

Ecclesiastes (Part Four; A)

Who Is Really In Control?

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 19-May-12; Sermon #1102

In the first sermon of this series on Ecclesiastes I gave you three terms important to understanding Solomon's purpose in the book. Those three words were: vanity, profit, and under the sun. Following the finishing of chapter 2, I believe that we can add five more terms that are very important to the remainder of the book, and these five terms are: God; work; wisdom; death; and joy.

The first three all appear within the first three verses of chapter 1, and they generally lay a negative groundwork for much of the book, because if one looks only upon the surface of Solomon's lecture, life seems meaningless and profitless. That is an especially correct conclusion if one only looks at life from "under the sun."

Now as sons of God, we absolutely cannot afford to do that. God does not create things in vain. God's creations are purposeful, and they are done in love, and Ecclesiastes is most assuredly *not* about the meaninglessness of life. The truth is, it is exactly the opposite. Everything in life matters to some degree, from very minor all the way up to very significant to His children fulfilling His purpose for them. Ecclesiastes *is* about the meaninglessness of life *without* God.

In chapter 2 Solomon begins opening the door to help us understand that he did not perceive God as being a celestial spoil-sport. Now in chapter 2, God, work, wisdom, death, and joy all enter the picture, and Solomon is beginning to show that a relationship with God must be at the center of one's life. He also teaches that death is a reality that we must adjust our mind and our approach to.

Everybody has only so much time, thus adding a small sense of urgency to life, and as we grow to know God, we begin to perceive that even death is an act of loving judgment on God's part. And so as we grow to know Him, we

begin to be able to perceive this more and more clearly; therefore, even death is for our well-being.

In chapter two's conclusion, Solomon begins to show that work, wisdom, and joy are gifts of God. Life is meant to be enjoyed, and work can be an instrument of great satisfaction, and both are enhanced by the relationship with God, and wisdom is, in all cases, to be chosen.

In the earlier part of that chapter, Solomon's experiments reveal that in no case should one reach the conclusion that life's truly fulfilling satisfaction is found in things or entertainments. Those pleasures are temporary at best. Life's most fulfilling satisfaction is found in a godly relationship.

Turn with me to Ecclesiastes 3, and we are going to read the first eleven verses.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck 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; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3 is one of the truly significant chapters in the Bible for the Christian. It contains teaching very important for us to understand if we are going to be successful at living by faith through making right choices. Its significance is not directly stated. It is perceived by reading between the lines, made possible because one knows God and other parts of the Bible which can then be fitted into what appears in this chapter.

I am going to give chapter 3 what I believe is a fitting title. My title is: “Who Is Really In Control?” Who is really in control of *your* life? Let us make it very personal.

Living by faith hangs on the strength of our belief in answering the question in this title—“Who Is Really In Control?” Life has many “difficult-to-answer” questions that tend to make us despair that life is indeed meaningless, like—Why do the innocent suffer? Why do the wicked prosper? Why is there so much injustice? Why is life filled with so many trials, and many of them are life-threatening and creating a great deal of despair?

I believe that the book of Ecclesiastes presents a broad solution to the questions of this sort, but let us begin with this: Remember the title—“Who Is Really In Control?” But here is my question, or my statement. If people are in charge, then life is *indeed* a game of chance, whose rules are in turn controlled by the most powerful people amongst us. Now that is, on the surface, what most of us would see, and that is the answer that the overwhelming majority of people would respond to of the question, “Who Is Really In Control?”

We can see these people, and hear these people making decisions, and they may even get us into war, or they may wipe out our prosperity it seems we have been saving for all the way through our life toward retirement, and suddenly it is gone because some man made a decision about something.

Now I have not been giving you any clear answers really. I know what you are anticipating in your mind, and that anticipation is, I would say, correct overall, but we need more direction regarding this. So if men are in charge—(I think you know from your own life, from your own experiences you have had in life, especially if you are older)—you know that men’s decisions regarding things are subject to a great deal of error.

