**The Secret Of Time**

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

**Introduction**

“Time is a gift of love and grace. Without time there would be no time to change…”

*Charlie Peacock*

Once again The Preacher broadly looks at categories (vv.1-8) and conclusions (vv.9-11); looking at events from an earthly perspective and a heavenly perspective (vv. 15-21). In the next several chapters the author presents the idea that God has a purpose for our lives (chapter 3); that God gives wealth according to His will (chapters 4-6) and that God’s wisdom can guide us through our life (chapters 7-10). Warren Wiersbe outlines this chapter; “Look up: God orders time (vv. 1-8); look within: eternity is in your heart (vv.9-14); and look ahead: death is coming to all (vv. 15-22).

The Preacher invites the reader to consider time, eternity, death and suffering. For many this section of Scripture began life as song by Pete Seeger and later made popular by the Byrds (1965). Pete Seeger wrote the music and copied the words from the King James Bible 1611 the words; “turn, turn, turn”. Pete donated 45% of the proceeds to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions; an humanitarian relief organization dedicated to providing funds to help resolve the Middle East conflict between Jews and Palestinians.

Solomon wrote the poem in a series of fourteen couplets and twenty-eight statements. Fourteen are negative and fourteen are positive. They fall into three separate categories; the first is in part a description of the effects of time on our bodies (vv.1-3); the second has a focus on our soul (vv. 4-5) and the third our spirit (vv.6-8). I read that on Veteran’s Day; November 11, 1963; John F. Kennedy paid a visit and respects to Arlington Cemetery. While gazing over the rolling hills and stone monuments he is said to have remarked “It is so beautiful that I could stay here forever”. Within two weeks he returned in a flag draped coffin and was buried beneath an eternal flame. It is said that Kennedy’s favorite portion of the Bible was Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (see David Jeremiah; *Searching For Heaven On Earth*; p.45).

**Time And The Body (vv.1-3)**

**Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NKJV)**

To everything there is a season,  
A time for every purpose under heaven:

We live in an ordered universe with times and seasons. We live in time; we live by schedules and clocks; we all have the same amount of time any given day. The Bible teaches that how we spend our time is significant. It becomes a reflection of who we are and what we believe. How do you spend your time? Do you waste time? What is it that you accomplish? How do you invest your time? A popular new item on the internet is the death clock. The death clock averages your time; and based on age and health and body weight index it guesses how much time you have left. I am down to 600,000,000 seconds (give or take an hour or a day).
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Webster’s dictionary defines time as “the measurable period during which an action, process, or condition exists or continues”. So what makes time so important? Time seems to have the quality of slipping into the past and ceasing to exist. We cannot go back in time. Moments seem to happen only once and cannot be repeated, even though the sun comes up and the sun goes down. We may repeat actions in time; but the time itself is gone. Physicists argue whether time can slow down or speed up—and it appears that time accelerates with age.

This year the founder of Jews for Jesus died. At age 77 he wrote; “I can no longer indulge the illusion that I will die young.”

When will time end? How will time end? Clearly if time has a beginning it must have an end. With the absence of time comes the eternal state. It would appear that with the creation of the sun the moon the stars the universe time began. With the end of our universe time will cease. When time comes to a halt is eternity set in motion? I don’t think so. Eternity exists and has always existed. Not only are there times and seasons in the life of a planet but there are times and seasons in the life of an individual. The universe itself is on time-table; all the evidence seems to indicate that the universe had a beginning, a middle and an end.

The Bible teaches that not only did God order the beginning, but He also orchestrates the times and seasons to accomplish His will. God is at work in the universe. And God is at work in our lives accomplishing His plan and will. Clearly if we cooperate with God’s plan and will life will not be meaningless but meaningful. Everything is and will be beautiful in its time.

Ecclesiastes 3:2 (NKJV) A time to be born,
And a time to die;
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck what is planted;

We might read verse two; “a time to give birth”. We clearly cannot chose to be born; we cannot hasten our birth or determine our parents (not all people believe this). Life and death are punctuated by the presence of God; our sovereign God is present and active; He is not passive or absent; we exist because God allows us to exist.

We live in a world where human beings have embraced forms of infanticide and genocide. Because human beings can practice birth control; wickedly practice abortion, infanticide, genocide, or orchestrate surrogacy; we think we are in control of life and death.

