

RWA 19 - Session 3

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[0 : 0 0] the sun. So we're going to fangle that being the case. Let me read all of chapter 3 for us. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under the sun. That's encouraging.

A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to break down and a time to build up. 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.

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 his time. Also he has put eternity into the hearts of, into man's hearts. Yes so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceive that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and do good as long as they live. Also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. This is God's gift to man. I perceive that whatever God does endures forever. Nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it. God has done it so that people fear before him. That which is already has been and that which is to be already has been and God seeks out what has been driven away.

Moreover I saw unto the sun that in the place of justice even there was wickedness and in the place of righteousness even there was wickedness. I said in my heart God will judge the righteous and the wicked for there is a time for every matter and for every work. I said in regards I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same.

As one dies so dies the other. They all have the same breath and man has no advantage over the beast for all his vanity. All go to one place all are from the dust and to dust all return. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth. So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work for that is his lot, his gift, his reward.

[2 : 4 4] Who can bring him to see what will be after him? Time. We're all very conscious of it aren't we? We were all having our roast and we saw that our session was going to start five minutes late. We've all pulled an all-nighter at university that time just ran away with us. Time. Think about your life and think about the part time plays in it. And don't just imagine what life would be like outweighed time.

Just imagine if the snooze button on your alarm wasn't a thing. Just imagine if you could really master something because you had time to do it. Just imagine if it wasn't reading Ecclesiastes in the short time that you had. But you could just go look the next 200 years I'm gonna read Ecclesiastes.

Time is a massive thing isn't it? And Ecclesiastes 3 is all about time. Time is mentioned 36 times in the chapter in one way or another. The preacher starts with a very bold claim. For everything there is a season. And a time for every matter under heaven. God has set rhythms into the way the world works.

Chapter 1 started with the idea of cycles. Chapter 3 is about fluctuations. Do you see there's 14 couplets of words? And they are to a lesser or greater extent opposites. So verse 2 there is a time to be born and a time to die. That is what begins and ends your life. At one point you were born in the cot and one day you'll die and be put in a coffin. God has set parameters for your life.

There is a time you will die despite what you think will happen. These fluctuations happen. Time to plant and a time to pluck up. Any arable farmer knows this. There's a time you plow and sow and then a time you reap and harvest.

[4 : 55] If you don't know that as an arable farmer you will be bankrupt. If you forget to sow there'll be nothing to reap. If you forget to reap it'll all be overgrown and wasted and shot through.

Time to break down and a time to build up. I work underneath the shard in London. Everyone's very proud of it. There'll be a time the shard comes down. Time to build and a time to tear down.

There's a time to laugh and a time to weep and a time to laugh. You all know this. It'd be very insensitive if your friend was having a bad day and you gave a hearty maniacal chuckle.

There's a time to mourn and a time to dance. It would be inappropriate for any of you to do the floss at a funeral. It would be inappropriate for any of you to go to a wedding in sackcloth and ashes.

Although my mother-in-law was very tempted to go to our wedding in sackcloth and ashes. Verse 5 is interesting. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones. The commentators have a field day with this.

[6 : 11] Some people think it's a time you throw stones during the fallow period of the field. Some people think it's about boundary markers being moved.

So there's a time to let your ancestral inheritance be open for everyone but a time for it to fence it up. One commentator called Richard J. Belcher, he says this is a Hebrew idiom for having sex.

That there's a time for having sex and a time for not having sex. I don't really know what it means but I think we should clarify before we invite anyone to do these things. Do you want to gather stones with me?

Could be an incredible shock if we're not all reading off the same page. But do you see what God says? There is a time for something and a time for something else.

And let's be clear, one doesn't always follow the other. But we're all conscious that there are people who have been through horrific trauma and their whole life has been a time of effort that they might not recover from.

[7 : 14] There are other people we know who seem to cruise through life and it's one party after another. Their life is a time for dancing. We know some people who are time to be born and time to die are way too close together that we're comfortable with.

And we know other people that live a hundred years and still look very youthful. I used to play golf with a guy who was 93. He beat me every time.

Because his time to die seemed to be a long way off in the future. It's funny, isn't it? Do you also see that those opposites cancel out each other?

That one day you plant and another day you'll pluck up. And you'll eat the food and there'll be nothing to show for it. You know times where you were mourning and you didn't think you would get through.

