

Time and Eternity

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[0 : 00] We're in the book of Ecclesiastes, and we're going to read the first 15 verses of chapter 3. Ecclesiastes 3, you know this passage very well. It must be one of the most well-known passages in Ecclesiastes, a time for everything.

So, Ecclesiastes 3, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, if you're flicking through your Bible in the Ecclesiastes chapter 3, and we'll read from verse 1.

The preacher says, there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant, as we were just hearing, a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time of peace.

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy, to do good while they live, that each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil. This is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken away from it. God does it so that people what there is has already been, and what will be has been before, and God will come.

We'll end our reading at the end of verse 15. Let's stand and we'll sing together. Creation sings the... Let's just ask for the Lord's help now as we come to his word. Father, with your word open before us, we pray that you would speak to us now. Lord, help us to number our days, to give ourselves to wisdom, to recognize how we are made in our frailty, and yet at the same time we have a loving Heavenly Father who has given us a Savior. Help us, Father, to make much of him. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[2 : 54] Amen. Did you find the sermon stuff? Good man. Stick the first one up. This was when I used to, when we, Lucille and I, were courting, there was a shop that I used to, I used to run up from Waverly, from Glasgow, train from Glasgow, and there was a shop that had this clock in the window, and I used to, I couldn't go by it without stopping. I was just there myself. I hadn't seen Lucille, and I stood. Many of you have probably seen that clock before, have you? No?

I just love it. It's just a wee hand at the back. It picks up a ball bearing every minute, and it goes round, and it whizzies up and down, and it lands in there. So the next one would land in number four at the top. Once it gets to five, it flips down, and then another ball bearing goes in there. So you can tell the time. That's 8.35, 6.78, 8.38. I just, I just love clocks. I just, where you, it's too boring to look at the clock and just go, yeah, well, it's 25 past six, whereas you look at that, and things would happen, and I couldn't afford to buy it at the time, but it was always in the window, and for about a year, I must have, every weekend, I'd look at this clock and go, clock envy. I just, I just wanted that clock. Here are other clock designs.

That one at the, on the left-hand side, it is half past seven. That's two and a half thousand pounds for that clock, which just lights up at different times. I like the wooden one there. That clock moves round. That's quarter past five. If you can read that, that'll go down. That wee other bit will move round like that. It'll eventually go up to six, and so forth. I just, ingenious. It's, it's very, very good. Here's another set of clocks. This is, I'm especially keen on that, because for years, I've wanted to build a clock like this. The top one, you can buy kits, and, and you think, that's a reasonable price, maybe a hundred pounds or something. Doesn't include the bulbs. The bulbs cost a small fortune. They're probably dearer now, because most of them came from Russia. They're called Nixie tubes,

and I just love them. That other clock at the bottom costs a few grand, and that just sits there, and it counts away. I love that. It's, it's fair. I just love clocks. I just, especially the ones that are ingenious. Here are a couple other ones that are quite funny. I know quite a few folk, the top one. Yeah, it doesn't matter. You just put the numbers anywhere, because I'm late all the time, and I like the bottom right-hand one. My daughter did well in maths at university, and I showed her that this afternoon, and she goes, wow, that's great. She, she wants a clock where you can sit there and work it all out. The square root of four is two, and so forth. Very good. Lastly, another, another image. Who, who, whose painting is that?

Salvador Dali. He, he was asked about what inspired him for that, and did he, he was asked, did it, was inspired by Einstein's theory of relativity, and, and he said, no, it was a surrealist perception of a camembert melting in the sun. Wish I, I quite, a melted cheese just melting in the sun. Anyway, whatever reason why he painted that, but it's very well-known Salvador Dali. Tonight, the theme is time.

We're looking at time. That's the passage we looked at earlier, how we use it, how we view it, how, with God in the picture, or God outside the picture. So, that's what I want us to look at.

[6 : 28] We're looking at Ecclesiastes, the preacher, which is what it means, basically, and he's looking at life under the sun. With God, life is meaning. Without God, life is meaningless, and without real purpose. And you remember last time he sought to answer the question in verse 3, what do people gain from all the labors under the sun? He experimented last time as we were looking at, he looked at wisdom, tried to figure it out. Without God in the picture, didn't make sense.