Solomon suggests otherwise; human beings may participate in the process; but human life and human death are not human accidents. We exist by the very nature and will and plan of God. I saw a picture posted at USA TODAY. A man was carrying a placard that read; “GOD DOESN’T EXIST: GET OVER IT”.

But the Bible reads GOD IS IN CONTROL: GET USED TO IT (see Gen. 29:31-30: Josh. 24:3; 1 Sam. 1:19-20).
Psalm 113:9 (NKJV)  He grants the barren woman a home,  Like a joyful mother of children.  Praise the Lord!

Psalm 139:13-16 (NKJV)  For You formed my inward parts;
   You covered me in my mother’s womb.
14  I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
   Marvelous are Your works,
   And that my soul knows very well.
15  My frame was not hidden from You,
   When I was made in secret,
   And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
16  Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
   And in Your book they all were written,
   The days fashioned for me,
   When as yet there were none of them.

What book is that? Is this the genetic code? Could this be some kind of plan? Did God make us and prepare us in such a way that we could perfectly accomplish His plan?

Can we foolishly hasten our death? Can we prevent our death when it is time for death? Perhaps if God wills it (Isa. 38). King Hezekiah wept and begged God to spare his life and he was granted an additional 15 years.

The Bible says “All the days ordained for me were written in Your book” (Psalm 139:16 NIV).

The Jewish calendar was based on harvest (Lev.23). Human beings can sow and plant but only God can give the increase. Plucking can refer to reaping or pulling up unproductive plants. “A successful farmer knows that nature works for him only if he works with nature” (Wiersbe p.45).

Seasons set boundaries on all life. Planting and harvesting must be done at specific times.

Ecclesiastes 3:3 (NKJV)  A time to kill,
   And a time to heal;
   A time to break down,
   And a time to build up;

Does “a time to kill” mean war (probably not) or self-defense (probably not)? It probably refers to the times of catastrophe, plague and sickness in the land (1 Sam. 2:6). Life seems strangely caught between slaughterhouse and hospital, between battlefield and first-aid station; between murder and medicine; between killers and healers.
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Why does God permit some to die from disease and plague and other to live?
Thank God for Doctors and nurses and health professionals. God can use medicine and miracles.

Time And The Soul (vv.4-5)

Ecclesiastes 3:4 (NKJV) A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn,
And a time to dance;

For some they think they are impervious to life’s tragedies and horrors; and stiffly say; “I don’t cry”. But we do. We cry at birth. We cannot escape the hurts and horrors of life. We seem to learn best from affliction. But we thank God life is not simply an endless parade of pain and set back. There are times of refreshment and much needed laughter.

We live in a world–where if you live long enough--someone you love will die. And if you live long enough and have children--and they have children--there is a time for joy.

Ecclesiastes 3:5 (NKJV) A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing;

Israel is a rock ridden place. Wiersbe tells the story that when God gave stones to angels and told them to distribute them in the world they tripped and dropped most of the rocks in Israel.

The place is filled with stones and farmers fight a constant battle with clearing the stones in order to plant. If you want to hurt your enemy you fill his field with stones (2 Kings 3:19, 25).

The Lord will use even rocks for our good and His glory.

People would gather stones, cut stones and use them to build walls and temples. Stones can also be picked up and hurled in hatred. If your enemy fills your land with stones you might be tempted to hurl them back. Be creative. Take the rocks and build something with them.

Middle Eastern people are not shy about showing emotion. They will hug and they will kiss. They will laugh and they will cry. Few things are more insulting that slapping a person’s face. The face is the place that reveals dignity and honor. To slap someone’s face is the ultimate expression of degradation and dishonor. People embrace when they meet and when they depart. In one sense we might paraphrase this “a time to say hello and a time to say good-bye”.

Time And The Spirit (vv.6-8)

Ecclesiastes 3:6 (NKJV) A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away;

Some translate this; “a time to search and a time to give up the search”.

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Here we have the Biblical beginnings for Craig’s list and classified Ads; the Biblical evidence for Church Rummage sales and garage sales.

Would you say you are a realist, a pessimist, an optimist? We have goals, we chase dreams, we work hard and try to achieve those dreams. But is there a time when we close the book, abandon the search, face the facts, that certain dreams won’t come true?

Much of our life is spent in renewal, keeping, saving, making over, remodeling and changing. We live in a world where some things are so yesterday; or retro; they are so today or contemporary, and so tomorrow, futuristic. And vintage becomes current and current becomes stale and we are ready for a new change.