But if a just and loving God is in charge, then the transcendent eternal wisdom of that great immortal Being intersects our circumstances, overruling by directly involving Himself. So that is a very distinct possibility, as we will see. A correct understanding of this can produce hope

if a person believes that God is in control. It can produce hope in a person, because one then sees that things are not as randomly out of control as they first appear. There is a great deal more order to life than one would guess without a background in the Scriptures.

A man by the name of Joseph Krutch taught English at Columbia University in New York City between 1937 and 1952. Regarding man, he said, “There is no reason to suppose that a man’s life has any more meaning than the life of the humblest insect that crawls from one annihilation to another.” Well, welcome to a meaningless bug’s life!

The very highly regarded philosopher, George Santayana, taught at Harvard from 1889 until 1912. This is what he said regarding man: “Why shouldn’t things be largely absurd, futile, and transitory? They *are* so, and *we* are so, and they and we get along very well together.” And so he said life was absurd.

Did you notice that God was not considered by either man? Both of these men were brilliant in their fields of study, but the evaluations that they gave to mankind are really extremely short-sighted.

Now consider this important truth that we all hold as of great importance to our life’s perspective because we believe God. Listen carefully to this. *Of all of God’s creation, only man is being created in the image of God.* All insects are, among their own kind, exactly the same. Did you ever see one wasp that is different from another wasp of the same family? They are all exactly alike; however, every single human, including little old you, is a unique individual—*every* person who ever walked on the planet.

I asked Richard this morning if he knew any figures about how many people that demographers believe have been born, lived, and died on earth since the time of Adam and Eve. We both came to roughly the same conclusion that demographers usually figure about 50 billion people have lived and died. Right now there are somewhere between 6 and 7 billion people who are alive on earth at this time.

Not a single human being living now, or who has ever lived in all of history—50 billion or so—has or has had DNA exactly the same as yours.

Let that roll around in your brain. *You are unique* ! Nobody has ever looked like you. Nobody has ever lived your history of occurrences in life beginning at the exact moment that you were born, who your parents were, where you lived, what are the exact ages and sex of all of your siblings, and the exact incidences of your life—where and when you went to school, and how long you went to school.

Now if we are not unique, then we are not any more important than a bug, and life indeed has no meaning. Each human, you see, can think spatially, and we are especially conscious of the passage of time, and we know that one's life is moving away from some event and toward others, and we can consciously make choices between the alternatives, and this is why, brethren, the book of Ecclesiastes is not about the meaninglessness of life.

Everybody in here will respond somewhat differently to the words of this book. The differences may be just very subtle, minor things. Sometimes the differences will be very great from one person to another. Why we make these different perceptions regarding this is because our backgrounds are different, and because you are unique from the person who is standing right beside you.

And so Ecclesiastes is aimed at each one of us, even though we are so different; therefore, Ecclesiastes is not about the meaninglessness of life where nothing matters, but contrariwise, what Solomon is teaching us is because we are all unique, *everything* matters. Everything!

Ecclesiastes 3 is concerned with giving us an overview of such weighty matters for our consideration. Brethren, no insect, no bug can do such a thing. You are, before God, His own special creation. You are different, and He has to deal with each one of us on an individual basis. That is awesome! We can all come up with different answers about things honestly, simply because we look at it somewhat differently from the person standing right next door to us.

You let this roll around in your head, and you begin to understand why such a thing as war exists, of why peace is so difficult to attain, even between a husband and a wife. When we are wed we become one flesh, but we are not of one heart and one mind yet, but this is the way that God is going to bring

us until John 17 says we will be one with the Father and with the Son. We will all think basically the same way, and especially we will have the same kind of character even though we will be unique individuals.

What an awesome creation we are. And it is going on. We are not bugs. You are not even a dog, or a lion, or an elephant. You are so superior to any one of those other things God has created, and when we come to understand it, we are a higher, greater creation than angels. Let that roll around in your brain.

He wrote the book of Ecclesiastes for His kids so that we would understand a little bit about life that we did not have available to us before, and He had one of the smartest men who ever lived on the face of this earth be the one who wrote it. Ecclesiastes is an awesome book.

