

The Lord of Time

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[0 : 00] Will you turn with me, please, to the passage we read in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, looking for a short time this morning at verses 1 to 8, not taking each of these verses in detail, but looking at the main theme that runs through them and how it relates to our lives here in this world.

It's not an easy book, Ecclesiastes, is it, to go through and establish what it's getting at and why it is saying things in the way it says.

It was written by someone who was looking for an answer to the meaning of life or the purpose for human life and set about looking at the world around him and himself and his own place in it and questioned very many things that he saw and set them out in the way that they are throughout this book.

One of the key phrases you find right at the beginning of the book, and that is, under the sun. What he says there in verse 3 of chapter 1, what does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

And that phrase, under the sun, runs through the book, and it's a key to its meaning because at times the writer seems to be an utter pessimist, looking at things so darkly that there is really no sign of any hope in what he says.

[1 : 30] But what he's doing, at least as most interpreters would take it, what he's doing is looking at life as it is, life in the raw, if you like, human life, human situations, but leaving God out of his calculation, leaving God out of the picture just for argument's sake, so that he can search for meaning without God, and search for the meaning of human life without taking God into his reckoning.

Where does it take him? What is his conclusion? What answer does he come to as he looks for the meaning and purpose to human life but without God?

Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. That's the conclusion that needs to be come to. That explains what you find in chapter 3 here.

Passages such as you find in verse 19 to the end of chapter 3, what happens to the children of man? What happens to the beast is the same. As one dies, so is the other.

All go to one place. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upwards and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? If you leave God out of your calculation, you cannot come to a certainty about even the destiny of human beings.

[2 : 49] You are really in the same situation as the writer here in his calculations without God. Who can tell whether the spirit of man and the spirit of beast is really any different?

And that's why he brings God into his reckoning as the book goes on. And that's why he concludes in chapter 12, the last verses of the book. This is the conclusion.

Let us hear it, he says, of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole duty of man.

So he is a realist. He is looking at life as it is, but for the sake of argument, as we've said, leaving God out of the picture just to build up the picture for us.

He has not become a fatalist or a pessimist. He is not somebody who is locked into the view of life that says, well, it's inevitable how things are going to work, so there's really not much point in taking life seriously.

[3 : 50] He's not a pessimist just thinking that everything is going to be bleak and dark anyway, so let's just live life and make the best of it because it's not going to come to much anyway.

That's not what he is either. He is a realist looking at life as it is, but then looking at it finally in relation to God as the supreme governor of time.

You and I need to take life as it is. You and I need to look at life in our own circumstances, in our own life, in our own relationship just as they are.

Some people can't face looking at their life in a realistic way. They move away from things that are really true about themselves and they don't want to face up to things that are true about themselves.

You and I have to be realist. You cannot have a relationship with God without being realistic about life, without looking at it as it really is or as the Bible describes it. That's why you find it so important that we keep hold of what the Bible tells us we are and what we're like because otherwise you're not going to get very far with really having a relationship with God.

[5 : 05] That's where so many in our world sadly go wrong because the moment you displace the Bible, you put it aside, you don't reckon with what it says about yourself or about the world in which you live, about history, about God, you've got a problem.

You've ceased to be a realist. And you can't do that if you're serious about life. Well, that's really the kind of pattern that you find throughout this book of Ecclesiastes.

And here in chapter 3, these opening verses, you find this reference to time all the way through these verses. And these are verses which we read quite often at times of funeral service, for example.

You find these verses often read and that's perfectly appropriate. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die.

Then you go forward into verse 11 and you find that he's saying he speaks there about God. He's introducing God, you see, into the picture, beginning to introduce God so that we'll see how it's important to have God in your reckoning as you're measuring the things of life.

[6 : 19] He has made everything beautiful in its time. See, there's the same reference as you find in the previous verses. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart.

In other words, he's beginning to introduce the reality of what we were made for and who we were made for and what our destiny is and how we're not just creatures of time. But he's saying this is the cycle that we know of in life, a time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted.

In other words, he's putting this into relation to God, ultimately saying three things. Firstly, God governs time. Secondly, God became subject to time.

And thirdly, God tells us how to use our time. First of all, God governs time.

Here's the matter that he states. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. And as you go through these verses, you're reminded of chapter 1 of Genesis, for example, where you find the specific order that's mentioned there as God the Creator brought things into being.

[7 : 32] It's not haphazard. It's not accidental. It's not something where God just throws things out in his creative power and leaves them to find their own place in the universe.

