

01-05-13b Ecclesiastes

We're ready now to resume our study in Ecclesiastes chapter 3. And we, I think, have established the context of this section, verses 1 through 9 of Ecclesiastes chapter 3. And the link to our 2 Samuel 23, 5, actually 23, 1 through 7, is in verse 5, which is when he says, he's indirectly quoting God, and God says that his house is not so, it's not ruling righteously in the fear of God, and therefore it's not producing that fresh grass from the earth in the cloudless morning. But he has set this everlasting covenant, ordered in all and secure, that is for all my deliverance and every goal, every desirable goal, that was not caused to sprout. Well, that goal, the word for goal is our vocabulary term in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, verse 1. The time for every purpose or goal under heaven, that is the same word.

And there's a text note in the New American Standard on that word that says, literally, delight. There is a time for every delight under heaven. They choose the translation event in the NASB, but they put a text note there and say that it's delight.

But this is a desirable goal. It's not just a delight in terms of a pleasure. It is something in which you get great and deep satisfaction.

And so desirable goal is the idea. So out of verse 1, and this is our summary of verse 1, and this verse, by the way, and I think I pointed this out last time, has an A-B-B-A structure in the Hebrew, because you have for everything, you have for all, there is an appointed time, the Zaman. And then in the second part of the verse you have, and there is a time for every Kepetz, which was our vocabulary term that we found in 2 Samuel 23, this desirable goal under Hashemayim, under the heavens.

And so you have all, time, time, all, is your sort of A-B-B-A structure. And this foreshadows the structure that we're going to encounter in the remainder of this very tightly woven poem. But the two concepts that stand out in verse 1 are, first of all, there is an appointed time for everything.

To everything there is Zaman. It has been established, and this implies that there is an actor or a thinker, someone who is planning and appointing behind this. And then there is a time for every desirable goal.

And so the idea is that in everything we're about to encounter in the next eight verses, there is a desirable goal. Because the word et, which is there's a time for the desirable goal, well that word et is going to be used 28 more times in this section. So every time we find a time for dot, dot, dot, in the next eight verses, the word et, it harks us back to verse 1, there is a desirable goal in each of these times.

What is the desirable goal? Well, it's the beautiful good. It's the tov that is tov in God's eyes. There is a way to take these appointed events and aim for the desirable goal.

Now that goal may not sprout, it may not have its fulfillment, but that's what we're looking for in that time. That's what we're shooting for. Well, what I want to do, we read through this in the first lesson, and we have a time for this and a time for that.

I'm going to use the board to diagram for you a little bit of the structure here, because it helps us to understand the emphasis. A laundry list of 28 different times could easily get tedious. But the way this is structured, and it's fairly easy to see, even in the English, but even more so in our Hebrew text, there is an underlying structure here that enables us to determine the emphasis.

So let's begin with verse 2. It says there is a time to give birth and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. So in verse 2, let me find a pen that's got some ink in it here, we have a time for giving birth. Some translations say being born, but as I pointed out last time, this is giving birth and a time to die.

And then the second line says a time to plant and a time to uproot. Well, if you look at these, one of them is more desirable than the other. We don't typically look at death or uprooting as a good thing.

But giving birth is one of the highlights for parents. The birth of children is one of the standout events in your entire life. And planting, everyone looks at planting as a positive thing.

You have the prospect, you have the hope of things coming to fruition and prospering and blessing and so forth. So if we were going to diagram these in terms of desirable and undesirable, and I'll just use the letters D and U, the pattern in verse 2 here is going to be desirable, and I'll put a dash, and undesirable for line 1, and the same thing in line 2, desirable, and then the undesirable is presented. Okay, we come down to verse 3, and it says a time to kill and a time to heal.

Well, it's not difficult to figure out which of those is the desirable. Killing is undesirable, so here we have U slash D, because healing is the desirable or the favorable, something that's positive. You have the negative and the positive, the beneficial and the not so beneficial perhaps.

Then the second line in verse 3 says a time to tear down and a time to build up. And once again, the pattern is the same, undesirable and then desirable. Well, right away you can see that in verse 3, we have the reverse order of what we had in verse 2, right? We had D, U, D, U, and now we have U, D, U, D. So, we can see that there's a, I'll just put an X here between verse 2 and verse 3 to show how this has been reversed.

