers sold him to Egypt.
      - These were some very dark threads that were woven into God’s tapestry in Joseph’s life and he had no idea what God was making.
    - But the weaving continued and soon it became evident that Joseph was sent to Egypt to be raised up in power...
      - and to rule over Egypt with wisdom so that his brothers could be kept from starvation—
        - he and his brothers who were the patriarchs through whom the salvation of the world was to come!
    - Joseph and his brothers were able to see how God brought together all the changing seasons of their lives into a beautiful square in the tapestry that He was weaving...
      - But they were not even able to see fully how it all fit with the larger plan...
        - How Joseph was a type of Christ, the rejected stone, who was raised to be the bread of life that all his people might live!
  - How beautifully do all the parts of the tapestry fit together!
    - The Lord God does not miss a stitch!
  - b. We could tell a similar story of Naomi who went to Moab in the famine with a husband and two sons only to lose them all in a season of sorrow...
    - then to return with Ruth her Moabite daughter in law who became a blessing to her, not only providing for her in her old age, but also bearing a son for her in her old age through her marriage to Boaz...
      - Again, God brought beauty out of the changing seasons of her life that she could see and rejoice in...
        - Her sorrow was turned to dancing.
    - And she did not even know the greatest part—that in the larger tapestry that God was weaving,
      - the child that Ruth bore was the progenitor of David, the great king, who in the even larger picture was a type of Christ the Saviour.

- c. Time would fail us to tell of the dark times that were turned to beauty in the life of Israel in Egypt, David under persecution by Saul, Mordecai oppressed by Haman, and so on...
    - But we must surely mention God's Son, the man of sorrows, who is at the very centre of God's tapestry...
      - He who came to redeem us and was treated with contempt by His own people, rejected and despised, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...
        - and who was given a season of intense weeping as He prepared for the cross—and then was rejected on the cross even by God the Father...
        - And the poor disciples were so distressed—they thought all had come to nought—that all was lost—that the Messiah had failed!
      - But all of these dark threads were needed to beautify tapestry that was completed by Christ's resurrection as the one conquering sin for all His people—
        - and then by His ascending to rule at God's right hand until all His enemies are made His footstool...
        - The tapestry is still being knit together,
          - but already with the resurrection, we can see that God makes all things beautiful—marvellously beautiful—in His time!
- My brothers and sisters, this is the way that God operates!
- **He makes everything beautiful in its time!**
2. But I want you to know that it is often the case that we cannot discern the beauty of what He is weaving together!
- a. Solomon says that even though God has put eternity in our hearts...
    - so that we yearn to see the whole story of God's redemptive work...
    - yet, he says, **“no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.”**
    - We cannot sort it all out—we cannot see the whole plan and how all the diverse parts—every detail—will fit together...
      - We are myopic—nearsighted—and we cannot see the whole picture.
      - We cannot sort it all out but we can be sure that God will make it all beautiful in His time...that He knows what He is making.
  - b. Joseph could not see it when he was forgotten in the prison!
    - Even more, Israel could not see as four centuries went by with increasing oppression in Egypt...
    - There were generations that were born and that died in bondage in Egypt—



- the task that God gave them their whole life was to toil in Egypt under oppression...
  - And they could not see the beauty that God was going to produce—theirs was a lifetime of sorrow—
    - But it was their part for God and they will not lose their reward!
    - We will surely be surprised to meet all the unnamed unsung heroes of such dark times who served God in their generations.
- c. My brothers and sisters take heart!
- You are part of the great tapestry of God.
    - He gives you seasons of sorrow and seasons of rejoicing, but He will surely complete His beautiful work.
  - You may not be able to see how our little church and your little life and your sickness and your rejection and your loneliness and your struggles will all fit into the whole...
    - but they will, and God will surely be glorified...
    - It is His tapestry and He has it all in His hands—every detail.
    - Take the seasons as they come and serve Him in them all!

TRANS> Solomon tells you that there is nothing better for you to do!

### **III. There is nothing better than to be cheerfully engaged in the task that the Lord has given you with each season of life.**

- Take each season as from His hand, knowing that He will bring forth beauty out of both the hard times and the pleasant times!
  - You are His servant, and what better place can you be than in His service as a part of that great beautiful tapestry that He is weaving together?
    - What difference does it really make in a million years if the service was hard and long when it emerges at last in beauty?
    - So what if it was your part to live and die as a slave in Egypt?
    - So what if it is yours to suffer rejection or illness your whole life so that the glory of the resurrection will stand out in all its brilliance?
  - Put it all in perspective—an eternal perspective such as Paul had in 2 Cor 4:16-18 when he said,
    - **2 Cor 4:16-18: Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, <sup>18</sup> while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