As you read through chapter 1, it's impossible to actually conclude that God is not a God of order, a God of precision, a God of beauty, a God of placing things in relation to each other in the way he sees fit.

Nothing in Genesis 1 is unpredictable. Nothing in Genesis 1 is out of place. It's all got its own place in God's placement of them.

There's nothing there in Genesis 1 that God needs to redo. He doesn't need to say, he doesn't say at any time, I should have done it a different way or I should have put this here and that there, so I'll need to readjust it.

I'll need to actually begin again or just refashion that. Everything there is good. And when God looks at it after it's all done, it's very good.

[8 : 33] It corresponds to himself. It has the order of God about it. Of course, that came in Genesis 3 to be spoiled by man's sin, which entered into the creation and had its effect on the creation.

I'm not going into that today, but you know very well for yourselves. Romans 5, for example, all of these tell us what devastation sin caused, human sin caused, our rebellion against God caused. What he's saying here, though, is that everything has a season. There's a time to be born and a time to die. There's these cycles of time. Everything is in its time. But it's important to take with us the fact that God's precision follows through into all of that.

The time that you were born and I was born is precisely the time that God had it in his plan. The time that we will die is precisely where God had it in his plan.

The things that happened in your life. The comforting things. The difficult things. The challenging things. The bereavements.

[9 : 48] The sorrows. The joys. The gladness. They're not accidental. They're not unarranged. They're there because that's God's plan for you.

That's what we sang in Psalm 139. Where the psalmist there is in speaking to God and is taking up with the knowledge that God has of him and how amazed he is at the precision of God's knowledge and the detail of God's knowledge and the exactness of God's knowledge because that's what God is like.

He's exact and he's precise. And he gives thanks to God for the fact that even when he was being formed in his mother's womb, God's thoughts were upon him.

That was precisely as God had ordained it. Of course, that has a very important relation to what you find so sadly in our society, the taking of the life of the unborn.

And that's important. But as he goes on, he speaks about the things he said that were to be in his life. They were all written in your book before I came to be.

[11 : 01] God had the book of his life completed before he was born. Do you and I really appreciate that? Because that's so helpful to us that everything has its appointed season, that everything is really in the cycle that God has arranged in its own place meaningfully.

And it's so helpful to us when things occur in our lives that are so challenging, that are so difficult, that cause us to ask so many questions as to why and how should it be like this and why should it be me?

For everything, God has a season. And there is a purpose and a time for every matter under heaven.

You see, God knew what he was doing when he put together every single element in your life. And that will be the case all the way through your life and on into eternity.

And it's helpful in the matter of our experience as he goes through it there in these verses from 2 to 8. He goes through all of these different types of experiences that we find in life.

[12 : 09] And it's interesting that he's put them in pairs in this way that you find they're really from one extreme to the other. You see, he's talking about a time to be born and a time to die.

They're at the extremities of human life. The beginning, the end of human life in this world as we know it. The birth and the death. Time to plant. Time to pluck up what's planted.

That too is a set or a pair of opposites. Time to kill. A time to heal. Time to break down. A time to build up. In other words, what he's saying to us is that in the whole range of human experiences, whether it's mourning or dancing, embracing or refraining from embracing, tearing or sowing, seeking, or losing, birth or death.

Within the whole range of these, within the whole parameter of human experience, everything is there. Everything that can possibly be experienced in human life.

Because the two extremes include everything in between them. What he's saying is there is a time for that in God's appointment, in God's wisdom, in God's purpose.

[13 : 21] The whole range is governed by God. God is the governor of time. But he's the governor of time in being so precise and so ordered, even in putting together the things of your life.

Now that contains mystery for us too, because we bring things upon ourselves. Our lives, of course, are sinful lives.

There are things we do that we ought not to have done. Things we've said that we ought not to have said. Things that have taken place that we cannot take back.

Does that mean God didn't purpose them? No. In the greatness and wisdom of his sovereignty and his control over time, you can go to God and say, Lord, I can't understand it all, but I know that you have arranged everything in your purpose in my life.

Help me to accept that. Help me to live in accordance with that. Help me to live under the majesty of that. Of your greatness. Of your wisdom.

[14 : 31] Of your plan for me. Because that's really what life should be about, isn't it? And you see, there's your third thing here.

It's not just the matter as he states it, and then as he takes on the whole sweep of human experiences between these two extremes in each of these references through these verses, there's

also the fact that these things actually apply to God as well.

