

# A Search For The Meaning Of Life(5) - God's Governance Of Time

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now let's turn together to Ecclesiastes chapter 3. Today we're looking at verses 1 to 8, this very famous, well-known string of verses where the writer of Ecclesiastes speaks about the time for every matter under heaven.

Now we've seen as we've gone through Ecclesiastes up to this point that the writer of Ecclesiastes is a realist. He takes life as he finds it. He takes life as it is.

Even the aspects of life that you are aware of are raw and difficult and challenging. He faces that. He doesn't avoid dealing with that. He takes that as a realist. He realizes this is indeed how things are.

And so he's seeking to deal with them in that way. But that hasn't left him as a fatalist. It doesn't mean because he's a realist and knows these things that he's a fatalist.

He's not one of those people who just is locked into an inevitability or looking at life in an inevitable sort of way and saying, well, this is how it's going to be anyway, so there's not much I can do about it.

[ 1 : 15 ] So I'll just go on with life as it is and just leave things to go on by themselves. He doesn't look on the dark side as a pessimist either. He doesn't think that it's always going to be the worst that's going to happen in his life.

He's not one of those people who, when they have a time of rejoicing and peace and comfort, will say of themselves, well, there must be something really bad in the future. This is why I'm given this just now to enjoy so that when the bad things come, I'll be more ready for them.

He's not a fatalist or a pessimist. He's in actual fact a theist. As you know, a theist is someone who believes in a supreme being, but when you come to the Bible and to the writer of Ecclesiastes, he's a theist in the way that we want to be theists and believing in and trusting in the only God, the true God, the living God.

And he introduces the matter of God, as we saw at the end of the previous chapter, in verse 26, to the one who pleases him. God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy.

And although he's got difficulties over that, he's introduced God, which is the first time in the book. And we've seen that the term under the sun leads us to understand that what this writer is doing is looking at life, but not really including God in his calculations.

[ 2 : 43 ] And when he does that, he's come to the conclusion there is no meaning and there's no purpose to be detected in human life if you leave God out of things, if you leave the involvement of God or the sovereignty of God, as we'll see today, then it doesn't really make any sense at all.

There's nothing certain. There's nothing on which you can lean your weight and your hopes. It's just all futility and vanity. And as you come to him as a theist and to come to these verses today, you can see that what we want to see is that God is presented as one who has arranged human life, arranged the things of life, so that each thing is in its own season, as he says here.

And as he thinks about that, if you go forward to verse 9, we're not going to look beyond verse 8 today, but it's connected, of course, especially verse 11.

God has made everything beautiful in his time. 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 he has made everything beautiful in its time.

That's repeated after the string of references to time in verses 1 to 8. In other words, what you find in verses 1 to 8 fits into that emphasis in verse 11, that all events in God's plan are in their right order.

[ 4 : 17 ] There is nothing mixed up in God's own plan. There is nothing out of its own place. As God governs the events of the universe, the events of individual lives, what the writer is saying is, he has a time appointed for every single thing, for every single event.

And every event that happens in your own life and in my life, as you then deduce from this and apply this, has a purpose behind it, and that purpose is the purpose of the God who arranged it. We may be not aware of that purpose. We may be can't fit all things together. Indeed, we can't very often. As we look at the events of our lives, as they're strung together, as we reflect, as we look back, and as we think forward, God willing, it's very difficult sometimes to find how these things fit together and how there can be a meaningfulness and a purpose to that.

What the writer is doing is encouraging us to think of, for everything there is a season. There is an appointed time with a purpose, a time for every matter under the heaven.

They are governed by God, and where God governs, it's not disorder, it's order in His plan. Where God governs, you find His arrangement to make sense to Himself and to fit with His purpose, with His eternal purpose.

[ 5 : 46 ] So let's look at this under two main headings, and we'll finish with a third heading briefly. First of all, He is the God who governs time. Secondly, He is the God who became subject to the conditions of time, because we'll bring this to see how you can see much of this revealed in the life of Jesus, and what is revealed in Jesus, in His ministry on earth.