When we come down to verse 4, we have a time to weep and a time to laugh. So, weep slash laugh, second line says time to mourn and a time to dance. What's our pattern here? Undesirable to weep, undesirable to mourn, desirable to laugh, desirable or favorable to dance.

We come to verse 5, we have a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones. This would be

literally cast away stones opposed to gathering stones. And the second line of verse 5 says a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.

Now, depending on what you see in the casting stones and gathering stones, embracing and refraining from embracing, we're not real sure which is the desirable and which is the undesirable. For now, just take it on faith that we have in verse 5 a desirable first and an undesirable second. This will become more clear when we go back and look at it in more detail.

So, we've seen, once again, we have a reversal in the pattern. Verses 3 and 4 began with the undesirable thing and then presented the desirable. Now we're back, so we'll put another X here between verses 4 and 5 to show the crossing of the pattern.

So, just looking at what we have so far, what do you expect is going to happen in verse 6? What will we have first, the desirable or the undesirable? We expect, following the pattern, we're going to have another desirable first and undesirable second. Sure enough, when you look at verse 6, a time to search and a time to give up as lost is what the New American Standard translates to as saying. What does your New King James say in verse 6? Time to gain.

This is literally to seek. We could say seek or gain and a time to lose or give up as lost. And then the second line of verse 6 says a time to keep and a time to throw away.

This is what I think about when I look at my garage. I haven't ever gotten to the time to throw away. Then in verse 7, he says a time to tear apart and a time to sew together.

Tear apart slash sew together or mend. Well, which one is the desirable? This time it's the latter, isn't it? So, just as we've seen before, you go for four lines and then you have a reversal of the pattern. So, put another X here and now we have undesirable and then the desirable.

And the second line in verse 7 says a time to be silent and a time to speak. This is another one we don't always perceive in the right way. Time to be silent and a time to speak.

And here, being silent is presented as the undesirable and speaking is the desirable. Then in verse 8, we have a time for love and a time to hate. That's a pretty easy one to figure out.

We have the desirable first, the undesirable second. So, we can see we have another X, another crossing of the pattern between verses 7 and 8. And then the final line in verse 8, a time for war and a time for peace. And once again, it seems as though the pattern has crossed because war obviously would be the undesirable for most of us and peace would be the desirable.

So, we have two lines at the beginning. Then we have the four lines of verses 3 and 4, four lines in verses 5 and 6. And then the two lines of verse 7, the two lines of verse 8, giving us a total of 14 lines. This is interesting from being an English major and that sort of thing.

I don't know if you've ever studied the sonnet form in English. Shakespeare wrote some sonnets.

John Donne and a lot of the other famous old guys from back in the early days of English literature composed in the sonnet form.

A sonnet is also composed of 14 lines. And in a sonnet, you have a very similar structure to what we have here. The first eight lines in a sonnet are two quatrains, two four-line sections.

Then that's followed by a couplet. You have two quatrains and then you have a third quatrain and then a couplet. So, you have four, eight, twelve, and then two final lines.

Well, in the same way here, if you look at verses 2 and 3 together, I'll just draw a line across between verses 3 and 4. Lines 2 and 3, that gives us a four-line section or a quatrain that is related by a chiasm or related by this crossing of the pattern. When you get to verses 4 and 5, you have a four-line pattern with the switching of the pattern in the middle, the X in the middle. When you get to verses 6 and 7, you have once again a quatrain or a four-line pattern with a chiasm or the crossing of the pattern in the middle.

And then at the end, you have this couplet and it is also opposed. The two lines are in tension with each other by having the pattern opposed. And you'll remember if you want to kind of complete the structure that the introduction up in verse 1 also had all, time, time, all.

So, we had a little introductory chiasm at the beginning. Well, this is all real neat and it diagrams out so perfectly, but if it doesn't carry some freight, if it doesn't communicate something to us, it just becomes...we were talking about the miracle of Christ when He cast out the demon from the deaf and mute man and the mute man spoke and the crowd was amazed. They were impressed, but they didn't go anywhere beyond impressed.

