

A Time for Everything under Heaven #6

Ecclesiastes 3:6; Ephesians 4:28

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Issues of financial security are important to us all. If we were to take a poll throughout the congregation, I dare say that one of the greatest challenges (and even stresses) in our lives would be seeking to make ends meet each month, seeking to get ahead of the bills and expenses that we face each month, and seeking to provide not only for our present needs but seeking to prepare for our future needs as our family grows or as our circumstances alter and change.

Clearly, it is a godly characteristic to seek to provide for the financial security of our family at the present time (1 Timothy 5:8). It is the trait of a Christian, not only to provide for his family in the present, but also to prepare now for his family's future needs (consider Joseph in Genesis 41, who prepared seven years for the famine announced by God; the wise son in Proverbs 10:5; and the ant in Proverbs 30:25). In fact, it is the slothful and lazy person that presently wastes his time and resources, and then finds (to his distress) that there is a day of reckoning in the future. Dear ones, God calls us to be diligent and faithful stewards of the resources entrusted to us, so that we might not only have enough for ourselves and our family, but even for others who may be in need (Ephesians 4:28).

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon makes the case for being diligent in regard to our financial security. However, in the Book of Ecclesiastes (3:6), Solomon states (in effect) that our financial security is ultimately in the hands of our sovereign God, "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). For there is a divinely appointed time TO GET as well as TO LOSE; and a divinely appointed time TO KEEP as well as TO CAST AWAY. This truth is not intended to cast the Christian into despair or to make him/her lazy. To the contrary, it is intended to cast the Christian upon His mighty, loving, wise, and merciful Savior for his financial needs. Let us consider the following main points in God's Word from the pen of Solomon this Lord's Day: (1) God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Getting and Times of Losing (Ecclesiastes 3:6a); (2) God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Keeping and Times of Casting Away (Ecclesiastes 3:6b).

I. God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Getting and Times of Losing (Ecclesiastes 3:6a).

A. Solomon does not expressly state what is included in these divinely appointed times of GETTING (whether wealth, property, jobs, achievements, or promotions). However, we can be confident that the times of getting mentioned here by Solomon are times when we have what is sufficient for our needs, and even for our comforts in this life.

1. Dear ones, such times of prosperity in our lives are not ultimately due to our own wisdom, knowledge, power, or wealth. We may like to think that they are. However, the Spirit of God teaches us that promotion and advancement in any area of our life does not come "from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Psalm 75:6-7). Likewise, we find this truth clearly taught in the prayer of Hannah: Read 1 Samuel 2:7-9.

2. The fact that God is the one who gives us all that we get in this life in no way relieves us of our responsibility to be hard-working, diligent, and wise in the decisions we make. God uses all of these means to provide for us. But the Lord is still our Provider. We can get nothing in this life unless He first gives it to us, unless He first ordains it, unless He first appoints it in His season.

3. How is it that one person works hard and makes wise decisions, but barely makes ends

meet; while another person with less effort and less ability has wealth and riches almost fall into his lap? Dear ones, God would humble us all by making it clear that all of those times which we have acquired in some form of wealth, He has appointed it for His own glory and for the good of His people. It is, in fact, the height of pride when we forget this truth and rather bask in the sunlight of our own arrogance, speaking, acting, and receiving the praise of men, as if we appointed such promotion and advancements in our own lives. We are so prone to remember what we have done (though we are only the mere instrument) to obtain wealth, but so prone to forget our merciful God, who has graciously ordered the opportunity, the circumstances, and the events wherein we have prospered. Do we deserve to get anything of blessing and prosperity in this life? Do we deserve to receive even a drink of cool water to quench our thirst, or even a piece of bread to satisfy our hunger, let alone all that we presently enjoy? Dear ones, God owes us absolutely nothing, except everlasting torment for the sin we have committed against Him. Just as Christ has freely borne the punishment which we deserved (as His people), and has graciously lavished us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, so He has graciously lavished us with every material blessing in this earth that we enjoy. Thus, when we receive anything in this life from Him, we receive it from the boundless depths of His glorious mercy and grace to us (according to 1 Corinthians 4:7), and not because the Lord was under obligation to give it to us.

