

Thoughts on Time and Eternity

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[0 : 00] You don't have, and there are times when you wish you had some of those gifts. Not all the gifts we don't have we desire to have, but there are particular gifts I'm sure! that we talked about it, you'll say, boy, I wish I had that gift.

One of the gifts I wish I had that I don't have is the gift to write poetry. I just don't have that gift, but I do enjoy poetry.

Now, not all kinds of poetry. I don't enjoy abstract poetry where you have to hurt your head to figure out what the person is writing about. I enjoy poetry about life. I enjoy reading poetry where someone has taken the time to think long and hard about life, and then they write clearly about it. And that's one of the reasons I like some songs, because some songs actually are poetry with music and they really communicate things about life.

But you really do have to take the time to observe human life, to think seriously about it and then to write clearly about it if you're going to have good poetry that's meaningful about human life.

[1 : 23] And I think that's the reason that this section of Ecclesiastes that we have come to this morning is very meaningful to me, and I believe meaningful to many of you as well.

And obviously, the section I'm talking about is Ecclesiastes chapter 3, verses 1 through 15, but in particular verses 2 through 8, because verses 2 through 8 represent a poem that the preacher writes about time.

The preacher writes this poem about time, and I think it is very insightful for us to consider it. And although this is not the only poem or poetry section in Ecclesiastes, I think it is probably the one that is most memorized.

We go to funerals and we tend to hear it, and many of us can at least quote the very first verse of this poem. And so if you've not done so, would you kindly turn to the book of Ecclesiastes.

This morning we'll be reading verses 3 through 15. And what we're going to see is that the preacher, he writes about time, and he introduces time by saying this in verse 1, for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.

[3 : 03] But when we read verses 9 through 15, we are able to see that the preacher's overall point is not to talk about time in a vacuum. Instead, the preacher's overall point is to talk about time in relation to God.

And to put it even more plainly, what the preacher is doing is the preacher is teaching us about God. So please follow along as I read and let us together hear and heed God's word and consider what it says to us about God.

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to break down and a time to build up.

A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.

[4 : 21] A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to cast away.

A time to tear and a time to sow. a time to keep silence and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live. Also, that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.

[5 : 33] This is God's gift to man. I perceived that whatever God does endures forever. Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it.

God has done it so that people may fear before him. That which is already has been. That which is to be already has been.

And God seeks what has been driven away. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you this morning for the privilege we have to gather.

Father, to be able to worship you in song. To be able to pray to you.

And Lord, now to be able to sit under the instruction of your word. Lord we thank you that you have watched over and preserved your word for your people and we ask this morning that you would bring the benefit that you have intended from this section of your word to all of us who are gathered here this morning Father we pray at this point not just out of a rote practice but out of a genuine awareness that we need your help we need the illumination of the spirit to open our eyes to truth to cause us to comprehend your word what it says and also what it means and how it applies to our lives and so we ask that you would do that this morning

[7 : 28] Lord would you pour out abundant grace upon me as I bring your word to your people and cause us all to hear and to heed your word we ask these things in Jesus name amen those of you who heard the previous sermon in this Ecclesiastes series might recall that I indicated that Ecclesiastes 3 marks a new section or a transition in the book up to this point the preacher had given himself to understanding the scope of human activity on the earth with the view to discovering what was good for the children of men to do under heaven during what he describes as their few days of life and so much of chapters one and two is taken up with the preacher telling us all that he did in his quest to understand how we should live and how best to use our time and his exploration of the big themes of life like wisdom and pleasure and folly and as we come to chapter 3 what is clear is that the preacher has thought about life long and hard and one of those areas that he's thought about is the area of time and in a world where things just seem to happen the preacher shares a sobering observation about when and why things happen and generally the preacher helps us to make sense of all that happens in this life by telling us in these verses that times and seasons are ordained by God in heaven for the activities of man on earth the preacher insightfully because of his observation of life and his observation of all the activities on the earth the preacher helps us to see that these things aren't just randomly happening they're not haphazardly just taking place no the preacher helps us to see that times and seasons are ordained by God in heaven for the activities of man on earth these are the words of the same preacher who at the outset of this book observed the world and he did so without any reference to God and he now plainly tells us that God is the one who sets the times and determines the seasons for every activity under heaven meaning all of man's activity on the earth but again when we consider what the preacher is saying to us in these verses we realize that he is not presenting God as some kind of a divine time keeper who is just keeping track of all the different things and when they should start and finish but instead the preacher helps us to see that God is the God over creation he is the one who sovereignly sets the times and sovereignly sets the seasons for everything under heaven we track times and seasons