We tend to think perhaps of these verses as we read them as just things that apply to human experience, to human life. But actually, when you go through the Bible, you'll find that these terms are used of God himself and the things that God does.

For example, God speaks to Israel at times as the one who gave birth to them. Deuteronomy 32, verse 18, He gave birth to this nation. He created them a people for himself.

And he's also the one who says that he has planted them. Jeremiah chapter 24, He plants and he also roots up. That's what he said to Israel, to Judah.

[15 : 41] Because of their sin, they were going to be rooted up and away they would go to Babylon, to captivity. There's God described in the terms of Ecclesiastes 3 as one who plants and one who roots up.

And then you find God also saying of himself that there are things which he hates. You have to be very careful how we use the word hate.

It's a word that's often misunderstood these days. People talk about hate crimes. And all they're doing is just expressing, all they're complaining about is people expressing an opinion.

And expressing an opinion, sometimes perhaps not wisely. Nevertheless, freedom of expression and freedom of speech is important to us. You mustn't think that when people say something that contradicts what we believe, what we say, that they're engaging in a hate crime.

That's just being politically correct. Sadly, that's the world we live in. You know, God is himself one who's expressed as hating. If you turn back to the previous book of Proverbs and chapter 6, verses 17 to 19, verses 16 to 19, there are six things that the Lord hates.

[17 : 01] Seven that are an abomination to him. Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness that breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

God hates them. Don't believe the philosophy that says, or the version of the gospel that says, God is love, and there's nothing else to be added to that. You mustn't think about God in any way as having anything to do with anger or wrath or hatred.

That's not being true to the Bible. Whatever view you have of God, make sure it's the balanced biblical one. Don't let it become a distorted view just to keep up with public opinion with what the world thinks or what elements of the church thinks.

Make sure it's the God of the Bible, the God that's presenting himself there in the full-orbed majesty of his being, in all his attributes, in all that makes him glorious.

And here he is telling us that he himself knows a time to hate and things that he abhors. Well, you see, all of these elements also apply to God.

[18 : 23] We need to take account of the complete character of God. So God is the governor of time, the governor of history.

There's that wonderful picture or imagery in the book of Revelation where the Lamb in the midst of the throne in heaven takes the scroll of this book, the scroll which really amounts to the whole history of the world, of the universe.

Nobody was found worthy until the Lamb came forward. No one was found worthy to open this book, the scroll, and to unfold its contents. But he came, the scroll was given to the Lamb.

That's Jesus, the risen Jesus, the victorious Jesus. And he proceeds to open the scroll. And as he opens the scroll, the events of history unfold right through to the end of time.

Who today is ruling the world? Who's ruling history? Whose will is it that's being carried out? In whose hands is this book of your destiny and mine?

[19 : 32] It's in the hands of Jesus. It's in the hand of the risen Jesus, the one who died and rose again. And that's what we need to take account of, that God came into time. He became subject to time.

God entered into time, if we can put it that way, in the mission of his Son into the world. God sending his Son in our nature, to take our human nature, to take the sin of his people, to die the death of the cross, to rise from the dead.

All of that is God's book for his Son. God's plan for his Son. That which was devised between them from all eternity. And as he entered into time, you can see the precision of that.

A time to be born and a time to die. How does Galatians put it for us? Galatians 4, when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth the Son, born of a woman, made under the law.

You see the preciseness, the exactness, when the moment had come. Thousands of years since the world was formed, and yet this precise minute of the Son of God entering into time by taking human nature.

[20 : 56] And it's the same all the way through to his death, isn't it? If you read, comparing John 7, verse 30, where it says that the hour was not yet come that Jesus should be arrested and taken into custody and examined, the hour was not yet come.

Hadn't reached that point yet in the way of Christ in this world. But when you then go to John 17, that wonderful, wonderful prayer of John 17, and please don't think that John 17 is just the church reading back something that they remembered about Jesus and putting it into the form of a prayer. That's what liberal theology will tell you. But if you're a Christian and you understand the Bible to be factually correct as it is, Jesus uttered that prayer. He uttered that prayer in the upper room with the disciples.

How did he begin that prayer? Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you. See how precisely Jesus, the Son of God in our nature, had come to this point in his life where he knew and where he could express to the Father, Father, the hour has come.

This is it. This is the moment. This is why I came into the world. This is why I was born at the precise time at which I was born, in the precise manner in which I was born, in the precise place in which I was born, so that I would come to this hour, this hour of my destiny, the Son of God is saying.