A. But I tell you, if you have never been reconciled to God, you resent the fact that you are part of God's tapestry.

- You still are...but
- 1. You don't like it one bit that your whole life is about nothing else but bringing glory to God!
  - You feel strapped in—oppressed—trapped—cornered by such talk and you desperately want to deny it.
  - You want to pretend that there is no God like the God I have described to you.
- 2. And I tell you, you should be upset about all this—probably a lot more upset than you are!
  - Because as it stands now—if you are not reconciled to God—your purpose in God's tapestry will be of the same sort as the Devil's.
  - For all eternity, you will be a receptacle of God's wrath and curse—
    - You will be what Romans 9 calls a vessel of wrath fit for destruction.
    - Your sole purpose will be to serve as an example of what sinful creatures receive from a holy God.
      - It is a terrifying prospect!
  - As Solomon points out in verse 14-15,
    - What God does is forever...you cannot modify it...
      - Just as you cannot change the seasons of your life—you get only what He appoints—nothing more and nothing less...
      - **“nothing can be added and nothing can be taken away.”**
        - **“God does it that men may fear Him”...**
          - that they may see that He is God and that they cannot ignore Him or trifle with Him.
- 3. Now there are three ways that you can respond to this...
  - a. No doubt, you want to just pretend that it is not true. And that is the first way you can respond—go into denial...
    - You want to pretend that there is no God like Solomon has described who made the world and who sends all the times and seasons of life.
    - You want to distract yourself from this and to come up with arguments and excuses and ways to deny it—
      - because it is awful to think that He has that much control of your life—even though you know that you don't have that much control.
    - You may want to turn to drugs, or to porn, or pour yourself out for success in your career like Solomon did...maybe you will even get into philanthropy!
    - You will even believe sophisticated fairy tales like evolution to try to avoid God—
      - or maybe you will opt for a false religion—even a modified form of Christianity that denies that God appoints all the times and seasons...

- You know, something like precious moments Christianity...all sheep and fluffy things...
  - But avoiding the truth will no more change it than it will change the fact that there is a time to be born and a time to die.
    - You can't change what is by not liking it and not believing it.
- b. Others of you will become bitter toward God—you will look at the trouble in your life and you will seethe with resentment!
- You will lash out at God as unjust and unfair and you will do what you can to rebel against Him...
  - But all your rebellion will do as make you more fit to be a vessel of wrath on the day of judgement...
    - You will gain nothing by it all—only more judgement that will give more glory to God.
    - It is one of the greatest lies of Satan that you can get something over against God by your rebellion...
      - All you do is add to His glory and to your eternal misery.
- c. So rather than denying the truth or becoming angry about it, why not submit to it?
- There is a free offer of the gospel you know...
    - Jesus Christ was crucified for sinners—that we might be forgiven, and God promises that if you believe, you will be pardoned...
  - You will be pardoned and you will be reconciled to God.
    - Do you remember how I said before that if you are not reconciled to God, you are a receptacle of God's wrath?
    - Well Jesus is also a receptacle of God's wrath—
      - He came to receive all of God's wrath against His elect people.
      - He is like a lightning rod for all of us so that instead of striking us and casting us into Hell, God's wrath and curse all came upon Him...
        - He bore it all—all the pains of Hell—that we might be saved.
    - If you come to Him for mercy, you can be restored to God and then you will have an entirely different destiny!
      - Instead of being a receptacle of God's wrath and curse, you will be a receptacle of mercy—
        - on display for all eternity as part of the great tapestry of God as a recipient of His love and forgiveness and grace!
        - Oh do be reconciled to Him if you are not!

- B. And now a word for you who are reconciled...you can do your God-given task in faith and hope with joy...
- As Solomon says in verse 12 & 13,
    - there is nothing better for you than to rejoice and to do good all your life, and also that you should eat and drink and enjoy the good of your labour—for this is the gift of God.
1. If you are reconciled to God through Jesus, you can do good all your life!
    - What could be better than that!
    - You can take the changes that God gives you and you can serve Him—in life and in death, in building and in tearing down, in keeping and in throwing away, in war and in peace...
      - You can look at all the times and seasons as opportunities to add to the great tapestry that He is weaving together.
      - What a blessing that you can do your part—that you can do good!
  2. As one that He has reconciled through Christ, you surely want to do this!
    - How could you not want to honour Him when you know Him—when you know His kindness and grace in Christ—
      - when you know His promises to give you eternal life and an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
      - When you know that even through the hard seasons of life, He is preparing you to share glory with Him in His house...
        - That even when you don't understand how it will all work out, it does not change the face that He will bring forth beauty in time.
  3. And along the way, you can even enjoy the many blessings—the seasons of joy and gladness that He gives in this world...
    - the good food and drink and the glad times that He gives...
    - Sure, there is a danger in making idols of these things,
      - but the best way to avoid idolatry is not by avoiding them all, but by using them with thanksgiving as God sends them and parting with them cheerfully in those seasons when they are taken away.
      - And know that these are tokens of His kindness and of the unmitigated seasons that you will be given by Him in glory...
        - For then there will be no more time to die, or to kill or to break down or to weep or to mourn or to refrain from embracing or to lose...
    - We can scarcely comprehend it, but God has put eternity in our hearts...
      - a yearning, for those joys that have not yet been experienced...
        - for that beautiful song that we have not yet heard,
        - for that food that we have not yet fully tasted,
        - and for that love and that warm embrace that we have not yet shared.

**Conclusion:** Oh dear congregation...

- Accept the times and seasons that God has appointed for you here...
  - Accept the fact that you are here in those changing seasons to bring glory to God and there is nothing better than that you do good in each season of life until the time comes that the Lord brings you into eternity with Him.
  - Whether you want to or not, you will bring glory and honour to Him...
    - by your destruction and judgement if you refuse to do good and be reconciled to Him through Jesus...
    - but by your glorification and blessing if you come to Him and enter into the stream of eternal service and joy through Jesus Christ.