



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Good & Sovereign

January 31, 2021

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Clint Pressley

3 *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*

² a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

⁹ What gain has the worker from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. 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. ¹² I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man. ¹⁴ I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be

added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. ¹⁵ That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

(Pastor prays)

It's difficult to be hopeful in a world that celebrates the killing of an unborn child in the mother's womb and promotes the elevation of gender confusion and transgender ascendancy. The last two weeks have proven to be a harbinger of things to come and hard days ahead for the confessing church, that's what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the believing church, we have difficult days ahead. We've felt it in our school as we strive to strengthen our position on Biblical sexual worldviews. It's enough to make a Biblically minded parent worry for the future.

As you think of those things and focus on the continual downward spiral of those things, you can feel the sense of futility bubbling up to the surface. It's almost a sense of hopelessness, that is, if you focus on life under the sun. And that's just what the preacher is doing in chapters 1 and 2 of Ecclesiastes. In chapter one and two, the preacher talks about the state of the world and our almost depressing place in that world. But something glorious happens in chapter 3. He brings our eyes up, he turns the light on and strengthens our souls as he casts his vision not on what *we* do but on what *God* does.

Chapter 3 tells us that so many of us have got it all wrong as we try to think of the place of God in our world. We are trying to fit Him in on a Sunday or at supper saying the blessing or during a tragedy. Or we are trying to fit Him in with a few minutes of Bible reading in the morning or evening. You hear it in the language. We threw God out of school when we abolished school prayer.

How small do you think God is? Chapter 3 doesn't talk about us trying to find a place for God in our world. Chapter 3 talks about us finding *our* place in His world. Chapter 3 introduces us to all the consuming goodness of God and the overwhelming and joyful security of knowing that this is my Father's world. And all that is – is God's, which is liberating and encouraging and should be food for your soul. So instead of wringing your hands at every foul turn of our society, let's turn our faces into the warm light of our Creator and rejoice in the soul-saving grace of His son Jesus. I want this to be an encouragement to you today.

No Matter What, Our God is in Absolute Control

Let's take a look at what the preacher says about God. All of this is about God.

God's plan is good

Let's read verse 1 slowly. **3** *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:* That is everything and every matter, all of it. There is not one rebelling molecule or ray of light that escapes the all-encompassing plan of God! Creation itself is marked by an orderliness which takes its origin in the divine plan and will of God! Even the sentence itself indicates God is taking pleasure in the unfolding of His plan in creation.

Look back again at verse one. **3** *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:* For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. That word *matter* is an event, *Hepes*. It means "to find pleasure." It's the idea that God's plan is good. The happenings in this world are good. We will get to the poem in a moment, but when you read it you will see that there are good and bad things listed in the poem, but the indication is that these events, good and bad, joyful and painful, are in God's hands and should not cause alarm.

Of all the people in the United States, Christian people should take great comfort that our God is in absolute control and His plan is good. So we ask, how do I honor God? How do I grow? How do I adorn the Gospel? How do I fight sin? God's plan is good.

God has set the boundaries

Here is the most well-known part of Ecclesiastes. It was popularized by The Byrds in 1965 in a song written by Pete Seeger. There are seven couplets of four, fourteen opposing actions. Just read a little bit of it:

² *a time to be born, and a time to die;*

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ *a time to kill, and a time to heal;*

I don't think it's wise to define and explore each element. It's a poem, and you need to take it as a whole. Life is composed of varying and different events and every one of those events is in God's time because He's the Lord over time! Isn't that what Paul says in Galatians 4 - in the fullness of time, God sent forth His son. Or in Mark 1, when Jesus started His ministry He said, "the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom is at hand." And in John 7, when they tried to arrest Jesus but they couldn't because His time had not yet come.

Even the gospel is given to us under the rubric of time. Romans 5:6 says, "for while they were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly." You must remember that God is the great author and artist in time, and He is creating a giant and stunningly beautiful perfect mosaic that we can't see! We are one little tile in His mosaic. Our God is in absolute control. His plan is good and He set the boundaries.

