

A Time for Everything under Heaven #2

Ecclesiastes 3:3a; Genesis 20:6

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Rev. Greg L. Price

The fact that there is a Divinely appointed time for everyone and everything under the heaven should lead us to Christ to find in Him the joy and satisfaction we desire while here on earth. For how can one look to that which is created for joy, when the creature does not know, nor can it absolutely control what will happen in the present or in the future? Every created thing is dependent upon the Lord God Almighty for its existence, purpose, and very motion. For everything (and every movement of everything) that is created exists for God's own glory and not for the glory of man or for the glory of creation (according to Revelation 4:11).

Dear ones, whenever we would presume to doubt or to disbelieve that the ways of the Lord in every circumstance are most wise, holy, and good in promoting the Kingdom of Christ in our life, in our family, in our Church, or in this world, we are brought back to questions such as these. Who would you trust to make the right and best decisions for your life? Your Heavenly Father who knows the beginning from the end, or one who can hardly see a step in front of him? Your Heavenly Father who is infinitely wise and has never made a single mistake (and can never make a single mistake), or one who makes mistakes every day? Your Heavenly Father who is infinitely holy, or one who is sinful and drinks in sin as a thirsty man drinks in water? Your Heavenly Father who is almighty and has the power to turn every event in the direction that works for His glory and your good, or one who cannot even control his daily calendar of events? Your Heavenly Father who loves you with an everlasting love, who sent His Son to redeem unworthy sinners, and has prepared a paradise of joy in heaven for these same unworthy sinners, or one whose love is distorted and perverted by sin?

We continue our study of Solomon's conclusion as to where everlasting joy and contentment is to be found. Solomon has unequivocally stated that lasting joy is to be found in God alone, who graciously gives it to those who are good (and good I would add by virtue of Christ's imputed righteousness): "For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy" (Ecclesiastes 2:26). One attribute of God that especially brings peace, comfort, joy, and contentment to the heart of a Christian regardless of the trial or blessing that he/she experiences is that of God's absolute foreordination of everything and every event under the heaven as stated in Ecclesiastes 3:1: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

Today we shall consider God's absolute foreordination of and His good government over every event that involves killing: (1) God Has Ordained and Controls Killing (Ecclesiastes 3:3a). Next Lord's Day we will consider the second part to the couplet: (2) God Has Ordained and Controls Healing (Ecclesiastes 3:3a).

I. God Has Ordained and Controls Killing (Ecclesiastes 3:3a).

A. As we continue our consideration of the various events that are listed here by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8, there are several preliminary remarks I should make before proceeding any farther.

1. First, the events that are listed by Solomon in verses 2-8 do not include only good and lawful events that occur in the lives of mankind, but also heinous and unlawful events as well. For remember that Solomon is not excluding any event from the scope of God's predestination or providential care ("To EVERY THING there is a season, and a time to EVERY PURPOSE under the heaven" Ecclesiastes 3:1). So when we read that there is a time TO KILL (in verse 3), we ought not to understand that only lawful killing in self-

defense is appointed by God. Rather we ought to understand that there is also a divinely appointed time for unlawful killing by way of murder as well. All of the free sinful acts of man are herein included in the lists of events drawn up by Solomon. And so as we continue through the list, we must think in terms of both lawful and unlawful aspects of the various events that are mentioned.

2. Second, the list of events itemized by Solomon is not intended to be exhaustive of everything that might possibly happen in the life of a man. Rather this list is intended to be REPRESENTATIVE of all the events that occur in the life of mankind. If you will, it is a SUMMARY under which every event in our lives might be placed in one way or another.

3. Third, this list of events (being a summary of all that occurs in our lives) must include not only physical circumstances that happen to us, but also spiritual circumstances as well, not only outward trials and blessings, but also inward trials and blessings as well, not only that which we can see, but also that which we cannot see with our eyes.

4. Finally, this list of events is not intended to communicate to us that there is an appropriate and fitting time for everything we do in our lives, as if the emphasis falls upon what we are to do in every circumstance that arises in our lives. Rather the emphasis falls squarely upon God who foreordains and controls every event in our lives. It may be true that there is an appropriate time to do this or that in our lives, and that when we do so, we are more likely to enjoy life as we see Solomon teaching in Proverbs 15:23: "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" We all certainly need to grow in the area of being wiser and more prudent in knowing the most appropriate time to discuss offenses that exist between us, rather than just blowing off steam whenever we feel like it or never addressing offenses that need to be discussed. But dear ones, although that is true, that is not what Solomon is teaching here in Ecclesiastes 3:1ff. The very first set of couplets (in Ecclesiastes 3:2) makes it clear that the focus is not upon man doing what is fitting in every season of his life, but rather upon God ordaining every event in man's life. For how is a man to act appropriately at his birth, since he has no control over the time of his birth or the circumstances surrounding his birth? Here in Ecclesiastes 3:1ff, King Solomon is directing us to rest with child-like trust in our Father who ordains all events in our life for His glory and for our good as His adopted children.

