

Time is in God's Hands

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[0:00] And a season for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot.

a time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance.

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. A time to embrace and a time to refrain. A time to search and a time to give up.

A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate.

A time for war and a time for peace. What does the worker gain from his toil? I've seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time.

[1:02] He has also set eternity in the hearts of men. Yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.

That everyone may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his toil. This is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. Whatever is has already been. And what will be has been before. And God will call the past to account.

Time. We have time outs.

We have time ends. Say time is on our side. Time is against us. One author said time is an illusion.

[2:03] And lunch time doubly so. I don't know what that means. I've been thinking about it all week. J.K. Rowling wrote, It's a strange thing, but when you're dreading something and would give anything to slow down time, it has a disobliging habit of speeding up.

But then, on the other hand, C.S. Lewis wrote, The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of 60 minutes, an hour, whatever he does, wherever he is.

Time is a conundrum that we cannot solve. Augustine said, What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is.

But as soon as someone asks me and I try to explain it, I don't know. Time. That's where Coaleth, our wise man, now turns his attention.

The first great act of Ecclesiastes is over. In act one, scene one, Coaleth thundered out in despair.

[3:11] Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. The Hebrew word is Havel. So it's Havel, Havel, Havel of Havels.

Everything is Havel. And remember, Havel is primarily the frustration that God has put into this world because of man's rebellion.

And so, the whole world now rebels against our lordship. And so, we work, but our work falls apart in our hands.

And we build a business and die and then give it to a fool. And Coaleth says, this is Havel. So, Ecclesiastes is Coaleths.

And that's the Hebrew word for teacher or preacher or assembler or something like that. It's his wrestling with that reality.

[4:09] The reality of Havel. And first he asks, well, how can I get out of this monotony? I'm just like the sun. I'm rising and I'm setting and then I'm hurrying around to the other side so I can get up and do this exact same thing over again.

For what? For what? We aren't getting anywhere. One generation hops on the stationary bike and rides as fast as they can.

And where are we going? I don't know, but we're making good time. And that generation collapses. And the next generation gets on the stationary bike and says, yes, now we are going to make some progress.

And he says, there's nothing new under the sun. We're getting nowhere. The question then is, what does the worker gain for all of his toil?

We're not getting anywhere on the bike. And so what's the point? Is it pleasure? And Coaleth said, no. Is it wisdom? No. Is it the good life? No.

[5:12] Everything is Havel. There's no escaping it. It's grasping after the wind. And there is no way out.

That was Act 1. But Act 1 ended on a surprising note. In the final scene, Coaleth came to a very hopeful resolution.

He saw that what the thing to do was, was to take life as a gift from God. And to really enjoy it. Enjoy your food.

Enjoy your drink. Enjoy your work. Because this is the gift of God to you while you live under the sun. So he was trying to work and to find some way out.

He was trying to find some way of escaping and finding meaning and satisfaction in this world on his own terms. In his own way. As a reward for his labor. And then he realized that he had everything backwards.

[6:17] The happy life and salvation, they both only work if they're taken from the hands of grace. Only when you're living on grace can you live a happy life.

So Act 1 ends. And the curtains close. And the lights dim. And you hear shuffling in the background as they move the scenery around. And then the curtains open again.

And the first thing that you notice is that Act 2, in Act 2, the scenery is different. Things are different from here on out. There's no more talk about Coaleth being the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

There's no more experiment to try to figure out how to escape Havel. He's already said, what more can be done than what I've done? What more can be done than has already been done?

There's no way out. I've tried everything. And there's no escape. So Coaleth must settle down to living in this reality. So how do you live where everything in your life is slipping through your fingers like the wind?

[7:26] Where it's like grasping oil. And it falls through your hands. Well, he begins with the biggest possible picture.

He's going to start out with this very broad panoramic view of how do you live in this life. He begins there.

And he begins with God's sovereign control of all things. And that's the first thing that we see in chapter 3.

God is in control of all of the days of our lives and everything that happens in them. It's all under his direction. That might not be clear on the surface.