They began to explain Him away and the reaction didn't fulfill itself in change of mind. Well, we want to go beyond being impressed to respond to what's being said. Well, let's take a look at this first quatrain here, the first four lines in verses 2 and 3. Giving birth versus dying, planting versus uprooting.

Well, we know that planting, that's the beginning of life for crops and the uprooting, that's when they're finished. It doesn't say reaping though, it says uprooting. There's a time to plant and there's a time to uproot.

And the end of our life, our physical life, we don't think of that in terms of being reaped. We think of being uprooted. We're sort of yanked out of this life.

And so these two ideas are really related, aren't they? The giving birth versus dying. Giving birth is like planting. It's not your beginning, it's you giving birth to someone else.

And in a way, this speaks of the change of the generations because you sort of pass the torch to the next generation. You give birth to your children, you plant the next generation, so to speak, and then as they get underway and start taking over the world, you die. And so it's not so much

looking at the beginning and ending of an individual human life as it is looking at the turnover of the generations, which we saw back in chapter 1, where one rises as the other falls type of thing.

Then in verse 3, there's a time to kill and a time to heal. And, of course, we've reversed the pattern, but killing and tearing down are similar to die and uproot, right? In fact, there's even Scripture. You can look, for example, at Job 16.14. Turn over to Job 16.14. This is the language that's used in that passage of a human life.

I always like going over to Job. You have to really pay attention to who's speaking and where you are in that book. That's why we did that overview not long ago.

But Job 16.14, here Job is reproaching his friends. His friends have spoken and they've tried to lay off his pitiful state on some failure or some sin that he's committed. And he's saying, you know, even though I speak, my grief is not relieved.

Up in verse 6, if I remain silent, how am I eased? You've made desolate all my company. You've shriveled me up. Here these friends are supposed to be comforting him, and they're just shriveling him up with false accusations.

He says in verse 11 of Job 16, God has delivered me to the ungodly and turned me over to the hands of the wicked. Remember the Sabians came and stole his camels and he was wracked and ruined by a lot of enemies. I was at ease, but he has shattered me.

He has taken me by my neck and shaken me to pieces. He has set me up for his target. His archers surround me.

He pierces my heart and does not pity. Literally, he pierces my kidneys and does not pity. He pours out my gall on the ground.

This is what they used to call in the Old West being gut shot. He breaks me with a wound upon wound. He runs at me like a warrior.

Well, this breaks me with wound upon wound. This is being torn down. It's the same word, same verb here.

And Job is talking about his human life is being torn down. There is a well-known principle in the military service. The reason we have boot camps and similar programs for officer candidates and so forth is that you have to take the sort of weak and non-useful civilian identity that someone has adopted through the first 16 or 17 years of their life.

You have to tear it all down and then rebuild them in a military manner, rebuild with useful characteristics like reliability and loyalty and obedience and selflessness and orientation to the unit instead of the individual and an understanding of responsibility and authority. And a lot of times that's lacking. Well, you can't just sit down and reason with someone and say, you know,

we really would appreciate it if when the senior enlisted man or the officer comes and gives an order, you know, it'll really help everybody out if you'd obey that.

We don't have the means or the motive to try to do that. You just tear everything down. You destroy what's there and rebuild them and make them almost mindless automatons at the beginning where they will jump at the sound of an order and later on they can figure out how much sense it makes.

But you don't appeal to their reason. You basically do it by brute force. You tear down this useless structure in their soul and build up something in its place.

Well, so all of these really have reference to human life and it's human life within a generation. It's human life in the nation by extension. And there is a time when everything is new, when the potential is ahead of you.

It's been planted. You've given birth. You've got a child there.

Their life is ahead of them. They haven't made their mistakes. They haven't limited their options.

Everything is ahead of them. And then there's a time when it's all over. Your opportunities are in the past.

You're reviewing and looking back on the good and bad and on the ups and downs. This is what you have in verse 2. In verse 3, there is a time to kill and there is a time to heal. And these are general statements for a reason because they have a lot of applicability.

There are things that we need to kill off in our soul. We have attitudes. We have memories.

We have ideas and beliefs in some cases that have to be killed off. And there is a time for healing. And it has application whether you're in battle.

