

A LESSON IN TIME, ECCL.3

Something worth living for #3

◆ **Intro:** If it isn't clear from reading the text, the topic our Teacher digs into in chapter three in his search for what's worth living for, is time, timing, and the reality of right and wrong. So just for fun, let's have a contest to see which side of the room can name the singers/writers/band behind these well known oldies about time. The first one standing may answer. Name the artist who sang...

- ◆ Too much time on my hands -Styx
- ◆ Back in Time -Huey Lewis
- ◆ Time after Time -Cindy Lauper
- ◆ Time is on my side -Rolling Stones
- ◆ Time of the Season -Zombies
- ◆ If I Could Turn back Time -Cher
- ◆ Does anybody really know what time it is? -Chicago
- ◆ Good Times Roll -Cars
- ◆ Time of Your Life -Green Day
- ◆ Yesterday -Beatles
- ◆ One More Time -Daft Punk (ok, not a oldie)
- ◆ Turn Turn Turn -Byrds (actually the Teacher in Ecclesiastes!)

◆ That was fun I hope. It's interesting that we humans are aware of time. It's also one of our problems.

◆ **1. A human problem: Time tells us there are limits, and this can lead me to despair.** Being aware of time means humans have the remarkable ability to transcend merely existing,

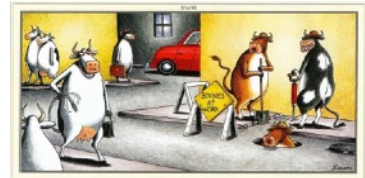
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into wonder, worry, doubt, meaning, value, right and wrong, and the like -all because of our awareness of time. Let me explain. Animals do not live in an awareness of time. Goats cannot be transported to a galaxy far, far away, in another time, or another place by George Lucas. Hamsters can't be horrified by reading a story of someone's daughter kidnapped and abused. They cannot transcend immediate existence like we can. Walt Whitman wrote in "A song to myself":

Animals do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins. Not one is dissatisfied or demented with a mania to own. They don't swear, and get nervous about the next day. They are not aware. They are self-contained.

◆ That's why the Far Side, by Gary Larson is so funny. It gives animals characteristics that they could never have, that only humans have. Here's a few examples.



◆ Ok, humans beings can reflect on, or survey reality outside ourselves, we are conscious of time. That means we can ponder progress, or direction, or meaning. We exist, and we are aware we exist! We can't help it!



◆ *v11 He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end*

◆ A. Do you see the problem with being human? We know too much! We know that we *don't* know enough of it! We know, for example, that sometimes the same thing can be good, or bad! In the opening poem, the Teacher observes with 7 pairs of

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opposites, that there is a right time to do something, and there is a wrong time to do the very same thing. Which means nothing is simple either. We have to find out what the standard is. We have to know the “when”!

◆ When the fire is cozy and she’s your wife, a kiss is a right thing. When the fire is cozy and it’s your neighbors wife, it’s not the right thing. No one can say, “Kissing is always good. Just follow your heart.” There’s more to it in a moral universe.

◆ When it’s a funeral, it’s not the right time to dance. When it’s a wedding, dance away into the night, but again, probably not with someone else’s wife.

◆ Suppose we’re going to the beach so you bring a suit. But it’s a 3-piece business suit. Wrong timing. Musta missed the memo. Suppose you decided to come to church in a suit, but it’s your bathing suit. It’s gonna feel a little like the wrong time for that! No one’s embarrassed at the beach in their swim suit. But I’ll bet you’d feel a little timid wearing it here. So time means there is timing; a right time, and a wrong time, and that points to the deep issue of morality.

◆ And this is pretty much was the poem in v1-8 tries to illustrate.

◆ B. Here’s another problem that time presents to us: we can’t control it. Time waits for no man. Time keeps on ticking away. We can’t go back to the past, or forward into the future, or *Back*

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to the Future for that matter. But we can know about before, and we can know about after! We tell stories about it all the "time." This leads to frustration! We can think about the future, but we can't be there, or control it. We can realize the infinitude of time in both directions, but we can't travel there. We can lament the past, but we can't change it. We can know we are a small, fragment of a huge universe, and a little blip in the long line of eternity, but we have no control over it. We can know about history, existence, time, eternity, appropriate and inappropriate, -but we don't rule any of it.

◆William Brown puts it, "*Human beings, in short, are caught between self-transcendence and stifling ignorance. They are both in time and out of time.*" The Teacher wants you and me to realize how truly impotent we all really are.

