

ECCLESIASTES
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
“Turn, Turn, Turn”
February 25, 2024

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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. ¹

Even as I read this, there are some of you in the room today of a certain generation who now have a tune on repeat in your head.

And...there are many who do not know what I'm talking about but ask your parents or grandparents about folk singer Pete Seeger. If not Seeger, then perhaps The Byrds.

Seeger's song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" has been popular since the 1950s, but when The Byrds recorded it in 1965 it went to number one and

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ec 3:1–8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

eventually became known as a Woodstock-era ballad calling for world peace.

But thanks to Seeger, many grew up unknowingly memorizing scripture.

But as we look to this section of Solomon’s writings, we care less about Seeger’s inspiration and more about what the Spirit inspired for his people and his church.

What is our focus today? Simple. Just three things to consider.

1. THE POEM
2. THE PARALLELS
3. THE PROMISE

THE POEM

The passage may not be a pop song, but it is a poem. We are not certain if Solomon, called The Preacher here, wrote it or is quoting a well-known poem of the day.² Regardless, the words here are ultimately for his glory and for our good. God loves poetry. His Word is filled with poetry. Some would say to God, is to love poetry.³

I remember when I was in junior high school and felt a creative urge to write a poem. It was someone’s birthday, and we were signing the person’s card. People were writing little notes for whomever was getting the card. So, rather than just write “I hope you have a great birthday (that’s what I likely would write today.)” I creatively put together a poem. It took me about 15 seconds to come up with this timeless treasure. Thus...it was a moment of inspiration. So I wrote:

*Violets are blue,
Roses are red.
I hope you have birthday,
Until you are dead.*

² Bartholomew, Craig G. *Ecclesiastes: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 162.

³ O’Donnell, Douglas Sean. *Ecclesiastes: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2014), 71.

I'm thinking about having that framed and selling copies on Etsy.

Unlike my uninspired and errant words, God gives Solomon words of prose. He slides into this poem after some very intense statements regarding his feelings of frustration and despair regarding life and time and how things seemingly just continue repeating regardless of what he does. Turn. Turn. Turn?

Yet, this poem offers more than a continued slide into despondency. This is the beginning of a shift in perspective. A needed shift for the writer. A needed shift for you and me.

There has been much written about the layout of the poem; the way it is written, and the phrases used. What is offered here is a listing of truths that are descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, there are statements made in clarity here that leave us thinking "Yep. That's right."

This is important to clarify because there are those who read everything as prescriptive.

THE PARALLELS

When we speak of the parallelism in this poem, we cannot help but dissect the writing style a bit. Parallelism is the structure of the poem, and this is the basic construct of Hebrew poetry. Every biblical poem uses it.⁴ The good thing for us is that this form of poetry is easily translated from Hebrew into hundreds of other languages without losing its form.⁵

⁴ O'Donnell, 70.

⁵ O'Donnell, 71.

The poem is repetitious. It consists of fourteen lines. Each is constructed similarly in what is called antithetic parallelism.⁶ Do you care? Probably not. But you should care about what this reveals.

Throughout this passage you will read a word or phrase. For example, “A time to be born” and its parallel response “and a time to die.”

There’s “A time to kill” – sounds like a John Grisham novel, right. Grisham knew what he was writing. The parallel response is “A time to heal.”

There are fourteen such connections. Some are easy to understand. Others are confusing. This matching of opposites is a poetic device known as “merism,” which not only emphasizes the extremism of each word, but subtly considers every feeling that would lie between the two extremes.⁷ In other words, this is more than a word salad of randomness, but carefully thought-out parallels that describe the reality of life as Solomon sees it and as we experience it.

He sees that this life he has grown to despise is full of these parallel realities. Is this comforting? Is this a “give peace a chance” passage? Likely not. At least not at this point.

The despairing one looks to these words and longs for more.

Is this a declaration of determinism iced with a layer of fatalism? It could be, but that would be short-sighted.

Yet, most people...even many of us...are more short-sighted than we would like to admit.

⁶ Griedanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 72.

⁷ Akin, Daniel L. and Jonathan Akin. *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016), 37.