4. Now all that we get in this life (although ordained by God and divinely appointed by God from all eternity) may not be lawfully obtained. It may be stolen. It surely was sinful and contrary to God's law for Joseph's brothers to steal him and sell him into slavery, and yet Joseph demonstrates God's absolute sovereignty even over the wicked sin of man-stealing when he says this to his repentant brothers: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20). Although man does steal, rob, and cheat, we shouldn't have the attitude that since the Lord sovereignly appoints all that we get in His season and at His time, it makes no difference whether we get what we have by honesty or by dishonesty. God could not be clearer: "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL" (Exodus 20:15). It is not a faithful Christian that steals and then justifies it by saying that God ordained it. Such a wicked person merely uses God to promote his own sin as does the hypothetical person in Romans 9:19: "Why doth he [God] yet find fault? For who hath resisted his [God's] will?" God does not force man to steal, rob, and cheat. Man freely chooses to do so. And God shows His justice in punishing thieves as we see in the case of Achan, who freely chose to obtain wealth by stealing it and was stoned to death for his theft which also led to the death of many in Israel (in Joshua 7:19-25). Nor should we have the attitude that we might steal because God will graciously forgive us later, if we confess our sin. Shall we sin that grace may abound? "God forbid", says Paul in Romans 6:2. Such willful sins are aggravated sins. Although God will forgive where there is true repentance, it will likely come at a great price in pain and heartache to us.

5. Dear ones, if it is God who has given to you what you have by His Divine appointment, are you learning to be content with what He has given? Even if there are needs that you see in your life, if He has given to you what you have (though small it may seem), is He not able to give much more to supply what you presently lack? He may do so through a promotion, through a special gift, or through working two jobs instead of one. All of your anxiety and worry will not add a day to your life or supply that need in your life. When the Lord takes us out of our comfort zones in regard to financial security, He is stretching us and building our faith. Let us learn to cast ourselves upon Him who has promised: Read Matthew 6:33.

B. Now it follows that since our GETTING is divinely appointed by our heavenly Father, Solomon states that our LOSING of what we have gained is also divinely appointed by our good and wise God, for there is "a time to lose" as well (Ecclesiastes 3:6).

1. Oh, we like those times of GETTING, but how we kick and scream when the Lord brings those times of LOSING into our lives. But in those times of LOSING, we are taught by the Lord not to place our confidence in our financial assets. For our security is not ultimately in our job, in our check, in the economy, in

our investments, or in our property. Our security is in the Lord our God. As Job confessed when he had lost all that he had: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21-22). Paul, in fact, calls riches “uncertain”, because we do not know whether they will be there for us tomorrow or not (1 Timothy 6:17). That is the very point that Solomon is making here in Ecclesiastes 3:6 as well. If you place all of your hope for happiness, joy, and contentment in your wealth, you are foolish. For Solomon says in Proverbs that those very riches which we covet can grow wings (as it were) and fly away in a moment (Proverbs 23:5).

2. Dear ones, it is at those appointed times of LOSING that God has patiently taught this stubborn student to appreciate every morsel of bread that I eat and to be thankful for my wife and children with which He has blessed me. It is at those times of LOSING that God has taught this dull learner to look to the greater treasures of God’s sovereignty, God’s wisdom, God’s goodness, and the gracious gifts of His peace, joy, comfort, and righteousness. It is at those times of LOSING that this slow pupil has learned to look to the glories of heaven above, where “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

3. Dear ones, God never takes from us, His dearly beloved children, anything that He doesn’t replace with something much more precious, if we only will look and receive by faith what He offers to us. Perhaps God in His infinite wisdom knows you need to learn how to be content in all circumstances far more than you need that financial security in your life. Perhaps the Lord knows you need to learn to be thankful at all times far more than you need that extra money in the bank. Perhaps the Lord knows you need to appreciate your family, to grow in your trust in Him, and to look to the treasures in heaven much more than you need treasures upon earth.

4. Dear ones, it is not only those who GET who struggle with covetousness, but also those who LOSE who struggle with the sin of covetousness, which God says is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Covetousness is a species of idolatry, because what we covet in this life becomes our first love instead of Christ. What we covet in this life becomes that which is most important to us rather than our God. Are you presently in a time of LOSING? Do not fall into despair. The Lord has you right where He wants you. He has your attention. He is teaching you in the School of Christ what is truly important in life and where to find true joy and peace in life—IN HIM.

II. God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Keeping and Times of Casting Away (Ecclesiastes 3:6b).

A. The couplet that now is under consideration would seem to complement (and fill out) what Solomon has just stated. There would seem to be a connection between times of GETTING and LOSING and times of KEEPING and CASTING AWAY. I would submit that the theme of financial security does not end with GETTING and LOSING, but continues with KEEPING and CASTING AWAY. For once we have entered into a time of GETTING, there will also follow times of KEEPING what we have gotten. But there will also follow times of CASTING AWAY what we have gotten as well.