◆*Psalms 39:4-8*"Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it. "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. Save me from all my transgressions;

Note that last line. Despair in our impotence in the universe is not the final answer..

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◆2. Here's **the good news: God, not human beings, controls my times.**

◆*Psalms 31:14-15 But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.*

◆Job 14:5 Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.

◆The seasons, appropriation, time, history -these are all ruled by a sovereign God. The Teacher is clear on it.

◆v11 God gives each thing it's right time.

◆v11 God gives man awareness of the future and the past, and eternity.

◆v13 Satisfaction is a gift from God. You can't demand it, and you can't force it.

◆v14 You can't overrule anything God does.

◆v15 God judges what's right, appropriate, valuable. You can't avoid it.

◆v19 We know more than the walruses, but we have no more control over reality than they do. Only God does.

◆What is more, all the opposites in the poem are a literary device called a merismus; they represent the extreme boundaries and also everything between them! So the author points to God's sovereignty. He sets the time to plant and the time to harvest and all the little times stacked in between those two!

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◆ I want to help convince your heart this morning that God is indeed sovereign over your life. The Teacher sees it. Let it sink in. Assuming that the writer is in fact Solomon, let's compare what he also says in the Book of Proverbs, chapter 16.

◆ v1: To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue.

◆ v4: The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster.

◆ v9: *In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.*

◆ v33: The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

◆ Listen, we are not the shapers of our lives so much as the recipients of them. We can glimpse but we cannot grasp the course of life. Live your life with your hands open to heaven!

◆ **3. My lack of control over time tells me to revere God who does rule over it.**

◆ v14 *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.*

◆ Now we are to the difference between the poetry in Ecclesiastes and similar poetry in ancient Egyptian literature that will help us see the appropriate response to this conundrum we call time. There is a song from the tomb of King Intef, an Egyptian Pharaoh from around the time of Abraham. It laments the passing

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generations, just like Ecclesiastes 1. It recommends rejoicing while you are still alive, just like the refrain in 2:24 and 3:12 and four more places in Ecclesiastes. But it draws a different conclusion: Pagan wisdom concludes that you must follow your heart into whatever makes you happy. But that's not what Ecclesiastes says! It says to follow God's design for happiness and accept it as a gift from him.

◆ Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

◆ Besides, the prophet Jeremiah reminds us that...

◆ *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." Jeremiah 17:9-10*

◆ B. And how do we fail to revere God? When we ignore his designs and his perfect commands. Just look what's happening in our world today. People are confused about the most scientifically basic facts about gender! Unions want to teach our grade-schoolers about sexual activity. Our president flat out disobeys a decision of the Supreme Court, and ignores the Constitution. We, puny little blips in time and space, on one planet, in one galaxy among billions say, "It's all accident. I don't believe in a God because I can't see how if there was one, he

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would(n't) do _____." Talk about inappropriate arrogance! Pornographers actually call God to their defense saying, "God gave us our beautiful body so we should show it off." We say to world and to God, "My heart wants this and therefore it's right because it's how I feel." Carry that to it's logical conclusion and you have no basis for any law whatsoever! (A time for...or a time for...)

◆**Conclusion:** Chapter 2 taught us to not push living off into the someday but to watch for God's goodness in every moment. Chapter 3 is telling us that while we are in the moment, we are also aware that there is more than the moment, eternity. There is before, and there is after and we can't control it! But since God can, we need not despair. You see, the knowledge of time also allows the a presence of hope! No creature can hope that cannot comprehend future time. No being can hope who has not the promise of something better coming later in time. No human can hope who does not follow the path of truth through the past and it's trajectory into the future.

◆Can I show you some examples of God's control over time in the past, so that your heart can hope in him for the future?

◆God sent his Son Jesus to this world. Paul writes,

◆"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children" (Gal 4:4-5).

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◆ Jesus began his ministry by preaching,

◆ “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15).

◆ When the authorities tried to arrest Jesus, John reports that

◆ “no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come” (John 7:30).

◆ But Jesus’ time soon came:

◆ “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father” (John 13:1).

◆ Jesus told his disciples to

◆ “go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples’ ” (Matt 26:18).

◆ Here’s the central truth for today; when we revere God and his Son Jesus the Messiah, we can live in hope. When you lie down at night, turn off the media, and pray to God who actually does control our times. Hand your life over again today to Jesus Christ!

◆ *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Matthew 6:33, 34, NIV.*