So God governs time. God became subject to the conditions of time. And thirdly, just in a brief word at the end, God tells us how to use our time. He governs time.

Here's the matter, first of all, stated. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. In other words, as we said, God is a God of order.

When you think of this as God's doing, as God's plan, as God's government, in God's government there is order. When you read, for example, through Genesis chapter 1, the account of the creation, of God creating all things, God creating the universe.

When you think of how that chapter is structured, what you find is that there is order. There is actually an arrangement, and a purpose in the way that God went about things. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void.

[ 7 : 03 ] And God said, let there be light. And God said, and God said, and God said. And all the way through that, you've got God's arrangement, God's order, reflecting the order and the perfection that's in himself.

And so you find in terms of God's government, for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. Everything in its time, as verse 11 actually tells us, God's sovereignty is certainly before us.

But remember too, the writer is saying, God's sovereignty is precise. There's a precision in his arrangement. There's a definite order in his arrangement.

For everything there is a season and a time. In other words, what really lies behind this is an emphasis on an appointed purpose by this sovereign God.

Every single thing that he has arranged has his own purpose behind it. Every single thing that comes to pass has come to pass by the fact that there is a season appointed by God.

[ 8 : 11 ] Therefore, he encourages us today to come to really see something of the beauty and of the grandeur and of the greatness of this God. So that when you come to trust in him, you can trust in him as one that is absolutely dependable.

How do you know he's dependable? Well, for one thing, he is a God of order. He's a God who has arranged things in a way that you can see he's consistent. He doesn't change his mind capriciously. He doesn't actually make a mistake and then try and catch up. Everything has a season, has an appointed purpose. And then he expands on that.

Not only is that matter stated, and we've dealt with it very briefly, but it's also the matter is stated, but now it's expanded as something we know from our experience.

Verses 2 to 8 really sees the matter in our experience. Now you can see that the arrangement here is in terms of couplets or things that are mentioned together as extremes.

[ 9 : 18 ] There's a time to be born and a time to die. There's a time to plant and a time to pluck up what's planted. A time to kill, a time to heal. There's a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance.

What you're finding through that, scholars call that medicines. So that you find in each of those one extreme balanced up by its opposite.

And what that means is that the writer is taking account of everything in between. The whole range of human life is between birth and death, a time to be born and a time to die.

The whole range of human emotions is taken up by a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance. There's a whole range of human emotions taken into account as he says that.

So it's a very comprehensive way of stating everything in its own time. Whether you're thinking of the time of birth, when you're thinking of the beginning of life, or the end of life, when you come to die, whether you're thinking of mourning times, or glad times, rejoicing times, the extremes are there, but everything in between is taken into account of there is a season, there is a purpose, he says, for everything.

[ 10 : 33 ] He's been looking for meaning in human life. He's been looking to detect, is there a purpose in human life? Is there something meaningful when you leave God out of it?

No, he says, all is vanity, but when you take God into account, it begins to take up a form of order, and of meaning, and of purpose, because there is a season for every matter under heaven.

There is a time for this, and a time for that. The whole compass, the whole spread, the whole span of our human experience, and of events, are taken account of in what he's saying.

So, in other words, there's nothing random in this. All is governed by God, and all is governed by God in his purpose. He hasn't just thrown out a whole series of events, and let things get on with it. There used to be, still, I think, probably, believed by some people, that God just created everything, like you find a clockmaker, or a watchmaker, creating a watch, and then he winds it up, and lets it go, and that's it.

[ 11 : 40 ] That used to be known as deism, where people believed in God as the creator, but as the creator, he had just created, and then things that he had created went on in their own way.

He didn't actually keep up any kind of control over it. He wasn't presiding over it precisely. He just created and just let people get on with life. That's not the God we understand.

That's not the God we trust in. That's not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's not, as we've seen, as we'll see in a moment, what God revealed in Christ himself. There is everything.

There is a season for everything, a time for every matter under heaven.

