

A Time for Everything under Heaven #3

Ecclesiastes 3:3; Psalm 103:3

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Rev. Greg L. Price

There is a divinely appointed time for EVERYTHING that occurs under the heavens (according to Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3:1). Whether the event is lawful or unlawful, good or evil, God has foreordained it and controls it for His glory and for the good of His people. For God by His almighty power and infinite wisdom has made everything BEAUTIFUL in His time (so Solomon teaches in Ecclesiastes 3:11). Our faith is especially stretched to understand how God can make something beautiful out of murder, rape, adultery, molestation, or a terrorist's bomb. But is that not what Romans 8:28 teaches (where even the wicked slaughter of Christians in Romans 8:35-39 is included among those things that God works for the good of His people)? Is that not what Genesis 50:20 teaches (where the jealousy, hatred, man-stealing, and lying of Joseph's brothers are included)? Is that not what Peter preaches concerning the most heinous crime ever committed in all of history—the murderous execution of our sinless Savior (in Acts 2:23)? Of course, we must maintain at the same time that God is neither the author nor the approver in any of these instances wherein sins are committed by the free acts of man (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 3:1; 5:4).

This truth is so important in Solomon's treatise on where to find true joy and contentment (which he began discussing in Ecclesiastes 2:24). For without faith in such a God who ordains all things for His glory and for our good, we can find no place of comfort or satisfaction in this life. For where there is no rhyme or reason, there is only worry and fear. But where there is a child-like rest in the arms of our Heavenly Father who can make no mistakes in what He ordains, our joy is made full. Dear people of God, our hope in such a God can never die, for He has promised to make all things BEAUTIFUL in His time.

In the previous sermon, we considered the first couplet in Ecclesiastes 3:3: "a time to kill and a time to heal." At that time, we only addressed "a time to kill." This Lord's Day, let us finish that couplet and then address the next couplet in Ecclesiastes 3:3. Our main points for this Lord's Day are these: (1) God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Healing (Ecclesiastes 3:3a); (2) God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Breaking Down (Ecclesiastes 3:3b); and (3) God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Building Up (Ecclesiastes 3:3b).

I. God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Healing (Ecclesiastes 3:3a).

A. The Hebrew word for "heal" conveys the idea of mending or sewing together that which is torn or ripped. God's healing comes in many forms to us: whether it be healing of our souls or healing of our bodies. All healing is divinely appointed by our Almighty God. If God did not appoint healing in your life or mine, there would be no healing. There would only be killing and destruction.

B. God may miraculously heal the sick without any means at times, as He did through Christ and the Apostles (and still has the power to do) in giving sight to the blind, in opening the ears of the deaf, in strengthening the limbs of the lame, and in raising the dead from the grave. There is nothing our God cannot do in healing and restoring life to those who are ill and near death's door. God may also heal the sick by means of medications, supplements, treatments, exercise, rest, and diet. However God should choose to heal the sick (whether with or without ordinary means), it is still God who heals all of our diseases (Psalm 103:3). Of course, the means used to heal must also be lawful. For example, forming embryos in order to harvest stem cells may have the result of bringing about healing in various cases, but this means to healing cannot be lawful

(according to God Moral Law); for it involves murdering children in their earliest developmental stages.

1. What we struggle with so often is this question: Why does God heal that person, but does not heal me, or my child, or my spouse, or my parent, or my dear friend when we have fervently called upon Him in prayer to do so?

a. Is this question not raised in our minds in John 5 when the Lord Jesus visit's the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem where we are told, "a great multitude of impotent folk of blind, halt, and withered" lay around the pool hoping that someone would help them into the pool after the stirring of the waters by an angel, so that they might be healed of their infirmity? The first infirmed person who stepped into the pool after it was divinely stirred was healed (according to John 5:4). Carefully observe that not all were healed, only one was apparently healed at a time (even though God had the power to heal all of the sick who desperately struggled to get to the water of life). The point of God's healing of some and not of all is made even more clear when the Lord Jesus approaches just one man at the pool of Bethesda who had been severely ill (most likely he was lame or paralyzed as we see in John 5:7-8). But out of the great multitude of those who were severely afflicted, the Lord chose just one man to heal.

