

THE TIMES OF OUR LIVES
EBC - May 27, 2012 (am)

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The Book of Ecclesiastes Is
 - a. Poetical - philosophical - polemical
 - 1) As such it difficult, repetitious & deeply reflective
 - 2) It is meant NOT just to read BUT to think about, meditate upon
 - b. Exploration - various ways people seek meaning & happiness in this life under the sun (apart from God)
 - c. Explanation - futility of life & all its pursuits without God..... as one has noted

He's not arguing that life with God is empty, but that those who attempt to live this life apart from God know only meaninglessness, futility; (? 1st Presbyterian, Jackson)

2. The Search for Meaning.....Chapters 1-2 - Lists 3 Ways People Search For Meaning
 - a. Seek meaning - *THROUGH WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE*
 - 1) **1:15** - Knowledge cannot solve all problems
 - 2) **1:18** - Knowledge brings increased sorrow
 - b. Seek for contentment - *THROUGH PLEASURE*
 - 1) Since learning & knowledge brings sorrow - determines to seek contentment in amusement
 - 2) **2:1** - Preacher says - **“Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.”**
 - 3) BUT no lasting satisfaction - **2:2** - **“I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?”**
 - c. Seek fulfillment *THROUGH ACTIVITY*
 - 1) Preacher builds, plants, designs - throws himself into activity with fervor
 - 2) **vs 11** concludes - **“all was vanity & striving after wind”**
 - d. BUT - GREAT TRIUMVIRATE fails - science - amusement - activity
 - 1) Apart from God these things bring no enduring meaning - happiness - satisfaction
 - 2) Apart from God - all of these things are empty - vanity - have no lasting meaning.
 - e. Where do you go if
 - 1) Wisdom will not supply meaning?
 - 2) Pleasure will not supply satisfaction?
 - 3) Work or human quest - will not supply fulfillment?
3. **Chapter 3** - Turns to Solution
 - a. **Chapter 1** - speaks about an ageless - continuous repetition..... **SEE 1:4-9**
 - b. **Chapter 3** - speaks again about ageless, repetitious cycles
 - 1) What good is it to be born IF eventually & inevitably you will die?
 - 2) What good is it to plant IF what you plant is eventually uprooted?
 - 3) What good is it to throw stones IF they must eventually be regathered?
 - 4) What good is it to go to war IF you will eventually make peace?

- c. Chapter 3 different
 - 1) vs 1 - No longer “*under the sun*” but “*under heaven*”
 - 2) vs 11 - God makes *everything beautiful in its time*
- d. Answer supplied is to UNDERSTAND - ACCEPT & BELIEVE that there is a Sovereign, Divine, Providential God who orders & governs all things in this world

B. COMMENTARY

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

- a. Among more familiar and probably quoted portions of Ecclesiastes & Bible
- b. Passage influence on pop culture - Byrds hit song - *Turn, Turn, Turn*
- c. But beyond its poetical beauty & popularity - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

2. Vs 1-8 - Events of Life Are Beyond Our Personal Control

- a. Passage Is NOT so much *PRESCRIPTIVE BUT DESCRIPTIVE*.

..... 1) Preacher NOT saying - that there is a time when you should set about doing all these things AND that a man's happiness depends on knowing when to do what. - NOW THIS MAY BE TRUE BUT

2) Preacher IS saying - God has appointed times when all these things will happen & His appointment is great & certain.....**SEE 3:14**

- b. We all like to think we are in control - BUT ECC 3 reminds us that *WE MAY DANCE, BUT NOT TO OUR OWN TUNE*
- c. There is a season and a time for every matter under heaven
 - 1) Time to be born & time to die
 - 2) Time to plant & time to harvest
 - 3) Time to mourn & time to dance
- d. We do not control any of these things
 - 1) I do not number my days
 - 2) I do not appoint the seasons of the year
 - 3) I do not control the events of life

3. Vs 9-15 - God In His Providence Is Controlling the Events of Our Lives

- a. vs 10 - God who has given
- b. vs 11 - God who makes everything beautiful in its own time
- c. vs 11 - God who ordains the beginning and end and all between
- d. vs 14 - What God has ordained is not changed by man
- e. vs 15 - God who sets upon the throne & orders the cycles - the events
- f. Luther writes

All of this is directed against the free will of man, and against all human purposes and fancies, but especially against the notion that it is in our power to determine seasons, hours, and persons, and measures and places (Ecclesiastes, Keddie, p 70).

4. Keddie Notes - Section Has A Corporate & Eschatological Tenor

a. **3:5** - couplet

*A time to cast away stones, and a
time to gather stones
together*

- 1) Jesus prophesied destruction of Temple - **“Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down”**
 - 2) In OT - conquering armies
Scattered stones on fields to make unproductive
Gathered stones for road to move the army
 - 3) Stone gathering - sign of judgment
- b. **3:2** planting & uprooting - **Ps 44 & 80** refers to taking Israel from Egypt to Canaan & nation’s subsequent fall

5. Fear of God

a. **3:14** - 1st time in book Preacher speaks of the **“FEAR OF GOD”**

- 1) Will not be the last
- 2) In fact he concludes book - **Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV) — ¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.**

b. **Ps 90**

- 1) Moses begins by speaking of the great, eternal & sovereign God
- 2) Then he addresses the temporary nature of the earth and man
- 3) Then he prays - **So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. (Vs 12)**

c. A life lived in the fear of God is one

- 1) Recognizes greatness of God
- 2) Realizes all my days - events . . . are in His hands
- 3) Lives a life willing obedience & thankfulness
- 4) Lives with a sense of eternity - judgment

C. APPLICATION

1. God’s Providence Is Source of Great Comfort

a. SEE 2: 24; 3:12, 22

b. Luke 4:28-30 - crowd was going to kill Christ

c. ps 31:15 - my times are in God’s hands - definite Messianic aspects BUT also teaches you & me

- 1) The events of my life are under God’s control.
- 2) No danger or disease can happen to me without God’s permission
- 3) God gives life - preserve it & takes it away.
- 4) All of life - - its origin - its continuance - its changes - its seasons - childhood, youth, middle age, old age - all are in the hand of God.
- 5) We shall live as long as God has appointed; we shall pass through such changes as he directs; we shall die when and where and how he chooses.

6) In the faithful discharge of our duty, therefore, we may commit all these things to him, and leave all at his disposal.

2. A Good Little Book I've Recommended is - *Tyranny of the Urgent*

a. Really has to do with how life's "urgent" situations press out ordered life

b. There is a Time . . . controlled & ordained by God

c. God only allows us so many opportunities

1) Worship

2) Family

3. **3:11** - God Has Put Eternity in Our Hearts

Made to commune with God - to worship Him, serve Him, enjoy Him

Made to desire eternal life & be aware of its reality

ONLY place joy & eternity meet are in Christ - you are invited to come to Him and exchange the tattered rags of your morality for His righteousness - your emptiness for His fullness - your lack with His satisfaction - turn to Christ and live - not just get along BUT LIVE!