It's not random. It's all governed by God. It's all backed up by the purpose of God from all eternity.

Now, of course, there's a lot of mystery in that. You expect some mystery when you're dealing with God.

You can't cram everything into our puny minds and expect to understand everything. Only God has that capacity. But he's telling us, this is the God we worship.

[ 12 : 38 ] This is the God that governs our lives from day to day, God's governance of time. But you know, these things, as they're mentioned there, though they're very much part of human experience, and we haven't got time to go through each and all of these couplets, these verses as they're twins together, these matters.

But you can see a lot of it is from their personal daily experience in the days of the Old Testament, where there was much mourning at times, where there was casting away stones and gathering stones together.

That's from an agricultural background. There's a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. In other words, he's talking there about the custom in the old days then to welcome people by an embrace, and there's times when you refrain from embracing when it's not appropriate.

Time to tear and a time to sow, time to keep silence and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, time for war, time for peace. They knew all of these things in their daily experience in the Old Testament, and we still do to this day by and large.

What he's telling us is that the matters in the experiences we have in life, in all the extremes of experience in human life, they have the government of God over them and the purpose of God behind them.

[ 13 : 58 ] But they also apply to God himself. He's not just telling us that God presides over these experiences where we are actually active in doing certain things that have God's purpose behind them.

These words that are used throughout this passage are actually terms that are used about God himself. For example, God is spoken of as one who gives birth to a nation, to the people of Israel. He gives birth. He's the creator of life. He's also the one who has determined the end of our course in this world, the end of life. Job chapter 14, verse 5, he has appointed the days that he should live that man should live says Job.

And that, of course, has huge implications ethically today when we face challenges like demands for euthanasia and abortion and so on.

when we as human beings through the advances that science has made, through the advances that have been made in technology as well, have come to think that we can actually leave God out of the picture just as for the purposes of his exercise the writer of Ecclesiastes is doing.

[15:16] And we think that we preside over life ourselves, that we have the capacity to create when human life starts and when determined when it starts and when it ends and that we have the right to be in charge of that for ourselves.

No, he's saying, that is God's prerogative. And God's prerogative means that's what lies behind the times of our birth and our death.

He has determined this. He has it in his own government. And you find the same sort of thing, for example, in Jeremiah chapter 24 and verse 6 where God is speaking there about taking his people back from exile, from captivity, where he's going to restore them.

But he's also saying that in terms of an agricultural metaphor. He's been tearing up. He's been actually uprooting. But he's now going to replant. You see, God is described as one who does this. And all of these descriptions as they apply to God tell us that God in fact himself has times for doing this and times for doing that. And all of that reminds us of the greatness of God.

[16:22] Proverbs chapter 6 Let's just finish the point with that one. In Proverbs, the previous book, chapter 6, you can see how in chapter 6 and verses 17 to 19 there are six things that the Lord hates.

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 his to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, one who sows discord among brothers.

You see, it fits in with what it says in Ecclesiastes 3, a time to love and a time to hate. God himself does that. That's true of God.

You know, we're used to thinking about and hearing about God as a God of love, as if there was nothing about God but that he is love. Now, of course, God is love. It's one of the great emphases of the Bible.

God is love. Let's never be in doubt about that. But love is not God and love is not all there is to God. God describes himself as hating certain things, sinfulness, things which are abominable to him.

[17:34] When God says in his word, I hate this, then we'd better listen and we'd better realize that God has that particular aspect to his being just as much as he is a God of love.

Let's not fall into an imbalanced view of God because to understand anything to do with God, the Bible is actually telling us you need a balanced view of God. You need to take the Bible's presentation of God as it is.

And so that's including hate as well as love. When God's hatred is directed to sin, we have to pay attention to that.

And nowhere is it better expressed and shown than in the death of Christ as the bearer of the people, of his people's sins. So the Lord governs time, but let's move on to the Lord becoming subject to time or subject to the conditions of time.