You see, the words in this poem such as kill, weep, mourn, hate, and war, as well as the reality of death, did not exist prior to Adam eating of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Thus, as Solomon has revealed throughout the book thus far, and as we groan within our souls, our lives of despair are the result of paradise lost.⁸ Ecclesiastes is the lamentable reality that Eden was forsaken by sin and everything changed...for the worse.

Sadly, many who vocalize their desire to follow God, practically desire only half of God.

Think about that. We embrace the theology of life, and love, and hope, and grace, and power. We should.

Yet, many embrace a one-dimensional deity. They like to think of God as giving life, but not appointing the time of death.⁹

A time to be born, WITHOUT a time to die?
A time to plant, BUT NO time to pluck up what is planted.
NO TIME to kill, BUT ONLY a time to heal.
NO TIME to break down, BUT ONLY a time to build up.
NO TIME to weep, BUT ONLY a time to laugh.
NO TIME to mourn, BUT ONLY a time to dance.

And so on. This is a problem for some of you even now. Why? Because a pabulum-tainted, ear-tickling message *seems* to be good news, but there is no good news if not for the reality of the bad news of sin. There is no life needed in Christ if there is no death due to sin.

Why do people blame God when difficulty comes? Because they have half of God—the version that works only for their desires and not a God who is sovereign over all. Not a God who is God over time and who

⁸ O'Donnell, 71-2.

⁹ Ryken, Philip Graham. *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 82.

chooses, as Martin Luther stated, “You cannot live any longer than the Lord has prescribed nor die any sooner.”¹⁰

That statement leads many of you to want to ask me “What about?” questions. But I dare say, don’t miss the point. The point is that the sovereign God of all creation is God over *all* things and that includes all time. He is king and creator and never surprised nor taken aback.

But if we worship half a God, we will, as many have done, forsake the sovereignty of God initially turning him into little more than a somewhat divine version of ourselves.

And, unknowingly, that is what Solomon was sliding into. The emptiness within his soul was a longing for what was, without recognizing that what is, is also under God’s control. The paradise lost would be found once more, but in a way devised before the creation of time, for the glory of God.

THE PROMISE

The promise of God has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

In the frustration and lament about time and how it seems to be cyclical and repetitive, God provides an answer in Christ.

Jesus is our Savior and as Matthew Bridges stated in his hymn “Crown Him with Many Crowns” Jesus is the “Lord of years” and the “Potentate of time.”¹¹

As descriptive as the poem in Ecclesiastes is, it points not to a prescriptive way to live, but ultimately to a **prescription** to our current state.

Jesus knew when it was the right time for EVERYTHING.

¹⁰ Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works* (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1972), 15:51.

¹¹ Bridges, Matthew. “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” Public Domain.

Jesus was never late. Never early. He was always right on time.

Rest in this promise – Jesus always knew what time it was.

When was he to die? Not on the day the people originally desired to kill him, because the hour had not yet come. But on the right day, at the right hour, Jesus died on the cross.

Romans 5:6

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.¹²

He rose from the grave...right on time.

1 Corinthians 15:4

⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,¹³

He stated he was the vine and his followers were the branches. He is the Lord of the harvest so knew when it was time to uproot.¹⁴

He knew when it was time to heal. He knew when it was time to weep. He knew when it was time to laugh and celebrate. He knew when it was time for each emotion to be experienced and shared. He never laughed at the wrong time. He never said the wrong words. He knew when it was time to build up. He knew when it was time to tear down. He knew when it was time to seek lost sheep and when it was time to lose the goats who refused to hear his voice.¹⁵

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 5:6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Co 15:4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁴ Ryken, 83.

¹⁵ Ryken, 84.

Jesus has never been impatient. And the promise of the gospel is found in him.

This is the promise. He is the promise fulfilled. The only thing he does not know, by the Father's design and the Son's admission, is the day or hour when he will return.

But in God's providence and grace, in our desire to reclaim paradise lost, we can. This is the promise...

Revelation 21:3-4

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ¹⁶

...for those in Christ Jesus.

So, how are you doing with your time? Are you waiting on God's timing? Are you living your life knowing there is already set a time for you to die? The wise live with the end in mind. This is not morbid. This is reality. So, make the most of your time today. Redeem the time by surrendering.

¹⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Re 21:3–4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.