

“God Over Time”  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Intro: Time is such a dominating factor in our lives. How many times to you look at the clock and consider time throughout the course of your week? ....

**The Point: Stand in awe of God’s sovereignty over time.**

**I. Submit to the sovereignty of God over all seasons of life (3:1-8).**

Verse 1: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”

- Verse one summarizes the content of the poem that follows. There is a season for everything and for every matter, a time.

**Who is God? Sovereign**

- How big is your God? Our God is transcendent, and he exercises absolute sovereignty of the world he has made.
- Isaiah 46:8-11 “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; **I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done**, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”
- Psalm 115:2-3: **“Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’ Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”**
- Our God is both transcendent and imminent and is sovereign over the world he has made and the details of our personal lives.
- Matthew 10:29-30: **“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.”**
- Psalm 31:14-15a: **“But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand;”**
- If you are looking for a weak, less than omnipotent god (not that you could find one), don’t get on board with the God of the Bible.

**God is Sovereign over all times and seasons** The Preacher provides a poem to make his point. He gives us fourteen pairs of opposites, 28 ingredients of life in all. He gives us opposites to help us understand that there is a sense of completeness about God’s sovereignty. **Read 2-8**

- V. 2: Encompassing the whole life cycle... A trip to the hospital
- In verse 4 we move to the emotions... These verses cover relationships, possessions, times of great sorrow and great gain.
- How can we summarize this poem? With a few principles...
- 1) There are *seasons* in life and we normally don’t get to control the seasons. If this list we’re ingredients, I’m sure all of us would have some pretty easy choices to make.
- 2) God is sovereign over these times & seasons. Nothing in our life happens apart from permitting or sending it. I know some of us may be going through a really difficult season. It may even seem like this particular season is perpetual, but remember it’s a season, and mixed within difficult seasons are still times for embracing and for seeking and for laughing.
- 3) These seasons are going to come. The question is not when, but how will we respond. Though our response to the providence of God is central here, we also need to recognize the wisdom principles involved in this passage.
- God is sovereign and we must respond to his providential rule over all things. At the same time, we are responsible and must exercise wisdom through all the seasons and experiences of life. You say,

what does wisdom have to do with it? Wisdom knows the appropriate or fitting time to practice these actions...

- There is a time to keep your mouth shut and a time to speak up....
- There is a time to mourn with those who mourn and a time to break it down.
- There is a time to work and a time to rest. Some of us still may not have learned that from last week.
- There is a time
- This is the essence of biblical wisdom. We take the knowledge we have of God, his will and intentions for our lives and then we apply it in particular times and circumstances to his glory. I'll show you what I mean from the Proverbs.
- What does Proverbs 26:4 say? "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself." Okay. Someone says something ridiculous, and it's best to keep silent and not even give a response lest we prove ourselves foolish in the moment as well. But, what does Proverbs 26:5 say? "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." What? Isn't that a contradiction? Doesn't that disprove the Bible!?! After all, this is contradiction #31 on the provocative list of Bible contradictions put out by the renowned atheist Sam Harris. Well, this is no contradiction. It's a picture of wisdom. There is a time to answer a fool according to his folly and a time to keep your mouth shut. (Proverbs 26:4-5 ESV)

*Trans: The result??*

- In light of God's sovereignty over all seasons, how does the Preacher respond? This leads us to our second point...

## II. Stand in awe of God and his sovereign ways (9-15)

- The programmatic question of 1:3 surfaces again here in verse 9: "What profit is there for the worker in all that in which he labors?"
- He has made everything beautiful in its time... everything is well-ordered, fitting.
  - God has made all of the times (including vv.1-8) suitable under his sovereign control of all things. That doesn't mean that everything that happens pleases God or that everything in this fallen world is beautiful to God or to us, but that God is over every detail, carries out his purpose, and has the last word in every detail under the sun.
  - He is weaving all of human history together to work out his beautiful purposes. Even the most despicable acts. We can't see it, but he can. EXPOUND
  - **Pic:** God is eternal and stands outside of time. If human history were a parade, unlike the spectator who sees one float pass after another and catches his favorite or not so favorite pieces of candy, God has the Goodyear blimp view. He sees the beginning from the end and the end from the beginning. God is not myopic. He does not suffer from being near-sighted. Added to the fact that God is eternal and
- "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..."
  - We have a sense of both the past and future. The Preacher says that God has placed a compass within us all that points us beyond this life, that tells us there is something more than our present existence.
  - To me, this is an apologetic (a defense) for the existence of God... We know there is something more. We long for something more. This world is not as good as it gets. And even if we hold thoughts to the contrary, wouldn't we want it to be true?
  - And YET, even though God has placed eternity in our hearts, we still cannot understand all of his ways. We do not have the capacity to understand the big picture. So what do we do?
- **vv 12-13:** another *carpe diem* passage. In light of not being able to fully understand the meaning of God's times and God's ways, the Preacher says to enjoy the times God gives as a gift today.
  - We get so caught up in where we've been, and what happened last week, and what she said last month, and the opportunity that we blew last year, that we totally miss *today*. On the flip side, oftentimes we get so caught up in where we're going (I can't wait to graduate. I can't

wait to get married. I can't wait to transition into that new job. I can't wait....) whoa. Whoa. Whoa. What about *today*?

