

Ecclesiastes #2 – Of Times and Seasons

Eccl. 3:1-11 contains the well-known section about there being a time and season for everything (1-8).

We have seasons of life. There is a time to be

- A baby, when all our concerns are for physical things – food, drink, sleep, touch, the love of a mother.
- A child, when we learn about safety, and social things like play, obedience and morality, and education.
- A young person, when we start thinking of ourselves as independent of parents, learning a trade and preparing for marriage and family.
- Married – when life is full of promise and hope and excitement, experiencing life no longer just as individuals, but as united in heart and body with a spouse.
- A new parent in wonder at the new life you have brought forth, and learning that new responsibility.
- A parent with children who are getting out on their own, learning to let go of them.
- “Empty-nesters” – when the children are gone and we have grandchildren, and we are phasing down from active employments to a retired state.
- Elderly – when our physical and perhaps mental state is deteriorating and we have an increased awareness of approaching death.

One part of contentment in God is to learn as you move from one stage to another, not to be in regret as to what you are leaving behind, but to see those things as preparations for what lies before. What tragedy, to look at your life and wish you were “back there again”. Why would some wish they were still teenagers or young people? Some perhaps because they still have youthful lusts that they wish they could still indulge, but others perhaps because they regret the way they wasted those years, and wish they could go back and get right what they originally neglected or failed.

“A time to be born, and a time to die” – the time of our birth is not up to us – that was in God’s appointed time. He knew you from the foundation of the world, yet appointed a time for you to be conceived, to be born, and a time to die. We should exercise ourselves to know his will and to do it, and thus fulfill his purpose in creating us.

As you did not choose how and when, or even whether, to be born, so the new birth is something that is done by God. He is the one who raises you from spiritual death, and gives you the heart and will and ability to believe the gospel. You are “born of the Spirit”.

“A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance”. There is no point to tell a sinner to rejoice in the Lord and to sing – his place is not to sing and rejoice, but to repent. Only when we face our sins and hardness of heart squarely and honestly can we become recipients of God’s saving grace. God doesn’t want your sacrifices, he wants repentance and a humble contrite heart, now. Only a person who has wept over his sin and lost state can truly rejoice when he comes to experience life and forgiveness. He who is forgiven little, loves little.

“A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away” We spend a lifetime acquiring things, some good and some bad, some beautiful, some useless. They are not necessarily bad, because they can be ways for us to “make our souls enjoy good in our labour” (2:24), but why do we accumulate? Is it simply for enjoyment, or to be able to bless others also? Do we allow those things to take the place of God in our affections? Is our goal in life merely to “get” more and more, as a substitute for God? Can we enjoy material things as God’s blessings and be thankful in them, or do we pervert them so that we seek them instead of God? If so, 2:26 says God gives to the sinner travail, to gather and to heap up that he may have to give to him that is good before God. Are we generous, or grasping? Can we enjoy this world and its pleasures without becoming enslaved to them, and idolizing things?

“A time to keep silence, and a time to speak” We often feel compelled to speak when it would be better to be quiet. We would speak rashly to man, instead of bearing with patience their indignities. We want to “give them a piece of our minds”.

But there is also a time to be quiet before God. Prayer is not merely us speaking to God, but also our listening to God, becoming quiet before him and eliminating the distractions so we can hear him, and be instructed, admonished, encouraged, or inspired. When God is speaking is not the time for us to be jabbering on, but to shut our mouths and listen.

“A time to love, and a time to hate”. Obviously we are to love others, and as Jesus says, even to love our enemies, and to do good to them, even as our Father does good to those who hate him (Mt. 6). But he also says we are to hate father and mother, and even our own lives, or we are not worthy to be his disciples (Lk. 14:26). Not to hate them as individuals, but to hate everything that would be an obstacle or hindrance in following God and loving him with all our hearts, souls, mind, and strength.

What or when should we hate? We are to hate evil (Prov. 8:13), to hate lying (Ps. 119:163), vain thoughts (Ps. 119:113), and every false way (Ps. 119:104). i.e., we are to hate the things that God hates. Also, 1 Jn. 2:15 says we are to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world”

3:9 gets back to one of the main questions of the book – **“What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?”** i.e., What is the point of all our work and striving?

I believe the answer is included in the following verses, where he says **“I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.”** God gives us tests, tasks, responsibilities, or crosses to bear, at various points in our lives, to be exercised in those things for our good. He doesn’t just give us every good thing without our asking, or without striving and desire, else we would be like spoiled rich kids. He has an eternal purpose to make something of each of our lives, and that “making” will not come automatically, but through experiences both good and bad, through success and failure. So what profit is all your labor? It is making you the person God has called you to be.

3:11 – **“He hath made everything beautiful in his time”.** The things you experienced early in life were perhaps beautiful in their own way but that was for then. What about now? Can you see that God has made your “now” beautiful? Can you rest in him that your future will also be beautiful in its own way? Even hard, difficult, and painful times can be beautiful, because they teach us to rely on God, and to seek his face. The hardness of this life, and the fact that we are following and believing and loving an unseen God will increase the blessedness of our future state as we enter his presence in heaven.

We should learn to appreciate the beauty of our life and circumstances in the present, and not merely to be looking to the future, as if things will be better then. You have eternal life now – Jn. 5:24, 1 Jn. 5:13.

“also he hath set the world in their heart” “The world” is “olam” in Hebrew, meaning eternity. What does it mean, that God has put eternity in our hearts? For one thing, that we are not mere animals, concerned about the immediate present, but recognize that we have a position in history past, and that our reality and existence will continue in the future, even beyond our own brief mortal existence. We see that, like it or not, we have an eternal existence from the time of our conception to the never ending future. Even in the past, we existed, not in physical reality yet, but in God’s divine and eternal fore-ordained plan.

Not everyone is as aware of this eternal aspect of our nature as others, but I think most people who think much on the deeper things, either know and accept them, or either unconsciously or willingly reject such thoughts, because of the implications concerning God, and our relation and responsibilities to him.

“so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.” Even those of us who have been enlightened and made alive in Christ, can see only a small portion of God’s providential plan and control of our lives. We are a very small part of God’s creation, and our part is to live out that part in faith and confidence, and to realize that while we may only be a note in God’s symphony, we are still important in our time and way.