This puts us on the spot, because even though no higher animal can do the things we are able to do, we have to understand that we were not given life to be entertained. There is a very serious purpose being worked out, and some of us have a hard time grasping the value of what we have been given, spending our time maybe vainly trying to get our way against other people, over other people.

That's not what life is about. It is about pleasing God. It is about yielding to His creative powers and doing things we may know we should be doing, but we do not want to do it because that nature within us wants to fight against it. Well, God's purpose has been revealed to us, and it is our job, by and through faith, to make the choices to fit our life into that purpose, and what these otherwise brilliant men said was woefully uninformed. If what I just said is not true, then I think we may as well indeed be no better than a bug.

In Ecclesiastes, chapters 1 and 2, Solomon presents us with four reasons why life appears to be meaningless. In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon takes a very significant step, because he links us with God and he begins showing us through the mind of faith why *life is not meaningless for the sons of God*. The overall reason is because God is the most important part of the mix of personalities.

Solomon does not say Point Number 1 is this, Point Number 2 is this, and Point Number 3 is this. Rather, he does it this way. It is much more subtle, and he does it by suggesting that we look through the eyes of faith. We have to do four things. They are simple steps to understand. We have to begin by looking up “above the sun” to God. Do you get the point? He also then suggests that we have to look within, because there is something within man that links us with God. We just read it here in Ecclesiastes 3—God has put *eternity* in our heart. We have an innate desire to live forever. No bug has that. No lion has that. No elephant has that. Only human beings—and it is there because God put it in us, and it should be one of the driving forces of our life to take advantage of that.

The answers are in this Book. I do not just mean Ecclesiastes. I mean the whole thing. So he says we have to look within. We have to search within ourselves, because that something that links us with God is there. God has put eternity in our heart, and so we believe that there is something more to life than we can see on the surface, and it is this desire to live forever.

Solomon also then tells us that we have to look ahead, because something is ahead of us: the certainty of death. It is in everybody’s life, and it must be dealt with. Seven times in the book of Ecclesiastes he brings it up, and so we have to deal with it.

Three of those four steps that he is giving us are in chapter 3. The fourth does not begin until chapter 4, and that one is, we have to look around. And so we have looking up, we have to look within, and we have to look ahead, and we have to look around to what is going on in the world around us, and so we are just not looking at it in a sense of not being a part of it. We *are* a part of what is going on, but do we want to go in the same direction that all the other sheep are going? Do you get my point?

Is there anything in the world around us that will give us wisdom as to the choices that we should make? They are there. How many statistics do we get from our government of how many people are getting divorced, how many are getting sick, and on and on? There are all kinds of things that we can look toward and weigh and balance, and make choices. That adds the fourth thing we have to do in our life. So what is he saying? He is underlining this,

telling us that we have to seek God, and God answers through the events of life. This will fit better as we continue through chapter 3.

Now if there is somebody overseeing our life—and we know that there is somebody there—we know that He is going to give us guidance. He is not going to hit us on the head very often. He is not going to appear before us and give it that way, but the answers are available in most cases, and I have to admit I am blind to them myself very often. But do not give up.

Let us go back to Ecclesiastes 2, and verse 24. The reason I want to go to this verse is because it provides a positive bridge into chapter 3. It actually begins this way:

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

I am going to be expounding on this more in the next sermon on Ecclesiastes because these verses here are pretty important. I am touching on them right now just to give us a little reminder.

I just said a few minutes ago that we have to seek God. That is part of our responsibility as a son of His. We have to seek Him. He reveals Himself, but He reveals His purpose, His character, His mind, and so forth, and it is not given to us all at once. He makes us seek it. We have to look up. We have to look within. We have to look around. We have to look ahead, and so forth.

Ecclesiastes 2:26 For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

These verses here provide a transition into chapter 3. There is one more place I want to go to before we get into chapter 3 a little bit further. I want you to go with me to the New Testament.