God is the one who sets them and so this morning in our remaining time I want us to consider these words of the preacher and for those of you who are taking notes have organized my thoughts for this sermon under two headings the first one is recognizing God's sovereignty in life the preacher begins by telling us in verse 1 that there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven and then he proceeds to identify some of them and obviously we know right away that the preacher is giving us a representative list and not an exhaustive list because he doesn't list every single activity that happens under heaven but I want us to consider this morning that the list that we do have is a divine list it is an insightful list and when we consider the list of the activities that the preacher gives us we are able to see immediately that they are divinely representative of life in a fallen world in verses 2 through 8 the preacher helps us to see in different ways activities that remind us of how life in this fallen world is broken and the fact that nothing is permanent now again it is very clear that the preacher is using poetry he actually uses 14 couplets where he says there is a time for this and a time for that a time for this and a time for that and again at first glance it could really appear that the preacher is just reporting what he has observed that there is a time for everything under the sun

and that is the impression we could get from verses 2 through 8 because he simply says I just see there is a time for this there is a time for this it doesn't tell us anything more up to verse 8 all we can truly say is he says you know I see there is a time to be born and there is a time to die there is a time for these things under heaven but at the point of verse 8 we get no insight into understanding okay what is the meaning of all of that why is there a time for this and a time for that well the preacher comes to verse 9 and he asks a question that is not a new question this is a question that he has been preoccupied with from the very outset of this book he asks the question what gain has the worker from his toil and I believe that to appreciate the question that the preacher is asking it would be helpful to somewhat paraphrase it and connect it with what he has said about time in verses 2 through 8 so here is what I think the preacher is asking what he is saying the preacher is asking this he is saying in a fallen world where there are set times and set seasons for all activities what does the worker gain from all his effort he is basically saying here we are and our arrangement is this we are toiling and working in this world but in this world there are set times and there are set seasons for everything and we well know that we don't set them we don't start them we don't decide when our time to weep is we don't decide when our time to mourn is we didn't decide when our time to be born was and we will not decide when our time to die is and so the preacher is getting at this deeper issue he is basically saying in this world where you are subject to the reality of times and seasons that are set for particular things what does the worker gain from all of his toil and then in verses 10 and 11 the preacher goes on to share his insight about how the worker can gain from his toil and let me just pause for a moment for those of you who are probably wondering why this sermon seems to be moving pretty fast and we have just really passed through verses 2 through 8 and 14 indicators of sets of time that he that the preacher is referring to again these are representative the preacher isn't

I don't think the point is for us to go through and try to labor through each one of these as much as it is for us to get the point that there are set times and seasons for every single thing under heaven and that what we need to be considering is in light of that reality how are we to live in light of that reality what are we to seek to profit from how are we to seek to apply ourselves how are we to live our lives in this world where there are times and seasons that are set for us and so the preacher asks this question and then he proceeds to share his insight concerning it you would notice that he says in verse 10 I have seen it's quite interesting that he uses that expression there where he says I have seen but he could easily have said

I have perceived and the reason I point that out is because he says in verse 12 I perceived and he says in verse 14 I perceived and what the preacher is doing is the preacher sharing with us his observations of life and what he was able to perceive and what he was able to understand so essentially what the preacher is saying to us now is in light of this world where there are set times and seasons that we don't determine he's saying he's seen something he's saying one I've seen this business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with the preacher is not talking about something he's casually seeing but he's talking about something that he's thoughtfully considered he's thought about this and notice what he says in verse 11 which continues his thought from verse 10 he says he essentially says two things in verse 11 he says he has made everything beautiful in its time also he has put eternity into man's heart yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end so the first thing the preacher says in response to the question that he raises and also this observation that he has made about this business that God has given to us to live in this world where there are set times and seasons for the things in our lives the first thing the preacher says is that

[18 : 30] God has made everything beautiful in its time in these words the preacher helps us to see that the times and seasons and the events that take place within those times and seasons have their origin with God who has made everything beautiful in its time see it is when we hear what the preacher is saying in verse 11 that we understand that these times that he enumerates for us in verses 2 through 8 are not just haphazard things that happen that just drop out of the sky so to speak he helps us to see that God is the one who is behind them God is the one who makes everything beautiful in its time and clearly the preacher is describing beauty from God's vantage point his vantage point in heaven not our vantage point on earth because on earth there are things that we would experience in these times and seasons that are confusing that are painful that are difficult but from

