

"Time"

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. The late 20th century poet Roger Waters, who's also known as the bass player for the band Pink Floyd,¹ and the primary lyricist for that band wrote this.
- It's time to kill today. And then one day you find ten years have got behind you. No one told you when to run. You missed the starting gun.
- And you run and you run to catch up with the sun, but it's sinking, racing around to come up behind you again. Sun is the same in a relative way, but you're older, shorter of breath, and one day closer to death.
- Each year is getting shorter, never seemed to find the time. Plans that either come to naught or half a page of scribbled lines. Hanging on in a quiet desperation is the English way.
- The time is gone. The song is over. Thought I had something more to say. I might start every sermon in the series with a progressive rock quotation, just so you know.
- [1 : 1 8] From the dark side of the moon, he writes about his experience of time. Time that reveals the dullness of the day that we fritter and waste away. Time as something that we take for granted and then wish we had more of.
- Time that marks the progress of human life towards death. Time like grasping the air. Like the wind through our fingers as we try to hold on futilely.
- You know, we have all sorts of things that run through our head, just as normal everyday things about time. Things that we say, too. Things like, all I have is time. Some people mean that by saying, I've got all the time in the world.
- I can do everything. Some people think, all I have is time and I've got nothing to do and I'm bored out of my mind. Some of us will say things like, where did all the time go?
- In awe of something wonderful or in sorrow of something lost. Many of us say, there aren't enough hours in the day.
- [2 : 2 2] We wish we had more time. Some of us will say things like, I've got to make the most of my time. Some of you are new here to a college career or a university path.
- You have an urgency of purpose. How do I take advantage of this? Some of us have been saying, I've been waiting for this time to come with great anticipation. Or, I've been waiting for this time to come with great dread.
- Some of us later on in life may say, I've wasted all those years in painful regret. And some in our youth will say, when will my time come?
- In anxious and eager expectation. And all of us can probably point to a time when we said something like, do you remember the time when? When we think back at a time of a wonderful memory.
- Why are we talking about all this? Because today, as we continue in our series in Ecclesiastes, the topic turns to time. We're going to be looking at Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

[3 : 29] If you want to turn there in the Pew Bible, it's page 519. The Scriptures will also be up on the screen when we read them. Remember what we've seen. Ecclesiastes is a book of exploration.

The writer is leading us into a journey of looking into the very corners of human existence in a search for meaning, in a search for purpose.

But he starts at the very beginning in chapter 1, verse 2, by saying, vanity of vanities. All is vanity. Meaningless, meaningless. Ephemerality. Not lacking substance.

Everything under the sun that is without reference to God seems to be without meaning in purpose in our world. It is like grasping at the wind to try to find in this life under the sun what we most long for.

And so, our writer would call him Kohelet because that's the transliteration of the Hebrew word. It might be translated preacher or teacher in your Bible. But he is leading us as our expedition guide.

[4 : 38] And today, he's going to explore key questions about time. And as we look at this, we're going to look at two questions from the passages and then one question that leads us beyond the passage to the rest of Scripture.

So, if you're taking your outline, there we are. That's where we're going. So, first, in chapter 3, verses 1 through 9, he asks the question, what is time for and can we find life in the times that we live in?

Let's read that together. Ecclesiastes chapter 3, verses 1 through 9. 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, 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 sew, 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?

So if you're a classic rock fan, you also recognize that the Byrds made this a very famous song. It's a Pete Seeger song. To every season, turn, turn, there is a reason. So anyway, if you want to look it up, the Byrds with a Y, B-Y-R-D-S. So this passage was turned into a pop song. But the question is, what is he actually saying when we look at this?