But just follow as we go through and I think you'll understand. Well, Coaleth explains God's sovereignty, his direction over our lives in a poem. And the birds, of course, sang it in the 60s for every season.

[8:24] Turn, turn, turn. And they sang it and they had no idea what they were talking about. This is not some new agey hippie expression of the way to live.

This is really a stark expression of the mystery of God's sovereignty over our entire lives.

This poem consists of 14 merisms. You might be asking, what is that? Well, simply put, it's a figure of speech where two opposites are put together to explain and to describe the whole of something. So where two opposites are put together to describe the whole of something. And that might sound complicated, but it's really not. So, moms, imagine that your six-year-old comes to you and she can't find her shoes.

And you say, well, honey, you need to look high and low. Now, when you say look high and low, you don't mean just look at the ceiling and look at the floor, do you? You mean look everywhere.

[9:29] Look everywhere from the ceiling to the floor. And in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In other words, he created everything from the highest to the lowest.

And so that is a mirrorism. And so when you see that that's what's going on in Ecclesiastes 3, then you realize that this poem is not about giving advice.

It's not prescriptive. You aren't supposed to look at this and say, okay, next time I lose my sock, I need to ask myself, is this the time to search or is this the time to give up?

I got to figure out what time it is now. And of course, that's to totally miss the point. What Coleth is saying is that life happens to you.

There is a time for everything in your life and you don't decide. God does. So look at verse 11. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end.

[10 : 38] So Coleth is saying, this is God's work. This is something that God has done. So then let's look.

What has God done? What does God do? How does he work out all things in his own time? Verse 1. There is a time for everything. And a season for every activity under the sun.

So how broad is God's sovereignty? How broad is God's direction in this world? It includes everything. Every activity. Like what?

Verse 2. A time to be born and a time to die. So Coleth starts with the most comprehensive realities of our life.

Birth and death. And it's quite apparent that he's not giving us advice. Do you see that? He's not giving us advice about when we should do certain things.

[11 : 39] Did Lila on Friday morning decide, I'm going to be born this morning? No. She was born. And you don't decide when you die.

Death happens to you. And even the man who goes out and hangs himself. That is included in God's sovereignty. Judas Iscariot, you remember, he went out and hung himself.

And so fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy that was written about him. God times your birth and your death. As the psalmist says, all the days for me, all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

And so remember, this is a mirrorism. If he's set out the birth, our birth date, and the day that we're going to die, he's going to, he, every other day in our lives, are set down in his calendar on his timeline.

So Coleth goes on. There's a time to plant and a time to uproot. So ask a farmer. Ask a farmer if he has much say in when it is planting time and when it is harvesting time.

[12 : 55] And the answer is no. Because if the farmer is not out there planting his seed when it's time to plant, he's not going to be a farmer for very long, is he? And if when harvest time comes and he's not out there harvesting, God isn't going to say, oh, I didn't know that.

I'm stocked. You get more time. If you will not harvest at harvest time, you better get used to being hungry. And so God is in control of the planting and the time to uproot.

Or maybe it's more than just harvesting. Maybe this is just talking about there comes a time when if you plant a fruit tree, that that fruit tree is going to be dug up and burned.

It's going to be uprooted. And some of you have beautiful fruit trees and you're enjoying their fruit. But one day they will stop bearing fruit. They'll get a disease or you decide that you want to use that space for something else and you'll dig them up and uproot them.

And the day of its fruitfulness will be over. And it will be as if it had never been. So planting, harvesting and uprooting.

[14 : 04] This was the work that the Israelites, the ancient Israelites did to support their families, how they made a living. So that was the work that most people did.

And it's the same for us. You stay a child for so long. And then it comes time for you to get a job. Even if you don't want a job, it's time for you to get a job.

Because if a man will not work, he should not eat. And so you go to work. And you work. And 30 or 40 years go by. And then it's time to quit working.

But what about if you don't want to quit working? Well, the management throws you a party. And they smile to you. And they give you a cake. And they push you out the door.

Every man has a time when he is uprooted from his work. And it's God's time. It's God's time. Verse 3. A time to kill and a time to heal.