Here is something wonderful in the person of Jesus, in the ministry of Jesus, that you see these emphases in these verses actually coming to the fore in Christ's life as well.

[18:45] In fact, you could say they're revealed in Christ's life even more clearly than they are in these verses in Ecclesiastes 3. God entered into time.

God came into this world in the person of Jesus, his Son. There is a time for all the events of Christ's journey. When he came to be born, how does Galatians 4, verse 4 put it?

When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman made under the law. You see, that was in God's plan. He wasn't early, he wasn't late.

It was exactly, precisely as God had planned it. The governance of time, the governance of history, the governance of the world's events, the birth of God's Son in the flesh, the birth, the incarnation. The real meaning of Christmas is in the fullness of the times, in the governance of time. And it's the same with Christ's death. Remember John chapter 7? Attempts were made to take Jesus into custody, and it failed.

[ 19 : 52 ] Why? Because John says, his hour had not yet come. The precise time for his death had not yet come around. But when you go to John 17, and you begin reading through the prayer of Jesus there in the upper room, what does he say to the Father at the beginning of the prayer?

Father, the hour has come. You see, God has a precise time for the ministry of his Son in this world, for him to be born, and for him to die.

And all the way through the ministry of Jesus, including his resurrection, which corresponds with what was predicted or prophesied in the Old Testament as Luke chapter 24.

If you read through that passage about the resurrection of Christ as he spoke to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, you find that Jesus is emphasizing that all of this took place as was prophesied by the prophets.

And he expounded that to these disciples. You see, Jesus knew when to heal and when not to heal. Jesus knew there was a time to weep as he did with Mary and Martha and a time to rejoice as he rejoiced in his spirit when the disciples that he had sent out came back and told of the success of their mission.

[ 21 : 18 ] Luke chapter 10. And Jesus rejoiced in spirit. He knew when to rejoice. He knew when to weep. He knew when to speak, obviously, because he spoke always in a way that fitted in with the need that was presented to him.

He knew when to be silent. Herod had him in front of him. He wanted to ask him many questions. Jesus was silent. It wasn't the time for him to speak.

He knew that. For Herod, that time had gone. And all the way through, Jesus has a perfect timing in his ministry. Do you ever read in the Gospels that Jesus was late for anything?

No. Do you ever read in the Gospels that he arrived too early for something? No. Every single thing is precise as it was appointed.

there is a season and a time for every matter in his ministry. That is God being revealed to us.

That's the precision of God. That's the governance of time.

[ 22 : 22 ] That's in the person of Jesus himself. How he actually has a precision about how he does things because he is God. And he is God in accordance with what he has revealed of himself to be and to do.

Now that has a huge importance in your life and mine. Because this is the God you trust in. You don't want any other kind of God than the God that's revealed to you in your Bible.

You do not want the caricature of God that's mentioned in atheism and humanism and secularism and all of these isms that are out there that challenge the Gospel and challenge you and challenge God and challenge the church and challenge the Bible.

Where God is presented if he exists at all as the sayings go as a God who is cruel as a God who is a tyrant a God who isn't in control of time a God who doesn't really do things the way he should do things he should do things as people see them why doesn't he cure people of illnesses why doesn't he do things in a certain way because God has his plan as God he is not just precise he is sovereignly precise he is the God who governs time why is that important in your life and mine why is what you see in Jesus and the precision and the control and the governance of God in Jesus why is that important to you because this is the God you can depend on the God you trust in is not going to be different to what he actually says of himself his lordship over your life fits in exactly into the the matter as it's stated in chapter 3 verse 1 for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven it all fits in there doesn't it you may be today reflecting poignantly over the past year loved ones that were taken from the scene of time people you lived with and loved and they're no longer here they've gone from this world they've gone to eternity you may have many questions over that as to why now why me why at this time why in this way why was there suffering involved why did God not prevent that so many whys no human experience no questions of life