He says there's a season for all these things, and he has this long list of time, a time for this, and a time for this, and a time for this. And I think there are a couple of approaches that are not right that we need to expose. The first one is that some people might read this and think, life is completely prescribed for you, and there is nothing you can do about it. So for every season, your life is predetermined, and you live a life like a puppet in the play. Someone else is controlling the strings and has written the script, and you are just following that along, and you have nothing to say about it. I don't think that's what it says. A second one is a call to discern every moment, where we might think about, okay, what season are we in now? And then tomorrow you think, what season are we in now? Or each hour of the day, what season are we in now? And always saying, okay, we've got to determine the seasons that we're in so we can figure out what we're supposed to be doing. Are we supposed to be mourning, or are we supposed to be weeping? Now look, or mourning or laughing. There we go. Now here's the thing. There's something true about that biblically, but I don't think that's what he's saying here. The third thing that could be is an affirmation of, hey, what this means is that everything has its place. You know, there's a time for you to be rejoicing, and there's a time for you to be weeping. Everything has its place. And so we want to know that when we do things that we're affirmed, you know, and, you know, maybe it might be thought of, like, if we're on a journey, right, and we're like, well, if we have time, we can stop by the ice cream shack on the way to the beach and get some ice cream if there's a time for it, right? And we think as long...and there's an appropriate time for everything and an affirmation that, oh, there's time for all these things in our lives. But I actually think that, as is typical in the book of Ecclesiastes, the writer here is simply describing. He is saying life is full of many things. And if you look through the list, half of it is things that are positive or good, and half of it are things that are negative or things that we maybe would not like as much. And they're set as polar opposites, right? It's that life has a whole gamut of things, right? And it doesn't say these are the only seasons in these eight verses that will happen, but he's saying, this is representative. There are...there are going to be seasons of your life that will cover the whole of the scope, from life to death, from mourning to rejoicing, from war to peace, from love to hate. This is what...this is what human life looks like. It's got all of these things, right? And why does he write this? I think he writes this because we as human beings have a tendency to see times and seasons as commodities for us to try to spend or use or control. We too often want to see time as something that is in our purview to shape, mold, and make in a particular way.

[10:09] Right? We might want to live as people who make sure that we have quality time. And look, quality time as a concept is good, right? As opposed to just quantity watching TV. That's not...you know, there's something good about relationships. But sometimes we think, well, I can replace time with people and control it so that my quantity time, that's really going to be the...or my quality time, that's really going to be the thing, right? Or I know that, you know, nowadays often people will say, YOLO, right? You only live once. What does that mean? I've got to take it all today. I've got to get everything that I can and squeeze like a lemon every drop of juice out of this day because you only live once. These are some ways that I think we try to take time and control it. You know, it's funny, if you're a Harry Potter fan, you know in the Prisoner of Azkaban, spoiler alert, I'm just telling you, spoiler alert, Hermione Granger gets a time turner. She's given it by the leaders of the school so that she can attend twice as many classes as any other student. And she does it at the same time.

So she goes to one class and then she turns her hour back and goes to another class. And she's completely overwhelmed and it's really not good for her. And then in the end, it turns out to be a very fortuitous gift for her in all that. But what a picture of our life. Don't we wish we had time turners so that we could do more with our days and just ratchet up our ability to accomplish and to achieve? We're so busy rushing around trying to control the time to get as much as we want out of it. One commentator likened time to the ocean water that fish swim in. We all live in time. We can't escape it. But can you imagine a fish trying to control the currents of the ocean? Can you imagine a fish trying to say to the ocean, well, you've got to work this way today for me to accomplish my goals?

But I think that's what we do. We kick against the goads of the seasons we find ourselves in. Whether we rebel against science, seasons of quiet or rest or loss. Whether we insist on life, seasons of productivity or joy or celebration, we wrestle with time. And Koholet is saying to us, there are times and seasons for everything. This is how we are going to experience life, and we don't have control over it. In fact, this is one of the most important things that you see in this is that inherently He is saying, behind time there is a Creator. There is a Creator of time who determines these seasons. He sovereignly oversees life because He created time, and He created purposes for the seasons of our lives that we may or may not understand.

And this is why verse 9, I connected to the first eight verses, because this is the question that comes out. So, what's the point? Why do I do anything if God has determined all these things?

If the seasons are fixed, if God is under control, then can I get any gain by doing what I do? Does it make any difference? Well, it's a good question, isn't it? Let's keep reading and see what else our author has to say to us this morning about our struggle with time, because in verses 10 through 15, I think he gets to some of the roots of why we struggle with time. So, let's look at verses 10 through 15 this morning. It says this, 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.

[14 : 31] I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live, and that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. 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 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. Okay.