Only when God is, and it's the same today, you cannot make sense of the world unless God is in your equation. It just doesn't make sense. Then he had not only a wisdom test, but a pleasure test. Looked at laughter, and so what does it really achieve? Then looked at projects, started to build things, make things, design things, and what did that achieve? Possessions. He gathered so much salt.

If Solomon is the writer, don't know for certain, but if he is, one of the richest men, one of the wisest men in the world. Then he looked to the senses, alcohol, drugs, wine, and saw what that did. Wine, women, and song, he tried all of them, and still was left empty. Tried fame and status. He tried work. He tried working hard, and so forth. And all of these, he basically came to the conclusion, without God, these things are meaningless. But with God in the picture, they have a meaning, they have a purpose.

[8 : 03] And it's the only thing that really makes sense. Now, in chapter 3, he's looking at time. And I want to just use the rest of our time just to look at that. I have two points. The first point is this.

First of all, in the first eight verses of this chapter, he looks at the human clock, you could say. He's looking at our world, and he sees that it runs like clockwork. There's various things happen, like a big machine where various things happen at certain time. Our world runs like clockwork.

Seven days ago, we were here. The other seven days have passed. We're back here again. Night follows day. The four seasons. Summer, sad to say, will soon pass. Autumn will come, and then we'll have winter, and so forth. It's a mechanism. The world is like a clock that's created and sustained by God.

And we live by the clock. Our whole lives are organized by the clock. We are controlled by the clock. You're sitting there hoping that I finish a good bit before seven. And if I finish at quarter to seven, you'll feel even better. We're governed by the clock because we may have something else we want to do. Squeeze things in before bedtime tonight, whatever time that is for you. But we, our whole lives are governed by the clock and the calendar. We wake. We sleep. We hope we get eight hours sleep.

We're at work, maybe. We have eight hours work. And then maybe in the evening, we relax. We've got appointments. Maybe you've got an appointment. This week, I've got another dental appointment. After three months, I've got another one. On Tuesday, specific appointment. I need to be there.

[9 : 49] Maybe sitting in the chair while she drills away or whatever she's going to do this Tuesday. Appointments. Dentists. Doctors. Interviews. Timetables. Trains. Buses. Planes. Trying to catch things.

Places to be. People to meet. Things to do. All governed by the clock. Night will come. We need to squeeze things in. Clocks play a very big part of our life. We even have sayings about clocks, don't we? We have many well-known. Making the most of our time. Killing time. I had an elder who hated

the phrase killing time and wasting time. Used to say no Christian should ever use those words. I was just killing time. I was wasting time. We are to redeem the time. Make the best of the time that the Lord gives us. A stitch in time saves nine. In other words, do sort it now. Save devastation later on.

We talk about high time. It's high time. High time. This happens. There's a sense of urgency. We do something in the nick of time. We can be behind the times. We're old-fashioned or whatever. We can have a whale of a time. We can be having a good time. If you're a criminal, you're doing time. And not so much what's related to time. As we phrase, *carpe diem*. Seize the day. Make the best opportunity of that day or of that time. So, we know the importance of time. It regulates us. Without time and organization, our lives would spiral into control. We seek to control time or we use it the best way. There is another saying, time and tide waits for no man. We cannot control time. As we can't control the tide that it comes, we are always intrigued by, well, the tide's going out, the tide's coming in at Musselboro. And we go, we don't like it when it's out so much. We like it when it's in and the boats are bobbing up and down. It comes tide and tide. Time and tide waits for no man. We can't control time. It doesn't wait on us. But we'd love to be able to control time. Movies. There are loads of movies that deal with the subject of controlling time, going back in time or going forward in time to change things back to the future. *Looper*, *Terminator*, *Groundhog Day*. I think I've seen that as many times as he woke up every morning. I've seen that. I know the dialogue in *Groundhog Day*, great film. *The Edge of Tomorrow*, even better film. We have never seen *Edge of Tomorrow*. Have you ever seen *Edge of Tomorrow*? *Live, Die, Repeat* with Tom Cruise. That is funny. But it's a good film. Really makes you think. Sci-fi, you think. Great, though. *Star Trek*. *Men in Black 3* was on last night. It was about going back in time to undo something, to stop something happening so that the future will be better. We would love to turn the clock back to 19-whatever, when we were younger, when we were fitter. I'd like to be that person again.

