

Wired for Eternity

Ecclesiastes 3:9-22

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August 10-11, 2024

During the Paris Olympics, the best athletes in the world have been competing against each other, including Rocky grad Courtney Lindsey, who ran anchor for the 4x100 men's relay. One article referred to him as a *"a quiet champion in everything he did and didn't draw attention to himself at all."*

On the other hand, a few Olympic athletes appeared to be self-centered and proud as they strutted around the track wearing bling before their races started. Some of them were quoted as saying, *"I'm the best...I'm doing this for me...it's all about me getting a medal."*

I celebrated how some Christ-followers chose to leverage their platform for gospel purposes, like Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone who broke the world record and won gold in the 400m women's hurdles on Thursday night. Rather than boasting about herself, she gave all the glory to God: *"For a long time, my identity was in track and field. But I realized that first and foremost, I'm a child of God. It set me free to run the race God has set out for me to run...records come and go, the glory of God is eternal...I don't deserve anything but by grace, through faith, Jesus has given me everything."* She is obviously living with eternity in mind.

The title of our message today is "Wired for Eternity." Here's our main idea: *While we are mired to earth and tethered to time, we are also wired for eternity and will live eternally, in either Heaven or Hell.*

How many of you have been reading through Ecclesiastes this summer? Anyone read it three times yet? I received a note from an Edgewood couple on Friday which made me chuckle.

We had finished reading through two readings of the book of Ecclesiastes and were moaning and groaning about having to do the 3rd reading thru (as you had instructed). When along comes in the mail the other day "Today in the Word" and the heading of "What are we here for?" This caught our eye and sounded familiar and lo and behold it's a devotional on the Book of Ecclesiastes! Soooo...just to keep you in the loop we are now enjoying a daily dose of Ecclesiastes from this little book and doing our 3rd reading.

Please turn to Ecclesiastes 3. This chapter begins with the temporal and ends with a focus on the eternal. If last weekend helped us see there is a *season* for everything, today we'll learn that there is a *reason* for everything.

Last week we made some observations and applications from the opening verses as we discovered this truth: *Because God has a reason for each season in our life, we can trust His timing.* We'll circle back to the opening verses and pull in the rest of chapter three. I see six insights we must embrace.

1. Trust God's timing (3:1-8). Solomon states his thesis in verse 1 and illustrates it in verses 2-8: ***"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."*** Using twenty-eight statements, of which fourteen are negative and fourteen are positive, Solomon describes both disquieting and delightful times.

Let's walk through these contrasting pairs, noticing the key word is ***"time."*** We're called to receive rather than resist these rhythms of life so we can say with the psalmist in Psalm 31:15: ***"My times are in your hand."***

- **A time to be born and a time to die (2a).** God appoints both our first day and our last day on earth. Just as we accept birth as God's gift to us, we must accept death as being under God's control. Unless the rapture comes first, everyone must keep the two appointments of birth and death.
- **A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted (2b).** This is true in the plant world as well. God gives seasons to sow and seasons to reap. Proverbs 20:4 says, ***"The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing."***
- **A time to kill, and a time to heal (3a).** The word for ***"kill"*** is not murder but is the word used for capital punishment (see Genesis 9:6). There's a time to heal wounds by making things right through reconciliation.
- **A time to break down, and time to build up (3b).** There's a season for destruction and a time for construction. After surveying the ruins of the walls, we hear Nehemiah rally his team with this charge in Nehemiah 2:17: ***"Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision."***
- **A time to weep, and a time to laugh (4a).** In some sad situations, we should weep and in happy times we should laugh (Romans 12:15). I think of Psalm 30:5: ***"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."***

- **A time to mourn, and a time to dance (4b).** The word for “*mourn*” refers to “*wailing or lamenting*” while “*dance*” means, “*to skip or leap in praise,*” like when David danced before the Lord (1 Chronicles 15:29).
- **A time to cast away stones, and time to gather stones together (5a).** While there are various interpretations of this phrase, Solomon seems to be referring to the practice of throwing stones at one’s enemy or dumping rocks on his good soil as a way to keep him from growing crops (2 Kings 3:25).
- **A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing (5b).** There’s a time to be close with others and a season where it’s good to be alone in order to reflect.
- **A time to seek, and a time to lose (6a).** Sometimes we’re called to search hard for something and other times we have to let it go.
- **A time to keep, and a time to cast away (6b).** I think of young families who need to acquire baby equipment and then they get rid of it all at a garage sale when the kids are grown, only to buy it again when they become grandparents.
- **A time to tear, and a time to sew (7a).** The word “*tear*” refers to tearing garments as an expression of grief and “*sew*” speaks of a readiness to move forward.
- **A time to keep silence, and a time to speak (7b).** We’ve all had the experience of saying something at the wrong time, haven’t we? I think of Proverbs 15:23: “*To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!*”
- **A time to love, and a time to hate (8a).** This phrase covers life’s two basic emotions. While we’re not to hate people, we are to hate our own sins and to be repulsed by rampant evil in the world today. Romans 12:9 says, “*Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*”
- **A time for war, and a time for peace (8b).** While Pete Seeger and the Byrds added six words to this verse in the 60s to change it into an anti-Vietnam anthem in their classic song, “*Turn, Turn, Turn,*” true peace will only come when we turn from sin to the Savior, who is the Prince of Peace.

