

Events without Christ are Meaningless

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

Speaker: Matthew Black

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Date: May 5, 2010

Introduction: Open your Bible to Ecclesiastes 3 and Isaiah 46. Tonight we continue in our series called “Finding the Meaning of Life”. Tonight we are going to find out that “Events without Christ are Meaningless”.

The prominent 20th century atheist Bertrand Russell once said, "Unless you *assume* a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless."¹ Russell taught that life is meaningless. This philosophy that life is meaningless is called “existentialism”. Man just exists with no purpose—life is totally arbitrary and without significance. How sad! Yet most people live this way.

God’s Purposeful Plan

God has laid out a different plan. Check it out in **Isaiah 46:8-11**, “Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. 9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: 11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.”

We all live in a small window of time. God governs over it all. God’s governing over this time frame is so extensive that ravenous birds hunt because He tell them to. The hawk flies around hunting a mouse because God called him to do that. That’s what this verse is saying.

And then God says, “Unless you think you're not a part of that governance, a man moves from a far country to this present country because I called him”. It was God’s counsel that my grandfather move from Scotland to the United States in 1918. He met my grandmother who was German, Charlotte Becker. They married had a son who in 1974 had a grandson named Matthew Black. I’m glad God brought my grandfather to execute the counsel of God when he moved from a far country. That’s what God is saying. It hits home.

Compatibilism

Don’t get me wrong. We do freely choose our way. But God works His way even through all the choices we all make, both good and bad. It’s what theologians call

¹ Dr. Hugh Moorhead, *The Meaning of Life* (Chicago Review Press, December 1988). Dr. Moorhead, a philosophy professor at Northeastern Illinois University, once wrote to 250 of the best-known philosophers, scientists, writers, and intellectuals in the world, asking them, "What is the meaning of life?" Their responses are published in this book.

compatibilism. It's just as Joseph told his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good".²

The Deists of old taught that God was like a watchmaker. He wound up the clock and walked away. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that God is intimately involved in His creation. Amazingly, God is "mindful" of man!

Let me show you another place before we get into Ecclesiastes 3. Look over at **Acts 17:24-28**, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, *though he be not far from every one of us*: 28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being".

This is an amazing passage of Scripture. It basically says that God is very close to all people. He has determined when and where they will be born, the language they would speak—which means ten trillion years ago—God said, "Matt Black will be born in 1974 near Chicago and be flown in a helicopter to Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, and they'll save his life". Now my father will tell you that my sister and I were an accident, that we were the biggest surprise caboose in the history of the world. My oldest brother is 14 years older than me! So, my parents were like, "Oops!" But God was looking at my parents and perhaps said, "Watch William and Barbara's face when they find out they're having TWINS! – and the second set of twins at that!" God planned it all along.

And God planned that I would love Chicago, and be born on the south side and love the White Sox. I was raised in a school system that exposed me to the Spanish language. I got saved and met my sweetheart in Spanish class. All of this was ordained by God.

We all made real choices, but God worked His will in all of them and ordained and weaved His will from before time began. What Paul is saying is we are all living in the allotted time period for your life. And not only that, but He's going to take it a step further and says—not only is the time period correct, but so is the place.

Ok, with that in mind, let's get started on **Ecclesiastes 3**, "To every *thing* there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted; 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 A time to rend,

² Genesis 50:20

and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace”.

Usually, when this list is mentioned, it is viewed as things that occur in life, things that happen in life. What this list really is, is not just a list of things that happen in life, but a list of things **God sends**. And this is hard for us.

Think of this list as a list of ingredients that God mixes together to serve His purposes in your life, in your allotted time, in your set boundary. We tend to second guess events in our lives don't we? But we have to remember with all these events what **verse 1** says, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven”.

So just like there is a time and a season for everything, there's also a purpose.

Is There a Purpose for Life?

Solomon asks the question again, to see if you are listening. Is there a purpose? Is there any profit to all that we do? **Verses 9-10**, “9 What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? 10 I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it”. What is the purpose of it all?

Well let me tell you there IS a purpose. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (verse 1). There's a purpose behind all of it, the joy, the sorrow, the mourning, the laughter. There's a deep abiding purpose. In fact, there's three of them.

I. **God is making all things beautiful in His time.** That's what verse 11 says, “He hath made every thing beautiful in His time”.

So, it is God's plan with God's vision, with His ability to see, to make everything beautiful in His time. Which means every little step, every little sorrow, every little tear, every hurt, every joy, all goes into the bowl to bring about what is beautiful in the end.

A. Examples. Children... rehabbing a house.

Example #1: Let me give you an example. On May 30th, Katie, our eldest daughter will turn 11 years old. There are so many events that have gone into her life—some ugly, some wonderfully beautiful, but as I look back, God makes all things beautiful “in His time”.

