

“Ticktock” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–15)(1.29.23)

Ecclesiastes 3:1–15 (NIV84) *A Time for Everything*

3 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:
2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

⁹ What does the worker gain from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on men. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good

while they live. ¹³ That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

¹⁵ Whatever is has already been,
and what will be has been before;
and God will call the past to account.

THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

LET US PRAY

“Ticktock”

INTRODUCTION:

Most of us think about eternity in terms of time. We think about it being infinite time, a time without end. It even seems that this scripture trends with that same thought pattern. It contains a poem of 14 lines where time is mentioned 28 times. In our holy scriptures, seven is the number of completeness; for instance, think about the Creation account. Time is also mentioned in the first verse with a somewhat parallel word of season. Then in the eleventh verse, it seems that there is a relationship between time and eternity: [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men. So, our initial assumptions about the relationship between time and eternity seem justified.

Karl Barth, the famous 20th century theologian who once appeared on the cover of Time Magazine, disagrees with that assessment. He preached,

“Perhaps today we understand anew what the Bible tries to tell us through the word “eternity.” At any rate we are more ready to listen when it speaks of eternity, than we were in the years and decades before the war [Most likely, he is referring to WWI, which was supposed to be the war to end all wars, or possibly WWII]. **Eternity is not time—in no sense of the word.** It is neither the infinitely vast sum of all times, nor is it the so-called new, better time that, after the passing of all bad times, will finally come to be. Eternity is eternity; and by that we mean that it is beyond, hidden from all times, separated from them by a gulf that (at least from an earthly point of view) once for all divides eternity and time. This gulf can never be bridged by progress and development. For faith, which actually carries us across the abyss, has naught to do with progress and development or with any other upward struggle and effort of man. Faith comes from God—“God has set eternity in the heart of man.””

A generation before Barth, one of my favorite preachers, Alexander Maclaren wrestled with the understanding of eternity in our hearts:

“The little child taught by some grandmother Lois, in a cottage, knows what she means when she tells him “you will live for ever,” though both scholar and teacher would be puzzled to put it into other words. When we say

eternity flows round this bank and shoal of time — men know what we mean. Heart answers to heart — and in each heart lies that solemn thought — for ever!

That eternity which is set in our hearts is not merely the thought of ever-during Being, or of an everlasting order of things to which we are in some way related. But there are connected with it other ideas besides those of mere duration. Men know what perfection means. They understand the meaning of perfect goodness; they have the notion of infinite wisdom and boundless love.

These thoughts are the material of all poetry, the thread from which the imagination creates all her wondrous tapestries. By the make of our Spirits, by the possibilities that dawn dim before us, by the thoughts "whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality," — by all these and a thousand other signs and facts in every human life we say — "God has set eternity in their hearts!"

BODY:

The rest of verse 11 says, "yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Isn't that the truth? We wrestle with the times and the appointed seasons of life. We try to discern purpose in life and particularly our purpose. We desire some control, but it is always out of reach. The very first couplet of comparison Qoheleth, our teacher, gives is a time to be born and a time to die. These are totally outside our control and they encapsulate all the other times. They frame our search!

Songwriters John Bettis and Albert Hammond wrote a song, famously sung by Whitney Houston, which expresses the angst of the human heart as we feel the tug of time against the eternity in our heart. The name of that song is "One Moment in Time." I have posted a video on RightNow Media in the Ecclesiastes Bible Study of Whitney Houston singing this song against a backdrop of Olympic athletes competing for gold medals. Here are the words:

Each day I live
I want to be
A day to give the best of me
I'm only one
But not alone
My finest day
Is yet unknown

I broke my heart
For every gain

To taste the sweet
I face the pain
I rise and fall
Yet through it all
This much remains

I want one moment in time
When I'm more than I thought I could be
When all of my dreams are a heartbeat away
And the answers are all up to me

Give me one moment in time
When I'm racing with destiny

And in that one moment of time

I will feel

I will feel eternity

I've lived to be

The very best

I want it all

No time for less

I've laid the plans

Now lay the chance

Here in my hands

Give me one moment in time

When I'm more than I thought I could be

When all of my dreams are a heartbeat away

And the answers are all up to me

Give me one moment in time

When I'm racing with destiny

And in that one moment of time

I will feel

I will feel eternity

You're a winner for a lifetime

If you seize that one moment in time

Make it shine

Give me one moment in time

When I'm more than I thought I could be

When all of my dreams are a heartbeat away

And the answers are all up to me

Give me one moment in time

When I'm racing with destiny

And in that one moment of time
I will be
I will be
I will be free
I will be I will be free

What is meant here by free? I am not endorsing the theme of this song. I offer it in contrast to the lessons we learn in today's scripture. It certainly highlights an inner drive to accomplishment, a search for meaning, and an inexplicable longing. It expresses the dance within the human heart between time and eternity.

Author, preacher, and seminary president, David A. Hubbard shared this story: "November 22, 1963, is an unforgettable day for those of us old enough to remember. I was entertaining a distinguished European scholar at Fuller [Theological Seminary] during the first year of my presidency. He had completed his morning lecture, and we stopped in my office on the way to lunch. Inez's face was blanched and her lips taut as she relayed the news that President John F. Kennedy had just been shot in Dallas and was on his way to Parkland Hospital. He, his family, and the entire nation were overwhelmed by an event over which no one seemed to have control.