b. Dear ones, God does heal in His appointed time certain ones, but does not heal others. He may even choose to heal an ungodly man, while allowing a godly man to suffer in his physical affliction. Why? I don't know the SPECIFIC reason, but I do know the GENERAL reason: Romans 8:28. Our God is always up to something good when He heals you or even when He does not heal you, dear child of God. Of that you can be sure.

2. Let me ask you: What do we all deserve due to our sin in Adam and due to our own personal sin? Do we not deserve death and all of the miseries of this life (not to mention an eternity of torment in hell)? But hasn't Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law (in every respect), being made a curse for us (according to Galatians 3:13)? Absolutely! So if that is the case, when the child of God suffers physical illness (and even death), is God (as an avenging Judge) pouring out upon His child His infinite wrath and punishment for the sin committed against Him? Absolutely not! For God as our Judge has already (once and for all) judged Christ for all of our sin (past, present, and future). So the miseries of this life which we now suffer are not God's retributive justice being satisfied against us. Rather we now suffer the miseries of this life (including death), as appointed by our beloved Father, for our good, for our sanctification, for our discipline, for our growth in grace, in order to take us out of our comfort zones, so that we might fall upon our Savior for the grace we need every single day, and so that we might see every day that God is our Healer (whether we are immediately delivered from that affliction or trial, or whether we are given grace by God to endure that affliction or trial). The Holy Spirit tells us that we are healed by the stripes of the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 3:24). Healed of all our sins! Healed of all the miseries in this life! Is there healing in the atonement of Christ? You better believe there is, and not only spiritual healing, but physical healing as well (as seen in our resurrected bodies, which we shall receive on the last day). Every good benefit and gift we receive as the children of God in this life is the result of Christ's work as our Mediator.

3. Have you thanked the Lord for the measure of healing that you do enjoy today? You were able to get out of bed today—many were unable to do so in this very city. Oh, dear Christian, if you have become mired in self-pity about all of the pains and heartaches you face, perhaps it would be helpful to occasionally take a walk through the hospital just to remind yourself that so many are suffering much greater afflictions than you are presently suffering and how gracious God has been to you.

C. There is always hope of healing for the Christian. For whatever misery you face, it is your good Father (and not some dreaded enemy) that appoints every season of healing in your life (even that final healing at the resurrection of the dead). Are you suffering today? You will be healed (whether sooner or later). For the Lord is your Healer, dear child of God. Yes, there is a time to KILL in God's sovereign plan. But never

forget, there is also a divinely appointed time for your healing. The fact that you have been healed of all your spiritual diseases guarantees that you will be healed of all your physical diseases. If God was not absolutely sovereign, we would have no assurance that we would ever be free of the many physical afflictions of this life. But because our beloved Father is absolutely sovereign, we may have that child-like trust and confidence that HE WILL HEALS US IN HIS GOOD TIME. May the Lord ever give us faith to trust His good and wise plan for our lives.

D. Dear ones, not only does the Lord heal us physically by means of various remedies, He also heals us spiritually by means of various remedies as well: namely, the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. The Lord gives to us spiritual food for our nourishment and growth in grace, even as He gives to us physical food. Are you availing yourself of these means to your healing each day when it comes to the Word and prayer, and each opportunity you have to come to the Lord's Supper? Could the reason for your lack of God's joy, peace, and comfort be that you are not eating and drinking regularly of His means of grace? Just as the body will suffer without physical nourishment, so will the soul suffer without spiritual nourishment. God's healing in our souls ordinarily flows to us by means of communing with our Savior in the WORD, SACRAMENTS, and PRAYER. That is why you are asked before coming to the Lord's Supper, whether you have been regularly eating and drinking of Christ's benefits in your secret worship and family worship. How can we expect God to heal us spiritually of our sins and weaknesses, if we are not availing ourselves of these ordinary means? If we are not faithful in the ordinary means He has given for our healing, why should we be surprised if we see no growth in our faith and love, or see no growth in overcoming various sins in our lives?