Our struggle with time has three sections to it. If you look at this, interestingly, you can see their verb. The writer says, I saw in verse 10. Verse 12, I perceived. Verse 14, I perceived. These are the three things as he explores our relationship with time. In verse 10, 11, describe the crux of our experience of time. And I want to do a little bit of translation reworking here, because we love the verse in verse 11 that says, He has made everything beautiful in its time. And we love that God makes everything beautiful. And there's a sense in which that's wonderfully true. But I don't think it's actually the best translation of that word. It's more that God has made everything appropriate in time. That is, that He has fixed those times for us. That He has chosen them each in its season for good purposes. And this is how we experience life. Right? When we're young, we want to go out and take all of life. As we get older, we realize life just comes at us. And we think, you know, I do this in marital counseling. When I tell married couples, like, do all the discernment you can as you're getting ready to get married, to choose a good partner, and to start and lay a good foundation. But be prepared, because you never know what God is going to throw at you. You never know what challenges, what disruptions, what changes in your life will come. And when you're prepared for that, then you're ready to do this. Right? God has appointed seasons. And if we fight against those all the time, we're fighting against God. So, He says that there's this, that there's this appointedness to our every, to our seasons.

And then He says in the very next sentence, but He's also put eternity into our hearts. And this is why we wrestle. Because we think that our life should produce something that has eternal value, that has eternal weight, that has eternal worth. And then He goes on and says, but you're limited, and you're fallen, and you can't understand all that God is doing from the beginning to the end.

So, you have a sense of eternity without having the ability to grasp the fullness of it. This is the crisis that we have in our experience of life and our experience of time.

We have both a problem with now and a problem with not yet. All of them seem less than what we hoped they would be. We want them to be clearer. We want them to be more sustainable, more controllable, more manageable. And they aren't that.

[18:08] You know, I grew up with golden retrievers. They have no sense of time. They don't know that you're going to come back later to take them out for a walk. When you arrive in the door, they're like, yay, you're here, you're here. And they jump up and down, and they're like, so excited. And they're like, walk, walk, food, ball? What can I do? Right? And then when you walk out the door, they sit down, they put their paws in front of them, and they look at the Moosers, their very sad eyes, and they say, oh, I can't believe you're leaving me again. Right? Have you had dogs like this? This is, right?

But it's fascinating because they don't have any sense of time. This is a uniquely human experience. Because we have eternity in our hearts. Because we were made for seasons to live under God, and we can't quite fit it all into a coherent picture, can we? But the writer goes on, having said this and exposed our problem with time a little bit more clearly, this now and not yet problem. And he says, well, let me tell you about each one of them a little bit more. So verses 12 and 13 gives us an affirmation about how do we handle the now. It is good for us to enjoy life and to do good. This is what God has appointed us to do in this life under the sun, to eat and drink and enjoy the fruit of our work while we are able. Why? Because this is God's gift for us. And this is an ongoing theme in the book of Ecclesiastes, and I want you to keep your eye out for, is that there's this contrast between this grasping and this gifting, right? The grasping is when we try to rest control and meaning and purpose in our lives, but the gifting is recognizing that what we get from God, we're meant to receive and rejoice in. And so he's saying that in our heart response, all that we experience, the seasons that we experience, both the good ones and the bad ones, both the hard ones, and the rejoicing ones are meant to be received as God's good gift. And in the midst of that, to enjoy

His goodness and provision. And this is not existentialism. This is not just, ah, who knows where you get meaning? We'll just, you know, eat, drink, and be married for tomorrow, we die. You know?

It's not just squeezing meaning out of life. It's saying, no, there's a God in the universe who's determined everything, who's giving us life, who's giving us breath, who's giving us bread, who's giving us anything that is good in our lives, and who is even giving us the hard things in our lives that we might see them as gifts from our sovereign Creator.

Zach Eswin, who wrote a great commentary on Ecclesiastes, if you're interested, said this, learning to receive rather than resist these rhythms, we draw nearer to God and His purposes of the life and lot that He has given us. In short, we enter an already established routine that we did not choose, but that shapes how we live. I thought that was helpful. We do not choose our seasons, but in our recognition of them, we are able then to live rightly in light of it.