But you did get through by God's grace and now you're dancing and you wonder why was I ever so upset in the first place. You broke up with your first girlfriend and you weeped yourself to sleep for months.

[8 : 25] And then you met someone else and you laughed long into the night. And it's like all of that pain and all of that tragedy kind of cancelled each other out.

See the big question, as in chapter 3, as in chapter 1, is if we oscillate like this. And the net gain of both times is absolute zero. What's the point in doing anything?

But the point of Ecclesiastes is your life is misty, not meaningless. Your life is misty, not meaningless. You didn't actually get to see what time it is.

It's building time. Great. You build something and you're very proud of it. But then you'll die and someone will tear it down to build something bigger and shinier and with more glass. But actually, the message of Ecclesiastes 3 is across the times, over the long haul, is net gain zero.

There's no actual gain. There's some shrewdness in it. There definitely is a time to keep silent. Think about all the trouble we would save ourselves if we stopped speaking one sentence earlier.

[9 : 37] Before that thing came out that we couldn't put back in. And there's other times where somebody's faced with such tragedy and we don't know what to say. Or we could say that.

Time for your phone to be on loud. Time for your phone to be on silent. What is the point we say?

Well, the preacher says there's a lot of points. Look at verse 9. What gain has the worker from his toil? Well, what's the answer to that question all the way through? What is left? What is the profit?

Nothing. All this activity in verses 1 to 8. And his conclusion, verse 10.

I have seen the busyness that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. It's just busyness. Doing our own little projects in our own little way. And after we're dead, they'll probably die.

[10 : 40] And there'll be nothing left. It is misty, but it is not meaningless. It doesn't mean at sewing time you shouldn't sew.

And it doesn't mean at tearing time you shouldn't tear. And it doesn't mean at laughing time you shouldn't laugh. Or at weeping time you shouldn't weep. In fact, it would be insensitive not to. It's not telling you to be stoic or pessimistic or nihilistic.

It's just saying no, that in this time do this and in that time do that. But don't think doing this then will give you any legacy long in the future.

And act appropriately in the right season of life. But don't act appropriately so as to gain. Act appropriately because it's the right thing to do. You don't know what will come from what you do today.

You certainly don't know what will come from what you do tomorrow. But do it anyway. Because there's a rhythm of life to do this and a rhythm of life to do that. And actually what ultimately comes of it is totally beyond your control.

[11 : 46] Because God has set up the rhythms in life. Life is vaporous. But don't be paralyzed by that. Be freed by that. To weep when you should weep.

To mourn when you should mourn. To dance when you should dance. To cry when you should cry. To cast away stones when you should cast away stones.

And to gather stones when you should gather stones. Whatever that means. There are times for things. This has particular input to your work. I guess if you're a doctor you know this more than any.

And most of you seem to be doctors in some form. There isn't time to heal. But that person will still die.

There's a right thing to do. To do all that you can. To give them as long as possible. To give them as much chance to respond to the grace of the Lord Jesus as possible. But no doctor here saying do you know what I've got the keys of eternal life.

[12 : 51] It's not possible. Because God has set a time for that person to be born. And a time for that person to die. Still be a brilliant doctor. Still try and make those two as far away from each other as humanly possible.

But know that the net gain of all your effort will still end in a coffin. Unless the Lord Jesus comes back. It's inevitable. There's times you're busy with good things.

But be clear that your busyness doesn't ultimately result in absolute gain forever. You're not going to make a name for yourself. And if you do it will be as a byproduct of doing what you can with what you've got in the time that you have.

It won't be because you go, I really need to make a name for yourself and myself. The preacher says life is misty but it's not meaningless. Don't take Ecclesiastes as an example just to stay at home and watch Netflix.

It's not what it's saying. It's saying enjoy your life. Take every opportunity you have. Do the right thing at the right time. And that's enough for you.

[13 : 59] And do it all fearing God being conscious of him being conscious of you. The perspective says the preacher. This perspective will help you live skillfully in the world.

It'll help you do with all of your might what is absolutely right in front of you. At the right time to the glory of God. Life is vaporous.

It's a bit foggy. You can't see clearly the end. But do what's right in front of your face. That's what fog is, isn't it? The reason you drive 15 miles an hour in fog is because you can only see a little way forward.