II. God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Breaking Down (Ecclesiastes 3:3b).

A. The Hebrew word used for "break down" ("a time to break down") conveys some violent act which destroys what was previously built or established. Whereas killing and healing seem more applicable to individuals, breaking down and building up seem more applicable to social institutions, like families, churches, and nations. The Lord would have us to remember that He who kills and heals the individual, also breaks down and builds up the family, church, and nation. God's foreordination is not relegated to only individuals, but includes all groups of individuals in their social capacity as well.

B. Solomon, the repentant Preacher, states, there is "a time to break down." I would submit this includes an unlawful breaking down as well as a lawful breaking down. For whether a matter is unlawful or lawful, it has its divinely appointed season in God's all-wise plan. Nothing catches Him by surprise. If God has not ordained ALL breaking down (whether it is an unlawful breaking down or a lawful breaking down), then there is no meaning or purpose in the breaking down of that marriage, church, or nation. We then have no hope of even the possibility of a building up. For if God has not ordained and is not providentially working the breaking down to His own glory and for the good of His people, how can we ever believe that God can reverse the breaking down to bring about a building up?

1. Let's consider marriage for a moment.

a. The walls of a marriage may sinfully be broken down and destroyed by a spouse who commits adultery or willfully deserts the one he/she has promised to love until death should part them. However, there are sins of which we must be aware that also lead to adultery or willful desertion: physical or verbal abuse; drifting apart due to becoming too busy and not spending time communing with one another; thinking more of how our husband or wife should serve us than how we should serve our husband or wife; focusing more on his/her duties than we do on our own duties; lying to one another and destroying trust; calling one another degrading names, through a desire to talk but not to listen; finding more pleasure in

receiving rather than giving; neglecting words and deeds of love and affection; failing to worship and praise Jesus Christ within the home; and treating strangers more civilly than our own spouses. Marriage is also broken down by various wicked laws that grant divorce on the basis of irreconcilable differences or that allow “no-fault” divorces (both of which are contrary to God’s Law). Moreover, marriage is broken down by same-sex “marriages” (which is likewise forbidden in God’s Moral Law).

b. Let us be clear that there are lawful and biblical reasons cited in the Scripture and in our Subordinate Standards (like *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 24:5-6) to completely break down (or dissolve) a marriage: namely, fornication, i.e. adultery (Matthew 19:9) and willful desertion that cannot be remedied (1 Corinthians 7:15).

c. Dear ones, we should mourn and grieve over our own sins that can lead to breaking down the walls of our own marriage. We should seek forgiveness from God and our spouse for the various ways we have done so (seventy times seven according to Christ in Matthew 18:22). Our sins that lead to breaking down our marriage are wicked and despicable in God’s sight, but even these grievous sins are ordained by God and used by Him to teach and to train us in the School of Christ.

2. Let us consider further the breaking down of the walls of Christ’s Church.

a. This too is ordained by God even when it is unlawfully done. When all manner of false doctrine, corrupt worship, and tyrannical church government attack the Church of Christ and are embraced by the church, the walls of Christ’s Church are broken down.

(1) We see this breaking down of the walls of the church in the Old Testament, when Jeroboam introduced images into the worship of Jehovah, introduced his own priesthood, his own holy days, and his own innovative worship (1 Kings 12:25-33).

(2) We see this breaking down of the walls of the church in the New Testament, when false teachers brought into the church various false doctrines that had not been given to them by Christ or the apostles (Romans 16:17).

