

The Rock: 07-26-2020

Ecclesiastes 3

First reading: Ecclesiastes 12:11-14

Title: A time for everything

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Theme:

In the writings of Solomon, we find a pessimistic cynic, who also is sorting out the truth of God and His goodness in all things. No matter the time or the season, God is in control and can be trusted.

Introduction:

In looking through my notes from a couple years ago, the last time I preached on this book, I was hoping for a nugget or two to bring forward.

Amazingly enough, I wasn't disappointed. I didn't find a ton, but I did find that God uses all that stuff which somehow comes out of my mouth and goes to your ears. Through the Holy Spirit, He translates it into something personally applicable and helpful for each of us.

I think this will help us as we transition away from Joseph and into our

next series "By faith". From faith to faith as it were, Joseph navigated and negotiated his life under the guiding hand of God.

In all of his ups and downs, God was his reference point, his anchor in everything. We are going to discover that this was the guiding principle of all the heroes of faith.

As we look at Abel, Abraham, Sarah, Moses and ultimately ourselves, and how we can keep from being caught up in the shifting and sinking sands of a world full of confusion.

Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, struggled with life's ups and downs. The injustices, the seemingly timewasting activities of day to day life, and strangely enough along the way, discovering that this was not what made him weary and tired.

In an interesting twist that I think speaks volumes to our struggles today, he discovered that it was actually too much pleasure, NOT pain and suffering, which wearied him.

"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I

kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun."

-Ecclesiastes 2:9-11 ESV

Strange, but very true today. A life of ease, convenience, "stress-free" living and accessibility to everything we could ever want. Say nothing of the basic necessities of life: food and water - makes us ill-prepared for the changing seasons and the concerns and strife which come with all that.

Now, I'm not recommending that we give everything up and move into a cave to learn a lesson. I am looking for us to gain some perspective and recognize that our worldview and way of living affects how we see others and the world.

The Story:

You see, too much pleasure actually wearies the soul, and dulls the senses. Too much pain frustrates it. Learning to balance and manage these in light of who God is and what He is doing in our lives

is key to genuine Christ-centered contentment.

In 1954, folk singer Pete Seeger added a few words and a melody to the words penned by King Solomon almost 3,000 years prior.

When the Byrds recorded it in the mid-60's, another time of great turmoil and stress in our country / world, they turned these verses into one of the biggest hits and most listened to songs of the time.

Why? It was a timely tune, with timeless lyrics, at a moment when we needed to be reminded that there is a time and a season for everything.

You see, just like right now, 2020, the 60's were an imbalanced time in an unsettled world. That brought about an inability to rest in God and truly understand and accept the flow of His created order.

Chaos became, and becomes the norm in this great "Cosmic accident". And yet, the reminder ringing out of the radio in 1965 was, "NO, there is actually a reason for life, a time and a purpose under heaven for each one of us."

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven"

-Ecclesiastes 3:1 ESV

Now, if that be the case, Solomon starts us off with the hardest one to face and to deal with. Birth and ultimately death.

"...a time to be born, and a time to die"

-Ecclesiastes 3:2a ESV

It's one of the harder ones here in the list, especially here in America. I can't speak for anywhere else, because I don't live anywhere else, but we have a very hard time dealing with and facing the truth that one out of one of us will die.

And knowing that there is a fixed time for me, as painful as that may be to think about, is as natural as the day I was born.

If life is defined by two dates and a dash, that dash in the middle which makes our life is so very important.

How we handle, navigate and negotiate this list Solomon gives us, builds that life. Make no mistake, life happens for all of us at 60 seconds a minute, and how we respond to that, speaks to our character.

God has ordered things this way, and this is one of Solomon's main points in this book. A book which at times, comes across

as written by one who is a pessimistic cynic, complaining about his world.

BUT -It is a world of his own making, being that our lives are the sum total of our choices. If we bring ourselves under God's authority and direction, we will live our lives in a balanced Christ-conforming way.

One which honors God and values others. We are no cosmic accident, no freak of nature given over to our feelings, emotions, outrage, and what seems to be our need to be perpetually offended.

It's as though we are just a bit higher up the evolutionary food chain like a turbo-charged monkey, giving ourselves over to everything that unsettles us.

God did not design us that way. We were not launched forward in a moment in time without a creator and purpose behind that moment.

No, there is a time for everything under heaven and much as with Mordechai's advice to Esther when she had to step up on behalf of her people, he told her:

"And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

-Esther 4:14 b ESV

In other words, you are no accident, the circumstances of your life, it seems, have been worked out by God to have you right where you are to help your own people. Do not shrink back.

To know that we are here, and purposefully so, with assignments that he gives us, actually is a deeply settling thing.