So in that 15 mile an hour gap, seeing what you can, do the best thing with the time that you have. Worry about what's around the next bend or over the next hill or the next 30 years.

Do what you can in the time that you have with the opportunities that you have. That's what Ecclesiastes is saying. It's very much what Jesus says, isn't it?

[15 : 01] Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. While it's today, do today stuff. And tomorrow, do tomorrow stuff.

But don't worry about tomorrow stuff. Today there's a time for everything. Life is misty, but it's not meaningless. This is not depressing, it's freer. Play with a straight bat.

The ball that is coming down. How do you eat an elephant? One slice at a time. Don't worry about eating the whole thing. Just do it slice by slice by slice.

Every life matters. That's the message. Every hour matters. The preacher says we can easily waste the time that we have by worrying about the time that's to come.

And the preacher says, no. Today. Now. We must learn to pray. Father God, thank you for right now. And by your grace, help me to do the right things to your glory.

[16 : 03] So now what we do in the Lord's Prayer. Give us today our daily bread. Give me today enough to get me through. Because you're a good father and you've got tomorrow all. So now.

Help me live skillfully in the world today. Help me do the right things at the right time with the right efforts. Verse 9 is our theme verse.

What gain is the worker from his toil? What's left at the end? What's the profit? Nada. Zero. Sipa. Niet.

Yet. Your life is misty. You don't know the future. So do today.

You can see. Go on a walk. Massively enjoy it with the people you went on a walk with. Enjoying the health that you have and the views that you saw and the creation that you were in.

[16 : 59] That's enough. Tomorrow. Do tomorrow stuff. God has said it so we live in the present.

Because we don't know the future and we can't change the past. Life is misty but not meaningless. Time is going away. That is so ironic. But see in this chapter he also wants us to know that we have timeless tendencies.

I think there are four things in verses 10 to 22 that jar with that. Look at verse 11. God has made everything beautiful in its time.

God has made everything beautiful in its time. There are moments aren't there where we see a sunset or we gaze up at the night sky or we see gymnastics done in an amazing way.

And we just stop. And it's like the time stops. That we have an innate appreciation for beauty. Don't we? And time just seems to last as you gaze into the sunset in all of its glory.

[18 : 14] Or you look at a rainbow. You know that's amazing. Time seems to stop. And what is that? Well it's because we have fragments of Eden. Echoes of Eden.

That have given us a profound sense of beauty. And in those moments where you gaze up at a night sky. How do you feel? You feel very small.

Don't you? Like all this is going on up there and here I am down here. And God made all of this by speaking. And he knows me by name. It's because part of the echo of Eden.

Part of living in this twisted world where there's still fragments of very goodness going on. So that it reminds us that it always wasn't like this.

That that beauty that seems to still everything. There is profound beauty even in a fallen world. And as people it resonates with us.

[19 : 15] There are still glimpses of Eden outside of the garden. You see this in your work I think. In the house I live in in Campbellville there's a little patch of artificial grass.

And it gets leaves all over it all the time. So I have to get my leaf sucker out. It's my favourite gadget I have. A Bosch leaf sucker.

And I go along and I suck up all the leaves and it goes like this. Brilliant. I wish my grass was bigger. Not so I'd have more space. But I'd have more ability to suck leaves. But there is something once I've finished.

And I stand back and it's beautiful in its own way. What is that? Because God has given me appreciation of beauty. What did God do in creation? He brought order from chaos.

And what do I do with my leaf sucker? I bring order from chaos. You should all love the washing up. Why? Because it's doing the right thing at the right time.

[20 : 23] As one who's made in the image of God. What is washing up? It's bringing order from chaos. What are many of your jobs bringing order from chaos? Some of you have jobs about making beautiful things.

Do that with all of your might. Why? Because you still have this echo of Eden in you. That gives you a profound sense of enjoyment from beautiful things. Whatever your job is.

It's beautiful. And that gives it a sense of beauty and worth. That gives you a sense of now. If you're a doctor, it seems like most people here.

I never get bored of saying that. I have never felt so safe on a weekend away. I mean, I think I can just indulge in reckless behaviour right now and it'll be fine. Because it's like having the entire cast of casualty in my back.

If you're a doctor, you're bringing order from chaos. You're bringing health where there's illness. You're bringing hope where there's hopelessness. That's beautiful. And Ecclesiastes 3 would say there's a profound sense of beauty in what we do.