[15 : 03] This could refer to animals. This could refer to people. There comes a time when your animal needs to be put down. And there's a time for that animal to be healed.

And those times happen to you. So when I was 19 or 20 or so, I took my dog to the vet. And he was sick. And we had taken him to the vet many times.

And he wasn't getting better. And I took him to the vet. And I took him in. I walked in with my dog that I had for 14 years. And I walked out with a leash and a collar.

And that was it. The day came. And the years of enjoyment were over. And I said with Koaleth, I hate life. And, but that's life.

And you don't say, I don't say that harshly. It's just life is lived on God's schedule. Not ours. So there's a time to tear down.

[16:04] And a time to build. So there's a time to tear down Grandpa Latex's barn. Right?

And there's a time to take the timbers from that barn. And build a garage. A new garage. All of your own. You build something. And in time, someone else tears it down. All of the time in between, it was God's work.

The beginning and the end. Our work is undone. But God's work stands. So there's a time to weep. And a time to laugh. Time to mourn. And a time to dance. Maybe you've seen that clip on YouTube. With the dancing wedding party.

And if you haven't, you can just look up dancing wedding. And you'll see it. All the bridesmaids. All the groomsmen. All the ushers. And the groom. And then finally the bride.

[17:00] Go dancing down the aisle. Until they finally reach their place in front of the altar. At the front of the church. And there was a time to dance. And there's a time to laugh.

There are weddings. And there are parties. In this world that God has planned. There are sweet times in God's plan for our lives. And there's also a time to weep.

And mourn. And cry. Inconsolably. At the sadness of life. So that wedding party. That danced forward.

To their vows. Happy that their day finally came. When they could be one flesh. They were happy for their wedding day. One day. One of the bride.

The bride or the groom. Will be in a coffin in the same church. And. There'll be no more dancing. Or laughter. They vowed until death do us part.

[17:58] And death's cold. Sullen stream. Will part them. And years of marriage will be over. There's a time for everything under the sun.

Verse 5. A time to scatter stones. And a time to gather them. Everyone is confused about what he is saying. One scholar thinks it might be referring to.

You gathering stones from a field. And then building a house out of it. Or maybe the other way around. One Jewish scholar. Argues that this is a euphemism for sexual activity.

And so he thinks gathering and throwing stones. Refers to the sexual side of the next lines.

Embracing and refraining. And that does make the ideas go together very well.

But. No one's quite for sure what the truth is. There is a time to embrace. And a time to refrain from embracing. And so there are times when it's good to do that.

[18:57] And there's other times when it's best not to. And God determines those times for us. He determines the times of our lives. Even on that level of our lives.

Verse 6. A time to search. And a time to give up. Now I've asked my wife's permission to give you this illustration. Some time ago my wife was. We'll say walking around the house rather noisily.

And she said to no one in particular. I spent half my time looking for things. And I said. Well if you didn't spend half the time. Half your time losing things.

That would help. And. I'm part of my wife's havel. And. I take my role very seriously.

But. God has those frustrating moments. Planned for us. When we can't find our shoes. And we've lost our paper.

[19:59] We've lost our data on our computer. There's a time for all those things. We don't ask for them. But they come upon us. They come upon us in his good time.

According to his sovereign will. Verse 6. Goes on. There's a time to keep. And a time to throw away. A time to tear. And a time to mend. This probably refers.

The tearing and the mending. It probably refers. To mourning. And. In that culture. You tore your garment. When you were sad. And then sewing your garment. Back up.

You see in the Old Testament. Lots of times. People tearing their garments. Because they're in anguish. But you know. Probably a few weeks later. You would find them sitting there. Sewing their garment.

Back together. Tragedy strikes. And we tear our clothes. In grief. But as time goes on. The grief becomes less acute. Doesn't it? And we sew ourselves back up.

[21:00] And we pick ourselves up. And we go back to work. There's a time to be silent. And a time to speak. And a time to love. And a time to hate. A time for war.

And a time for peace. So. Our lives are full of strife. We have little personal battles. With people. And nations go to war. At one point.

Nations are at peace with each other. And then. All of a sudden. They're at each other's throats.