II Corinthians 5:8-10 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

I am just touching on this so that we can understand that in our relationship with God, it is to Jesus Christ that we must give account. That is what it says there. We all stand before Him. He is our Judge, and it is His assignment from the Father to prepare us for the Kingdom of God. We all know that He is our High Priest, and that He is Head of the church, and it is His assignment from the Father to prepare us for eternity.

Now a priest is a teacher of spiritual matters. A priest, by definition, is a bridge-builder. Christ builds relationship bridges between us and the Father and the Father's purpose so that everything is connected together. Let us understand that the One we are dealing with most personally is the Son.

Back to Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:

We are going to consider a couple of the words here. First of all is the word "everything."

Everything The word "everything" is, I believe, used as a broad generality encompassing the events that are named in the next seven verses. We will get to that in just a minute and the verses that follow. "Everything" is a generality referring to the next seven verses.

Season Is a broad over-ruling scheduling at work. You can see the broadness in the sense of the seasons of the year. Each season is three months, and so if you are thinking about time, which we are in this chapter, time/season is broad.

Time This is the most precise of the words here, and it gives an orderliness that might not be apparent even to those who are experiencing the events. We will see about this in just a little bit.

So we have “season”—a broader period of time. “Time” is much more precise.

What follows this opening verse here is probably the most famous poem on time that has ever been written. Keep in mind, as we begin a more detailed look at chapter 3, that chapter 2 ended on a positive up-beat note, and what we are looking at here in the first 8 verses of Ecclesiastes 3 are grammatically-called “merisms.” Each merism contains a pair of opposites which, when combined, make up a whole. And so, evening and morning, as it appears in the Bible, would be a merism. The day is encompassed by both the evening and the morning. That is a whole—the two of them together—but they are opposites. The two opposites make a whole.

In Genesis chapter one it states that God created the heavens and the earth—heavens, way up there, and the earth down here. They are opposites, but the two of them together make up a whole. It means then that God created both.

What we are going to look at here are merisms and things that get down to your and my daily life. There are 14 pairs in Ecclesiastes 3, and each pair makes up a whole. Now what is their purpose? Each of these merisms indicates an event, or many events, within them which everybody must pass during one’s lifetime.

Here is a very important factor for us to understand and accept if we are going to live by faith. I want you to look right now at verse 9.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-10 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.

We have got 14 merisms, and the most important thing to you and me is not the fact that they exist, but they are *God-given*. Here is why I spent so much time trying to prove to you that you are an individual. Nobody else on earth

has ever been like you. You are different from everybody else. God has to do it to you individually.

Sometimes we will see this as husband and wife, because they are one flesh. These events are going to come into your life. In most cases, every one of them is going to come into your life whether you like it or not. If you are a son of God, God is going to lift you up at times, God is going to put you down at times. He is going to make you go through painful situations. Why is He going to do that? We will see in just a little bit why He does that. Solomon is showing us something very important.

We are going to go to the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 1 is something he says there that can apply to you and me as well, and we will connect it with another verse in Jeremiah just a little bit later.

Jeremiah 1:11-12 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see a branch of an almond tree.” Then the Lord said to me, “You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word.”

The word “ready” there can actually be better translated as “watching.” “I am watching to perform My word.”

As He did with Jeremiah, so does He do with you and me as well. God is watching what is going on in our life. We will connect this all together, because He is dealing with you and He is dealing with me in the same way as He dealt with Jeremiah, with Isaiah, with Moses and everybody else that is a big name in His Word. He dealt with them personally because He had responsibilities for them to carry out to be prepared for His Kingdom, and He has responsibilities for you and me to carry out in order for us to be prepared for His Kingdom. He is watching what is going on.

Of course the One who is most responsive to us, if I can put it that way, and the One we have to deal with, is Jesus Christ. But all through this, what you need to get across to yourself is that God is Sovereign over your life, and He wants to know whether you understand it, and whether you are willing to live with it. Is He your boss, or is He not? Do we respond to Him as our Father and our God and our Creator, or do we just ignore Him? He says, “I

am watching.” That is what He told Jeremiah. “I am going to see what you’re going to do with what I have given you to do.”