[21 : 35] Because God has made everything beautiful in this time. You have the ability to use your time to be on board with his agenda. And help make beautiful things in a fallen world.

Do you see also the end of verse 11? He's put eternity in man's hearts. There's something very awful about death, isn't there?

Funerals are awful. I took my first funeral when I was 25. It was a man who was kicked to death on his way back from the pub, leaving two young children aged 52 years old.

Awful. We stood on that graveside and his children cried. And it was almost like an otherworldly cry. I could still hear it.

They're like heart crying. Things are never going to be the same. This is wrong. Where's my dad? I'm never going to see him again kind of cry. And there's something about death that is really unnatural.

[22 : 44] The last conversation you had with them frozen in time. All the things you wanted to say and never did. All the things that you did say and wish you hadn't. There is something very unnatural about death.

And it jars with us. When David Bowie dies, when Prince dies, what does everyone say? He died far too young. Who said? Who said he died far too young?

He died at just the right time. But there is something wrong about death. And I think it's exactly because of this verse 11. Because God has put eternity in man's hearts.

We know this is unnatural. And let's be clear, it is unnatural. But as human beings, we were meant to live in a relationship with God for absolutely ever. With him being creator and us being creatures.

And we messed it up. And we keep messing it up. And as a result, people die. And it jars with us. Because it is totally unnatural.

[23 : 49] There is something inside you that says, I should live forever. And that's the way it really should be. Let's be clear moving down.

Verse 16. Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice even there was wickedness. And in the place of righteousness even there was wickedness. Like corruption is an awful thing, isn't it?

So many countries of the world are ruined by corruption. And we go, that is wrong. That where people look for justice and they find wickedness, that is wrong.

Because there is something in us that has an innate sense that justice should be done. That when bad people get away with stuff, it makes us feel queasy.

That is wrong. But do you see the writer of Ecclesiastes is absolutely nailed on in verse 16.

[24 : 57] Something profoundly wrong with wickedness in the place of righteousness. We long for justice. We used to run a food bank at Princefield.

And there was a guy called Luke came in. And I know his name was Luke because I always used to think he's Luke the lunatic. I mean, just a horrible guy.

Hated God. Hated people. Hated everything. Hated everyone. But would come in to read the paper and get some food from us. Hated us. And one day he was reading the paper and it was at the time that the Jimmy Savile thing had all blown up.

After Jimmy Savile had died. And this guy Luke was fuming because he was abused as a youngster. By a relative. And this brought it all back. I think that's why Luke was a lunatic.

And I engaged him in conversation and I said, what do you think about Jimmy Savile? And he said, if I saw him now I would kill him and I would believe it. He was a lunatic. And I said, like literally the bravest moment of my life.

[26 : 07] I said, Luke, but be clear. Jimmy Savile got away with it. And he put his paper down and he slammed the table. He said, what do you mean? And I said, well, he got away with it in his life.

He was a hero and a philanthropist and somebody who worked for good. And then he died and he got away with it. A hero in life.

And only once he died, Luke looked at me and he went, no! He will be judged. And I went, well, Luke, is he going to be judged by God? And the minute he said it, he was like, I don't believe in God.

This is all very awkward. And then we had a gospel conversation and I said, do you really believe that? He said, it's just got to be.

Bad people shouldn't get away with stuff. And I said, Luke, are you a bad person? I mean, I don't know what I'd have for breakfast. I was like looking the tiger in the eyes and taunting it.

[27 : 10] Come on, I don't know if you think you're hard enough. And he said, no, I don't believe that. I believe bad people, what's getting cut to them. And I said, Luke, do you think you've done some bad things that God might have a problem with?

And he went very, very quiet. He said, I have. He'd gone from being an atheist to being convicted of sin in like literally two minutes.

I'd never seen anything like it. And then I said, Luke, I think the only hope we have is bad people who have done bad things and were facing God's judgment is the Lord Jesus. He was so angry with me.

Slammed the table, threw the paper at me and he walked out. We have an intense sense of justice, don't we? This is great hope.

People denied justice under the sun. We'll know justice on the last day when the righteous judge of all the earth does right. We have a sense of justice. And Ecclesiastes 3 says we've got justice at the very heart of the way God has made us.

