

Biblical Soul Care
Lesson 4
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Introduction: Ecclesiastes chapter 3 is perhaps the most referenced portion of Ecclesiastes. It is often quoted, by believers and unbelievers alike. The message brings hope and assurance that there is a purpose, a time for all the seasons of life that man lives in this fleeting, vain and sometimes inexplicable life under the sun. There is a strong message of the Sovereignty of God, the Incomprehensibility of God and the Wisdom of God who “has made everything beautiful (good, appropriate) in its time”.

Read 3:1-15

Questions:

What does God reveal to us about Himself through His Word in these verses?

Is there an order to and reason for the seasons of life that man (you) experience or is life under the sun random and without purpose?

What are the tasks and gifts that God has given to us according to these verses?

Verse 14 says that Whatever God does is forever and nothing can be added or taken away. Why has God made it this way?

Knowing the truths in regards to Gods character, how shall we then live?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: A time for all events in life

3 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

² a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Helpful commentary:

In Ecclesiastes, 'under the sun' provides the most common expression for limiting the viewpoint to man's perspective. Another phrase, 'under heaven' occurs only 3 times in the book (1:13: 2:3, 3:1). In using that phrase ('under heaven') Solomon is speaking of

God's involvement particularly at God's appointed times, because time is in heaven's control, not mankind's control.

This text does not prescribe (it does not tell people how to order their activities or when to perform the listed events); instead, it describes these events as part of existence. What is the point of this description of time-oriented events? It is that nothing happens haphazardly. No chance, no fate governs the things that happen in the lives of God's people. He controls all events.

Just as the cycles of terrestrial climate (sun, wind, clouds, rain) continue their incessant recurrences, so time inexorably moves along, oscillating from one event to the another – even its opposite event. In what Brown calls 'The Poetry of Polarity,' each activity possesses 'its relative worth and suitability, "its place" in the grand providential scheme.' Each event performs its own role in God's grand design.

From William Barrick "Ecclesiastes: The Philippians of the Old Testament"

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11 God makes everything beautiful/good at the appropriate time

⁹What gain has the worker from his toil? ¹⁰I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹¹He 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. ESV

¹¹God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time, but he has also placed ignorance in the human heart so that people cannot discover what God has ordained, from the beginning to the end of their lives. NET

Beautiful (03303) yapheh

Eternity (05969) Olam

Helpful commentary:

God is the cosmic artist, and we are made in His image. Therefore, we have an innate sense of reason and purpose in the events of life. God has put eternity in our hearts. We

not only have an inherent knowledge that God has a plan, but we have an inherent sense of eternity and the Eternal One. Consequently, the details of life matter to us. The events of life are not random, but they have a specific design that fits into an eternal plan. We have an innate sense that it is our task to figure out the reasons, put the pieces together, and see the big picture. However, even in this there is a big letdown, at least for now. God has not given us the capacity to figure everything out and understand the reason why things happen the way they do. God has not allowed us to look upon the canvas and see the full picture of what is being painted. This leads to profound frustration. Gibson says, “If we could see the end from the beginning and understand how a billion lives and a thousand generations and unspeakable sorrows and untold joys are all woven into a tapestry of perfect beauty then we would be God.”

As finite people we are profoundly restricted in our understanding of life. We have an earnest desire to want to know the plan and how the details fit together in the tapestry. But we do not and cannot. Belief in the sovereignty of God is vital to faith in God, but it never gives us some kind of special sight or understanding into the events of life. Brian Borgman “Don’t Waste Your Breathe”

Ecclesiastes 3:12-15 Enjoy this present life and fear God and rest in His Sovereignty

¹² I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

What Attribute (Divine Perfection) is highlighted in this Text?

“which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,” 1 Timothy 6:15 LSB

Sovereign (1413) Dunastes

Helpful commentary:

What does the Preacher know? He repeats from 2:24-26 that there is “nothing better for us than to rejoice and do good in one’s lifetime.” Rejoice! Be glad you know the Sovereign God! Be thankful for your life; Devote yourself to doing good, living a life of faithfulness (3:12-13). Qoheleth’s counsel to us is abandon all hope of full comprehension of God’s plan, be glad, and do good. “The answer to an unhealthy preoccupation with finding the answers and reasons for all of one’s troubles is to enjoy what you have to enjoy, including your toil, without trying to figure out some sort of ultimate leverage of advantage from it.” Borgman

It is enough to know that God is sovereign, wise, and working out His plan. It is enough to know He is making all things beautiful in His time. If we know this, then we know our biggest responsibility, or *summum bonum*, is not to be some sleuth trying to solve the mystery, but to be one who fears and trust God who is making all things beautiful.

Instead of being a great cryptanalyst, deciphering the work of God, He calls us to enjoy this short life, live for Him, trust Him, keep the right perspective on life, and know that He will not forget any of the things of the past. All things will be made right. God is making all things beautiful in His time. How can we be sure? Because in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son (Galatians 4:4-7). Because at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6). Because when God called each of us, He called us at the acceptable time (2 Corinthians 6:2). Because God exalts the humble at the proper time (1 Peter 5:6). If you are suffering, be confident since God is the cosmic artist, making everything beautiful. Trust Him as the One who has written you into His story. Trust Him as the One who is over the details of your life. Trust Him because He has already given His Son for you. From “Don’t Waste Your Breathe” Brian Borgman

Question:

How are you doing? Is there joy? Are you enjoying God’s gifts?

The Incomprehensibility of God by Dr. Keith Mathison

When we read about our Triune God in Holy Scripture, one of the most common ideas that we encounter is that He is beyond the complete grasp of finite minds. In Psalm 145:3, for example, we read: **“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.”** In the book of Job, we read: **“Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14).** Isaiah writes, **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens**

are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8–9).

The same idea is encountered in the New Testament. Paul, for example, exclaims: **"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:33–34).**

The idea we encounter in passages such as these is the doctrine of the **incomprehensibility of God**. This phrase is commonly misunderstood, so it helps to begin by explaining first what it does not mean. When we say that God is incomprehensible, we do not mean that we cannot know anything at all about God. God has revealed Himself to us and therefore we can know something about Him. We know something of God through both His general and His special revelation. His creation reveals truth about Him (Romans 1:19–21), and His written word reveals truth about Him (2 Timothy 3:16). It is important to note, however, that He has not revealed everything about Himself to us. Instead His revelation is according to our finite capacity. Theologians have distinguished between archetypal and ectypal theology. These are fancy words to point out the difference between God's infinite and perfect knowledge of Himself and all of His works and our finite and limited knowledge of Him. So, when we say that God is incomprehensible, we do not mean that we cannot know anything at all about God. What we do mean is that we cannot know Him exhaustively and comprehensively. Why not? Because God is infinite and we are finite. You may have heard or read the phrase *Finitum non capax infiniti*. This can be translated "The finite cannot grasp (or contain) the infinite." It is simply hubris to think that our tiny little minds could fully comprehend the infinite God. And if we had a God we could fully comprehend, it would be a good indication, to paraphrase Augustine, that we weren't actually thinking about the true and living God.

We have to remember that God has not revealed everything to us:

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

What is the implication of this doctrine? At the very least, it should encourage humility. Our God is infinitely exalted above us. We must understand our place as creatures in relation to the Creator. In theology, the incomprehensibility of God also means that we have to be willing to acknowledge our ignorance at times. We need to be able to say "I don't know" when we do not know.

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