Our whole foundation may not depend on that one instance. I am just giving us a principle so that we understand. So what do we know from other places that God does with us?

God then provides each and every one of us with these 14 merisms which consume huge chunks of our life and time and our activity during our lifetime, and many aspects of these merisms, brethren, are not enjoyable. He wants to see how we deal with them. Do we quit? Do we turn to Him for strength and help? Is our faith broken by what He puts us through?

Remember I asked that question: Who is in charge? Who is running the show? It is God who orders life. That is what we sing every once in a while. Psalm 32. “It Is God Who Orders Life.” Do we really believe that? The issue for us is, are we allowing Him to be the Sovereign over our life? Those who do will please Him, and they glorify Him in the responsibilities that He has given to them.

You should be able to begin to see that these merisms, once we understand them a little bit better, are given by God to shape our character to prepare us for our future in the Kingdom of God, and Solomon is showing that God is sovereign over time. Is that not how Ecclesiastes 3 began—“To everything there is a season and a time”? God is shaping our life all the time for the end that He wants out of it. He is a Creator. He is creating, and we have to use our faith to show Him that we are responding to these things that He puts us through.

God has revealed Himself to us and His purpose, and so we should begin to know why they are happening. Are we willing to accept them in a good attitude?

I want you to go to Deuteronomy 8 where we have a very good instance of what we are looking at here in Ecclesiastes 3. Let us put ourselves into this situation that He is saying here. You know that He said this to Moses to be delivered to the Israelites, but our Moses is Jesus Christ. Think of Him saying this to us.

Deuteronomy 8:1-6 “Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. “Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.

What we have here, brethren, is a parallel that ties directly into Ecclesiastes 3. It is teaching us through Israel’s experiences after He revealed Himself to them and freed them from their slavery to Egypt.

Think of our own conversion. These are critical verses given to help us to understand that when Israel left Egypt under God’s guidance, things did not necessarily get any easier. The forty years in the wilderness was a season that had a specific purpose to it. It was preparation for what lay ahead, and what lay ahead for them was the Promised Land.

God guided them. God humbled them. God provided food and clothing for them. God tested them to see whether they got it, and would live by His Word and grow as the time moved toward each person’s death. A major difference between us and them is that the church is not physically assembled in one group, at one time and place during our pilgrimage. You know what has happened. We are scattered all over the place.

Can you see the net result of this? He is dealing with us far more individually than He ever dealt with the Israelites in the wilderness. We are

really a “hands-on” work through Jesus Christ. That ought to be so comforting and fill us with hope of the attention that He is paying to us. This is what Ecclesiastes 3 is about.

So what He did for the Israelites—maybe two and a half million of them out there in the desert of the wilderness—He can do for groups. Whether it is one person here, and one person there, a little group here, a little group there, He is working His miracles of creation in us. That is what Solomon is saying. He is doing it largely by these 14 merisms. Sometimes we are up, sometimes we are down. Sometimes we are prospered, sometimes we are poor. Sometimes we are happy, sometimes we are sad.

I hope you get the picture that God is manipulating these things. Men are not in control, and in one sense you and I have far less control of our life than maybe we ever thought we did. Somebody else is pulling the strings to put us into an event. We do have control over the choices we make. That is where we come into the picture. Will it be this way, or that way?

Will we follow the wisdom that comes from Him, or will we follow the wisdom that comes from the world? We have to look up. We have to look within. We have to look around and about and so forth, and then He lets us make the decision. If we make a wrong one, He corrects us. He does not give up on us. He is not impatient with us. He keeps working with us until we finally get it, and He rejoices because we are moving in the right direction.

So just understand that the only major difference between us and the Israelites is that they were one group in one place at one time. The church is not like this. It is scattered all over the world. It is a spiritual body, and God's attention to us is really focused on individuals. He is not entirely focused just on individuals, because there are groups, as Revelation 2 and 3 clearly show. He shows 7 churches there, does He not?

