

God's Beautiful and Inscrutable Time – *Eccles 3:1-15*

Introduction – Can you hear the clock ticking in this passage? What word shows up over and over and over like the tock of a second hand? “Does anybody really know what time it is? Does anybody really care?” “Time keeps on slipping, slipping, slipping into the future.” “If I could save time in a bottle...” “To everything, turn, turn, turn, there is a season, turn, turn, turn...” These modern-day bards are dealing with a question we all ask, and Qoheleth, the Preacher, has answers. But they are not easily received by those who refuse to let God be God. And that is something with which we all struggle.

In the first section of the book (1:1-2:26) we found that Solomon was teaching us that man cannot find any ultimate meaning, satisfaction or joy in his life within his own power. Like faith, that kind of rest is a gift of God. Solomon is going to continue his argument, not change his mind as some want to argue, in this next section (3:1-5:20). What we will see is that God is sovereign over everything, including His giving of the good gift of enjoyment to us under the sun.

A Poem of Sovereignty – Behind all of man's activity is the all-encompassing plan of God and His decrees. There is a time for every purpose under heaven (v1). This means that the following poem is not about how we need to find the appropriate moments or seasons to act in a certain way. This poem is about God's activity, not man's. Verses 2-8 describe God's exhaustive determinations of all things that occur. Verse 2a is the perfect example: which one of us ever determined to be born?

Sovereignty and Responsibility? – If God is completely and exhaustively sovereign, foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass (and He is, Eph 1:4, 11), the question occurs, “so what does it matter what I do?” This is the question of v9 which Solomon goes on to answer. God keeps us busy in these things, because they are His things (v10). At the same time, we know that there is no problem with the complete sovereignty of God in everything and our complete responsibility for everything we do – at least not with God.

Beautiful and Inscrutable – Every child asks this question: why? And if he or she pushes far enough, we always find ourselves at the edge of wisdom under the sun; I don't know why. Like living under a giant needlepoint work, we can only see the knots and hanging threads. It makes no sense and it does not look beautiful. But Solomon declares by faith from the other side, God's eternal side. There, it is beautiful (v11, Rom 8:28). Although that nagging need to know all things is given to us (v11b), it is not because we will receive all the answers; we will not (11c).

Exhaustive Sovereignty (vv2-8) – Let's consider how exhaustive. God appoints our birthday and our deathday, and he does so for the plants as well (v2). God oversees when men and things are built up or torn down (v3). God appoints days of gladness and mourning and the emotions we experience in them (v4). He ordains the relationships, the closeness or tearing apart that occurs, the building and tearing down of things and ideas (v5). He directs the stock market, the gambling casinos, your checking account, and the amount of stuff in your garage, pantry, and laundry basket (v6). Grief and restoration are both His gift, and He appoints a man to say nothing or to say particular words (v7). God controls the destinies of our relationships, forming and dissolving them; and He controls the times of war and peace (v8).

Faith, Fear, and Rejoicing – The thirst for eternity is there to drive us to God. No matter what labor a man does, he cannot alter the plan of God. And this includes every evil and ugly action man or the weather has ever done. Christ was crucified by men who wanted to rebel against the plan of God, and their very actions of evil were the means by which God saved the world.

Rejoice (v12-13) – God does not give us the answers to the why questions. He knows every sparrow that falls to the ground, every single event of His creation, but we are incapable of knowing all of the “whys. What we are capable, by His gift to us, is to enjoy our labor and the good of it. We can taste and, by faith, see that the Lord is good, along with all of His predestined plans.

Fear (v14) – Why does God burden men with such a life, never knowing ultimately what is going on or why? So that we will fear Him. The “fear of God” shows up in Ecclesiastes at crucial points (5:7, 7:18, 8:12-13, 12:13). We know that perfect love casts out one kind of fear, but there is a fear that is present when we come to realize Who it is that we are approaching (Ps 2:11). In church after church, in family after family, do we see this kind of God-fearing people? Do we believe in an exhaustively sovereign God or some little idol?

Eternity in our Hearts Means – Ecclesiastes is a book of profound joy and honest faith in a God who cannot be put in a little box. **Why** – God made us in such a way that we will always long for answers; and they will not come.

Protection – This is the kindness and protection of God. Every action taken has profound implications for an eternity upon the world and countless souls around us. We would be frozen with inability if we knew how important every action we took was.

At the Last Day – we will see the other side of the tapestry that God has been weaving over and through us. And we are promised that it will be beautiful in every conceivable way.

Practice – We will never learn to give thanks in the hard gifts if we are not constantly giving thanks, enjoying our eating and drinking and laboring, in the easy providences. Resting in and practicing vv12-13 is so important, and so good for our souls.