And then. They're at peace with each other again. There's a time for everything under the sun.

Every activity. From birth. To death. From war. To peace. And it's not our time. This is God's work. It's God's time. And that is what Coleth wants us to understand.

This is all what God has done. Now at this point. If you're thinking with Coleth.

[22:00] Then you understand that this isn't so much a comfort. But this is a burden. It presents a problem. That God reigns over the times and the days of our lives.

And that all these things are happening. And that's the second thing we see. We see the burden of understanding time. So look at verse 9.

What does the worker gain from his toil? So look back over the first eight verses. There are 14 pluses.

And there are 14 minuses. You do the math. What does it come out to? Zero. Zero. Comes out to nothing.

Nothing at all. And under the sun. Man gains nothing lasting for his work. He plants. And the tree he plants is uprooted.

[22:59] And he makes peace. And war breaks out again. Man's work always comes undone. It's just a matter of time.

For us under the sun. And Coleth looks at this and he says. This is a burden. This is hard to understand.

How can our work mean anything? What does the worker gain from his toil? If in a few days my work is going to be undone? Verse 10. I have seen the burden God has laid on men. We're all carrying a burden.

How does our work fit into God's plan? When our work is being constantly undone. And this is a problem that we can't solve.

We know God is working. And we are working. And his work stands. But our work doesn't. Some time ago.

[23:57] Carrie went to Guatemala. And she was doing good work. But over her work. God was at work. She treated a baby for malnutrition.

And later that baby died. How does that all fit together? Why does her work matter? If it's just going to become undone.

Coleth explains the problem more in verse 11. He's made everything beautiful in its time. He's also set eternity in the hearts of men.

Yet they cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end. Carrie's work was beautiful in its time. It fit.

It was good. And somehow. From a divine perspective. When it came time for that child to die. It fit. It was good.

[24:59] And you say. Well how could it be good? My answer is. I don't know. It's Havel.

That's the burden. It fits. But it doesn't make any sense. And we carry this confusion. We know everything is beautiful in its time.

But we can't fathom what God is doing. So we have eternity in our heart. We know we were made to understand the beginning from the end.

But we can't do it. Our sins have separated us from God. We want our work to last forever. Don't you want that? You want this thing that I'm working on.

I want this to stay like this. But it doesn't. And everything is cursed. But God is at work. See he's the master weaver.

[25:58] And he has time and history stretched out on the loom. And he is working. And he's weaving a beautiful tapestry. But the problem is. That we are on the bottom side.

Do you know what the bottom side. Of something being woven together looks like. It's full of knots. And tangles. It isn't beautiful. And that's what we want to see.

And that is what we see. We see the ugly side of things. But we know in the end. That it is going to be beautiful. When we have history laid out before our eyes.

We will say wow. This is perfect. There wasn't a single string. Out of place. But now. From this perspective that we're living in.

There's a disconnect. They don't go together. And that is part. Of the havel. Of living under the sun. Of living on the bottom side.

[26 : 58] Of history. Instead of God's side. Well we've seen God's sovereignty over time. We've seen the burden. That puts on God. On men. And now Coleth.

Gives us two responses. How should you respond. To that confusing reality. The first response. Is found in verse 12 and 13.

I know there is nothing better for men. Than to be happy. And to do good. While they live. That everyone may eat. And drink.

And find satisfaction. In all his toil. This is the gift. Of God. So. We are to enjoy life. And we are to keep on.

Doing good. Just because we don't understand. Why things are turning out. The way we are. They are. And just because we don't understand. Or we. We do understand.

[27 : 52] That this thing that I'm doing. That is good. Is going to be undone. At some point. You do good. Anyways. This doesn't free us. To say. You know what? There's no point in working. If my work is going to be undone.

I'm not going to do it. Coleth is clear. And he says. Keep doing good. This is the thing that man is to do. And to be happy. To enjoy life. That you might drink.

And eat. Find satisfaction. In all this toil. This is the gift. Of God. And we saw that last time. There's no escaping Havel. So we must learn.