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2. Accept that you are made for another place (3:9-11). When Solomon observed the unpredictable times and changing seasons of this life, he concluded there has to be more. Listen to his despair in verse 9: “*What gain has the worker from his toil?*” When he seeks satisfaction on the horizontal level, he remains

unsatisfied. In verse 10, he says, ***“I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.”*** The word **“business”** is a word used for burdens and **“busy”** speaks of *“oppression and affliction.”*

With the exception of a few verses at the end of chapter 2, God’s name has not been mentioned much in Ecclesiastes. That all changes in 3:10-18 where we see reference to the Almighty 10 different times!

- Verse 10: **“God has given...”**
- Verse 11: **“He has made everything beautiful...He has put eternity into man’s heart...what God has done...”**
- Verse 13: **“...this is God’s gift to man.”**
- Verse 14: **“...whatever God does...God has done it.**
- Verse 15: **“...and God seeks...”**
- Verse 17: **“...God will judge...”**
- Verse 18: **“...God is testing them...”**

God alone has an eternal view and all we have is a point of view which isn’t any bigger than a little point. Once Solomon is reminded of God’s rule and reign over all things, everything makes sense for Him. Solomon’s gold medals would come and go, but only God’s glory is eternal. Only God is unchanging in the midst of the changes we see in life. Solomon makes three conclusions after he gets this truth straight in his mind and heart.

- **God has made everything beautiful in its time.** The word **“made”** means, *“to accomplish or complete”* and **“beautiful”** speaks of *“fitting and lovely.”* Even when we go through terrible times or sour seasons of life, let’s remember: ***“He has made everything beautiful in its time.”*** Write this down: *Trusting in God’s will means trusting in God’s timing.* God always acts for your ultimate good, even when it doesn’t seem like it’s for your immediate good.
- **He has put eternity into man’s heart.** We are made with a longing to know God because He has implanted eternity in our hearts. We see this in Romans 1:19: ***“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”*** A quote incorrectly attributed to Pascal but nevertheless true, puts it profoundly: *“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person, and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus*

Christ.” This is similar to what Augustine said: “*Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.*”

One of the best books on missions I’ve read is called, *Peace Child* by Don Richardson. As a missionary to the cannibalistic, headhunting Sawi tribe of Irian Jaya, he struggled to find a way to communicate the gospel message to them. The villages constantly fought among themselves, and because revenge and murder were highly honored, there seemed to be no hope of peace. Eventually he discovered the Sawi had a legendary custom that if one village gave a baby boy to another village, peace would prevail between them as long as the child lived. This boy was called a “peace child.”

Richardson used this connect point to help them see Jesus as God’s “Peace Child.” Because Jesus lives eternally His peace will never end. This *redemptive analogy* was the key which unlocked the gospel for the Sawis. In a miraculous working of the Holy Spirit, many came to faith in Christ, and a strong, evangelistic church was launched.

Since then, Richardson has studied cultures throughout the world and discovered redemptive analogies within hundreds of them. In his follow-up book called, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, Richardson gives fascinating, real-life examples of ways people groups exhibit terms and concepts which have prepared them for the gospel. God is using all this to bring the nations to Himself, bearing out the truth from Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God “*has put eternity into man’s heart.*”

- **We cannot fully understand who God is and what He does.** While we can know a lot about God through His Word and by studying His order in the world, we can’t know everything about Him or why He does what He does as 1 Corinthians 13:12 says: “*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been known fully.*” While God has set a definite time for everything, He has not revealed all the details. I like how Job put it in Job 26:14: “*Behold, these are but the outskirts of His ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?*”

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3. Enjoy life (3:12-13). In light of God’s reign and rule, we’re called to live a life of rejoicing according to verses 12-13: ***“I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to 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.”*** In my reading of Ecclesiastes, I came across another very encouraging verse. No matter how hard life is, God can give us joy in our journey. Listen to 5:20: ***“For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.”***

Our Mexico Team returned a week ago and will share what they saw God do in two weeks. Emma Lang, who went on the trip, gave me permission to share what she posted about her experience as God filled her heart with joy.

- God is at work in all nations.
- We are all brothers and sisters in Christ.
- God answers prayers.
- Everyone’s testimony is significant.
- God will make sense of what doesn’t make sense.
- The enemy will try to attack.
- God is sovereign.