God's vantage point in heaven the one who sets the times these things fit into his sovereign plan and the preacher says and they're beautiful he makes all things beautiful in its time I know that this is difficult to hear this morning it's difficult to understand how could these activities this representative group that the preacher gives us how could these really be beautiful how could events like killing and weeping and war ever be beautiful I think one of the reasons that we we have to do two things one we have to recognize that there are two views of this there is this one view on the earth where we would say no

I don't want weeping as a gift I don't want killing and say that that's beautiful yet the preacher says that God makes all things beautiful in its time one of the reasons it's hard for us to see how such events can be beautiful is that we see these events in isolation we see them in isolation and we also experience them in isolation and especially when they're difficult to go through but God who sets the times and seasons does not order and ordain events in isolation all that comes to pass all that comes to pass is a part of God's sovereign sway over all things the apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 11 that God is the Lord who works all things according to the counsel of his will all things if there is an aspect of life and existence that is outside of the scope of the sovereign sway of

God it means that this is not true it means that he is not ordering all things according to the counsel of his will from God's vantage point all things fit into his sovereign plan in a beautiful way and again we have to hold two truths in tension we don't say death is beautiful we don't say killing is beautiful we don't say war is beautiful but we need to agree with the preacher that from God's vantage point all things are beautiful because he knows and he understands his grand design and he is able to bring and work even the hard events of our lives in this fallen world to a beautiful outcome in his sovereign will I was trying to think how best I could explain this try to explain it try to illustrate it and the best illustration that I have this morning is one that is a little awkward for me for me because I don't understand what I'm going to be illustrating so much

I have heard it I've seen it but it's kind of foreign to me it's a tapestry a tapestry is a piece of thick cloth with pictures and designs that are sewn into it they're woven into it with colored threads embroidered in some way so you know someone you see someone crocheting and they just look at it doing something that is pointless but in the end there's a beautiful design that they're able to work into the fabric that they have and when you take a piece of crochet like if you had for example a table cloth that was crocheted you could immediately know which side was the top side and which side was the bottom side without it being labeled the bottom side just looks obviously wrong and confusing and without purpose and you just wouldn't you wouldn't even have the thought to turn the table cloth on that side when you turn the other side you see some kind of beautiful design that was in the mind of the person who made it and you can tell right away which side of that cloth you're supposed to put upside and which part is downside and see so both sides of that tapestry both sides of that work gives us two different views and I think for us we are under heaven and so we're experiencing all of these things and they're happening in this world and sometimes we forget that above the tapestry of the heavens there is one who sits and there's one who is working and weaving all things together in a way that is indeed beautiful in a way that indeed fits with his wise sovereign and good plan and so this morning what we are called to do is not so much to understand this truth as we are to accept this truth we're the ones who live in this world where we are

[25 : 30] I would say prisoners of time and seasons and some of these times and seasons are hard and they're difficult but we are told by the preacher under the inspiration of God that God makes all of these things beautiful in their time from his vantage point there's a beautiful and a grand sovereign design that's what all the preacher says not only has God made all things beautiful in its time the preacher tells us that God has also put eternity into man's heart yet he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end I like the way Michael Eaton describes our reality of having eternity in our hearts but not being able to find out what

God has done from the beginning to the end here's what he writes the eternity of God's dealings with mankind corresponds to something inside us we have we have a capacity for eternal things are concerned about the future want to understand from beginning to end and have a sense of something that transcends our immediate situation scripture speaks of our creation in the image or glory of God a glory which is largely forfeited yet not obliterated our consciousness of God is part of our nature and the suppression of it is part of our sin let's just try to quickly digest what Michael Eaton is saying he's saying that God has created us with a capacity for eternal things we want to

understand the future we want to understand things from the beginning to the end but we can't because of our fallen nature we have this

God consciousness that is a part of us because he created us in his image and his likeness but also we have this sin that causes us to suppress the very knowledge of God Michael Eaton goes on to say this he says the preacher's vast researches have found nothing in the finite earthly realm which can satisfy the human heart intellectually or practically though he has resolved to understand all that is under the sun there is that within him which makes him realize he can never comprehend God's plan in its entirety and see this is one of the distinctions between the creator and the creature the truth is that even without the fall we would never have comprehended and understood all that God understood that's just because of the distinction between the creator and the creature but added to that now is the fall and so we have this sense of eternity in our hearts we have this sense of being able to understand and touch and feel the eternity that

