

Day Three

Ecclesiastes 3-4

Perhaps one of the most recognizable passages in the Book of Ecclesiastes, comes from the insights regarding time which are revealed in ch. 3. The poem which opens up this section of the book is one which has given many people some profound spiritual and philosophical perspectives down through the ages. Undoubtedly, untold numbers of speeches, eulogies, addresses, tributes, wedding and funeral messages, and other forms of verbal and written communication, have used some of the words of this poem to make points about different aspects of human beings' relationship with time.

The Preacher understood the fact that the Sovereign God created time. He alone was outside the constraints of time. On the other hand, human beings by their very nature are controlled by time from the moment of conception to the point of death.

In a poetic manner, the author requires the reader or listener to contemplate many of the polarities of life. Given the challenges of my own time today, I am simply going to recite this poem and make a few brief comments. It is my prayer that each of you will take the time to conduct your own reflections, in order to let the Holy Spirit minister to you through the words of the Preacher's timeless poem:

"There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—a time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear 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 throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. A time to search and a time to give up as lost; a time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; a time to be silent

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and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace. What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-13, NASU).

I suppose when you soak in this poem and the comments by the author, you—like millions of others down through the centuries—have been astounded by the profundity of the contrasts listed. What has always made me go back and reread this poem is the comment that in spite of our time constraints, the Holy One has set eternity in the heart of mortals. This is perhaps the greatest contrast which each of us has to deal with during our aging process.

While we observe all of the other aspects of life transpire during the course of our physical existence, somehow, buried deep in our inner being, is the understanding that we are somehow "eternal." We have a Divine imprint upon us, making us different than those of the animal kingdom. We know that there will be a time for death, but by faith in the resurrection of the body, there will actually be existence beyond the grave. Still, the fact remains that we will all be judged for how we spend the time we have been given in the bodies we currently occupy. In fact, as the author states it, the time we have to eat and drink and do well is actually a gift from God.

The question I would have you ponder as you meditate on this poem today is simply this: **What time is it for you?**