

A Time for Everything under Heaven #1

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2; Acts 2:22-23

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If whatever comes into our life comes by pure chance and without any design or purpose, I would submit it is impossible to find true joy and contentment in this life. For a world of pure chance (where there is no rhyme nor reason for what happens) breeds only confusion and hopelessness—neither of which is a foundation for a lasting joy and contentment. However, a world wherein Almighty God works out His most holy, wise, and good plan for His people is a world that breeds confidence, hope, meaning and purpose.

Dear ones, only the Christian who rests in a sovereign God who controls every movement, event, and circumstance in this universe, in our world, and specifically in your life—only that person can know the everlasting joy of the Lord in the many different experiences in life (whether trials or blessings). For the Christian is able by God's grace to look beyond his/her immediate experience to see the hand of a good God wisely directing every event to His glory and to the benefit of His people. Whereas every person who does not find rest in God is lost in the confusion and uncertainty of what every new day may bring. To the degree that you rest in your sovereign, loving God, who can make no mistakes in what He has brought into your life, to that degree, you will enjoy a heavenly peace and contentment here upon the earth. To the degree that you forget or doubt your sovereign God, to that degree, you will be filled with discouragement, worry, fear, and despair. If the joy of the Lord has been absent in your life, I can assure you that you have not been resting in your loving, Almighty Savior.

Solomon had come to see that one important key to a lasting joy and contentment in this life was resting in his sovereign God, who wisely foreordained all that occurs in life for the benefit of His people and for the glory of His holy name. The main points from our text in Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 are the following: (1) God Has Ordained and Controls Everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1); (2) God Has Ordained and Controls both Birth and Death (Ecclesiastes 3:2); (3) God Has Ordained and Controls both Planting and Uprooting (Ecclesiastes 3:2).

I. God Has Ordained and Controls Everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

A. In the previous two chapters, Solomon detailed every endeavor he had attempted in order to find true joy and happiness in this world. At every turn, Solomon was disappointed. At every corner, he ran to catch the bus of happiness, but missed it every time. Oh sure, he could find some temporary laughs and some brief moments wherein he found some pleasure. But it was all so fleeting. It was all vanity—just like a mist that appears and then disappears. Solomon was always thirsting and always drinking, but never satisfied by the pleasures of this world apart from Christ.

B. Solomon related to us for the greater part of the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes where joy and contentment were NOT to be found. Then toward the end of Ecclesiastes chapter two, Solomon began to show us where lasting joy and satisfaction ARE found: They are found in God alone (Ecclesiastes 2:26). A blessed joy, a godly joy, the joy of the Lord does not abide in the soul of man by all of his mere searching. It is the free and gracious gift of God to all who embrace Jesus Christ by faith alone. They who become the children of God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone have a right to all of the privileges of the sons of God. One of those privileges purchased by Christ for His people is the joy of the Lord. Dear ones, if we are not experiencing the joy of the Lord, it is not because Christ did not purchase it for unworthy sinners like you and me. It is because we are neglecting the means which He has appointed to enjoy the joy of the Lord: resting in God as

the One who has ordained and controls every circumstance and event in our lives, in this world, and in this universe without exception. It is not easy to rest in Christ when your marriage, your body, your finances, your job, or your world all around you seems to be falling apart. But, dear ones, God does give grace to those who earnestly desire and seek to rest in His almighty power, wisdom, and love. Do you desire to find that child-like rest in the almighty arms of your Heavenly Father, where you know everything will work out for your good because your Heavenly Father rules over all? He is more willing to give that rest, than you are to receive it. For it is your inheritance in Christ.

C. Now as we consider Ecclesiastes chapter three, Solomon continues the theme he had begun at the end of chapter two. The Preacher (as Solomon calls himself in Ecclesiastes 1:1) continues to exhort God's people as to where the joy of the Lord is to be found. That joy and contentment (that lasts forever) is to be found in the God who has ordained every event in this world. Solomon begins with a more broad general declaration of God's sovereignty in Ecclesiastes 3:1, and then gives specific cases over which He is sovereign in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8.

D. Solomon states for the comfort and joy of God's people, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Let's unpack this briefly.

1. Solomon is all-inclusive in that which he addresses. Not "To some things", nor "To most things", but Solomon says "TO EVERY THING there is a season, and a time to EVERY purpose under the heaven." Nothing is here excluded in the universe, world, or your life. From the least significant event to the most significant event, from every free act of man to every motion of every particle of dust in the universe, from every movement of every atom in the universe to every step of every creature in the world, from every gentle breeze that moves a leaf or a blade of grass to every earthquake, hurricane, and tornado that destroys man and his accomplishments, from the simplest to the most complex of God's creation, from every wicked thought, word, or deed of a man to every righteous thought, word or deed of the child of God, everything and every motion has its season or appointed time—appointed by Almighty God for that particular time and season, rather than for another time or season.