(3) We see this breaking down of the walls of the church when various sects and denominations began to be tolerated (under the guise of religious freedom), so that the one true religion was no longer protected or preserved by the civil magistrate as God commanded in the first four of God’s Ten Commandments. When the peace, purity, and unity of Christ’s Church is subverted by not dealing with sin and error in our midst in a loving, godly manner (as taught in Matthew 18:15-20), we break down the walls of the church (whether intentionally or unintentionally). When we are impatient with one another, when we as elders abuse our power or authority, when the sheep do not submit to the lawful authority of the elders, when we do not do unto others as we would have others do unto us, when we do not love one another as Christ has loved us, when we are more interested in being served than we are in serving one another, when we crave the attention of others for what we have done in the church, when we do not take into account the unique circumstances that each of us face when forming our opinions of one another, when we come to the Lord’s Supper with offences in our hearts that we have not removed by going to fellow brethren, we are breaking down the peace, purity, and unity of Christ’s beloved Church—and this is a great abomination to Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). And yet as abominable as is the sinful breaking down of Christ’s Church, it is yet ordained by God for our good (1 Corinthians 11:17-19). This is the only reason we can still have hope, joy in the Lord, and contentment in such difficult circumstances.

b. There is also a time divinely appointed by God to lawfully break down the walls of an unfaithful church. When a church obstinately backslides from the truth of Christ, introduces false doctrine, corrupt worship, and tyrannical Church government into its constitution, the walls of that unfaithful church need to come down, for it is playing the harlot. It is antichristian. It is taking the crown from Christ’s head and placing that crown upon its own head. The gospel of Christ may even be preached within the walls of that church, but the idolatry of that church must be separated from, so that we do not become partakers of

that spiritual adultery. This is actually the most loving thing we can do for our brethren in such backsliding churches. It is in fact, speaking the truth in love. It is not easy, but it is necessary. This lawful breaking down is also ordained of God.

III. God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Building Up (Ecclesiastes 3:3b).

A. In the interest of time, let me simply say that our encouragement and faith is in God who heals individuals, but also builds up marriages, churches, and nations. Here is a message of hope for us all as we draw to a conclusion. Here is a package deal. The God in whom we hope with child-like confidence not only appoints breaking down, but also appoints building up. He has told us here in Ecclesiastes 3:3 that He appoints all events that relate to breaking down of marriages, churches, and nations for His own wise and holy reasons. But let us not stop there. For the same God also delights to build up what has been broken down. There is no room for hopelessness and despair here. Whatever is broken down in the life of the Christian is appointed because he loves His people not because He hates us. He can do us no wrong.

B. God has ordained times of building up. He delights in building up that which is fallen down (even as He delighted to rebuild the fallen walls of Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah). So our merciful God will delight to restore Israel unto Himself, to unify the Church of Christ throughout the world, and to bring the nations to Himself. It is clear from God's Word that your trust and hope is not in vain when it is in the God who builds up that which is broken down. In fact, the Lord usually breaks us down that we might see our sin, repent of it, and seek His forgiveness, before He builds us up. If you are in what appears to be a breaking down period in your life, you may still know the joy of the Lord and a peace that passes all understanding, because the Lord who appointed the breaking down does so in the life of His people, in order that He might build something far better in your life and mine.

C. The question I would leave you with today is this: Are you a wall breaker or a wall builder in the church? Are you fervently praying for the peace, purity, and unity of Christ's Church? Are you praying to be used by God in sharing your faith with others, in giving liberally (as you are able) to the work of the ministry, in loving the brethren, in showing mercy to the brethren, in speaking the truth in love, in thankfully receiving the ministry of your pastor and elders and encouraging them in it, in not allowing offences between one another to develop into resentment and bitterness? Do you want to be used by God in His kingdom to be a wall builder? If you do, the Lord Jesus will use you. This too is seen in the Lord's Supper as we renew our covenant with the Lord to be those who love His Church, pray for her, and seek to preserve the peace, purity, and unity of Christ's Church.

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