God is saying for everything there is a season I have my purpose in every event of your life I give meaning to every matter under heaven it's all part of my plan could you have devised a better plan than the one God has for you no would it have been better if God had left us to ourselves to decide what was important and what wasn't what was fitting in our human experience and what wasn't of

course not you know and I know we'd have made a mess of it we make a mess of it as it is but God does not make a mess of anything he's the God of order of purpose of meaning of structure that's the antidote to our doubts and to our speculation trust in Christ trust in this

[ 26 : 12 ] God trust in this dependable God in this consistent God in this sovereign God in this precise God in his governance of time in his governance of your life in his governance of your family life in his governance of the events of your life in his governance of the time that you will die the governance of every event in between them yes they're difficult at times yes they're impossible to understand at times yes it's at times you prefer that they were otherwise but you would not prefer to have another God that's the point you would not prefer to have another arrangement than the arrangement of God because when you come to trust in this God it's like this writer is saying you realize that he has made everything beautiful in its time it's fitting as far as he was concerned as far as he's concerned it's part of his arranged program so God governs time governs it precisely but sovereignly sovereignly but precisely he became subject to time in terms of putting himself and Jesus under the conditions of this time and there's the same order and the same precision and the same time for every matter revealed in the life of Christ and thirdly just in briefing summing up he tells us how to use our time if you cast your mind forward to

Ephesians these well-known words of Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 16 possibly the older translation is more familiar to us chapter 5 verse 16 where you find the writer where you find Paul actually saying in terms of our lifestyle and how it has to be lived out making the best use of the time redeeming the time in the older translation look carefully then how you walk not as unwise but as wise making the best use of the time because the days are evil redeeming the time because the days are evil in other words what he really is saying is it's almost a summary of Ecclesiastes 3 verses 1 to 8 he's really saying learn how to be active in all of these respects to accept that for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven and to actively under God's governance of the time of your life make the best use of your time don't waste a moment of time as far as possible

I do it all the time you do it some of the time we're all guilty of it but in terms of our spiritual life and our relationship with God and our facing of eternity make the best use of your time and especially make such a use of your time the time given you and I too so that we will be ready to die when that moment comes I don't know when it is you don't know when it is none of us does but it's appointed there's a season for it God is behind it God has arranged it it's in his plan and learn how to live by trusting in Christ so that you will be ready to leave this world when that moment comes in America in the late 1700s into the 1800s a famous educationist called Horace

Mann said many precious things and this is among them a saying which really runs like an advert you would place in a paper over a particular item of jewelry that had been lost you would place an item in the lost and found column perhaps sometimes in the past at least that would be done this is how he put it in terms of our life lost yesterday somewhere between sunrise and sunset two golden hours each set with sixty diamond minutes see the image is calculated two lost hours two golden hours two wasted hours each set with sixty diamond minutes no reward is offered or they are gone forever you can't recover them and if you apply that to the whole of the span of our human life it certainly applies to the life of those

God forbid any of us should be in that situation who are lost forever no reward is offered or they are gone forever make the best use of your time put your life in the hands of the governor of time the lordship of time as you find it in Jesus may God bless these thoughts on his word to us we are going to conclude now by singing from psalm 22 psalm 22 and sing psalms tune is marelle and singing verses 27 to 31 that's from page 27 and this of course is a psalm as you well know that Jesus quoted on the cross especially the beginning and deals with the sufferings of Christ but it also deals with Christ as a victor towards the end of the psalm and how it calls upon us to depend on him and put our life over into his hands psalm 22 verse 27 the whole earth will remember him and turn towards the lord their god all peoples will bow down to him the nations of the world abroad psalm 22 verse 27 to 31 the whole earth will remember him and turn towards the lord their god all nations will bow down to him the nations of the world abroad dominion to the lord belongs and over nations he is king the rich of all the earth will feast and worship with an offering all those whose destiny is just will humbly kneel before his throne throne they cannot keep themselves alive for they depend on him alone throat remain so

[ 34 : 23 ] Ben ust tenido again days higher than a same mois of Tell the people, yet and born, the righteous act that he has done.

I'll go to the door to my left after the benediction. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen.

Amen.