2. The Hebrew word for "SEASON" is used in other places in the Old Testament for a set time that an event should occur (as when Nehemiah gave to the king a set time when he would return to serve him as we see in Nehemiah 2:6, or as when Queen Esther and Mordecai appointed a set time each year in which the festival of Purim should be celebrated, as noted in Esther 9:27,31). So Solomon assures us that everything that exists and everything that occurs has a God-appointed time for its appearance in your life and mine. Whether that event is a trial or a blessing, it is NOT by accident. It is divinely appointed by your heavenly Father who loves you (His people) with an everlasting love and who brings all of these appointed seasons into your life for His glory and for your good—not because He hates you, but because He loves you—not because He would destroy you, but because He would mature you—not because He would send you running away from Him with a slavish fear, but because He would send you running to Him with a child-like faith and love for Him.

3. Solomon is not here teaching fatalism. Fatalism gives no meaning and purpose to what happens in a person's life. Fatalism gives no hope that all will be well with one's soul. Everything simply happens because it happens. *Que sera sera* (whatever will be, will be). However, Divine predestination gives meaning and purpose to everything that occurs in your life (whether good or evil). There is always hope when God is in control. For we know that all will be well with us as God's children regardless of what we may have to experience; for He can do us no wrong. You may not specifically know God's purpose for the death of a loved one, for a miscarriage, for the inability to conceive a child, for the problems you are experiencing in your marriage, for the financial hardships you are having, for the health problems you or a loved one are experiencing, but, dear ones, you can be assured that God has appointed all these events for your good

(Romans 8:28).

4. Although God is neither the author nor approver of sin (James 1:13), He nevertheless has included even the sinful acts of man in His most wise and holy plan, in order to glorify both His justice in punishing sin and to glorify His grace in freely forgiving sin. If God had not foreordained even the free sinful acts of man, how could He rule them and overrule them for His own glory? How would we be assured that Satan and sin would not ultimately prevail over God? We know that God will prevail, because He has in fact predestined it (apart from being its author or approver) for His own glory and for the good of His beloved Church. If God did not rule over sin, and even appoint when it will occur, there would be no restraint to sin at all. Sin would run rampant without any purpose and without any control. If God did not rule over sin to His own glory and for His own purpose, every person would delve into every possible sin. Every person would become a devil. The devil himself would know no restraint. What evil would absolutely reign in the world, if God did not specifically foreordain and limit the free sinful acts of the devil and every man, woman, and child.

a. Note how Peter blames the Jews to whom he preached for their sinful role in Christ's crucifixion (which means, they must have freely chosen to sin in this way), but Peter also states that Christ was delivered into their sinful hands by the predetermined purpose of God (Acts 2:22-23). I say it reverently, but there is even a divinely appointed season for sin, which God rules and overrules for His glory and for the good of His people.

b. Let us, however, avoid two sinful extremes at this point. The first extreme is to profane the grace of God by continuing in our sin without repentance (sinning that grace may abound). Such an attitude of not taking sin seriously in our lives denies the very reason for Christ coming to die for the sin of His people in the first place—that He might destroy sin and all of the works of the devil. The second extreme is to profane the grace of God by acting as though God cannot or will not forgive the sin you have committed against Him or your neighbor. God delights to forgive unworthy sinners who acknowledge their sin and lay hold of His mercy in Christ Jesus. "For where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:19).

II. God Has Ordained and Controls both Birth and Death (Ecclesiastes 3:2).

A. Having stated in a general way the absolute sovereignty of God over everything and over every event under the heaven, Solomon now proceeds to enumerate 14 couplets (or 28 individual events), which summarize the many and varied seasons which God Himself appoints in the life of mankind. Each couplet is composed of a contrast in some way between events that happen in our experience. Some of the events describe acts over which a person may have some control, while other events describe acts over which a person has absolutely no control.

B. The first couplet states, "A time to be born, and a time to die."

1. For those who would contend that each person is in absolute control of his/her own life, that each person is master and lord of his/her own fate, that each person absolutely determines what shall occur in his/her own life, this first couplet demonstrates how false such a philosophy is. For which philosopher determined when he/she would be conceived and brought forth into this world? There is an appointed time to be born, and not even the doctor or midwife knows when that will be until that baby is delivered. If you do not control the first event by which you were ushered into this world (i.e. the time of your birth), it ought to be apparent to you that there are many other events in your life that are outside of your control as well. God appointed that first event, and He also appoints all of the events in your life thereafter for His own purpose.

a. The birth of a child is one of the most amazing things to behold. From conception to birth the Lord has appointed every detail of every child's development (Psalm 139:14-16a). Yes, God has implanted various traits and characteristics in the chromosomes of each parent, but God divinely orders and governs the various traits and characteristics that shall be passed from a parent to a child, from the dimple in

the chin to the color of the eyes. But what about the birth defects of a child? Were those also appointed by God? Absolutely! Consider the words of God to Moses in Exodus 4:11 and the words of Christ in John 9:1-3.

b. Even the child that is conceived by way of rape or incest, or is conceived outside wedlock, or comes so soon after the birth of the previous child—that child (and these various circumstances) is conceived by God’s specific appointment and should be protected by the law of the land (and not murdered). I want to make it clear that any politician who claims to be pro-life and yet allows abortion for any reason is a liar. He is NOT pro-life. There is never a biblical reason to murder a child in the womb.

c. As we consider the wonders of birth, let us always give praise to God for the children that have been given to us by God. They are God’s special appointments, delivered to us in His own time. If you have been unable to conceive or to have children, that too is God’s special appointment to you (at least for the present time). This may be painful to you, but God always tempers the pain in such circumstances with the knowledge that He has appointed it for His glory and for your good. He can do you no wrong. He has even better things for you in any blessing He has withheld from you. There are matters of blessing associated with birth as well as matters of trial associated with birth. But all matters related to birth are appointed by God.

