

Understanding the Times

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- [0 : 00] What time is it? Now don't look at your watch. I'm not talking about that kind of time. What time is it in your life right now? What season of life are you going through?
- If we measured our life in terms of the four quarters of a football game, here's a picture of it. Here's what it might look like. In the first quarter, that's from birth to 20 years old.
- So that's when you grow up. That's when a time of learning, of exploring. It's also a time of joy and pain.
- There's also good times, but bad times as well. The second quarter is when you're 21 to 40 years old. That's when you're trying to find your place, making your place in this world.
- This is when you really should be looking for that mate, settling down, establishing roots, having children.
- [1 : 09] Really now, this is the time when if we're going to mature, we mature. Truth is, we don't really and truly grow up in what you call be mature until the second quarter of life, this 21 through 40 years of age.
- Then there's the pains and sorrows, good times and bads in the second quarter of life as well. Third quarter would be 41 to 60.
- This is when you're established. This is when you are most focused. You know who you are. You know where you are. You know what you're doing. This is when you launch your children.
- When you launch your children out on their own and have the empty nest. This is when you have grandchildren. This is when you have joys and pains.
- This is when sometimes you have to start looking after and caring for your aging parents. The third quarter of life. There's good times and there's bad.
- [2 : 24] Then the fourth quarter, 61 to 80 years old. Generally speaking, this is when we're closing out our career. And for a lot of people, they're launching a second career.
- It's amazing how many people in their 60s and on up start new careers. Do things that they want to do, haven't been able to do in the past.
- Maybe do some things they don't have to get paid for like they had to during their working days. But as you get on up into the fourth quarter, most people have to adjust to a slower paced lifestyle.
- That's when you have recognized health issues. That's when you start realizing your mortality. It's in the fourth quarter of life that you really have to come to grips with the fact that everything doesn't work like it used to work.
- There's more pain physically. You realize you're wearing out. You realize your mortality.
- [3 : 34] There's joy. But there's pain. There's good times and bad. Not many people live beyond 80. And I know we've got a lot of people in this room that are beyond 80 and doing well.
- But if you live past 80, you're beyond the life expectancy. And so if you're beyond 80, we're going to call that overtime. Or we could say sudden death.

If you're 81 and up, and I hope I live to be that. You're winding down. You're winding down. Not all the way, but you're winding down.

A lot of people this age are struggling to stay active that want to stay active. Unfortunately, there's increasing loneliness because people you're close to die.

Unfortunately, there's decreasing independence because you just can't do what you used to do. There's more health problems. And you really do have to face death.

[4 : 45] But even in overtime, there's joys as well as sorrows. There's good times and there's bad times. I want you to think about it.

All the emotions and experiences that we have as we go through these quarters of life.

The book of Ecclesiastes actually summarizes them in poetic form in chapter 3. I want you to turn there with me this morning. Ecclesiastes chapter 3 is the most well-known chapter in this book.

What we're going to read in verses 1 through 8 to start with is considered the world's most famous poem on the subject of time. I want us to look at what we see here, this poem about time.

A time for everything. A lot of Bibles will have at the top as a caption. This morning I want us to think about how God intends for us to understand and experience the times or the seasons, if you want to call it that, in which we live and make progress through in this world.

[6 : 05] Let's read verses 1 through 8. A time to weep and a time to laugh.

A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together. A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.

A time to seek and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to cast away. A time to tear and a time to sow.

A time to keep silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.

He's telling us there's a time for everything. Notice in verse 2, the preacher, as he refers to himself, the writer, he begins by stating the big picture of life and death.

[7 : 29] There's a time to be born and a time to die. And the rest of these verses, if you think about it, just look at them, glance through there. They move through the different experiences of life.

All the varied human activities and emotions that we encounter personally or experience personally. Or we observe it in people we know.

Verse 2. A time to be born and a time to die. And really the rest of those sort of explains, summarizes in poetic form all the things that happen.

All the kinds of things. Everybody doesn't experience all of them. But all the kinds of things that happen in people's lives from birth to death. I want you to note how the poem expresses the complexity of life by pointing out the polar opposites in emotions and actions.

Time to born, time to die. Some of the opposites can be grouped together into a basic pattern of bad times and good times.

[8 : 44] It's obvious. Look at verse 3. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war in verse 8 and a time for peace. That's obvious.

Total polar opposites. Bad times and good times. But they're all not that way. All the seasons of life, all the times of our lives are not necessarily good or bad.