To take life. As a gift. Of God. We must learn. To be beggars. At the throne of grace. The same thing.

Applies here. As it did before. Life seems to happen to us. Regardless of what we do. And much of it seems ugly. And we know in our hearts.

[28 : 51] That it's going to be beautiful. But right now. It doesn't seem that way. Well how do you respond to that? You enjoy life. You take it from God's hands. As his gift. So you don't understand.

What's happening. You don't understand. Why you're filling in this hole. That you dug out. The other day. You don't understand. Why things in your life. Are. Just not the way.

That you like them to be. And you're. Everything is getting undone. Well what do you do? He's saying. Relax. And enjoy life. Because.

This is a gift. Of God. To you. So you can go to work. Even though. You know. Your job. Is probably going to become undone.

At some point. In this world. But you enjoy it. Because. God gave you the work to do. And you do it. Because it's from his hands.

[29 : 47] You try not to understand. The big picture. So much. And you take what God has given you. And you enjoy what you have. So parents. What do you do. When you're looking at your children.

And you say. They're growing up so fast. They're. They were just babies. And now look at them. And soon they're going to be gone. You know what I'm talking about.

Parents. When you look at your children. And you're sad. Because. The time that you have with them now. Is going to be gone. And you'll never. Ever. See them.

And enjoy them. This way. Again. Well what do you do. Coalesce says. You enjoy them. You enjoy this time in your life.

You hold them tighter. You read them a story. You play with them. While they want to be played with. Life is flying away. And soon this time. Will give way to another time.

[30 : 44] And you'll never get this time back. So you better. Enjoy it. It's God's gift to you. This is God's grace. And action. In your life.

The things that he's given you. To enjoy. So dads. Moms. Are you hearing me? Enjoy the beauty. Of this time. And there's ugly things about it.

But enjoy the beautiful things about it. This is God's command to you. As much as it is. To raise your children. In the fear and admonition. Of the Lord. Lord. Jeremy Taylor.

The old Puritan. Said God threatens. Terrible. Things. If you will not be happy. If you won't be happy. With what he's giving you. God is threatening.

Terrible things against you. So if you aren't enjoying. Your children. If you aren't enjoying. Your teenagers. While they're teenagers. Then you are scorning. God's grace.
[31 : 40] Because this is his gift. To you. The second response. Is found in verse 14. I know that everything God does.

Will endure forever. Nothing can be added to it. And nothing taken from it. God does it. So that men. Will. Revere him. God does these things.

So that we. Will fear him. We will fear him. So when your life is perplexing. And you don't understand the whys.

And the what for's. And you're carrying this burden. Of life on your shoulder. And you're confused. And you're feeling everything slip away. And it's hard. And you're sad.

What do you do? You fear. God. You respect. And you worship. God. God has put this burden on you.

[32 : 36] Did you see that? In verse 11. I've seen the burden. God has laid on men. The burden that you experience. Is a God given burden. For one reason. So that you will call out to him.

So that you will fear him. And see. And say. You know what? I am not the Lord of time. I am not the Lord of my life. God is. He's the Lord of time.

And you are not. So you only call out for help. When you feel the burden. You only call out for help. You only fall down and worship God.

And fear him. When you realize that. You know what? This life. That you are living. Is not on your time schedule. It's on his. So he's the one who's in control of this great cycle.

Of planning. And uprooting. And peace. And war. And laughing. And mourning. You see that in verse 15. Whatever is. Has already been. And what will be.

[33 : 33] Has been before. And God will call. The past. To account. God is the judge. God is the sovereign. Of history.

He's the one calling these things. To account. He's the one who's judging them. He's not asking you to. So he has the right to judge. Every event.

And every time. He's the one who calls. For death. And death comes. And he's the one who calls. And Lila is born. Not you.

God asked Job. Where were you. When the morning stars sang. Job who are you? Paul asked. Who are you oh man. That you should talk back to God.

Show what is formed. Say to who formed it. Why did you make me like this? Times of our lives. Are not in our hands. So do you understand?

[34 : 34] If you understand this. You will not say. Today. Or tomorrow. We will go to this or that city. And spend a year there. And carry on business. And make money. Why you don't even know.