Ironically, we learned that day, the President had planned to cite the words of Ecclesiastes' poem as part of his address. That irony has etched in my mind **the purpose of the poem**. It was not to encourage Koheleth's students to do things at the *right* time as though they had full freedom to choose, which was

probably to be Mr. Kennedy's point. The preacher's aim, to the contrary, was to warn them to **accept God's fixed seasons** and not to fight against the divine timing of the human calendar.

The point of the illustration is not to blame God for a tragic assassination but to call attention to the ever-present limits to human freedom. Daily we face the possibility of disaster, given the impact of the fall on creation, the rebellion of the human spirit, and the presence of the demonic in persons and organizations. Vigilance to do what we can and trust in God to make sense of circumstances beyond our control—these are the responses that help keep us sane in a world gone crazy."

Hubbard makes a true and poignant point, but there seems to be an error in his account. I searched online and found the planned speech of President Kennedy that he never got to make. According to those sources, which I read, there was no reference to Ecclesiastes. He did plan to quote King Solomon from Psalm 127:1 (NIV84)

Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchmen stand guard in vain.

It is a fact that President Kennedy liked to quote the Bible in his speeches. On November 25th, 1963 the official funeral service for the slain president was held at St. Matthew's Church in Washington D.C. The Most Reverend Philip M. Hannan offered the eulogy and used that poignant moment to highlight the passages from scripture that were most moving to the president. In that eulogy, Reverend Hannan did share that one of John F.

Kennedy's favorite passages of scripture was Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Because I use a daily email devotional from Dr. David Jeremiah, I also regularly receive other faith-based emails from his ministry. This week I received one that fits perfectly with Qoheleth's conclusions in verses 10-15. It is God that has laid a burden on men; or given the children of man business to be busy with; or tasks given the sons of men to occupy themselves; or the travail given to the sons of men. God has made everything beautiful; or appropriate; or suitable in its proper time (the good and the bad). It is God that has "done" from beginning to the end. God gives us the gift of work, toil, or labor; who provides for our eating and drinking. Human effort all passes away, but what God does endures forever. It is God that controls the circular rhythms of time and history.

Here is that email: Good morning Donald,

In these tumultuous times, we need to constantly be reminded: **God is in control.** Or, another way to say it is this, *Heaven Rules*. Even when our circumstances don't make sense to us...God is still God! And He's weaving the good and bad together to create a masterpiece.

In her book, [*Heaven Rules*](#), well-known author and my good friend, Dr. Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, uses the example of Daniel to reveal how seeing our life and world through the lens of Heaven's rule can shield us from panic—and provide renewed hope and perspective.

Daniel knew a thing or two about troubling circumstances. But, from the start of the Book of Daniel to its end—even while spending a night in the lion’s den, he remained a faithful servant of God. He understood what took King Nebuchadnezzar way too long to get (he even had to lose his mind and graze in the fields before he relented to this truth): ***Heaven Rules.***

As Nancy says in her book... “Our God in heaven is actively controlling and working through every single happening, event, and circumstance taking place on the earth, and He is doing it to accomplish His good, eternal, redemptive purposes.

He is doing it despite whatever you may hear concerning the state of our world while watching or scrolling through the news of the day. He is doing it despite whatever pops up as you check your email or social media feeds.

He is doing it despite the nervousness that’s ticking under your wristwatch while you’re perched in yet another doctor’s office or hospital waiting room, listening for your name to be called.

Heaven is still ruling. Heaven is *always* ruling.”

Dr. DeMoss Wolgemuth did a series of lectures on the Book of Daniel. I watched the first video and posted it in RightNow Media. She does an overview and gives the one passage of scripture that uses that specific phrase: Heaven rules. The context is that Daniel, a faithful Hebrew, is one of those in exile in Babylon. He has found favor with the powerful King Nebuchadnezzar. The king

has summoned Daniel to interpret his distressing dream of a tree.

Daniel 4:24–27 (NIV84)

²⁴ “This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵ You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. ²⁶ The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you **when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.** ²⁷ Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”

Are you now convinced that God is in control? At a minimum, we must acknowledge that we are not in control. Even in our own lives we have so little control. As Qoheleth rightly concluded last week, wisdom is better than folly. We will better navigate the time between our birth and our death when we walk in godly wisdom. Key to that wisdom is acknowledging the God of ALL creation – his power, authority, goodness, holiness, and love. Even when we are dealt a terrible hand of cards we must realize that somehow, somewhere, some way, God will use it for good.

Qoheleth tells us that the works of God have been done so that we will revere Him. The works of God have been done so that we will fear Him. the works of God have been done so that we will be in awe of Him. The Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men: Sovereign over the little kingdoms of our lives; sovereign over the kings and presidents of nations; sovereign over all that there is in time and eternity.

CONCLUSION:

AND then we have the most amazing miracle known to man; God entered human time. When the time had fully come, God sent Son.

Paul tells us in Philippians 2:5–11 (NIV84)

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

⁷ but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus is the gate of heaven through which we exit time and enter into eternity. But we do not have to wait until our death to enter eternity. Here are the first words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 1:15 (NIV84)

15 "The time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Have you answered the call of Jesus? Have you shared the good news? The kingdom of God is at hand – IT IS WITHIN YOU. This is the eternity that we seek.

AMEN & AMEN. LET US PRAY.