[13:01] Turn it back to a certain year, a time machine, dial in 1983, perhaps, and think that'd be good. Change something. Live differently. Choose a different course at university. Live in a different place. Do something differently. Fix something. Stop something happening. Stop the clock. Just keep things the way they are. Don't get any older, not facing the future. Perhaps you're hearing you'd rather move the clock forward to the Lord's return and to bring it back. So, we're fascinated by time. Time controls everything that we do. And the preacher knows this. And in the first eight verses, he's given us a picture of the things that we do with our time. And so, he's looking at life, and he's looking at time, and he's looking at how we use. It's not a comprehensive list. It's just a general list.

There's nothing, no real purpose in the order that he presents to us here. Basically, he's presenting various aspects of life between the two poles of life and death, as it says here in verse 2. A time to be born, and there's a time to die. I was born in 1960. That was the time I was born. Specific time. On my thing, it'll say quarter past whatever it was, to, that's when I was born. There'll be a death certificate. I don't know what date it's going to be on that. But there'll be a time to be born, and there's a time to die. And these are some of the things that we do in between. And that's basically what the preacher here is telling us. He lists them. Let's go through them very quickly. A time to plant, and a time to uproot. Very much thinking of agriculture, as Dorothy was reminding us. There's a time that she'll plant. There's a time that she'll maybe pick up and weed and so forth. It might be metaphorical. It might be a time of putting down roots and uprooting again, moving house, changing stuff. We don't know. Time, verse 3. A time to kill, time to heal, time to tear down, time to build. It speaks of termination and the preservation of life.

[15:05] It's generally that. Time for life for constructing, and a time for dismantling things. Verse 4. A time to weep, time to laugh, time to mourn, time to dance. Many activities that we experience, all part of our human existence. Time at a caleigh, time at a funeral, and so forth. Time to mourn, time to dance.

Experiences of life. Verse 5 is a confusing verse. It's obscure. Don't quite know, and most of the folk scattering stones, time to gather. Some people say it's ruining somebody else's field. Chucking stones in it. Others are clearing the field for agricultural use. Some folk say it's to do with wealth. Equivalent, the piling up of stones to just accumulating wealth. It's a kind of metaphorical thing. Could be that. We don't know. Verse 5. Time to embrace. Time to refrain from embracing.

If verse 5a is to do with money, that could also be a time to embrace wealth and to refrain from we really don't know. In chapter 4, verse 5, we'll maybe look at this next week, where the fool folds his arms. He doesn't work. He doesn't do anything. He doesn't acquire wealth, whereas this is perhaps acquiring wealth. Number 6. Time to search. Time to give up. Time to keep. Time to throw away. That might be a lot of the commentators say. It's maybe still to do with wealth. Gaining wealth, releasing wealth, relinquishing possessions, keeping some things. I mean, I certainly do that in our house. You buy something else, and then a couple of years later, you're tossing it out to buy something else. Keeping and throwing away. That could relate to anything. Verse 7 is a different thought entirely.

[16:57] A time to tear, mend, be silent, and to speak. It's believed that perhaps this is to do with the times when we're mending a breach in relationships. It's not so much to do with things, but to do with people. Maybe a relationship that's been torn, and we need to mend it, and so forth. To be silent, knowing when to speak and when not to speak, and so forth. In verse 8, similar to love, to hate, a time for war, a time for peace, linking to relationships. Now, we can add to that list.

We can expand on that list. It's really just taking them all together. Things that we do in our life. And that's why he says in verse 1, there is a time for everything, a season for every activity under the sun. The problem is, on this stage, we are actors. We do various actions. But verse 1 to 8 doesn't take into consideration the actor, with a capital A, a God who orchestrates all things.

Verses 1 to 8 are often mentioned at funerals. There's a time to do this, a time to be born, a time to die, and it's why we're here, and this person filled their life out. But without God, it's just this meaningless, endless thing of doing. And it's all positive and negative. It's constructive and destructive, a lot of these things that we do. We do this only to do the opposite of that. And it's basically that, left to itself, what do we gain from all these activities? But the last few verses, from verse 9 through to 15, he talks about the divine clock, God's clock. And that's really, so secondly, the divine clock. The purpose of verses 1 to 8 is to show that all events are determined by God. He is the God who's in control. The God who created this universe didn't wind it up.