God has put in us by his own very being some measure of that but it is frustrated because it only goes so far and no further and striving to understand what we can't understand only leads to frustration we can't understand it and this is why many things in this life and our own life makes no sense because we can't comprehend all that God has done and all that God is doing and so the preacher is calling us to recognize God's sovereignty in life that he is the one who ordains our times he is the one who ordained when we would be born he is the one who ordained when we are going to die and he ordains the times and seasons for everything in between the day of our birth and the day of our death God ordained them they're the how long they happen

God is the one who ordains our times of weeping our times of laughter our times of mourning our times of dancing they're not haphazard things that happen to us behind those events that seem to be human events or accidental events or arbitrary events the preacher is saying to us that there is one who sets the times and the seasons for all of those events these are not random events instead they are divinely ordered events ordained by the sovereign lord of all so the preacher calls us to recognize God's sovereignty that's why he gives us this list of times for this and times for that and he helps us to see that there is a God who makes all of these things beautiful in his time and the call this morning is for us to recognize

[31 : 17] God's sovereignty in life but that's what the preacher calls us to this morning the preacher also calls us to respond to God's sovereignty in life not only are we to recognize it but in this passage the preacher calls us to respond to it he's in essence saying to us rather than trying to understand God's eternal purposes and the times and seasons that he has set for your life you need to instead respond to God's sovereignty in life and the preacher calls us to respond in two particular ways starting in verse 12 in verses 12 and 13 he points out to us the first way that we should respond notice what he says I perceived that there's nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil this is

God's gift to man here in these two verses what the preacher is saying to us is that in light of the reality the times and seasons of our lives are in the eternal hands of a sovereign God we should seek to live with contentment in those times and seasons in a nutshell that's what he's saying the call in verses 12 and 13 is a call to live contentedly it is a call to live contented under the reality of a God who sets times and seasons in this life and for our life in essence what he's saying is we need to accept and embrace and enjoy God's sovereign dealings as gifts from his hands he says you're to be joyful we are to do good we are to eat and drink and take pleasure in our work on this earth and here's the reality about these words of the preacher for us this morning

I think it's so easy to think well he can only be talking about the good times he can only be calling me to some sense of contentment some sense of seeing a gift from God's hand in the good times but I don't think that's what the preacher is saying I think the preacher is calling us to see all of life even these difficult times even the times of weeping the times of mourning the times of losing he's calling us to see them all as gifts from God's hands and we are to find and seek and pursue contentment within these seasons within these times that come from the hands of a sovereign Lord the second way that the preacher calls us to respond is in verse 14 he says

I perceived that whatever God does endures forever nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it God has done it so that people may so that people fear before him so the second way he calls us to respond is by fearing God the first way is by being content the second way is by fearing God the preacher is saying that we have to respond by recognizing that God is sovereign that his

acts endure forever and they cannot be changed and what he is really saying to us is a God like that is to be feared a God like that is to be worshipped a God like that is to be reverent he says you are to fear before him that's the proper response when you consider this God who whatever he does endures nothing can be added to it nothing can be taken away from it that's the proper response but the preacher goes further and the preacher tells us that's the reason that God does it the very reason that he does it he does it so that people may fear before him he is that kind of sovereign God who whatever he does endures can't take away from it can't add to it and he does it so that we may stand in awe he does it so that we may reverently tremble before him not in terror although sometimes that is appropriate but that we would reverently tremble before this God who sets times and seasons who does whatever he does and it endures and you cannot take away from it and you cannot add to it that's the purpose behind

[36 : 59] God's sovereign dealings in this world and brothers and sisters I want to ask you this morning are we living this way are we living this way in light of God's sovereign dealings are we responding with contentment are we seeking to pursue contentment in the seasons of lives of our life that God sovereignly ordains for us at the times that he does the psalmist says in psalm 16 verse 6 the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places indeed I have a beautiful inheritance the psalmist recognizes that the boundary lines for his life they're divinely set God causes them to fall in pleasant places but when you read the account of the psalmist sometimes the psalmist would weep and sometimes the psalmist would pour his heart to

God because he was in turmoil and he was in trial and he was being attacked but yet he says that God's boundary lines for his life had fallen for him in pleasant places and he said I have a beautiful inheritance brothers and sisters God's boundary lines falls in our lives in pleasant places and sometimes the hard places those pleasant places can cause us to weep and cause us to mourn and cause us to experience loss but are we living seeking to be content with the boundary lines that God has sovereignly set for us are we living with holy reverence before the Lord recognizing that all of our times and all of our seasons are in his hands and he determines them in accordance with his sovereign will his good perfect wise will and

