

FBC Service November 19, 2023, Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 Genesis 8:22 The Changing Seasons

Intro: The Bible has a lot to say about time. The most important thing it says is something we know already—that our time is limited. Time can be used wisely or wasted, it can be invested or squandered, but either way, once used, it can never be recovered.

The most famous passage in the Bible about time reminds us that there's a time for everything in life. Here are the first four verses from Ecclesiastes 3:

For everything there is a season,

A time for every activity under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to harvest.

A time to kill and a time to heal.

A time to tear down and a time to build up.

A time to cry and a time to laugh.

A time to grieve and a time to dance.

Therefore, what we do with the moments of our lives, the opportunities we take, the people we talk to, the path we follow, all of it matters because sooner or later, for me and for you, time will be no more.

All of us are slaves to time more than we like to admit. Watch people eating lunch in the food court who pull out their cell phones and put them on the table, so they won't miss a call, or walking down the street with their phones glued to their ears.

It's incredible how we've changed the way we communicate:

I even remember such a thing as handwritten letters.

Now, we rely on email and instant messaging, and Facebook.

And if you're under 30, you communicate via apps called Tik Tok or What's App or Twitter, now known as X.

Psalms 90: 12 says, *"Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom."*

Numbering your days keeps us from the ultimate folly—thinking we will live forever, and therefore giving us excuses to put off doing what we know we ought to do.

A stanza of a famous hymn puts the matter squarely before our eyes:

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,

Bears all its sons away;

They fly, forgotten, as a dream

Dies at the opening day.

Our text reminds us that on our life's journey we'll face many different situations, experience many different experiences, and meet many different people. Sometimes we have gains, and we laugh. Sometimes we have losses, and we cry. Sometimes our feelings are hurt, and we feel isolated.

Sometimes our song is played, and we celebrate. Sometimes we really blow it, and we sink. Sometimes we get it right, and we smile.

The Bible says that God takes these collective experiences and eventually makes something beautiful out of all of the loose ends. Verse 11.

"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

Ecclesiastes 3 is a vivid reminder that it takes different seasons in our lives for God to get our attention, to awaken us to spiritual values, to challenge us with the reality of life and death and Christian commitment, and what He would have us do with our lives.

The four seasons that God has given to us are Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter, but there are many, many seasons of life. All of us in this service this morning, go through different seasons in our lives.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, to everything there is a season. *"There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven."* Another translation says, "Everything on earth has its special seasons."

It calls us to examine our lives in the light of eternity.

God uses every season of life to teach us something. To communicate to us something about Himself, something about His faithfulness, something about His love in sending His Son, something about His strength, something about His power.

So how is God directing you in the season of life in which you find yourself right now? Deuteronomy 11:2 says, *"Remember what you've learned about the Lord through your experiences with Him."*

In other words, whatever that experience is; God can teach you something through it.

God allows those difficult times of life to correct us and draw us closer to Him.

He tells us in Daniel 2:21, *"God controls the times and the seasons."*

Now here's the thing, we know the seasons of life are coming to each one of us.

We know these seasons are going to happen to us at some point in our life, but we have no control over when they come.

Having to wait is a season of life.

Things happen, circumstances occur that we have absolutely nothing to do with.

We need to understand that waiting for answered prayer, waiting for God to do a certain thing, waiting for a certain thing to happen in our lives is a part of the season of life.

I'm sure you've noticed how the seasons of life can change very quickly. You're in one season of life, and all of a sudden something occurs, and you're in a totally different season.

Loss of a precious wife or husband through death or divorce changed your life completely now that partner is gone. You were in a season of marriage, and now you're in a season of being single or being widowed.

All of us will lose members of our family; all of us will know what it is to have sorrow when we have to give up a loved one. **Grief is a season of life.**

Suddenly you're in a different kind of season. And you felt you had no control over that, and yet you find yourself in that season. But God controls the seasons of life the Bible says.

Others who were very active, and vibrant, now find there are things that they can't do that they used to do; strength and energy has declined. You're in a different kind of season in your life.

And for our young people, the seasons of life of which the Bible speaks are just as relevant. **His call comes to them in the Spring season of their lives.** Providentially it came to me at the ripe old age of 17.

Astonishingly God intervened in my life through the testimony of a friend to begin the work of bringing me to saving faith.

The seasons of life for all of us are Providential, they can also be Perplexing. Look at Ecclesiastes 3:11. *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.*

Christians believe God does everything just right and on time, but as humans, we can never completely understand what He's doing.

Isaiah 55:8-9. *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."*

As mortals, we will never totally understand Him. Now it's certainly true that sometimes we can look back at seasons of life that we've gone through, and we understand better what was happening and what God was doing, and how the Lord was molding us and shaping us through that season.

Because hindsight is always 20/20!

But at the time we never completely understood. And there are some things that we'll never understand until we get face to face with Jesus to see and know, and then we'll understand. The apostle Paul wrote, *"Now we look through a glass darkly."* Many times it's cloudy the purpose of God.

Sometimes it's so perplexing we cry out, "Why is this happening to me? Why is this happening now?" We say, "God's timing is terrible; what's He doing?" And we're very perplexed.

The seasons of life can also be Purposeful. God always has a purpose. Professing Christians believe life is not a series of random events that have no interconnection and no meaning and no purpose.

