

Ecclesiastes 3: 3 and 4; “A Time to Kill and a time to Heal”, Sermon # 11 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 26th, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

These first eight verses of Chapter 3 are some of the most well-known verses of the Bible to those who do not know the Lord. And the reason, I am sure, is because they speak about the human condition in general. The person who does not yet know the Lord is very concerned to see if they can find verses in the Bible which will affirm the earthly condition of all men; not just the elect of God. They do not want to have to deal with the issues of heaven and hell; of right and wrong, and of every man's need to be converted to Christ. They would rather deal with the human condition and plight; which is, seeking the meaning of life in the various experiences of what we all feel, and what we all will do, at one time or another. This is comforting to the one who does not want to think about their accountability to the Righteous God who has made man for His own pleasure. There is a time for everything in our life. We, as Christians should be able to identify with this, at least to some extent. Some of us were once this way ourselves. We wanted more than anything, at one time, to think that there was not a right or a wrong; there simply is what is. But later on we came to understand that it is the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God. When we were shown grace through believing in the gospel, it was a relief to us to find that there was God who has created all of what is, and who has told us what is right and wrong.

But still, we should be able to sympathize with unbelievers in their thought that there is a human condition in which we all share. We all have a time of birth; we all have a time of death. But when we come to verse 3 where it says that there is a time to kill and a time to heal, we find that we are dealing with a subject which is hard for those who are not trusting in God, not to take issue with; those who are not believing in all of His Word the Bible. Is there really a time to kill? Isn't every time of every day, a time to heal? Well, we want to examine this verse in the same way that I examined verse 2 the last time that we were together. I will attempt to take these verses and to briefly distinguish each subject in relation to God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. In this way, we will better understand what God would have us to do to glorify him in this life. In doing this I hope that you will see that killing and breaking down are describing the same thing; and that healing and building up are referring to the same thing. They are 2 descriptions of the same thing being referred to, in ways that complement one another.

1st – There is a time in life for killing and breaking down. (Verse 3)

I want to begin by saying that I do not believe that this verse is talking about the time to kill in war, because that is specifically mentioned in verse 8: “a time for war, and a time for peace”. We are not talking about being loyal to our country in a godly way. Rather, this verse is talking about being faithful to kill what God wants killed, and to heal what God wants healed. Now what is it that God would want killed? What is it that He would want us as people to kill? Is it other people? No, we can say for certain that God does not want us to kill other people in the vast majority of the circumstances that we find ourselves in. This is because the 6th commandment of the 10 commandments is: “Thou shalt not kill”, or as it is written in more modern language, “You shall not murder”. There are just four words in that command, but they are not so easily kept as you might think.

Turn with me over to Matthew 5, verse 21. Jesus is preaching His sermon on the Mount, and He is publicly refuting some of the misleading interpretations which the Pharisees had placed upon God's law. And here He says, as the Son of God, the One who has every right to interpret God's law with authority, for He is the One who gave it; “You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.” “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the

judgment.” “And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca’ (an empty-head; a worthless fellow with no brains) shall be in danger of the council.” “But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell-fire.” Here, ‘Jesus is straightening out and refuting the false notions of the Pharisees by showing those whom He is speaking to, that keeping the 6th commandment of the law is not merely an outward keeping of one’s self in self-control to restrain ourselves from physically killing someone. No, He is taking the matter to the deeper level of our hearts, and He is showing us that we can be killing someone in our heart, when outwardly we are not touching their physical body at all. We can fail in our self-control in our hearts and still be in sin in God’s sight. The sin of murder is still being committed there in our heart, when we cultivate unrighteous anger there, when it should not be there. Our text says that there is a time to kill, but it is never the place or the time to kill when unrighteous anger fills our heart. It is never right to hold a grudge or to take your own revenge.

So what is the greatest concern in regard to killing; the time to kill, and to kill righteously? The Christian’s greatest concern should be to kill sin in their own heart. Look over at verse 38 of Matthew 5. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. “But I tell you not to resist an evil person.” “But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” In other words, our natural, but not always righteous reaction, when someone slaps us on the cheek, is to allow ourselves to be provoked, and to slap them back. An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth. This is not the time to kill. Turn to James Chapter 1 and we will have this confirmed for us. Verse 18 tells us how we are brought forth as Christians, and how we are to conduct ourselves as Christians. “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.” “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” Turn over now to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 5. “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry.” Verse 8 – “But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.”

So we see, that unrighteous anger, and the killing that flows out of that, is not “the time for killing” that our verses are talking about. We also need to see that there is a righteous anger, a controlled indignation which is not “the time to kill” of our text. Turn with me over to Exodus chapter 2, verse 11. Here we have Moses, who was raised as “the son of Pharaoh's daughter”, choosing to identify himself with the people of God. This was a righteous thing to do. “Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens.” “And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.” “So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” “And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, ‘Why are you striking your companion?’ “Then he said, ‘Who made you a prince and judge over us?’ “Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” “So Moses feared and said, ‘Surely this thing is known!’ “When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses.” “But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.” Now we can see from this that Moses understood from the way that God providentially ordered his circumstances and position in relation to Pharaoh that he might indeed be the one to deliver the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt.