[21 : 34] So, in verses 12 and 13, He talks about the now, and then in 14 and 15, He talks about the not yet, the forever part of time. He basically comes out and just says, only God can do eternal things, because He is the Creator, only He can do eternal things, because He is the Sustainer, only He can sustain these things. We can't add or subtract at all to eternity. Only God is able to do the eternal work, right? Rather than trying to contribute, let alone control, to the eternity, we are to respond with awe and wonder, right? This is what verse 14 says, He has done this so that people may fear before Him. That is, fear not in the sense of abject, like, oh no, what is He going to do to me now? But fear in the sense of, there is a power far greater than me who controls all of my life and all of my seasons and my eternity. And He is the one who holds it from the beginning to the end when I can't. And in my human finitude, I can actually find rest and joy in knowing that it is God who holds, that it is God who holds the seasons of our lives, and it is God who holds our eternity. What an amazing thing it is. So, the writer of Ecclesiastes leads us into this.

Okay, so we feel all of these tensions and pulls of time, and then He leads us to say, don't you see? There's something more under this, and not just something more, but some one more underneath all of this. And so, when we look to God, this then leads us to our third point in our third question, which is, what are God's eternal purposes? What is God doing in time and eternity?

Think of the storyline of the Bible, right? It starts with God creating a perfect world where Adam and Eve live with joy receiving everything from God, but instead of receiving it joyfully, eventually, eventually, they rebel against Him, and they reject God and His good provision and say, I'd rather be like God and provide for myself and control time myself and do things on my agenda and my time frame, right? And the result of this is death. This life that was meant to go on forever in fellowship with God resulted in death. But God had a purpose even in this, because in the end of the day, we see that from the beginning of time, as the passage that Matt read earlier, before the foundations of the world, God had a plan to redeem a people for Himself, to rescue us from our estrangement from Him, from our meaningless lives under the sun in a fallen world, into an eternal and life-abundant eternity in relationship with Him. And this is what Jesus came to do in the fullness of time.

And so, Mark 1, 14 and 15, as Jesus begins His ministry, His earthly ministry as an adult, He says, Mark records this, now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

This was the pinnacle of God's timing plan, that God would, the final, His final and complete work of redemption would be done in the coming of Jesus and His life and death and resurrection.

[25 : 33] Galatians 4, 4 through 7, Paul writes this about it, But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father, so you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God. And He uses the word son there to say, you are receiving the full inheritance and the riches as a child of God. So, sons and daughters receive the inheritance of the firstborn son in the first century vision. He's saying, you have the riches of all that God has done, most importantly, that He has made you yours, and He has bound you to Him, right? That Jesus came to do this, and that through faith in Him, our lives are transformed and changed. Rather than seeking to gain from this life, rather than seeking to control this life, to give it more meaning and purpose, rather than living for today and not counting for eternity, we instead receive from God the One who came in the fullness of time to redeem us, right? To redeem us in both the now and the not yet, so that by faith in Jesus, we might come into a new saving relationship with Him and then live for Him in this earth, receiving from Him all of the graces and goodnesses that He will give us in this earth while waiting still for the fullness, the now and the not yet, the fullness of all that He has done for us in Christ, when we will know unending and eternal joy with Jesus where there will be no more sin and no more sorrow and no more sickness and no more death, and we will have unfettered fellowship with our God again.

The writer of Peter in 1 Peter 1, 3 through 5, reminds us of the riches of what we have to look forward to. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

And so, friends, as we think about our wrestling with time, Ecclesiastes points us to the work that God has done in the fullness of time as He sends Jesus, and He reminds us that the seasons that we live through now are seasons where we are to look to Him, to receive from Him all that He has for us in Jesus in this life, right? Which is not all happiness and joy and easiness, right? Some of it will be sorrow and loss and persecution and trial, but it will be in fellowship with Jesus who has saved us.

And to recognize that because of the eternal hope that we have, we can persevere in hope and in joy and in faith because of what He has done for us. Can you imagine what it would be like if you woke up every morning and didn't think, oh my gosh, I have so much to do today, how am I going to get it done?

Instead, you woke up and you said, this is the day that the Lord has made. Let me rejoice and be glad in it. God, what do you have to give to me today? And what are the good works that you want me to walk in today?

[29 : 26] What is the season that you're going to give me today? I don't know what it's going to be, but let me walk faithfully and joyfully and confidently with you. This, I think, is what the writer of Ecclesiastes would have us consider as we consider our times. Let's pray together.

Lord, thank you for this word. We pray that you would help us. Lord, help us to embrace this tension of the now and the not yet, and Lord, to live looking to you, knowing that you are the God of time and the God of eternity.

Help us, Lord, to see Jesus as the fulfillment and the fullness of all that you are doing in time and the foundation of what eternity will look like with you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.