There is a time to go in and bomb Japan, for example, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And then following that, there is a time to go in and rebuild and send aid and relief and help people rebuild. Once you've accomplished the objective of the destruction and the tearing down or the killing, then there is a time to rebuild.

So the big question is everybody recognizes, I mean, even secular people say, well, sure, there's a time for this and a time for that. But why would Solomon be bringing this up in this context? What have we seen on the outside edges of this sandwich here? There is a good in God's eyes that is to be sought. There is a way to take these decisions because these are appointed times.

God has appointed these circumstances. But within these circumstances, there is a worthy goal. There is a desirable goal in each of these that happens under heaven.

So those were our two big ideas in verse 1. Remember, God appoints these events. There is a worthy goal in each of these times. There is a time for every worthy goal under heaven.

So here we are under heaven. We're under the sun. God has appointed these events, these times.

There is an appointed time for each of these things. So two things are going to be required here. We have all of these pairs.

We have all of these doublets and powers of two going on in this sonnet structure. There are two things that we need to think about. First of all, we have to discern the times.

Remember, Jesus told the disciples about this. I didn't write the verse down, but He says, You determine the times. You look in the sky and you say rain is coming.

You discern the seasons. You know when it's getting time to plant or it's getting time to harvest. But He says, Can you not discern the times? Can you not discern the signs of the times? Jesus gave the disciples and gave Old Testament saints and put it in the Bible to be there in the 70th week of Daniel, the indicators to know when it is time to get down from your roof and don't even go inside for your coat, but run and flee to the hills.

There's going to be a time for that. It's an appointed time. So the first challenge is to discern the time.

What is it time for? Is it a time to start something new? People are always wanting to start a ministry. They're wanting to start an activity. They want to do something new that they haven't been doing before.

Maybe they want to move to a new place, start a new job. Well, is it time for me to give birth to this new occupation or this new ministry? Or is it time to let something go? Boy, there's no truer place for this than in the church arena where you have a local church. And the need for the church has disappeared.

The unity, the reason that people came together is gone. But people are just keeping the church going for its own sake. They don't want to let it die.

Different people, maybe elderly people who would be better off just going to the chapel in their retirement home, for example. But people say, well, we just can't let the church die. It's become an end in itself.

There's a time for things to end. There's a time to graduate from grade school and go to middle school, junior high, high school. You can't stay in kindergarten forever.

You can't keep your kids at home forever. You can't keep them a baby. People used to dress

their boys like girls and have them in long curls and things and try to keep them babies for too long.

There is a time to let something end and say it served its purpose but it's over with. I think labor unions might fall in that category. But there's a time to plant and there's a time to uproot.

So the first challenge is discern the time. What is it timed for? Where does the wisdom and knowledge come from for that discernment? Solomon speaks of it before and after this section, doesn't he? God gives wisdom and knowledge to discern the time. What is the second challenge? The second challenge is find the worthy goal.

As you give birth or as you let something die, as you plant or as you uproot, as you kill or as you heal, as you tear down or as you build up, are you going to do it as a worthy goal? Are you looking at it in the context of God's purpose and God's plan or of our own? So discern the time and then in that time, once you know what it's timed for, what is the worthy goal? And, of course, these two interact. Sometimes you identify the worthy goal and you know what time it is. You say, well, what is in keeping with the plan and purpose of God? What is most reflective of the fruit of the Spirit? Each of these quatrains focuses in on a single idea and looks at it from different angles.

We'll look at these in more detail next time. But why is this all in twos and fours and eights? Because there are these two ideas, discern the time, discern and seek the worthy goal. That's our daily challenge.

That's where the good that is beautiful is to be found. That's where the eternal that supersedes and lasts beyond the end of this life and beyond the rising and setting of the sun is to be found. And that's a description of our calling in this age just as it was in the age of Israel.

Well, we need to stop here. We'll resume next time in Ecclesiastes 3, verse 4. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the privilege of living in this age, of having the opportunities and being thoroughly equipped for every good work through the presence of your Spirit and through the power of your Word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and memory of these things, that we will take the time to meditate on them and incorporate them into the daily aspects of our lives. Where we set our priorities, where we establish our goals, and then we move to carry them out. We pray that in all things our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be glorified and we ask it in His name.

Amen.