4. Revere God (3:14-15). Because God is sovereign, we must submit to Him. I came across a provocative quote from another pastor this week: *“Can you worship a God who isn’t obligated to explain His actions to you?”* While God wants us to find joy when going through the junk in life, His ultimate aim is for us to revere Him as we read in verses 14-15: ***“I perceived 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; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.”***

This tells us God is eternal and immutable. Nothing can be added to His work or subtracted from it. I like how the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines God: *“God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”*

The word **“fear”** means, *“to revere with holy awe.”* One commentator defines it as *“trembling trust.”* God works His ways and His will in such a way that we should respond with holy reverence. This reverence is reinforced in 5:7: ***“...but***

God is the one you must fear. Deuteronomy 10:12 says, ***“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God...”***

I think of Job who after unleashing questions and hurling accusations against God, ended up confessing his trembling trust in Job 42:2-6: ***“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted...I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”***

I think of another Olympic athlete who put her faith in God in front of everything else. She feared God more than she feared the Olympic officials. Rayssa Leal, a 16-year-old skateboarder from Brazil, won the bronze medal and shared Scripture with a watching world during her competition. Using American Sign Language, she signed John 14:6: ***“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”***

Apparently, it was made clear to her that she couldn’t say anything about her faith, so instead of using her voice, she signed her faith: ***“For me it is important; I am Christian, I believe a lot in God,”*** she stated. ***“There I asked for strength and sent a message to everyone, that He really is the way, the truth, and the life.”***

This reminds me of what Oswald Chambers said, ***“The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.”***

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5. Rely on God’s justice (3:16-17). Like us, Solomon became troubled when he looked around and saw injustice happening in 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.”*** The word ***“moreover”*** means, ***“also or still,”*** showing us this is yet another thing that does not bring him satisfaction. It’s like he’s saying, ***“I saw something else.”***

There’s a lot of injustice in our world today as well. Micah 6:8 calls us to make a difference by speaking up and standing up for what is right: ***“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”***

Ultimately, we must trust God to straighten out what is crooked and to make right everything that is wrong. That's what Solomon concluded in verse 17: ***"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."*** God will not ignore injustice forever. This assertion is repeated at the end of Ecclesiastes in 12:14: ***"For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."***

In the meantime, we must guard our actions and our attitudes, so we don't become filled with self-righteous anger and take things into our own hands. Romans 12:19 is a good corrective for us: ***"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"***

6. Live as if you're dying. Let's look now at verses 18-21: ***"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 beasts, for all is 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?"***

I want us to see two truths from these closing verses.

- **Depravity is our descriptor.** The phrase, ***"children of man"*** reminds us we are all sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. Because of sin, we often act like brute beasts.
- **Dust is our destiny.** While Solomon considered how animals die, he realized that humans die in a similar way. We come from dust, and we go back to dust, which is exactly what Genesis 3:19 says: ***"For you are dust, and to dust you shall return."***

This leads Solomon to ask a question in verse 21: ***"Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?"***

That's a good question for each of us to ponder. Do you know where you will go when you die? Will your spirit go up or go down? In 12:7, Solomon fleshes this out a bit more: ***"And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."***

Let's summarize what we learned today.

- 1. Trust God's timing.**
- 2. Accept that you are made for another place.**
- 3. Enjoy life.**
- 4. Revere God.**
- 5. Rely on God's justice.**
- 6. Live as if you're dying.**

I appreciated this insight from Got Questions: *“In every human soul is a God-given awareness that there is ‘something more’ than this transient world. And with that awareness of eternity comes a hope that we can one day find a fulfillment not afforded by the ‘vanity’ in this world...life is but a vapor, but we know there is something past this life. We have a divinely implanted awareness that the soul lives forever. This world is not our home.”*

We hunger for Heaven even as we run on the treadmill of time. God has planted us in time but He has also implanted within us a longing for eternity. C.S. Lewis said it this way: *“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”*

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This week, I had lunch with someone and was reminded again about the power of the gospel to change lives and the truth that Jesus is the only way, the only truth, and the only life. I have permission to share part of his story.

He told me he was always religious, at times going to church every day. After experiencing a number of losses, including the death of his wife, he would go to church and often just sit by himself after the service. One Saturday morning he approached his church and couldn't go inside. He told me he couldn't do it anymore because he realized he wasn't finding what he was searching for. That same night he came to Edgewood. A month later, God saved him by His grace. He told me that even though he had a lot of religious routines, none of them satisfied him. Now that he has a relationship with God through faith in Jesus, he has found what he was looking for. With a big smile on his face, he said, *“I'm all in.”*

What about you? Are you ready to repent and receive Jesus Christ? Are you all in so your spirit will go up when you die?

Invitation.