Deism is a belief that says God wound up the universe and just lets it go, and doesn't interfere. I've known even elders that would almost say it doesn't. So why pray if God doesn't intervene in the creation that he's made? It's the most amazing thing. When you think of God created the world, heaven is his throne room, the earth is his footstool, and yea, he intervenes in your wee life. I'll be praying, going up to the dentist's chair on Tuesday, Lord, this drill no breaking my tooth. She said that the last time, oh, this drill's got a habit of breaking in your tooth. I went, why are you telling me that?

You'd just rather not know. And so you pray, Lord, intervene. Become involved in this time, just now. A time for pain, a time not for pain. Let it be the second of them. And that's what God does.

[19:52] He winds the world up, but he's still involved in this. The God who creates is the God who sustains. And the wise person knows this. They know that all these things. That's why he says in verse 9, what do workers gain from their toil? Burden. God has laid this in the human race. That was the conclusion he came to after verses 1 to 8. But now he considers God in time. God is sovereign. All things operate according to the will and to the skill of God. The Bible mentions the sovereignty of God over times. Amos 3, 6 says this, when a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? That the Lord is there. He's not asleep when these things happen. Isaiah 45, 7, I form the light and I create darkness. I bring prosperity and create disaster. I, the Lord, do all these things. Here is a sovereign God who's in control, who sees, who orchestrates many things. Time is something determined by God. You remember in creation, when God created through Christ, Colossians 1, the Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones, powers, rulers, authorities. All things have been created through him and for him. He created for him, for his purpose. He is before him, all things. And then you have these great words, and in him all things hold together. God who created this world doesn't just leave it to work like a clock. He sustains it, like you have to oil a clock into whatever. He sustains. He holds it all together. Should he take his hand off his creation, it would just spiral into chaos. He's a great creator God. Only he can control time. One of, for me, one of the biggest miracles in the Bible,

I've asked you, what was your, what do you think the biggest miracle is? We'd probably say the raising of Lazarus from the dead. That's life back. For me, one of the greatest ones is 2 Kings

chapter 20, verses 7 to 11. You remember Hezekiah's poorly, and he gets a poultice, and he puts on, and Hezekiah says this. He says, What will be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I will go up to the temple of the Lord on the third day? In other words, I'm not well. You've put a poultice on, but am I really going to get better? What will be the sign? The Lord, Isaiah answered, this is the Lord's sign to you, that the Lord will do what He has promised. Will the shadow go forward 10 steps, or will it go back 10 steps?

And he says, It's a simple matter for the shadow to go forward 10 steps, rather let it go back 10 steps. Now, these steps, like a sundial, you see the sundial, and you go at 6 o'clock. I love sundials as well. And you go at 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock, and just the fact that the sun, and I just look at that and think, wow, the earth is revolving, the sun is shining. It's not just a wee thing that's happening. It's a big thing. And for the earth to go back 10 steps on these steps that were used to tell the time, that is something. To think what Hezekiah was asking, the Lord takes this wee planet and just moves it back a couple of notches, that's powerful. That is powerful. That is the God. Our God controls things. And this is what he goes on to say, Everything is beautiful in its time. He's a great watchmaker. He's great at being in control of time. When the Lord saw that he made, behold, it was very good. And it's beautifully fitting for us. You think of the time that the Lord has given you. Everything is beautiful in its time. The Lord has a plan and a purpose. And that's why the psalmist says, Our times are in His hands. As our breath is in His hands, so is our times. Whether it's a time to do that or a time to do that, those times are in God's hands. I love the thought of that. In the providence of God, the Lord in 2023 brings us back to Scotland. That was His plan for us. He has a plan for you this week. Wednesday is already in His hands. And He's created everything beautiful in His times, our personal times. He works all things out according to the counsel of His own will. He's a sovereign God.

[24 : 51] And yet, verse 11, we can't understand. His ways are not our ways. One day is like a thousand years to Him and vice versa. Don't forget, with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a thousand years to live. His timings. His ways are not our ways. But everything is beautiful in its time, as it relates to you, as it relates to the universe, to the cosmos. And yet, we cannot figure Him out. That's what He says. And then, in verse 3, He has set eternity in the human heart. We feel this. People are aware of time, not just this week, but of eternity in their hearts. We have a sense of this past, present, and future. And He, verse 14, everything God does will endure. We grow at that.