B. Solomon distinguishes between "A TIME TO DIE" (in Ecclesiastes 3:2) and "A TIME TO KILL" (in Ecclesiastes 3:3). Has Solomon simply repeated the same idea using different words, or does Solomon have something more to communicate by the word "KILL" than he does by the word "DIE"? Although the end is the same when one DIES as when one is KILLED, I would submit there are some differences between the two words.

1. TO DIE is more comprehensive than TO KILL. Every living creature under the heavens DIES, but not every living creature is immediately KILLED by another creature.

2. TO DIE then ordinarily describes the END of a man's life, whereas TO KILL describes the MEANS to that end. How did that man die? He was killed by another man.

3. Thus, TO DIE is more PASSIVE in describing the end of every person, whereas TO KILL is more ACTIVE in describing the way in which a person died. The Hebrew word for "kill" is often translated "slaughter." The Hebrew word for "kill" has in view a violent death.

C. When Solomon states, "a time to kill", I submit he has in view a divinely appointed time foreordained from all eternity for both lawful killing and for unlawful killing. What is the difference between lawful killing and unlawful killing?

1. LAWFUL KILLING may be either intentional or unintentional.

a. One may lawfully INTEND to kill another person (not enjoy killing another

person) in the following three specific cases.

(1) It is lawful to intentionally execute a JUST WAR against a sinfully hostile and aggressive foreign people, which is simply a case of national self-defense (Deuteronomy 20 speaks of various conditions that God expected His people to follow in a just war). If, however, the war that is fought is not a case of legitimate self-defense against a hostile foreign people, it is then a case of national murder rather than a just war. That is why there must be clear evidence of intent on the part of a hostile nation to attack another nation before it might be considered a just war.

(2) It is lawful to intentionally execute CAPITAL PUNISHMENT against a sinfully hostile and aggressive individual within a nation, which is simply a case of national self-defense against specified criminals. God ordained capital punishment not only for murder (Numbers 35:31), but also for other civil crimes that like murder tend to destroy a nation if not punished with death, such as blasphemy (Leviticus 24:11-14), idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:1-10), adultery (Leviticus 20:10), homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13), kidnapping (Deuteronomy 24:7) etc. However, no one is to be executed by way of capital punishment without the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6). To execute a person on the basis of mere circumstantial evidence is not capital punishment, but murder.

(3) It is lawful to intentionally execute PROTECTION FOR ONESELF OR OTHERS against a hostile and aggressive individual or individuals, which is simply a case of personal self-defense of oneself or others (Exodus 22:2).

b. One may lawfully NOT INTEND to kill another person (so that there is no murder committed) when one accidentally and through no sinful neglect on his/her part causes the death of another. There is a difference between a drunk driver unintentionally swerving off the road and killing a pedestrian and a sober driver unintentionally killing a child who darts immediately into the path of his car. Both deaths may be unintentional, but one death is the result of sinful negligence while the other is not the result of sinful negligence (Deuteronomy 19:5).

c. Solomon states that in all cases where one is killed lawfully that each and every case is foreordained by God. Not even one of those who is killed lawfully is the result of an accident from God's perspective. No lawful killing catches God by surprise. Even the tragic accidental death of a loved one in a car collision was predestined by God for His own glory and for the good of those who are His children. If such were not the case, we would be thrust into the lap of pure chance. And if such killing is pure chance, we face an even greater difficulty: there is no rhyme nor reason for the accidental killing of that loved one. How can we derive any comfort or encouragement from that hopeless reasoning? The problem we face in such a situation is that we cannot see with our limited knowledge what our good God intends to work out in such tragedies. We only know the pain and the heartache that we feel at the loss of that loved one. Dear ones, God wants you to know that even such killing that is committed accidentally has an appointed time and a foreordained purpose. God is at work. He was not sleeping on the job. He was not impotent to prevent that accident from happening. It occurred under His watchful eye and under His providential care for His own glory and for the good of His children. How many people have come to a saving knowledge of Christ through such tragedies? How many people have been brought face to face with the reality and suddenness of death at such tragic times, so that they are without excuse? If we should lose a loved one in such a tragic situation, that which would bring us comfort would certainly not be a chance universe: namely, that there was no reason, meaning, or purpose for the accidental killing of that loved one. What would bring comfort and the joy of the Lord (even in the midst of our tears) would be that God had a purpose even if I cannot see it. God is the same God to me that He was before that loved one died. He has not changed. I may pray to understand more of that purpose, but my confidence is ultimately in God's goodness and power to order all things for His glory and my good.