Ecclesiastes 3:7 (NKJV)  
* A time to tear; * And a time to sew; * A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;*

Jewish people would tear their clothes to express profound emotions; either in times of rage or grief or deep repentance and sorrow.

Sewing is mending. But again I don’t think this is simply cloth. When do we break out the sewing kit? When things are torn. There is a time to mend.

Ezra 9:5 (NKJV)  
* At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God.*

When is the best time to keep silent? When is the best time to speak? When we don’t know the facts; when we are unsure of the information; when someone has whispered something in confidence; or something is linked to character. But when certain issues are at stake; when silence brings death; when silence is interpreted as acceptance then speaking becomes appropriate and necessary.

Ecclesiastes 3:8 (NKJV)  
* A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.*

Most Christians believe there is a time to love. But we are less likely to believe there is a time to hate. What does that mean? Clearly God hates sin.

Some ask the wrong question. “Who should I hate?”

“What should I hate?” We should hate sin. We should love what is good. We should hate injustice and the kind of prejudice that hides the character of God and the gospel of Jesus from people who need His love and grace and mercy and hope!
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Proverbs 6:16-18; “These six things does the Lord hate; yes seven things are an abomination to Him; a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, and a false witness that speaks lies and sows discord among the brethren”.

I hate war and I love peace. I hate bondage and I love freedom. I hate tyranny and I hate tyrants. And when tyranny takes my freedom and dissolves God given rights I will resist and oppose the tyrant. But the greatest threat is not the political tyrant or social tyranny. The greatest threat is sin and our enemy has been and continues to be Satan.

When Pete Seeger set the poem to music he believed this was the time for peace. For my generation a generation that believed contemporary music was the soundtrack for the antiwar movement Seeger added the words “A time of peace, I swear it’s not too late”. What was it about this passage that captivated a young president and fascinated a troubled generation?

Peter Muhlenberg pastored a church in Virginia. In 1774 he was elected to the Virginia legislature and was present at St. John’s Church in Richmond when Patrick Henry made his famous speech with the famous line ‘Give me liberty or give me death.” Peter was so moved that he promptly joined George Washington’s army. On a bitterly sad Sunday morning, he resigned his church and in his farewell sermon he preached Ecclesiastes 3:1; “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” Looking up at his congregation he said, “There is a time to preach and a time to pray, but there is also a time to fight, and that time has now come.” Then suddenly he flung off his robe and revealed the uniform of a continental soldier. He recruited other men from the church and they became known as the German Regiment under his command. Someone asked me if the Revolution was an act of theological impropriety; should America have suffered and submitted to the English Crown?

The question is harder than you might imagine. But in the end, the providence of God established America; the beginning and it current state. The providence of God will also see its end. If the passage teaches us anything--it teaches us that the providence of God, and the sovereignty of God unfolds in the lives of nations and people. Birth and death, sowing and harvest, joy and sorrow, acquiring and losing, speech and silence, war and peace--everything has its appointment time from God. He is sovereign and He is faithful. Our lives must reflect His pace, His rhythm, His wisdom, running through our moments, our days our years. Through all the seasons of life and circumstances of life; God is loving and powerful and faithful

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Conclusion
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There is a time and place for almost everything. Clearly there is no time or place appropriate for sin. Yet we are sinners. And what we need is a Savior.

We have a God problem. Some don’t believe in God. Some believe in God—but ask the question “How can God be both perfectly good and perfectly powerful?” Suffering suggests that He is not good; or if He is good He not all powerful. There must be something lacking in his love or lacking in his strength or lacking in his power. Otherwise he would deal my pain.

Some have concluded that God is not in control. And since God is not in control we must navigate the waters of our own circumstances with our own wits and resources. Some people believe in a God who when you pray to Him--His answer is--that’s not my job--God helps those who help themselves. But Solomon presents a God who is in control, of life and death and time. Birth and death are appointments. Sowing and reaping are appointments; God sets boundaries on the seasons. We are discomforted when we read that there is a time to kill and heal. We live in a world where both the universe and our body is in a state of decay. Scientists suggest we replace every cell in our body every seven years. Cancer cells, infection cells, worn out cells, must be killed. We are grateful when unwanted cells die. We build up in our youth and tear down when we are old. Someone said we know we are getting older when the type gets smaller, the steps get higher, the voices get softer, the muscles get weaker and our medicine chest gets larger.

My granddaughter knows that if her grandpa were a dog he would already be dead!