Look at some of these. Number 3. Verse 3. A time to break down and a time to build up. Most of the sports fans in here, and even if you just watch the news, we have seen how many NFL, Major League Baseball stadiums over the years being torn down, being imploded in order to build a new facility.

We see it all the time. Neither good nor bad. It just is. A time to break down. A time to build up. A time to embrace. A time to refrain from embracing.

Everybody needs to understand that. There's some people in your life, top of the list, your spouse, your children. Where it's just natural and spontaneous.

[9 : 57] You see them, maybe you haven't seen them for a while, you embrace them. We don't need to embrace everybody. You don't need to even think in terms of, I need to hug everybody.

Sometimes it's not appropriate. Sometimes it's not appreciated. There's a time to keep silent and a time to speak.

And we all could benefit from thinking about that more, couldn't we? Each of these can be good when done at the right time and in the right way.

This poem shows the complexity of life as well as the variety. Just glance through there. It's telling us that life is full of good times, hard times, and then in between times.

If you read that, it shows that life requires us to make many choices. We have to make many decisions that are difficult. That are complex.

[11 : 06] Some we just, we don't know. We just do the best that we can. Now, some of the things you see in that list, we could think of, they just happen to us.

Things like war and peace. That's not an individual thing. Some of these things that happens, talking about happens maybe to a nation, to groups of people, as well as individuals.

But, most of what we see in this takes place in relationships with other people.

just look at it. Think about this. If you danced with your spouse at your wedding, one of you is going to mourn when they die.

that puts it in the context of a relationship, a person. We might laugh together with a friend, but then weep later on when the one we used to laugh with betrays us.

[12 : 24] without thinking, we might reach out and embrace some people. It's just spontaneous, like I said a moment ago.

But we, deep down, we know, we instinctively don't embrace other people because it's just not appropriate. and think about this. Let's just be real honest now.

Over time, we grow to love some people, maybe a lot of people, and we come to hate some. It happens. He's not talking about what's right or wrong, good or bad.

The preacher here, he's just talking about time. He's talking about the seasons of life. He's talking about how life really is, and there's all kinds of emotions and experiences that we have as we go through life.

You know, how do you measure time? How do you measure the seasons of life? Personally, think about it for just a moment. We don't really look at the calendar that much as far as measuring our life, times of our life.

[13 : 33] We certainly don't look at a watch. We measure time and seasons of life more by our relationships than anything else.

You look back over your life, first quarter, second quarter, third quarter, wherever you are. You think about how you think of yourself. We identify more along the lines of being a son or a sister or a mother or a teacher or a grandfather or a something friend or a widow.

We think in terms of our life mostly in terms of relationships with other people. these are the times or seasons that God gives us that matter most.

Time with people. Time that involves people. That involves true relationships with people. Now look over the list one more time. Just glance at these things.

Look at them quickly. there's one common element about everybody's times or seasons.

[14 : 59] We have no control over most of these things. We have no control over most of what he's talking about. We don't determine the day we'll be born. We don't determine the day that we will die.

Surely you don't choose the days that you will weep. If it was up to us we would not.

If it was up to us we would just make sure that all our days were filled with laughter joy not weeping and pain.

You know we we make decisions every day. I'm not talking about we don't do anything. We make decisions we're supposed to make decisions we're held responsible for our decisions.

But the fact is the kind of things he's talking about here in this poem these things in the seasons of our life are almost completely out of our hands.

[16 : 12] we can't control them we can't predict them. There's a time for everything but we don't get to decide when those times will be.

I want you to understand that. Young people may need to especially understand this but others as well. There's a time for everything. There's a time about planting and plucking up killing healing weeping laughing mourning dancing but so often we don't get to decide when we dance when we weep when we mourn.

that leads us to the next major point in this whole section. We do not control our times God does. I want you to look back at verse 1 for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven under heaven that is significant so far the preacher has been talking about life under the sun and he's been talking about the futility of life under the sun a lot of things about life in this world is pointless and he talks about life under the sun he's talking about life where we leave God out where he's not involved things we do and so forth where we don't even bring God into our thinking or into how we act our relationship we have no relationship with him well this phrase under heaven most likely is calling us to not think of life under the sun like we've been doing but to change our focus now life under heaven life under the eye of God now it could be let's be honest some people believe that under heaven is just another way of saying under the sun but if you read all that's left in this chapter and we're going to read verses 9 through 15 in a moment it seems that Solomon is giving us a different perspective on life now he is he's bringing