God gives the unremarkable

In verse 9, the preacher asked his driving question, ⁹ *What gain has the worker from his toil?* And then in verse 10 he answers it strangely by reminding himself, and us, that God's gifts aren't just the stupendous, miraculous, life-changing events. ¹⁰ *I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.* Business. Verse 10 seems to describe the everyday mundane events that fill up our time. When you get to the end of the day and you are asked, how was your day? You can answer, it was fine, not much happened. That 8 to 10 hours of unremarkable happenings, they are a gift. So instead of being bored or feeling slighted, we should be thankful to the giver that He has given us the "busyness" to be busy with and find a way to do the unremarkable and under-noticed to the glory of God. Finding your place in God's world begins with seeing this as God's world and each non-eventful day as a gift from the ruler of the world. My fourth point tells us why. Because...

God makes it all fit

Verse 11 is the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament. God works all things together for good for those that love God and are called according to his purpose. Look at the first part of verse 11. ¹¹ *He has made everything beautiful in its time.* Beautiful. Appropriate. He has made everything beautiful in its time. God is ruling the universe and orchestrating the events in this world to bring about His own glory. The world is not out of control, it's very much in control and any

hurt, persecution, discomfort, pain, tragedy, wrongdoing, any of that has been brought about so that we, His people, might display what it means to be identified with Christ in His sufferings, outside the camp. Not only that, unbelievers listen...

God put the hole in your heart

Verse 11 says, . ¹¹ *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart,* God has placed the innate longing, the unquenchable thirst for more, a thirst that people tried to quench with 1,000 different remedies. I think this is the foundation for a mountain of emotional and mental struggles. God has put eternity in man's heart, and eternity can only be filled with the *eternal* one, Jesus. Here is a good place for the Gospel if you are a non-believer. God has created us in His image, but that image has been disfigured by sin. The sinful nature that all people are born with and the sins we commit call for the judgment of God. God is a just judge but also a loving father who sent Jesus to live perfectly in a way we can't. Then, at the cross, Jesus takes the full wrath of God and gives His full righteousness to anyone who will believe. This brings me to my sixth point about God.

God's sovereignty is what matters

Let's read all of verse 11 but pay close attention to the last statement. ¹¹ *He has made everything beautiful in its time. 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 don't know what God has done and is doing. We don't know His plan. We can't speak for Him and like in Job; we can't even question His ways. One of the most freeing things you can do is trust God. Trust that He's holy and good . He is just and righteous and, at the cross, He is forgiving and brings men and women to Himself. God's sovereignty matters for a reason and point 7 tells us why.

God is the one who gives happiness

Let's read about it in verses 12-13. ¹² *I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live;* ¹³ *also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.* This is God's gift. Someone asked, does God want you to be happy or to be holy? And my answer to that is “yes.” Under the lordship of Christ, one of the greatest things you can do is to accept the simple gifts that God has given us

gladly and use those simple gifts the way that God intended. Verses 12-13 say be joyful, do good, eat, drink, and work to the glory of God. Because no matter what, our God is in absolute control. This passage ends with a flourish. I'm going to leave verse 15 out there because there are three great things about God in verse 14. Let's run to the end of this sermon with those three.

God alone is eternal

Whatever God does endures forever. Nothing we stake our lives on will last, and yet the Gospel teaches that any sinner saved by grace is forever secure in Christ. He alone is eternal and there is our hope.

God alone is perfect

Verse 14 B says that nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. We've talked about His plan being perfect, but so is His love. It is perfectly shown to us in the cross of Jesus. God alone is eternal and God alone is perfect.

God alone is to be feared

God has done everything in your life and all creation that we might stand in awe and worship Him and Him alone. He is holy, righteous, sovereign and just. We are sinful, unrighteous, doubting and guilty. But that great problem is solved by Jesus who lived holy, fulfilled righteousness, took judgment, absorbed the punishment, and victoriously rose from the dead, and provides forgiveness and reconciliation to this good and sovereign God.

Believers, be encouraged. No matter what, our God is in absolute control. Unbelievers, He's used the events in your life that you might stand in awe, repent of sin and by faith come to Christ.

(Pastor prays)