[28 : 21] Isn't verse 17 encouraging? I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked. For there is a time for every matter and for every work.

This is important. There is a time for every matter and for every work. God will judge what we've done with the gifts that we've got in the time that we have.

This isn't purposeless. This is using our time conscious of the God who is very conscious of us. There's something beautiful.

Look with me at verse 15 and I'll try and explain it to you. That which is already has been. That which is to be already has been. And God seeks what has been driven away.

This is the picture of God as a shepherd. And it says that things happen in this life that are unspeakable. Things that are profoundly wrong happen.

[29 : 26] And then people forget about them. And verse 15 says God doesn't forget about them. Those things that happen that seem to have got away.

God goes after them like a shepherd and he remembers them and he brings them back. That is so comforting, isn't it? That is so posturally helpful.

I think of some of the people I would try and help at Brunsfield. Abused growing up. Never told anyone.

No one ever knew. No one ever saw. The person who did it died. And they're so angry. And to say no God saw.

God remembered. God went chasing after that event and he's got it. And one day there'll be judgment. Things won't work out.

[30 : 32] Don't think that coming to Jesus makes it all alright today. But I know that coming to Jesus in the light of eternity it will be alright forever. There are some things that are so deep and so sore that we would be so glib.

To comment to them all things work together for the good of those who love them. Just imagine that. How glib is that for somebody abused as a child? That was a good thing in the...

That is an awful thing to say. But to say the end of verse 15. He didn't get away from God and he'll judge it. That's a great thing.

He'll judge the baddies. And he'll judge the goodies. And he'll judge what you did in the time that you have with the gifts that you were given. So do the right thing at the right time.

That's what it says. Sense of beauty. Sense of eternity. Sense of justice.

[31 : 38] It's what God has given you to make the most of your time. And you see that he's done it deliberately. He's done it deliberately.

What God has done lasts forever. End of verse 14. God has done it so that people fear before him.

Verse 18. I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them. That they may see that they themselves are but beasts. What is the reason God has given us time and it jars with us?

It's to remind you and me that we're creatures. We don't exist outside of time. God does. We don't have time to do everything and know everything and see everything and own everything.

Because we're creatures. God knows all of those things. We worship a God who's in absolute control of time.

[32 : 43] And we live in his world according to his timetable. Your job isn't to try and control time. Your job is to use the time that you have and the gifts that you're given to do the best thing.

So that on the day that God judges it, he says, well done, good and faithful servant. That's your job. Isn't that why when Jesus goes to visit Mary and Martha and Mary is busy running around doing, Martha is busy running around doing everything.

And Jesus says to Mary, you've chosen the best thing in this time. Why? Because I'm here and you sit at my feet. That's the best things we can be doing.

Doing. But I think chapter three, living in time, tells us to live life looking outside this world.

Every time you feel stressed, look outside the world and think, it's not always going to be like this. One day there'll be time for everything. Think about all the things that you're worried about and know that there will be a time for justice in them.

[33 : 54] Think about all the times that you're sad about death. Think it won't always be this way. Time is a great enemy, but it's also a great teacher.

Time is a great teacher that tells us, friends, you're creatures. And being stressed about time is part of your creatureliness. But know that God is saying, do what you can with the gifts that you have in the time that you've got.

That's the big message. That's true of your work and your relationships, your college course, your opportunities, your holidays, your friendships, your service at church, your recreation.

It's not meaningless. But it's finite and limited. So do what you can with the gifts that you have in the time that you have.

I knew it was going to be ambitious to do chapter three and chapter five. So we'll leave it there. And we'll do the messy drawer tomorrow. Should we do questions? Should I pray?

[35 : 06] And then we'll do questions. Father God, thank you so much for your wisdom. We want to acknowledge as creatures that you're our creator. Father, thank you that there is a time for everything.

And help us do the right thing at the right time. Help us to eat and drink and take pleasure in all our toil when it is the right time to do so. Father, every time we're stressed about time, Father, remind us that you are God and we are not.

And help us bring, help that to bring perspective to us. To know one day we'll be in a time outside of time. And have time for everything.

A time where there'll be no more mourning or stress or fear or death or pain or sadness. And so may we make the most of all of those things in the present, knowing that we won't be able to do them in the future.

Father, bless us and help us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Questions on Ecclesiastes?