God into the equation he's talking about what God does what God knows what we can and can't know about him ourselves we don't control our time God does and in the context of this chapter especially verses 11 through 15 we're talking about now life before God life under heaven note in verse 14 what God does look at the phrase endures forever and God is the one who look at verse 11 has made everything beautiful or beautifully fitting it's not beautiful in terms of the picture of loveliness but beautifully fitting or appropriate appropriate is the translation a lot of times besides beautiful God is one who has made everything fitting appropriate beautifully fitting in its time now think about it because God lives forever he works in ways big picture ways that will accomplish his purpose and he's not really working just in the little confines of our experiences or even our whole life we don't see everything

God sees we know that but we didn't let it sort of sink in we don't and can't see everything that God sees therefore some of the things that happen in our lives don't make sense I want you to hear that from Ecclesiastes other places in the Bible some things happen to us in this world some things happen around us in this world that do not make sense to us but that does not mean that they are not without purpose we can't see as God sees because we're not God we don't have that eternal or heavenly perspective as he does some of the things not only don't make sense but they just don't seem right they don't seem good this is where faith comes in the Christian I want to use I'll use the word religion but I don't like to Christian religion is a life of faith it's supernatural it's not just what we see and can touch and feel we have to know God by faith trust him

[21 : 12] Hebrews chapter 11 tells us in a big way we have to trust that our sovereign and good and wise God is working according to a bigger picture than we can see and we need to trust we've got to trust that his picture of our lives will turn out the most beautifully fitting they could possibly be see think about God has a picture in mind of your life of what he wants you to be how he wants your life to turn out who he wants you to influence and all these kind of things and God is working through all circumstances people everything in your life God's working to bring that about good times bad times sad times happy times let's look at some of the very things that disturb us here for a moment number three we will always have unanswered questions about what God is doing and why he's doing it now let's look at verse nine what gain has the worker from his toil

I have seen the busyness that God has given to the children of man to be busy with 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 think about what he's saying there part of being wise in this world is learning to accept that we have only a limited access to the big picture God is working on in this world God has made us in such a way look at verse 11 God has made us in such a way that we know there is a bigger picture it says he has put eternity into man's heart we know there is more to life than what we just see we know there is more to life than just our existence you know the

Bible tells us in Romans chapter 1 that God makes himself known through nature but the theologians call natural revelation the idea is God made human beings in such a way that when we look around at the complexity and beauty and order of nature there is just something within us that says that didn't just happen there is a God who made it and then in Romans chapter 2 Paul talks about how God has put his word in our conscience he has written his word in our hearts so that we naturally not understand all things about scripture but that we naturally understand right and wrong we are born into this world with an innate understanding that some things are right and some things are wrong that's because we created the image of God that's what God has done and this goes along with it God has created us look at it again verse 11 he has put eternity into man's heart we know there is more we know life is more complex than what we can understand but then look at the next verse or next part of the verse it says we cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end you heard that right

God has created eternity within us we know there is something else but he doesn't tell us everything about what the else is there is a lot of mystery in life there is a lot of mystery about the person and work of God and that is what this passage is talking about nobody has all the answers no one even understands all the questions God is not being cruel not a joke by not telling us everything we just can't understand everything about God because we're not God we can't understand his mind his ways his wisdom his purpose we'll understand some things in heaven but we'll never understand everything that God knows because we'll never be God David Gibson provides us with a good perspective on all this look at what he says it is part of living well to accept two things first we are enclosed within times bounds and second

God is not we live in time and space it's all we can see hear understand God does not what we do comes and goes but whatever God does endures forever we are each building the project of me constructing the edifice of our lives but as we do so we are neither the architect nor the site manager we are each writing the story of our lives but we are not the main author now if you have this sense in you of just you are independent you always do it my way that's very frustrating to you but that's the truth that's the reality God is sovereign over this world he is sovereign over our lives God has put us in this world made us as we are we have certain responsibilities we do make real choices that affect the way we live but God works in and through and around and in spite of our choices and decisions that means sometimes we just cannot understand why everything happens as it does in the world and even in our lives now sometimes we suffer pain and hardship because of things we willfully intentionally did that's the law of the harvest you reap what you sow sometimes we can do just foolish things and it comes back to bite us we suffer as consequences but some things happen we had nothing to do with it we said did nothing wrong whatsoever as you just look at life as we just live life sometimes we or other people suffer for no apparent reason nothing will ever be revealed in this world that will make sense of the school shooting in Florida last week or any school shooting and no answers will ever comfort the grieving parents of those who died there just are none we're going to see next week that God is just and that there's going to be a day of judgment there's going to be a day of reckoning for all people and there's specifically going to be the day of reckoning for the wicked and we're supposed to count on that we're supposed to depend upon God to settle the score to make things right one day we'll talk about that a little bit more next week but our questions remain