Did you ever notice how different those 7 churches are? They are pretty different. There were only two of them that He was really pleased with—Smyrna and Philadelphia. The rest He had pretty harsh criticisms for. But there were individuals within those groups that He had harsh criticisms for. They were very fine converted people.

The long and the short of putting Deuteronomy 8 together with Ecclesiastes 3 is that we should get the picture that God is actively governing His creation. He is not idly sitting by watching what is randomly happening. The 14 merisms are twice the biblical number of perfection, which is 7, but this comprehensive but orderly listing of events covers a broad range of events, and encompasses practically every aspect of human life.

The reality of time is very important to Solomon's theme in Ecclesiastes, and in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 he shows God is the King of time. He is sovereign over time. He regulates our minutes and our seconds. He rules all of our moments and all of our days. Brethren, nothing happens without His superintendence of our life. God is sovereign over time. He is running things.

Please understand that Solomon is in no way suggesting fatalism. Yes, God establishes the pattern—up, down, this, or that—but He always leaves the choices to us. It can be good or bad depending upon our choice, so Solomon is not saying that God is arbitrarily setting things and that there is nothing we can do about it. It is just the opposite. We have the right from Him to make the choices of the way that we will go.

Back now to Ecclesiastes 3. We are not going to go through each of the merisms in detail except for one, and that is the first one. Notice first that the more precise term “time” is used to introduce each merism rather than the somewhat broader “season.” Season indicates a fixed period of time in a predetermined event, like summer season, winter season, autumn, and so forth. The time is more precise, and so it can indicate a beginning and an end.

There is something very interesting here that is helpful to you, and it is drawn from the Septuagint translation of the book of Ecclesiastes. The translators who translated from the Hebrew into the Greek have two different Greek words that they could have used to indicate time. Every time they chose the same word. The two words are (1) *kairos*. They transliterate into the English “*kairos*.” The other Greek word you are more familiar with is (2) “*chronos*.” It transliterates into “*chronos*.” *Every time* the translators chose “*kairos*,” and this is very helpful to understand.

Chronos is time considered as a duration, as in, “How much time until such and such happens?” You would use “*chronos*” in a situation like that.

“Kairos” is viewed as an opportunity. “Is there plenty of time to do this?” You would use “kairos” there. “Kairos” is not arbitrary regarding time like “chronos” is; rather, it indicates fitness, suitable, or an appropriate occasion, an opportunity.

So in the human sphere, things like abortion and birth control can very easily give one the impression that man is in control of birth and death. God’s Word shows that birth and death are not human accidents but divine appointments. This really gets fascinating. God is showing us that He is in control of these factors.

I am going to give you a number of scriptures here. We are going to go all the way back to Genesis 15. We are going to begin here. God begins to show us that He is in control of birth and death.

Genesis 15:2-4 But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.”

God is showing Abraham right off the bat here—“I am in charge. Don’t you worry. I’m going to give you a son.” It is going to come from God.

Genesis 18:11-14 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” And the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”

Remember, Abraham is “the father of the faithful.”

Genesis 29:31-35 When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. [Notice that *God* opened the womb.] So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, “The Lord has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me.” Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also.” And she called his name Simeon. She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Therefore his name was called Levi. And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Now I will praise the Lord.” Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

Genesis 30:17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. [God gave the child.] Leah said, “God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband.” So she called his name Issachar. Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son.

Genesis 30:22-24 Then God remembered Rachel, [*God* remembered.] and God listened to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” So she called his name Joseph, and said, “The Lord shall add to me another son.”

Let us go to the book of Joshua.

Joshua 24:3 Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.

God multiplied his descendants. Are you beginning to see here? It is spreading away from the one family of Abraham out to others within the tribes, and *God* multiplied them.

Go now to I Samuel 1. This involved the birth of Samuel.

I Samuel 1:11 Then she [Hannah] made a vow and said, “O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.”

