

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

November 9, 2008 - Skip MacMillan

A hint of God (in Ecclesiastes 2:24-26) moves to greater revelation of God (Ecclesiastes 3:1-22).

There is an appointed time for everything. 3:1-8

Time / Appointed Time = season, occasion, right circumstances, not a date.

In God's design there is a season for every activity under the sun.

"A time for war": conditions warrant no other option, but demand action by an aggressor.

"A time to be born and a time to die": a time to die is set in Psalms 90:10 as 70 to 80 years.

Yet, the wicked are said to "die before their time" (Eccl. 7:17) -Fox.

Something is terribly wrong when someone dies before their time.

"A time to laugh", say at a party but not at a funeral.

In all these activities, man is within the supervision of God.

God oversees these appointed times; we are to live within them and live well.

"Appointed Times"

1. Directs our attention to God and His sovereignty.

2. "Puts man in his place, far from being master of his fate and captain of his soul" -Eaton.
Humanity is not determining the appointed times.

3. Trying to move against the "appointed time":

Jesus said to Paul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14).

Gamaliel said, "if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38-39).

I wonder if the times when we force and strain to make something happen, if we are moving against such appointed times.

Contrasted with other times when things fall into place, working within those appointed times.

4. The call is to refrain from worrying and live in the present.

To worry and try to anticipate the "appointed time", you risk unnecessary struggle and anxiety. Be in the moment, enjoy today and enjoy life as it comes.

"Make the most of every opportunity for the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16).

Matthew 6:31-34.

5. Believer, you are to rest in Christ; your life is not in the hand of chance, fate, or a tyrant but in the hands of a compassionate, mighty, and sovereign God.

There is nothing to fear, not the past, present, or future, not something from within or from the outside, not your life nor your death. God reigns over time and seasons, and you are His.

“Under the sun” 1:14, 2:12, 3:16

What man can do and accomplish, the activities of humanity, human wisdom and knowledge. What our five senses experience.

Life “under the sun” is life without God, meaningless says Qohelet. It makes no sense.

Humanity is given two options: life “under the sun” or the alternative, life with God.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11

“What does the worker gain from all his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men” (v 9-10).

Referring to life “under the sun”.

Parallel thought is found in the story of Sisyphus.

Sisyphus: “The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.”

Camus: “As for this myth, one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it, and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain.”

This is how we can feel about work and life.

The thought of exerting our entire lives to accomplish absolutely nothing, utterly meaningless.

“What does the worker gain from all his toil?” Qohelet asks.

He is speaking about life “under the sun.” If you live only under the sun, what have you gained?

Is the sum total of our existence to painfully toil, gain nothing, suffer and die? Is this our lot?

If all that exists is life “under the sun”, our lives are meaningless and a burden.

However, this is only tragic if we were meant for something more, something beyond the sun.

Otherwise what is so tragic about a created thing doing what it was created to do?

What is so tragic about a tree remaining in one place its entire life, then dying?

Are we meant for something more? If so, what happened? How did we get here?

The “burden” Qohelet is experiencing has not always existed. There was a time when life was not a burden, a time when humanity lived in a beautiful place called Eden. There was no toil, no pain, no suffering, no lack of meaning because humanity was with God.

Only after man’s choosing to rebel and sin against God did God lay upon men the burden, a consequence of our sin, the Fall.

“. . . through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. . . By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:17-19).

The ultimate consequence of our sin is our separation from God Himself.

The tragedy is not the lack of meaning from our toil or the burden God has laid upon us, but that we are not living as we were built and designed to live, that is, in communion with Him. We are living in the restricted parameters of “under the sun”.

We are meant for something more than life "under the sun".

We are made to live with Him who exists beyond the sun.

We were created to live with God in the garden, to commune with the source of meaning and life.

God created us with this desire for eternal things. He set eternity in our hearts; we are eternal.

That's what makes life lived only "under the sun" (without God) so tragic.

We were created for so much more than just toiling in the soil. Our purpose is found in an eternal relationship with God.

The way to that life is through God the Son, He made a way through the Cross and Resurrection, gaining us access into an eternal communion with God, meaning without end, life beyond the sun.

Acts 17:24-31

Romans 10:9-11

"God has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. 3:11).