[28 : 44] God may be just but we don't understand some of them will never be answered and we just need to accept that here's the thing God is not accountable to us God does not have to explain himself he is God he is holy he is sovereign he is good he is all wise all knowing all powerful he is God and we are not he is not accountable to explain himself to us he does not explain everything he does he does not explain everything he allows we just have to accept it if that bothers us we just have to get over it if we're going to really have a relationship with God it's his decision what we know what we don't know but God can be trusted to work everything out for ultimate good you know the story of Joseph in a nutshell

Joseph a privileged son hated by his brothers sold into slavery taken to a foreign country he knew he didn't know the culture didn't know the language didn't know anything but he sought to be faithful to God and faithful to the man who bought him and God just raised him up in that man Potiphar's house he became the lead servant over everything well Potiphar's wife took a liking to him she tried to seduce him and one day she got his coat he was so committed to not sinning against God that way he said he just ran out from his coat she accused him of assault he wound up in prison he struggled there but finally by the grace of God somebody remembered Joseph in the prison brought him out to Pharaoh he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and Pharaoh put him in charge of all of Egypt prime minister of Egypt now that was all over 13 years

Joseph's brothers who had sold him things were bad at home they had to go down to Egypt and try to buy food and to make a long story short when they got to Egypt and they found out Joseph was the man they were dealing with they were scared to death they just knew he was going to justly exact revenge for what they had done to him here's what Joseph said to his brothers as for you you meant evil against me but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today Joseph understood what his brothers did were wrong it was evil he couldn't understand why they would do that but God worked through all that their willful mean intentions to save his people through Joseph Paul assures us that God's working for our ultimate good in Romans 8 28 you know that verse

Joseph's life story just plays it out this passage does not end with unanswered questions quickly it concludes with some very positive answers look at it we can experience joy and contentment during our times by trusting God's sovereign plan look at verse 12 quickly here I perceive that there's nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all is toil this is God's gift to man that's similar to what we looked at at the end last week a lot of us a lot of people including us as Christians have perfected the art of worrying a lot of people the way they react respond to uncertainty is to worry but as a result we when we do that we miss out on the blessings that God provides in the present God wants us to learn to enjoy his blessings today and do good with them is what he said in verses 12 and 13 we just read what stands out most that we ought to see in these verses is how what God gives us we need to readily acknowledge they are gifts from God he is not advocating this secular mindset of eat drink and be merry for tomorrow you may die this is an expression of faith in the goodness and grace of God he is telling us whatever God gives us the blessings he gives us enjoy them but enjoy them not just in and of themselves enjoy them as coming from God remember the giver not just the gift is what he is talking about we cannot truly understand or control the times or the seasons of our life but God can and God does he holds our times in his sovereign hands

God intends for us to be like children who trust their parents to know what's best because they can see what their children can't they know what their children are not capable of what they're not capable of doing or knowing such a relationship of trust in the life of a child is built on the character of the parents I know it takes a while for a child to trust that when a parent says no they mean it for their good but boys and girls teenagers there should come a time in your life where you reach the maturity to know my parents love me so much that they're willing to say no about certain things even though it causes conflict in the home even though it breaks my heart I don't get to do what I want to do even though it's just anything but good at the time when you reach that point of maturity when you realize your parents love you so much they'll do whatever's necessary to help you take care of you look out for you then you won't resent them so much then you'll be able to hear that no or not now as words of love words of wisdom that'll benefit you our God is a God of love of wisdom of kindness we can trust our times we can trust our lives in his hands if you ever doubt that remember he sent his son

[36 : 03] Jesus into this world to die to pay the penalty for our sins so that through faith in Jesus we can be forgiven made children of God for all eternity that's how much God loves us trust him with your times trust him in the season of life that you're in now regardless of what you think what you know what you don't know God is trustworthy let's pray together dear God show us now how we should respond to you show us father how we are responding are we fighting you are we just griping and complaining or are we trusting you and just seeking to be responsible learn what we can but accept what we can't so work in us dear God that we know what we ought to do if there's people in here who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior help them to see that is their greatest need right now so work in them to enable them to call upon

Jesus to save them and in an attitude of prayer you just obey the Lord and do what he's calling you to do and if you'd like to pray here at the front right now I will be here at the front and be happy to do that