Romans 8:28 is often quoted, "*We know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into His plans.*" I often have to stop and consider this.

That all that happens in my life - the bitter things, the hard things, the hurtful things, as well as the triumphs and the victories - can work for good. **Now it doesn't say they are good.**

Because there are some things in life that aren't beautiful – terminal illness is not beautiful in and of itself; losing a child is not beautiful in and of itself; In all of human experience, I know of no deeper, heart rending hurt than when any of our children we have raised, are taken from us.

Seeing any of our children hurting, or living like the Prodigal in the far country, is certainly not beautiful.

Seeing any of our children turn their back on all the Christian values they've been taught, and who by their actions, drag the reputation of their parents in the dirt, is certainly not beautiful. **There are few things that approach the depth of pain that such actions bring.**

The Bible doesn't say everything is good, but it says that God causes it to work for good, all things, both the good and the bad, work for good if you love Him and trust Him. If you're growing in the seasons of life, God will bring good out of it.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "*There's a season for everything, there's a time for activity, a season for everything under heaven.*" And then the writer mentions several life experiences that are a part of the seasons of life. In fact, there are numerous different life experiences that he mentions here.

It says, "*There's a time to be born; there's a time to die. There's a time to laugh; there's a time to cry. There's a time to find; there's a time to lose. There's a time to plant, a time to uproot. There's a time to dance; there's a time to grieve. There's a time to keep, and there's a time to throw away.*"

There are two kinds of folks in life: you know, there are the hoarders and the pitchers. And inevitably they always seem to marry one another, the hoarders and the pitchers.

One wants to keep everything, and the other wants to throw it away.

"What? You're going to throw that away? You've got to be kidding! We may need that sometime. I know we haven't needed it for the last 30 years, but we may need that sometime."

"There's a time to keep; there's a time to throw away." In other words, there's a season for everything.

God knows that sunshine all the time will create a desert. Fertile, productive soil will turn to sand if only the sun shines. He knows how much we need rainy days as well as sunny days.

Thus there are all kinds of seasons of life.

"There's a time to speak up, and a time to be quiet."

Normally I get those two confused and get in a whole mess of trouble. So do a lot of other men. Right? *"There's a time to hug and not to hug."* God has a time and a season and a purpose for everything.

Then notice the seasons of life can also be Productive. If you're going through a season of life, and you don't think much is happening, be faithful to God; keep trusting Him. God is always up to something even when we don't see Him working.

So I want to encourage you whatever season of life you're in, pain or disappointment, victory or success or some great blessing, to see the hand of God in it.

Life is a combination of contrasting seasons mentioned here in Ecclesiastes 3. In other words, it's not all pleasure or all pain; it's a combination of pain and pleasure.

He still calls men and women to follow Him, to seek first the kingdom of God, to not lay up for ourselves "treasures on earth."

A great problem for many people is **not** that they don't want to do what's right, **not** that they don't want to help others, **not** that they don't want to serve and follow God, **not** that they don't want to trust Jesus as their Saviour.

Their great problem is they never get started! They put it off. Their problem is procrastination. The seasons of life teach us that if there's something right now God wants us to do, we're not to put it off another moment.

It might be in regard to making our life right with God and have our sins forgiven. It might be in regard to our spiritual life and giving Him first place as our Lord.

It might be in regard to telling a husband or a wife how much we care about them; it might be in regard to telling a son or a daughter how much we love them; it might be writing a note to a friend.

It might be letting your life be used along with others in the body of Christ and joining your life together with other believers, and letting your gifts and your abilities be used for God's glory.

There can be many, many things. **But waiting until conditions are right, we'll never get anything done.**

O my church family, don't be waiting for our some other time, so we can give God some of our time.

Some people say, "I'm going to give my life to Jesus when I know I can live it, because I don't want to be a hypocrite. Or I'm going to wait until my kids grow up or until I'm financially secure.

And you've put some condition on it, and you've said, "When that condition is met, then I'll be ready, and I'll do it."

Paul reminds us though in 2nd Corinthians, *"now is the accepted time."* Now is always the right time for all of us to serve the Lord. He encourages us not to wait until tomorrow.

The seasons of life can be Providential.

They can be Perplexing

They can be Purposeful.

They can be Productive.

But God makes life beautiful in His time. Those who live a surrendered life according to God's time and schedule will ultimately lead a life of beauty.

E.G. There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn not to judge things too quickly, so he sent them each one on a quest, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away.

The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the fall.

When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen.

The first son said that the pear tree was ugly, bent, and twisted.

The second son said no, it was covered with green buds and full of promise.

The third son disagreed; he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled sweet and looked so beautiful; it was the loveliest thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfillment.

The man then explained to his sons that they were all right, because they had each seen but only one season in the tree's life.

He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person's life, by only one season, and that the essence of who they are, and the pleasure, joy, and love that comes from that life, can only be measured at the end, **when all the seasons have ran their course.**

There's a lesson here for Christian men and women that speaks to every generation.

Don't let the pain of one season destroy the joy of all the rest. Be faithful even when it's a winter season for you, don't miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer, the fulfillment of your fall.

Don't judge life by one difficult season.

Persevere through the difficult patches and better times are sure to follow.

Close: *"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven."*