- Babies begin with **pleasure**.
- And then, there's this **ecstatic joy** that occurs the moment the pregnancy test says, “Guess what?” Usually, there's ecstatic joy.
- And then, **nausea**. I mean, I remember with Katie, we were on our way to a deputation meeting, and five minutes before we arrive at the church, Jill says, I “I think I'm going to be siiiick.....” I'm sorry, but I have such a weak stomach that

upon arrival, Jill had recovered and she cleaned out the car while I taught Sunday School. So, Jill goes from extreme joy to naseau.

- Then she goes to feeling unbelievably **lethargic** and **exhausted** and sick for months. And then just the time that faded away (near the end), the back's starts hurting, the feet are hurting, we're up three or four times a night. You get in the car and go five miles and find another rest stop. That last three months, you live from rest stop to rest stop. And I did say "we're." At that point the feet are ramping up, legs cramping up, the whole deal. It is unbelievably tough experience, and "I'm glad I'm a man" kind of experience.
- Then with Katie there was 17 hours of **excruciating labor**. Yes we had an epidural, but I think it only one side of Jill's body! Then finally, there's this long, painful, but beautiful moment.
- All that pain turns into something **beautiful** "in God's time". After all that pain, it is truly amazing we have any other children. If you would have asked my wife or any wife two days after the first one, "no way!"
- And you want to hear something really interesting? Do you know that a woman who is breast feeding secretes a hormone that makes her body and brain forget about the pain, which is why people have more than one kid.

That's just one example. God says we are His masterpiece (Ephesians 4:10). He's sending all kinds of things your way that are hard and sometimes ugly.

Example #2: Did you see the building next door when we were rehabbing it? It was an ugly looking place until the last few weeks. Once we started putting paint on the walls, rolling out the sod and laying tile and carpet it really started looking special.

Application: You are looking at some events in your life right now, and you are asking "What is the purpose?" I mean seriously, "I don't get it!" What Solomon is saying is: you are not supposed to always "get it" when you're going through it. Too often we find ourselves on the human side of time, with no ability to see or comprehend how this thing can be beautiful. But you can be encouraged that there is a purpose to it. God's going to make it beautiful in His time.

Example #3: Think about life like a beautiful tapestry. When you look at the backside, all you see is loose strings and knots and messes. But turn it over and it is a beautiful work of art.

Example #4: Or how about the Grand Canyon? I've never been there, but some of you have. I'm told that if you take a hike from the bottom to the top, you feel like you are going down and up and sometimes you feel like you are getting nowhere, but once you get to the top it all makes sense. I think life is like that. When you are up close to the hills and trails, they don't make sense, and they might even look ugly. But when you look back, you can see your path and see how beautiful it is.

"God will make all things beautiful in His time". That's the first purpose for all the events God has in your life.

II. **God is focusing you on your unchanging, unmovable purpose for living: the glory of God.** That's what **verse 11** says, "He hath set the world in their heart". Some of you know that the word "world" has the idea of "eternity" or a "sense of eternal purpose". We know there's more than the here and now.

All of these events—our joy and sorrow, mourning and laughter, our planting and harvesting, our living and dying and everything in between tells us that this can't be all there is. There must be something more! Our goal is not to gain wealth and pleasure and knowledge. We must be a part of something larger than us. This was put into our hearts by God. We long to be part of something greater and bigger and grander. God is that grander purpose. God put eternity in our hearts. Everything on this earth is just a fading shadow, filled with frustration! This can't be it. That's right. This is not it! God will make it beautiful one day, but if this were all there was, it would make no sense. God put this eternal purpose in our hearts.

Application: Are you looking toward your eternal purpose in all the events of life? What is your eternal purpose? Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (**Philippians 1:21**). The catechisms put it another way: "the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever". Are you enjoying God in the uncertain ebb and flow of life? Are you living out your eternal purpose?

The third purpose is one you probably now is coming.

III. **God wants us to trust Him through all the events in our life.** Verse 11, "He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: 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."

We need to understand that God is God and we are not! You cannot possibly understand all that God is doing in your life. You don't have to try to always figure it out. You need to TRUST God. What do you need to do? Trust Him!!

- Paul says something very interesting in **Romans 11:33-36**. He says that not knowing how everything works out in the end makes us trust and glorify God. Check it out: "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! 34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? 35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? 36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

So often we want to be God's counselor. Has God ever needed counsel? Do you think you are going to understand His ways in your life. He's God and you're not. You need to stop trying to figure everything out and simply trust Him!

Let me give you one more encouragement.

- Solomon says you ought also to enjoy the good gifts that He sends you way, but enjoy them for His sake, not for the gifts themselves. Check out what Solomon says, “I know that *there is* no good in them [the events of life], but for *a man* to rejoice, and to do good in his life. 13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it *is* the gift of God. 14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him. 15 That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.”

Conclusion: God’s got a purpose in all the events of life, but without Him, the events of life are meaningless and confusing.

- I. God is making all things beautiful in His time.
- II. God is focusing you on your unchanging, unmovable purpose for living: the glory of God.
- III. God wants us to trust Him through all the events in our life.

Verse 15: God stands outside of eternity! “That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.” God sees the tapestry of life all at once. You won’t see it till you get to heaven. Trust Him in the meantime! Without Him all the events of life are meaningless.