I Samuel 1:17-18 Then Eli answered and said, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.” And she said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.” So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

I Samuel 1:20 So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked for him from the Lord.”

Hannah clearly saw, and gave God the credit. I can go right through the whole book of the Bible. The Bible is consistent. It is God who is in control of childbirth.

We are going to look in the book of Job, chapter 33. Elihu is speaking.

Job 33:4 The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

Let us go to Jeremiah 1. I do not believe that I have to take this much further, because it goes right in to the New Testament, and it continues right on.

Jeremiah 1:1-5 The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the

womb I knew you; [He had Jeremiah all planned out.] before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.

God did exactly the same thing with John the Baptist, and of course He did the same thing with Jesus Christ.

Let us go back to the book of Job again. Job is speaking to God.

Job 14:1-5 “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue. And do You open Your eyes on such a one, and bring me to judgment with Yourself? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one! **Since his days are determined**, the number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass. [emphasis ours]

What is he talking about there? He is talking about death. God also controls that too, and that is sometimes a very difficult thing to accept. Are we willing to accept His sovereignty over time?

Turn with me to Isaiah, chapter 38. This is something you are familiar with.

Isaiah 38:1 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’”

Then came the appeal from Hezekiah, and God says to Isaiah then:

Isaiah 38:5 “Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years.’”

What can we learn from this? I think that it shows us, from this example, that we may foolishly hasten our death through quite a number of means, like taking foolish chances by not eating very well when we know better, by risking accidents in the manner that one, let us say, drives an automobile,

taking alcohol and then getting out on the road and not having the wherewithal to really have the automobile under control, of taking medications that sometimes act within the human body like alcohol does.

We can see here that God may even extend life as He did with Hezekiah, but we cannot prevent it when our God-ordained time is up unless God wills to change it then. Our days are determined, but God is willing to extend it under certain conditions.

I want you to see something that I think is really significant. It is in Psalm 139. Just listen to what David said, and how much David understood about His relationship with God.

Psalm 139:13-16 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.

Let me give you what the *Revised English Bible* says, especially regarding verse 16. They translate this verse in this way: "Your eyes foresaw my deeds, and they were all recorded in Your book. My life was fashioned before it had come into being." What is implied here is even its length. These scriptures show that from the cradle to the deathbed, God is overseeing our life. That is humbling.

Please let me repeat something. This does not mean that we take a fatalistic approach. When David said that God foresaw his deeds, what he meant was God foresaw what He wanted David to accomplish, and all along the way David was making choices about what to do with his life, and he did not always make right choices. But God never gave up on him, and sometimes David needed to be, as we would say, really spanked pretty hard and threatened. But in the end God judged him that he will be in the Kingdom of God.

Now what God did for David He will do for us. As we go along in life He has things that He wants us to accomplish. Do you not as parents want your children to do something? Do you not want them to accomplish certain things in their life, and are you not very pleased when they do those things? Are you not confounded or upset when they do not behave the way you know that they *should* behave?

God is a Father, and He creates us with purposes in mind for us to fulfill in our life, and He allows us to make the choices as we go along through life. He is always there to correct us, to turn us in the direction that He wants us to go. That is why we have to look up. That is why we have to look within. That is why we have to look around, and that is why we have to look ahead, because it is from those angles we make our choices regarding life.

If we choose to ignore those things and not cause God to be sought or His way to be understood, and we do not look within ourselves and we make all kinds of bad choices, He patiently turns us in the other direction, and hopefully we will make the right choices. He is not going to give up on you. Sometimes we give up on Him, at least for a period of time.

Well, I can see that I am getting to the end of my time here for this sermon, and I did not accomplish anywhere near as much as I wanted to in this sermon. I hope that you will forgive me for that, and that you will learn from these merisms. They are given there so that we will understand why our life goes through these fluctuations. God is pushing the buttons because He has a program that He wants us to accomplish in our life, and these things help to educate us and give to Him the things that He shows us in Deuteronomy 8. He wants us to learn, that we will trust Him, and that we will follow His way of life.