- **“Many of us live in the past, reflecting on a season that we have already been through; either regretting the things that we have should have done, reminiscing about the things we shouldn't have done; or we live in the future, planning, anticipating and expecting that some day, things will be good and I will be happy and I will have a good time.” Blaise Pascal**
- Enjoy today! Live in the precious present. I'm not saying there's not immense value of reflection and planning. What I'm saying is: enjoy today.
- You only have one shot at 26, 36, 46, 56, 66, 76. You only have one shot at today. We will all only live February 19, 2012 one time, that's it. Let's enjoy it. We all only have one life. Let's live it, enjoying life, doing good, in the fear of God. The Preacher says “Be joyful... and do good.”
- “Be joyful...” Enjoy the times that God gives.
- “Do good...” Use the times that God gives wisely.
- App: How do you manage your time? Do you seek to improve it, to make the most of the time God gives you? Listen to a few of the resolutions of Jonathan Edwards regarding how he resolved to use his time for God's glory:
  - **5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.**
  - **7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.**
  - **17. Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.**
  - **52. I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age. July 8, 1723.**
- Now, verse 14, perhaps the key verse in this chapter. What does it say? “I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.”
- God's ways are enduring and eternal. He does what he does so that, “people fear before him.” Simply put, the Fear of God does not refer to being afraid of God but having a “reverential awe” before him.
- God is infinite. We are finite. God is omniscient. We are limited in our knowledge. God is self-sufficient; he has no needs. We are in constant need. God is glorious. We are not. God is holy. We are not. God is unchanging. We are not. Therefore, we should stand in awe of him.
- Do you fear God? Do you possess a reverential awe before him?
- God does what he does and exercises his sovereignty so that he might seize our attention in the hopes that we would know him, fear him, and worship him.
  - In worship on Sundays, do you come into to worship and pray and sing and hear his Word with this kind of mindset.
  - In the fabric of your daily life, do you recognize God's sovereign hand? Did you know Acts 17:26 tells us that God is sovereign over the times and places where we live so that we might seek him and find him.
  - In your suffering, do you realize that God wants to grab your attention? **C.S. Lewis says: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”**
- God's sovereign ways are meant to drive us to him, not away from him.
- Verse 15: “That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away. (or what has been pursued.)”
  - Nothing new under the sun. Learn from the past. Learn from those ahead of you.
  - Trans: In verses 16-22 we have one more lesson to learn about time... we should...

### III. Know that God has set a time for judgment (16-22).

- The Preacher now shifts his attention to the issue of justice. We know there are so many forms of injustice in the world. One thing I love about our college students is their concern for social justice issues, not only here in America but around the world. They are not willing to stand back and watch millions of people starving and without safe drinking water. They are not willing to hear of young girls being sold into sex trafficking industry.
- Injustice is so prevalent in the fallen world in which we live. The predicament in verse 16 that makes matters worse is that the place where justice should be served is so many times the place where injustice reigns. Look at what he says: “Moreover, I saw under the sun...”
- How often are the innocent condemned and the guilty go free or only receive a slap on the wrist. We can think of some of the most high profile court cases in the history of our country over the past twenty years that bring this reality to light.
- That’s the bad news. Here’s the good news: Just as God has a time for everything under heaven, so he has a time to judge the righteous and the wicked. One day, he will balance the scales of justice.
- Verse 17: “I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.” Did you know that the Bible is crystal clear when it comes to the reality that all of humanity will stand before God and give an account for their lives?
- 2 Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”
- Verse 18
- Summarize vv. 19-22: The Preacher is not making a blanket comparison between humanity and the animals. He understands Genesis 1, that people are made in the image of God, which means we have a capacity for rationality, and relationality, and creativity, and \_\_\_\_\_, that a ferrut or yak or emu will never have! The Preacher is simply zeroing in on one significant commonality: we both die.
- The Preacher again encourages us to consider our own mortality...

#### Conclusion:

How are you handling the times in your life?

Is this a time of great joy? Turn to God in gratitude. Recognize his sovereign grace and provision in your life. Is this a time of great suffering? Turn to God in dependence and faith. Recognize he gives us sufficient grace for each day and the gift of his presence as we journey through this fallen world.

Is this a time where you are wrestling with eternity? Turn to God. Listen to this challenge from A.W. Tozer: “We who live in this nervous age would be wise to meditate on our lives and our days long and often before [we see] the face of God and [are] on the edge of eternity. For we are made for eternity as certainly as we are made for time, and as responsible moral beings we must deal with both.” Have you dealt with both? Are you ready to die and move past the bounds of time into everlasting life?

All those who look to Jesus and Christ, and trust in his work for his on the cross receive God’s saving grace and will be prepared to spend eternity with him. Have you embraced the cross of Christ where Jesus died in our place, took on our sin, and absorbed the wrath of God so that we might receive his righteousness and the gift of his endless life?

What better time than now to decide to follow Christ? As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:2 “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”