There is an appropriate time for everything. Our duty, at least in part, is to see the goodness of God in all of the seasons of life, as well as each situation we find ourselves in.

Learning that there is a time to plant, to pluck up, a time to kill and to heal, to break things down, as well as to build up.

For us, we've all been learning to walk out our faith right in the beginning of a transition (breaking down and changing ministry) through a pandemic, all the while building up another ministry.

Understanding and accepting what God has for all of us as our next project in reaching the last, the least, and the lost.

I have found a settled peace in knowing that what is going on in our world did not take God by surprise as if it knocked

Him off His throne: "Wow, didn't see that coming!" No! He is God!

The deep abiding faith that God is sovereign even when our own nation is being torn apart and divided, and the world is trying to figure out a good balance in re-opening.

That we as a country are trying to reconcile our past with our present and are seeking to bring genuine voice and concern to racial-injustice.

NOT loud outrage and this worldly virtue of offence, that creates zero room for constructive dialogue.

The Church ought to lead the way in civil, thought out, Godly wisdom and conversation. Holding the line when outrage and offense become the excuse to vilify an entire institution such as the police.

All because of the poor character of some. That is unproductive and leads to even more unrest. Know the times and seasons. Trust God in each of them.

The problem Solomon deals with here as the pessimistic cynic wins the day when he, and we simply fight to stay mad without prayerfully trying to effect solutions.

God's people need to help the world to see and to accept that there is a time to weep, and a time to laugh. We need to know when to properly mourn over things, and do so correctly.

What breaks God's heart ought to break our hearts as well. Does it? I hope so. Even in our frustration, we can understand that too is a righteous thing that we wrestle with before Him.

How we handle that frustration reveals, once again, our character. There is a right way and a wrong way to be mad.

And even Solomon saw Covid coming. Right? Look at verse 5b:

"a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing."

-Ecclesiastes 3:5b ESV

Social distancing all for the glory of God, right?

You see, if we struggle to balance the times and seasons, we become unsettled, unstable. That is because we are focused wrongly.

So, we ought to remember a couple of things that will help us every day.

First: God has got this, and He has our lives in His hands. Solomon's Dad, King David wrote this:

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

-Psalm 139:13-16 ESV

If this is how God operates even before I was born, how my faith must grow and be reminded that in the midst of all that we are dealing with: He has this!

We are here for such a time as this. This season in our lives has been given to us to impact those around us in a way that shines God's glory and peace.

Second: Learn to be like the men of Issachar:

"...Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."

-1 Chronicles 12:32 ESV

They understood the times AND what they ought to do in those times. Sometimes for us (for me especially) the second part of verse 7 needs to be taken to heart much more than it is:

"...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak."

-Ecclesiastes 3:7b ESV

Why? If we understand what we ought to do, we discover that silence in words and loud in action is the better route.

Because the same Solomon tells us in Proverbs that:

"When words are many, transgression is not lacking. but whoever restrains his lips is prudent."

-Proverbs 10:19 ESV

In an age of outrage, God's people need to be the loving voice of truth and reason. That is very difficult to do when it seems clear that the Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in 2020 seems to be telling someone that they are wrong.

There is a time to love, and that time is always, and yes, there is actually a time to hate. But we need to get some

clarification from the LORD Jesus and also the Apostle Paul here.

Jesus tells us that the defining mark of a Christian is their love for each other. I've referenced this before:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

-John 13:34-35 ESV

Sadly, and in our time and season, the Church is divided, but not over biblical issues. We are divided over non-gospel issues.

Love does not drive that fight. Pride and selfishness do. Jesus wants servant warriors, not hateful and vengeful voices.

Then Paul, helps us by reminding us that love is an outworking of our receiving and understanding of God's grace toward us.

Living that out then shows the world what things ought to look like. How are we doing in our day to day walking out of our salvation? Being that light and salt, which Parks will be talking to us about in September as part of our faith series.

For Paul says:

"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

-Romans 12:9-18 ESV

Application:

Listen, it is natural that we become unsettled in tough times. That is why we have His word AND each other.

That is why I love looking at my phone sometimes and every once in a while, I'll get a text: "Hey, I'm praying for you." Or "How are ya?"

Or, they share their struggles and that reminds me that I am not alone in this. AND neither are they, neither are you. Honest, Christian love that seeks the best for the other is what will win the day, every time! It is the counter-intuitive way of living in this world.

God has set us all down where we are, right now in this time and season, with all that is happening -because you have purpose and He has the plan.

Solomon closes this book with the purpose and call of every human being who wishes to live a balanced and fulfilled life, when he says:

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

-Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ESV