I'm sure that we can all grow in these areas of seeking to be content of not complaining and trusting these are God's boundary lines for me these are the times and seasons that God has set for me let me seek to be content let me receive it as a gift from God's hands trusting that he gives no bad gifts to his children let us allow the times and seasons to cause us to worship and to reverence God when we receive good gifts We know we don't deserve!

them We know God is not blessing us because he doesn't know something or he's absent minded no he knows us through and through and yes in his goodness he blesses us abundantly! above what we deserve and that can cause us to reverence him and recognize his goodness and when we find ourselves like Matt Redmond says on the road that's marked with suffering and there's pain in our offerings we too can seek contentment and seek to reverence God knowing that he is altogether good and altogether wise and those boundary lines as well are set in pleasant places and those times and seasons are divinely set he makes no mistakes as he sets our times and seasons in verse 15 the preacher reminds us of yet another reason that we should be content and fear the Lord in the times and seasons of our lives he says in verse 15 that which is already has been that which is to be already has been and

[41 : 08] God seeks what has been driven away this is a very difficult verse to interpret I read different views on it but the one that I found most helpful is Douglas Sean O'Donnell's explanation of it I think he captures well what seems to resonate with the rest of the passage and this is what he says about verse 15 the sense seems to be that in the way God controls the times he ends up balancing the scales of justice for those who have lost out in life as the result of injustice he redeems the time and for those who have done injustice he renders judgment in his time on the last day God will certainly call every action into account here he's quoting the end of ecclesiastes and he concludes so here we are taught what

God has done is doing and will do we are taught something about his providence I saw one other commentator who referred to the latter part of verse 15 that talks about how God seeks what has been driven away and he's saying that it's the sense of God just watching over all things even what would be considered past God is watching over that providentially so that nothing is really escaping his gaze and escaping his sovereign rule God is the one who controls the times and he's the one who balances the scales of justice and this should give us faith to be content and to be reverent and

to trust him in the midst of the times and seasons of our lives that are difficult that seem to be unjust and sometimes when we experience injustice and we sing about it this morning that when the Lord returns as we sang! glorious Christ when he returns all will be made right when he appears he will make all things right and that is how we are to respond to a God who is sovereign over life we need to recognize his sovereignty in life and we need to respond to him and live reverently! before him as we consider these words of the preacher this morning one of the comforts for us should be in the fact that the times and seasons of our lives are in God's hands the time of our death is in his hands in the same way that the time of our birth was he is the one who sovereignly sets the times and the seasons of all that we experience between birth and death some of us are in seasons of blessings God has set them some of us are in seasons of trials that brought us to weep and brought us to mourn and God as well has set them what we're able to see is that no time or season is permanent on this earth the hardest trial that we walked through this morning has a set time and a set season and truth be told even seasons of blessings are not permanent and therefore we are to receive them as a set gift of

God and enjoy them and enjoy God in the midst of them and we should be comforted that there's a God who carefully watches over these times and seasons he doesn't just set them but he watches over them and he doesn't just watch over them to watch over them he watches over them to watch over us and so may God help us this morning as we ponder these words that the result would be that we would seek to be content in the times and seasons that he has set for us and we would seek to fear before him as the preacher says we will live reverently before him as he works at his sovereign purposes in our lives although the preacher does not reference it we know that there's also a time for salvation and that time for salvation the apostle

[46 : 15] Paul tells us in Galatians 4 verse 4 when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons you know if I was God I shouldn't say if I was God because I heard someone say if you were God you do the same thing God did and does but being me if I was God being me I don't know that I would have waited so long in my mind for the fullness of time when you read the account of human history and scripture and you read the account of human history and world history and all the suffering and all the other things that were taking place you kind of wonder why did God wait for Jesus to come at the time that he had him to be born of a woman why didn't you send him sooner but it helps us to see that

God did it in the fullness of time and from my vantage point I would think man you know short cut the suffering and the brokenness and the Savior but the Savior came in the fullness of time and what Paul says that God sent his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons God had a plan to redeem fallen man and in the fullness of time he revealed that plan and that's what he does in our lives he reveals his plans in the fullness of time scripture says that today is the day of salvation today is the day to call upon the Lord and so if you're here this morning and you don't know

Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior I encourage you to recognize the times and seasons recognize that this is a time that the gospel is going forth and whenever the gospel goes forth it requires a response it demands a response the gospel comes to us calling us to recognize our need for Christ recognize our need to repent and then to repent and turn from sin and put our trust in Jesus Christ Christ today is the day of salvation today is the day that God is causing his word to be heard in the heirs of all of us but in particular in the heirs of those who don't know Christ so I say to you believe the good news and trust in Jesus Christ let's pray together God