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Just About Time (Eternity Gives Time Meaning)
Ecclesiastes 3

July 2, 2017

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-{1}. **Ecclesiastes 3. Just About Time
(Eternity Gives Time Meaning)**

A. Background

1. Time's Effect

- a. time seems to have no real meaning for members of the animal kingdom
 - (A) at the first crack of dawn the birds are singing their greeting
 - (B) the rabbits, squirrels & chipmunks put in their appearances
 - (C) they have no fixed schedule for the day
 - (1) part is spend in gathering food as opportunity arises
 - (2) part in flitting from tree to tree; scampering place to place
 - (3) no day-timers; no deadlines
- b. but for us humans a different story:
 - (A) see somebody, do something, go somewhere
 - (B) start this job, complete that task, plan a project, and so on
 - (C) time can be a tyrant, subjecting us to great stress
 - (D) because as humans we are so very aware of how limited it is
- c. The Englishman Ralph Hodgson (1871-1962) wrote:
 - (A) **Time, You Old Gypsy Man**
Will you not stay,
Put up your caravan
Just for one day?
 - (B) using the picture of time as though it were a gypsy that wanders on and on, never to stop a while and leave one at leisure ... but time does not stop; it moves inexorably on.

2. Solomon's Argument in Ecclesiastes

- a. we have mentioned this before (and will again!)
- b. namely, that there are two perspectives from which a person may view and consider life
 - (A) there is the man-centred view of the natural man, "the man under the sun" ... and the result of that is that all of life ultimately becomes vanity, or meaningless
 - (B) there is the God-centred view of the spiritual man – to which Solomon turns abruptly from time to time in this book – which gives life purpose and meaning

c. this chapter applies this argument to the subject of time

B. A Time Series

3:1-9

1. Contrasting Events

- a. "1 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: 2 A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck 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; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw 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 of war, And a time of peace." (NKJV)
- b. Solomon notes that as time passes there arrive occasions or seasons which are fitting or suitable for certain events: this happens for every one who lives on this earth: some are positive, some are negative
- c. the first pair mentioned, are those which delimit the life under the sun – a person's birth and their death – beginning and end
- d. these 14 pairs symbolically set out all the aspects of life experience
- e. there is no need to go into them in detail today, for in each pair there are lessons that we could learn from God's word
- f. you can see that they cover such diverse areas as
 - (A) our livelihood
 - (B) our day to day actions
 - (C) our emotions and feelings
 - (D) our relationships
 - (E) our subjection to outside forces
- g. so man in seeing these things, will ask as in verse 9: "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" ... to which are ...

2. Contrasting Responses

- a. the natural person; the person whose point of view is limited to the five senses and the material world
 - (A) perceives these events but only as part of life's futility, vanity
 - (B) for some, as they experience these events, there comes a sense of fatalism, that there is nothing one can do to avoid them

- (C) for others, a feeling of weariness, as events press upon events, constraining them unwillingly into unwanted activity
- (D) but for all there is the rebellion against time's limitations that is like that rebellion in Eden when man wanted to eat of the tree of knowledge so that he could set his own course, rather than follow that which God had set
- b. the spiritual person; the person who has found an entrance-way for God to rule over their life
 - (A) perceives these events not as part of futility but as brought about by an all-wise and all-loving Father God for His creation
 - (B) who can by prayer seek discernment of those opportune times that God presents to His people to take hold
 - (C) who can recognise that all these events come into being and arrive as part of God's working all things together for the good of His people, to those who love Him
 - (D) who views them as a part of the fulfilment to the Christians given in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."
 - (E) what a difference that makes to us who belong to Jesus Christ!