1. As we consider those divinely appointed times of KEEPING, we are to understand these times as occasions when we guard and preserve what we have received from the Lord.

a. We are to KEEP what we have gotten for our necessities in life. We are not to carelessly waste what God gives to us. We are to live within our means and not spend more than we have. We are to keep what we have by saving it for a rainy day, when we may lose a job or a major need may arise. One of the pieces of counsel that I offer to couples preparing for marriage is this: Seek to save up a one month cushion (or even more if you’re able) in your savings account that you do not touch except for emergencies (a one month cushion is the amount of money that you earn in one month). For there will be car repairs, appliances that need to be replaced, and emergency trips etc. that will come up. If you always have such an

emergency fund kept and guarded in your savings account when it is needed, you will be less likely to be in a situation where you will need to borrow money (paying interest on that borrowed money).

b. However, these times of KEEPING what God has given to us not only speak of KEEPING for our necessities, but I would suggest these times of KEEPING also speak of KEEPING what God has given to us for lawful recreation, vacations, rest and relaxation, education, improvements upon our house, and generally enjoying the comforts of this life with which God has blessed us (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 1 Timothy 6:17). As long as our recreations are lawful, within our means to provide, and used to the glory of God, we may KEEP a portion of what God gives us for such enjoyment in this life.

2. There may certainly be a selfish KEEPING against which we must guard ourselves as well. This is a KEEPING that only thinks of how one's resources may be spent on oneself, one's own pleasure, or one's own enjoyment. There is little or no thought of Christ's kingdom or the needs of others. This is always the potential danger in times of KEEPING, namely, that we forget Christ's kingdom and those who are in need (as we see illustrated for us in the case of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31). This type of unlawful KEEPING may actually KEEP one from heaven itself (as we see in the case of the rich young man in Mark 10:17-22, who trusted in his riches and not in the Lord). Dear ones, let not those times in which you KEEP what God has given to you, KEEP you away from Jesus Christ. For what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his eternal soul in hell?

B. Finally, Solomon says there is "a time to CAST AWAY" (Ecclesiastes 3:6b).

1. What would the Spirit of God have in mind when He speaks of a time to cast or throw away what we have gained and kept?

a. These are times in which we take what we have gained and kept for our own needs and comforts and rather cast our resources upon others to help and assist them in their need. One of the reasons that we are to save and keep what we get by God's grace is so that we might minister to those who are in dire need (Ephesians 4:28; Galatians 6:10). The testimony of Paul is an example to us all (Acts 20:33-35). We know that we are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ when we find that we are more blessed in our giving to those in need than when we receive from others because we are in need. Are you looking around you for those who are in great need and upon whom you may cast your resources (Ecclesiastes 11:1)? It may seem to some to be wasting our bread to help others in need, but the Lord says it will even come back to us in various ways after many days. Dear ones, you are the hands of the Lord in ministering to the needs of one another. To minister to even the least of our brethren is to minister to the Lord Himself (Matthew 25:40).

b. There are also times in which we may cast away the riches we have gotten and kept in order to further the cause of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:33-34). When we become Christians, we must be willing to forsake all in order to follow Christ (Matthew 8:19). Dear ones, if we are not willing to suffer loss now for the sake of Christ's kingdom, what will we do if it should ever come to laying down our lives for the Cause of Christ? Some of you have indeed suffered loss for Christ and His kingdom because you will not work on the Sabbath, because you have moved from various parts of the country to be here under a faithful ministry, because you will not swear an unlawful oath, because you will not compromise your faith in Christ. As a result, you have suffered hardship, trial, and the loss of a comfortable income. You have cast away that which you had for the sake of Christ and His kingdom. Those who faithfully give out of their want (rather than out of their mere abundance) to supply the needs of the ministry have also cast away what they have gotten for the Cause of Christ (Mark 12:41-44).

2. But dear ones, what have you gained in casting away your wealth upon the needy or upon the ministry? Is it only a loss or is it a far greater gain. Peter, speaking on behalf of the disciples of Christ who had left their livelihoods and suffered loss in many ways to follow Christ, asked the Lord Jesus a similar

question in Matthew 19:27: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” Turn with me to Mark 10:29-31, where we see Christ’s response. Those who cast away all to follow Christ have gained a new family who possess (collectively) many homes if a place to sleep is needed, and who possess (collectively) much wealth if that is needed. Furthermore, they have gained the treasures of everlasting life, which begin here on this earth and extend to all eternity in heaven. Dear ones, don’t look at what you have cast away for Christ’s sake, rather look at what you have gained for Christ’s sake (Philippians 3:7-9). Beloved, whatever you have lost for the sake of Christ, you have gained a hundred fold according to Christ. Let us not worry or fret over our losses for the Cause of Christ. Let us rather rejoice and be glad in all of our gains. Let that be our focus. He, who has Christ, heaven, the ordinances, and the family of God, is truly rich no matter how little of this world’s wealth he may actually enjoy.

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