What will happen tomorrow. Tomorrow. What is your life? Your life is a mist. That appears for a little while. And then vanishes. Instead you will say.

If it is the Lord's will. We will live. And do this or that. That is what fear looks like. And so parents. Are you teaching your children. By the way you live.

By the words that you say. That God is in control. Of the days of our lives. Businessmen.

James. The quote from James. That is for you. Do you look at yourself. As the Lord of your life. And your business. You shouldn't.

[35 : 30] Because God judges all things. He is the one who rules. Your mist of a life. That is here. And gone. So fear him. I want to say.

One thing. To you unbelievers. And listen to me. If you aren't friends. With Jesus. Listen to me. Revelation 5.

John. The apostle. Is ushered into heaven. And he sees God. On the throne. With a scroll. With writing on both sides. And sealed with seven seals.

And John heard. A mighty angel. Proclaiming in a loud voice. Who is worthy. To break the seals. And open the scroll. The scroll.

The scroll. Is history. The scroll. Is time. So who. Who is worthy. To open. The scroll. Who is worthy. To carry out.

[36 : 29] God's plan. For history. Who is in charge. Of these things. Who is in charge. Of Ecclesiastes. Chapter 3. 1 through 8. But no one was found.

To open the scroll. And John. Wept. And wept. But one of the elders. Said. Do not weep. See the lion. Of Judah. The. Of the tribe.

The lion. Of the tribe. Of Judah. The root of David. Has triumphed. He is able. To open the scroll. And it's seven seals. And then John. Looked. And he saw. A lamb. Looking as if. Had been slain. And the lamb. Came. And he took the scroll. And he tore. The seals open. When John. Looked. He saw.

The lion. Of the tribe. Of Judah. And he saw. The lamb. That was slain. Unbeliever. Your history. Your life. Is in the hands.

[37 : 26] Of Jesus Christ. The crucified. He is controlling. The scroll. And so. I don't ask you. What are you going to do.

With Jesus. The question is. What is he going to do. With you. Because your life. Is in his hands. So do you see. What kind of dangerous. Position. You are in. Jesus died. To save sinners. From their sin. And you.

Neglect him. You live your life. However you want. And you rebel. Against the lion. And the lamb. Who was slain. And so. If you rebel. How will you survive?

Your life. Is in his hands. Your time. Is in his hands. And so. Stop. The rebellion. Fall down. And beg for mercy.

[38 : 21] While mercy. Is to be had. See. Now is the time. Of favor. Now is the time. When you can come. And fall down. And ask for mercy. So. Take hold of that mercy.

Take him. Take mercy. While mercy is to be had. Repent. And believe. And you will. Be saved. So. Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of time.

And he is the Lord. Of salvation. And now the door is open. Will you. Come in. Though your sins. Be as scarlet. They will be.

As white. As snow. What will you do? Let's pray. Heavenly Father.

I pray that you would. Sink. The truth. Deep into our hearts. And give us grace. To live lives. That reflect that truth. Father.

[39 : 26] Will you help us. To enjoy. The times. That you have given to us. Enjoy. The seasons of life. That we are in. Not to be always looking. For the next one. And the next one. Hoping that something better.

Will come along. But take the time. That we have now. As a gift. From your hand. And really. Enjoy it. For your glory. I pray.

I pray that we would fear you. Knowing that you control. Our birth. And our death. And. That it is right for us.

To keep doing good. It is right for us. To enjoy these things. And it is right for us. To fear you. And worship you. Because we are not God. We were not around.

When you. Decided. How to create this world. And when to create this world. And. We weren't there. To give you counsel. If you don't ask us. To give you counsel now.

[40 : 22] Will you help us. To know our place. Father. I pray for. The unbelievers here. Will you put a hook. Into their heart. And draw them to yourself.

Will you put a new spirit. In them. A new heart. A flesh. Of sensitivity. To the Lord Jesus. Who is the Lord of history.

And the Lord of salvation. And it is our pleasure. To serve him. So we pray these things. In Jesus name. Amen.