But the things that God does, He decides the duration of these things. Everything God does will endure. And nothing taken away from this. This is the whole image of God being the potter, and we are the clay. It says in Isaiah 29, you turn things upside down as if the potter were thought to be like the clay. What shall what is formed say to the one who formed it? You did not make me.

Can the pot say to the potter, you know nothing? The Lord is sovereign. He does what He does. And the preacher comes to the conclusion, time is a gift from God. Look at verse 12.

I know that it's nothing better for people than to be happy, to do good while they live. Each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in their toil. This is a gift from God.

Outside of God, these things don't have the same attraction. But as a Christian, to eat and to drink and to enjoy life is a gift from God. There's that old hymn by Isaac Watts. I love going to Bunhill Fields in London. That's where he's buried. I love seeing his grave and think of all the songs.

[26 : 54] Here's one of his songs. Come we that love the Lord and let your joys be known. Join in a song with sweet accord and thus surround the throne. One of the verses says this, the sorrows of the mind be banished from this place.

Religion never was designed to make our pleasures less. God has given us all things to enjoy, eat and to drink. Under the hand of God as he leads and guides and blesses. Beautiful gardens, lovely fruit, clothes, family. There are many things to enjoy under God's hand. And therefore, we are to eat and to drink, but also to do good, it mentions there. It's not just about us, but to live a life, to enjoy what God has given us under the sun and to accept these things from God's hand. But at the same time, God does all these things that people might fear him. Verse 14. God does that people might fear him.

It's a sad truth that people think they're their own God. They think they'll live forever. Try to talk to a 25-year-old about dying and a pension. It's the furthest thing in a pension. I'll deal with that when I'm 55 or something. 25, not bothered. They're invincible. They're teflon-coated. They are God.

Time is at their disposal. They will use it. I'm going to do this and buy that and be there. And there's something in the pride of man that does this. The simple truth is the whole point of this is to revere God, to acknowledge him. Near the end of this, we'll look at the verse, remember your creator in the days of your youth, a time when young folk don't think about God.

Think about God. Remember him. And we need to remember this, to fear God, to acknowledge that he is our creator. We remind folk of this at funerals, that he is the resurrection and the life.

[28 : 49] He gives life. He takes life. And also, where there's this sense of accountability, verse 15 talks about God calling the past to account because he's over time, control of time, past, present, future. He can call the past, the future to account. But he also controls our time. We will have to give an account, Hebrews 4. He sees all things. We have to give an account for our use of time. Paul mentions this in Athens to the believers there. He says, God, who made the world and everything in it, doesn't live in temples. He's not served by human's hand as if he needs anything. Rather, he gives him everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth. And he marked out their appointed times in history. This is my time in history. It's your time in history. And God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.

God, at a set time in history, we are told, sent forth his son to be the savior of the world. And people need to consider him. They need to consider him because a time is coming when God will overlook ignorance, but he commands all people everywhere, every person in Scotland, all people everywhere to repent because he's appointed a day when the day in the future, a day in the future when we will be raised back to life and we will be judged. He is set a day when he will judge the world. That clock is ticking down. If it was on a clock and it was judgment day, the hand is approaching it more and more. And we have to give an account. There's an urgency to this. Unlike Louis Armstrong, who says, we have all the time in the world. You'll be singing that on the way home. I love that song. We don't have all the time in the world. We have this time. Today is the day of salvation. We cannot presume on tomorrow. It is high time, you could say, for people to repent and believe. Today is the day that we seize the day and use this time to seek God and to run after him. So I've gone through that fairly quickly to try and make the best use of our time this evening. But time is a gift from God. If you're a Christian, use it. Use the gifts that God has given us. Praise him. Thank him for the quality, the fullness of life that we're talking about this morning that Jesus came to give us. But we need to use it to challenge others. How are they using this time? Are they using it to seek God? Today is the day of salvation. They cannot presume in tomorrow. They do not know if they will have tomorrow.

It's very sobering. I have members of my family older than me. They're still going on. There'll come a time when, from life to death, that they will pass on. During this time, God wants people to seek after him and to find him. May that be the case. Let's stand and sing a closing song.
In Christ.