2. Just as certainly as God has determined the precise second of each person’s birth, so He has likewise determined the precise second of each person’s death. If the first and the last events are appointed by the Lord, then everything in between is certainly set according to His most holy and wise purpose as well.

a. “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrew 9:27). Death is an appointment none of us will be able to ignore, or for which none of us will be late. Just as you have been born, so will you also die.

b. The question then is not whether you will die by God’s appointment, but rather will you be prepared for death when it comes? How do you prepare for death?

(1) You acknowledge that death is the judgment that you deserve for sin (and not only physical death, but spiritual death and eternal death in hell).

(2) You embrace by faith alone Christ (the eternal Son of God) and His promise of righteousness, life, and forgiveness. You turn from all your own works as making you acceptable before a holy God, grieving and sorrowing over how you have offended such a holy yet merciful God.

(3) You seek to live each day for the glory of Christ as if you were going to meet Him that day. None of us knows the precise time appointed by God for our death. How we should, therefore, live each day as if it were our last day upon this earth. How would we treat our husband or wife, children or parents, brothers or sisters in Christ, co-workers or strangers, if we knew it were our last day? Who knows? It may be our last day. Do you fear death because of what you will leave behind? Are you so tightly gripping the things of this world that you can’t stand the thought of forsaking them? Has this world become such a home to you that the thought of leaving it behind brings tears to your eyes?

(4) Finally, death does not have to be a dreaded enemy any longer to the Christian. For Christ has conquered death. Death has now become the door to heaven, wherein we shall sin no more, be tempted no more, suffer no more, grieve no more, weep no more, but will enjoy the unspeakable delights and joys of Christ in heaven forever more. If death is a fearful enemy to you, you will not enjoy the joy of the Lord while you are here on earth. If death is a fearful enemy to you, I can safely say you are not finding that blessed resting place in a sovereign and merciful Christ. Come to Christ today and cast all of your unbelief, worry, and fear upon Him. Dear ones, being prepared for death at any moment brings the power of Christ into every moment that you live.

III. **God Has Ordained and Controls both Planting and Uprooting (Ecclesiastes 3:2).**

A. This final couplet in verse 2 speaks of a divinely appointed time to plant and to uproot what is planted. As all farmers and gardeners realize, there is a particular season of the year to plant your vegetables if you would enjoy the fruit of your labor; and there is a particular time of the year to harvest your crop and to uproot what was planted. As we apply the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty even to planting and uprooting, we can say that God has ordained every plant that has prospered and borne fruit for our good, and that God has also ordained every fire, every drought, and every storm that has destroyed a crop that was planted. In other words, God is the One who provides for all your daily needs ("Give us this day our daily bread" Matthew 6:11). What have you to worry about when it comes to the needs that you have, when it is your heavenly Father that has appointed both a time of prosperity and a time of poverty? Even when you have gone without some things that you have wanted, have you ever gone without something that you actually needed and without which you could not live? Consider the words of Christ in Matthew 6:25-34.

B. Finally, note that the terms "planting" and "plucking up" also refer to God's work in establishing and destroying nations (Jeremiah 18:7-9). Not only are events ordained in the lives of individuals, but also in the events of every nation. The kings of the earth are as grasshoppers to the Lord (Jeremiah 40:22). The mighty nations of the world are as a grain of sand in God's almighty hand. He exalts nations at His pleasure, and disposes of them in His displeasure. Our comfort is firmly established in the fact that, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Proverbs 21:1). He raises up Pharaoh to show forth His own power and justice, and crushes him for his pride and rebellion (Romans 9:15-18). He raises up David to show forth His own power and mercy in forgiving him of his sin (of adultery with Bathsheba) and in blessing God's people (as Christ comes through the line of David). Why can we be confident that Christ will reign over all of the nations of this world during the millennium? Because He is the One that plants them, and He is the One that plucks them up.

C. What is the trial of faith that you are presently facing? The first thing to know is that God has you there for a reason. He has you there to deal with some sin, to build your faith, to teach you some valuable lesson you would otherwise not learn. You are in the School of Christ. Do you want to learn the lesson Christ is teaching you, or do you simply want out? May the Lord keep us all in those trials of faith until we learn those lessons He is teaching us for our good and well-being. Dear ones, remember this: there is no joy, no peace, no contentment, and no satisfaction in life, if you are not resting in the almighty and sovereign hands of your loving Father.

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