[22 : 24] Jesus knew when to heal, when not to heal. He knew when to weep and when not to weep. He knew how to rejoice and when to rejoice and when not.

He knew when to speak and when to be silent. In everything, the timing of Jesus was perfect. Do you ever read in the Gospels that Jesus was late? That he hurried up to get to a place because he knew it was behind time? No. Do you ever read he was too early for something? No. Everything about his life has the precision of Ecclesiastes 3. There is a time for every matter under the sun.

Nowhere better do you see it than in the life of Jesus. Birth, miracles, healings, raising Lazarus from the dead. See what he said there?

[23 : 28] When he was appealed to, to come and go to where Lazarus was, he remained where he was for four days. Instead of rushing to get to the place as you and I might do, no, he delayed, he stopped.

He didn't go immediately because he knew that the time for that was precisely set and hadn't yet come that he would take Lazarus back from the dead to the glory of God.

The time for everything. Is your life today, is your life today in the hands of this Jesus? have you willingly given the little span of your life that you have in this world however long we live?

It's not a lot, is it, when you compare it to eternity. Have you given that life of yours into the hands of Christ? Are you still not saved?

Do you still not have him as your savior? Do you not want him to control your life minutely, in detail, precisely? You see, you can't be saved on generalities.

[24 : 46] You can't be saved by just generally accepting that Jesus is a savior of sinners. You need to have him as your savior. You've heard that so many times.

You've possibly heard it from myself many times. put your life into the hands of the Lord of time.

Don't let another moment go past of the time of your life. Let it be for you today through in your own experience that the time for this is now because that's what God is saying.

this is your moment, your opportunity to give your life to Jesus and to have this life meaningfully controlled in your own experience by the Lord of time, a time for every matter under the sun.

His Lordship over our lives really is the antidote to all the problems we face in life. Isn't it? Because it doesn't matter really what you come across.

[26 : 05] I know very well this is easy to say in preaching and to say it in pulpits and it's much more difficult to live it out in one's own life. But whatever you come across in life and however difficult the going may be and however difficult the event may be in your life that's come into your life or will yet come into your life or has been in your life.

If your life is in the hands of the Lord of time isn't everything safe with him? Can't you say with Horatius Spafford I can say it is well it is well with my soul.

That's what it means to have the Lord of time as your Lord and the governor of your life. He became subject to time the one who governs time and he tells us how to use our time thirdly and finally remember in Ephesians where Paul wrote in Ephesians and in chapter 5 where he applies the teaching that he was involved in that was involved in the previous parts of that letter when he came to relationships and so on in chapter 5 marriage husbands wives children so on employers employees amongst all of that you find in verse 16 verse 15 look carefully then how you walk not as unwise but as wise making the best use of the time or the old translation redeeming the time making the best use of the time because the days are evil therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the

Lord is making the best use of your time learn Ecclesiastes the writer is saying learn what time is about learn to take God into the picture of your life at every stage don't leave God out of it that will mean just futility and vanity and meaninglessness and no purpose but with God in your life and your life in the hands of this Lord of time this Jesus then God's plan for you will be something that even if you can't see the meaning of everything in it you will know that everything rests with him and your life is safe in his hand and that you can trust in him and live in such a way that you will ultimately be prepared to die and die in faith you know sometimes you find things advertised that have been lost and appeal for them to be found sometimes you'll come across these adverts newspapers and newspaper columns lost wherever whether it's a pet or some object that was precious to someone a ring or whatever and there was a man called

Horatius or Horace Mann who was an American he was an educationalist he was a politician his passion was actually about education and seeing that people were given proper education and that was developed and rolled out so that people would benefit from it but he wrote somewhere in his life I can't remember exactly where this is but he certainly wrote these words and they're in the form of an advert with things that were lost but this is how he put it lost yesterday somewhere between sunrise and sunset two golden hours each set with sixty diamond minutes no reward is offered for they are gone forever see what that means how precious time is these two hours he says that I lost yesterday each of these two hours was set with sixty diamond minutes

[30 : 14] I can't offer a reward he says because they can't be recovered they're lost forever make the best use of your time and if you've misused time up to now or even from now on you still know you can take it to Jesus and ask his forgiveness but know the Lord of time let the Lord of time be in charge of your time of your life because the hour is coming and we need to face him and we need to hear his question and answer it what have you done with the time I gave you let's pray andar to