Turn with me to Acts chapter 7 and we will see what was going through Moses’ mind at the time that he did this killing. Verse 22 says, “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” “Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.” “And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian.” “For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.” Now we see here that Moses’ motives were good in killing this

Egyptian. He was defending the oppressed. He was avenging the one who was being mistreated and beaten. But he did not have clear authority for doing so. He believed that God was going to use him to deliver His people, but they did not understand. He really needed a call and authority to enact matters of justice like this. He was eventually to get his commission from God at the end of forty years' time in the desert. Verse 34 says, "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them." "And now come I will send you to Egypt." "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared him the bush."

And so, we see that the time to kill, for Moses, was found in Exodus 14: 27. It was when Pharaoh had let the children of Israel go, and then had treacherously changed his mind and decided that he would pursue them. "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it." "So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea." "Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them." "No so much as one of them remained." We see that God was with Moses in this killing. It was not personal revenge. It was a matter of God's delivering them from their enemies in a righteous way. This is how it always is for the Christian if they are thinking rightly. The Christian's killing, if it is to be done, must be perfectly in line with all of the principles of doing what is good and right in the sight of God. It should only be done in defending, protecting, and delivering the lives of God's people, or your loved ones and relatives in your family, or extended family. And it is not taking matters into your own hands to enact justice, as Moses wrongly supposed, when he killed the Egyptian before he ever had the call and the authority conferred upon him to deliver the children of Israel. No, that was presumption on Moses' part, and he had to flee from the avenging justice of Pharaoh. But he never had to flee again once he was forgiven by God and taught by God that he must go about any killing that he did, in a way that demonstrated to God, and also to men who are willing to do God's will, that God was with him and God was for him in it.

The act of killing, in order to be a righteous act, cannot have one ounce of the pride of man motivating it. God Himself has no sinful anger and no sinful pride in killing. But when He kills He is perfectly righteous in it. Turn with me over to 1st Samuel chapter 2. Here we see that righteous killing is not based upon raw power and force; one person being stronger or being more skilled in killing than another. Here Hannah prays this wonderful prayer to the Lord to thank Him for all that God had done for her in giving her a son. She was so very thankful, that she lent him to the Lord all as long as he lived. She believed that great things would come from the life of her little Samuel. And so it was to be. "And Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord.'" "I smile at my enemies, because I rejoiced in Your salvation." "No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God." "Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed." "The bows of the mighty men are broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength." "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry have ceased to hunger." "Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble." "The Lord kills and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and brings up."

You see; there it is. It is God Himself, and trusting in Him to help you to do according to the commandments and the principles of His Word; that is what makes all the difference between righteous killing and unrighteous killing. But is it not interesting that it says here that "the Lord kills and makes alive." The Lord knows that there is also a time to heal. And it says here that He "brings down to the grave and brings up." He can break down the life which is strong in sin and thus bring about repentance. He can make it strong in righteousness by bringing life to the soul

of the one who is dead in trespasses and sins. He does this in the New Birth. He does this over and over again in the life of a Christian by imparting grace to their heart.

Now 2nd – Let's look briefly at what it means when it says that there is a time to heal.

We have seen that it so very important that in the matter of killing that we do not adopt the principles of the sinful world in relation to the subject of killing other people. If we do not have the principle of Christ's love at work in our hearts we can become a very cruel person. The real question in your heart should be: Am I a person who wants to see relationships between myself and other people healed? Am I a person who wants my heart to be healed in the sight of God? Do I want my sinful heart to change so that others are benefited by my being with them, rather than their being hurt by my being with them? Then I have to learn to kill my sinful tendencies so that I will be able to heal and help others. We learn this from God Himself. "The Lord kills and makes alive..." He doesn't simply kill and that is it. He also heals. Turn with me to Deuteronomy 32: 36. "For the Lord will judge His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is no one remaining bond or free." "He will say, 'Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge?' "Who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering?" "Let them rise and help you and be your refuge." "Now see that I even I am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal." There is, in other words, a time to kill and a time to heal in God's mind. There is a time for those trusting in Him to be killed by His law; to be convicted of their sins; and there is also a time with Him, to be made alive in Jesus Christ according to His mercy. In verse 43 it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people."

This is the atonement which God made for all of those trusting in Him through the Lord Jesus Christ; He who was "bruised for our transgressions and wounded for our iniquities, and by whose stripes we are healed." It is on the basis of being healed ourselves, from the disease of sin, in being given the New Birth, that we begin to learn to seek for the healing of other people around us. That is the time to heal. God knows how and when to restore the soul after it has been diseased by sin, or afflicted by the sins of others against them. Listen to what He says in Hosea 6: 1. "Come let us return to the Lord; for has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up." "After two days he will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight." This is speaking of believers being healed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our faith in Him. This is how we come to the place where we will want to mortify and to kill our sin. And it is also how we will be truly healed, time and time again, from the wounds which sin has brought to us. I hope that each of us will be truly thankful, that with the Lord there is a holy killing and a holy healing.