2. UNLAWFUL KILLING may likewise be either intentional or unintentional.

a. Unlawful killing of another person that is premeditated is murder in the strictest sense. This crime clearly deserves death (according to God's written Law and the Law of Nature) as stated earlier. But it is not only private persons that commit murder, but also civil magistrates in their public capacity that can also commit murder. To unjustly take away the life of another is murder. Did the Roman Emperors murder many early Christians when they fed them to the lions in the Coliseum? Of course, because there was no just cause to kill them. Did Charles II and James II murder many Covenanted Christians when they hung them, quartered them, shot them, or drowned them? Absolutely, for there was no just cause to kill them. As stated earlier, when civil magistrates send their military into an unjust war, where there is no credible evidence of hostile intention against that nation or its covenanted allies, that civil magistrate (and any who consent to it) is likewise guilty of murder, for he has unjustly taken away the life of others.

b. Unlawful killing of another person may also be unintentional (as stated previously), where due to sinful and gross neglect someone is killed.

c. We have no problem understanding that certain people "deserve" to be executed for their crimes. Where our faith is tested is when we see loved ones and friends unjustly killed, or perhaps when we see the godly unjustly killed for the truth of Jesus Christ. When we see those who do not "deserve" to be killed unjustly killed, it is at that time that our faith is severely tried. Whether it be the unborn child that is murdered in the womb, or whether it be the loved one that is murdered by a terrorist bomb, we may be tempted to question how God could possibly foreordain such heinous and unjust killing of people.

d. The Arminian thinks he has a way out of this dilemma. The Arminian says, "God did not predestine that murder to occur from all eternity. God only foreknew that murder to occur from all eternity. But the Arminian has not escaped the dilemma at all. For if God can restrain sin in history (which it is clear He does from many places in Scripture, such as Genesis 20:6), why couldn't He and why didn't He restrain all such awful sins as murder from all eternity? The Arminian has a helpless God. We have an almighty, wise, holy, and good God who divinely appoints from all eternity murder for His own glory and for the good of His children. Let's consider this more closely.

e. Whenever I find myself tempted to doubt or to question the wisdom and goodness of God in appointing what is evil to afflict the innocent or the godly, I am cast upon the wisdom and goodness of that same God who appointed the cruel torture and murder of the sinless Lord Jesus Christ at the hands of those who hated Him. He voluntarily laid down His life for our salvation, but at the same time Christ was unjustly murdered. Could there have been or ever be a more despicable or heinous murder committed than to murder our sinless Savior? And yet Peter preaches in Acts 2:22-23 that the Jews wickedly and freely killed Christ by the foreordained plan of God. Likewise the apostles with the brethren prayed in Acts 4:27-28 that the Romans and the Jews conspired together to do what God had foreordained to occur for His glory and for the good of His people. Dear ones, it is easy to see the wise, holy, almighty, and good God's foreordination of Christ's torture and murder isn't it? Why? Because all of the benefits of His death are specifically revealed to us in His Word. But it is not so easy for us weak struggling Christians to see the wise, holy, almighty, and good God's foreordination of the murder of the innocent or of the godly. It is not so easy to see God's good hand in the wicked molestation that you experienced as a child, or in the backsliding of loved ones and friends from the truth of God's Word, or in the untimely death of that loved one, or in the physical suffering you or a loved one suffers due to cancer or some other dreaded disease, or in the pain and anguish of a failing marriage, or in the constant struggle to keep up financially with the expenses that seem to never end.

f. Why is it not so easy to see God's good hand in these personal events of death, pain, and struggle as it is to see God's good hand in the murder of Christ?

(1) Perhaps to some degree it is because God has not told us the specific purpose for which we are suffering as He did with Christ's suffering. If we could only know the specific reason why we are suffering, we would be able to find some comfort in our suffering. We ask, "How will this pain

specifically profit me or others?”

(2) However, we must honestly ask ourselves, “Would we trust our infinitely wise, holy, and good God any more if we knew His specific purpose?” Maybe we would, but I tend to doubt it. For, dear ones, God has clearly revealed to us in a more general way that there is a good reason for all that we suffer (Romans 8:28, not “some things”, but “all things” without exception). And this suffering in Romans 8 includes being killed unjustly as we see in the latter portion of that chapter (compare Romans 8:35-39). We have this promise from God, who cannot lie (even if we do not know specifically why we or our loved ones are suffering), and yet how often we have found no joy, no peace, no comfort, and no contentment in that very clear promise of God. If we will not find our rest in the Lord when He promises generally there is a good reason for our suffering, why would we believe Him if He promised specifically there was a good reason for our suffering?

(3) The problem we may have is that such a promise of God is good for everyone else (we think), but not for me. Other Christians should believe that God has a good reason for what comes into their lives (death and suffering), but I must see the good reason before I believe it and receive it. Dear ones, this is doubting Thomas all over again. Unless I see with my eyes, I won't believe. I can assure you that such doubt in our good God will only lead you to despair and hopelessness, to utter futility and vanity, to misery and discontentment. However, growing and learning to cast all of your cares upon your Almighty God, who has a good purpose even for murder in the life of His children, is the only way to find hope, joy, peace, comfort, and contentment in this life. Do you want to be miserable? Then don't cast yourself and all of your cares upon your good God. Do you want the joy of the Lord? Then do cast yourself and all of your cares upon your good God. The choice is yours—misery or joy. I implore you today in the name of Christ, choose joy.

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