C. A God-Given Task

1. For Mankind Only

3:10-11

- a. "10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. 11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end."
- b. this is a work which God has given to "the sons of men", which is simply a term for all mankind: in its largest terms, it is to seek God
 - (A) note the inclusiveness of this requirement; it extends to each and every individual who has descended from Adam & Eve
 - (B) men will occupy themselves with it whether they know it or not
 - (1) this is the impetus that dedicates men to science: physics, astronomy, medicine, chemistry, biology
 - (2) this is the force that drives men to study literature, poetry, philosophy and theology
 - (3) because God has created a universe that is beautiful
 - (a) it is intricate with every part fitting together
 - (b) the translates that word 'beautiful' by 'appropriate'
 - (c) not all apparent beauty is appropriate: "As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, So is a beautiful woman"

who lacks discretion.” (Proverbs 11:22)

(d) but God’s is, for it is intended to lead man to Himself

c. eternity – the sense of something above this physical world and beyond our place in time – has been put in the heart of mankind

(A) time – with all its riches, all its labours, all its accomplishments, all its pleasures, all its knowledge – in itself is vanity of vanities, utter futility and frustration

(B) it is eternity – that unknown and immeasurable realm in the past, that unknown and immeasurable realm in the future – the realm where God IS– it is eternity alone which make time meaningful

2. Solomon’s Evidence

3:14-22

a. the last part of this chapter pursues those results for those whose searching leaves God out of their considerations

(A) that in terms of death, they are indistinguishable from animals

(B) at least from human appearances

(C) though not in the final reality as is later made evident

(D) and in these verses there are further evidences that eternity must be taken into account if we are going to make sense of time & life in it

b. we have already stated the first evidence

(A) God has put eternal thoughts in the mind of short lived mankind

(B) that believers & non-believers both search beyond the limits and boundaries of time; to truth beyond this physical time & place

(C) the multitude of religions & occult practices

c. a further argument is that the Eternal God does eternal works, 3:14

(A) “I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.” (Ecclesiastes 3:14)

(B) the works of God are permanent: that everything He has done, is doing, or will do has the accomplishing God’s eternal plans as its purpose and outcome

(1) this passing world was created to further those plans

(2) mankind was created for those plans – which include eternal fellowship between the Creator and His creation

(C) the works of God are perfect

(1) in both the OT & NT we are told to add nothing to the the words that God has revealed

- (2) so also with the works of God: nothing can be added to them
- (3) any addition or alteration would spoil them
- d. finally, injustice prevails on this earth, yet justice must come, 3:16-17
 - (A) because God's nature is righteous and just
 - (B) "Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness." (Ecclesiastes 3:16)
 - (C) wickedness is equally well translated as "criminality"
 - (D) no matter how well & sincerely laws are made, the objective of justice is not met
 - (1) example on example is found in the Bible; in history, today
 - (2) because man in his fallen nature seeks to pervert justice
 - (E) and the place of righteousness, where the principles of justice are defined and assigned, is itself affected by man's criminality
 - (F) hence a time of accounting must come: "I said to myself, "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.'" (Ecclesiastes 3:17)
 - (1) wrongs must be righted, so, if that does not and cannot fully take place in time
 - (2) then God's nature demands that it be done in eternity
- e. eternity, therefore, is when the vanity, futility and frustration of this world, have their meaning manifest in God's Presence

D. Summation & Application

1. There is More to Say!

- a. in the light of OT revelation, the best that Solomon could give as advice, was "12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labour—it is the gift of God." (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13)
- b. how much more since "... now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel," (2 Timothy 1:10)
- c. eternity gives meaning to time; heaven, to life in this world

2. The Question

- a. we are left with is, "Do we regard time as though we were
 - (A) self-centred – as though God did not exist for 6 days a week?"
 - (B) God-centred – is God an essential part of our life and choices?"

b. for believers there can be only one correct answer.

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NAS New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NRSV New Revised Standard Version © 1989 National Council of Churches of Christ

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BM - Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
Calvin - Calvin’s Commentaries
EBC - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, MI:
 Ecclesiastes: J. Stafford Wright
Gill - Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament, by John Gill, D.D.
JFB -- Jamieson, Fausset & Brown
K&D -- Keil & Delitzsch, Volume 6: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
Kerux - The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.