

# “The Time of Your Life”

## Ecclesiastes 3: 1-14



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For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. We are getting close to a time of year where we begin to reflect on thankfulness, redemption and new life so I thought it would be a good time to look at the different seasons of our life for which we do reflect upon. Maybe you've heard these words before. It's a well-known text that was just read to us; it's a poem actually, and it comes from this ancient book of wisdom in the Bible called Ecclesiastes. This is the first line of a poem, and different things in this poem are going to stand out for each of us depending on which season of life we are in right now.

I am beginning to understand that there is more to life than just what is going on in my little corner of it in the Wolfington house. I am learning, as I hope you are as we travel this journey of faith together, that our lives are connected and we need to experience it together. When I do this, experience life with you, beyond my own little section of it, it brings me so much more fulfillment than I could have ever known in my own seclusion. I may not be experiencing retirement right now, but I get to share in the joy of it with others. I may not be experiencing illness right now but I get to share in the burden with others. Macy isn't playing sports right now but I get to enjoy it with your families. We are in a different season of life and while I may not be experiencing any particular season such as yourself, I get to share in it with you and you with me. And in the end, we are better for it and it is possible that I can help someone else through it because of my shared experiences. Because whatever is happening in our lives we share in this desire deep within every one of us to make sense of it and to find out what God is up to. And that is the fundamental question that is driving this whole book of *Ecclesiastes*: “What's the point?” How do you make sense out of this?

An artist once was asked to paint “peace and tranquility.” He thought about it for weeks. He could paint peaceful mountain scenes – gently flowing brooks – calm sunsets. But none of that seemed to stimulate him. Finally, after months of agonizing, the idea came, and in a matter of weeks, the painting was complete. He invited the man who had commissioned him to do the painting over to his studio for the first viewing. He pulled the veil off the work and immediately a frown formed on the man's face. His brow was wrinkled, his eyes were squinted, his lips were pursed tightly. He obviously didn't like the artists painting titled “Peace.”

The artist had painted a seascape. The sky was dark and forbidding. Lightning streaked across the canvas. Rain was driven sideways by the strong wind. Powerful waves crashed on a large boulder in the foreground of the scene. On first sight, the painting was anything but peaceful. The customer stared for a long time, trying to figure out how this painting could be called “Peace.” Finally, his face began to soften. His eyes opened wider – a slight smile graced his lips. He had finally seen it. In the midst of the raging stormy sea, the artist had placed a sea gull – perched safe and dry in a cleft in the rock. Though all around was stormy, as long as he clung to the rock, he was safe.

That's the truth of God's will for us all. Jesus came for the express purpose of giving us safe passage

through the rough waters of this life and eternity. If we will cling to Jesus through the storms of life, He will give us safety in this life, and that safety will give us confidence for every new day. So, the answer to the first question is: Yes, God does care, and He sent Jesus to prove it!

Let me see if I can set the context of this writing for you. Tradition has it that the writer is King Solomon. You may not know who King Solomon was, and that's ok because I really didn't either until I became a preacher, but the point is that he was a king and you can understand that. As a king he could try and have anything he wanted in life, and he did, to try to find the meaning of life. He had enough money and power to try it all. He tried a lot of it. As you read the letter, you realize he tried all forms of pleasure, he tried wisdom, he had wealth, possessions, he acquired more and more, accomplishments, castles, gardens, singers and dancers, slaves, you name it. Not only that, he was a poet and a philosopher. Yet no matter what he tried, he was still left with this empty feeling of not being able to explain it all. What's the meaning of it all? And that's where this book of *Ecclesiastes* comes from. How do you make sense out of the time and seasons of God's own choosing?

That's the problem that this writer is dealing with. I want to read on; He says,

“What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time. Moreover, He has put a sense of past and future into their minds. Yet, they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” [Eccl. 3:9-11]

And here's the catch: the hard part about being a human being is that God has put past and present into our minds; he has put the sense of eternity into our hearts. We want to know how to make sense of times and seasons, because we are capable of dealing with something as big as eternity. Just because we can't explain everything doesn't mean

that there's no point to it. It's frustrating that God has put this sense of eternity into our hearts and we can't make sense out of it. It says right here, “They cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” In other words, they can't explain it all.

But it's that frustration, that desire that comes from that sense of eternity in us that is the key to what makes us a human being in the first place, and it's the key to what leads us to God, because that is what guides us into hope, that sense of eternity. When you want to get right down to basics, hope is what makes us human.

Otherwise, I could just conclude that because I can't make sense out of things, I might as well just do whatever feels good, kind of like this writer, this rich king, tried doing whatever feels good. It didn't work for him and it doesn't work for you and me.

No matter what season of life we are in right now, we are dealing with this issue of hope. There are all kinds of seasons of life. There are seasons defined by age. There's birth and learning to walk and going to school and aging. I recently went to the doctor and found out I'm in a new season myself—I just got my first prescription to control high cholesterol. I can swim 20 laps in less than 20 minutes, workout and eat pretty well. There is no *good* explanation, I know it is hereditary, but that is not a very good explanation for me as to this season in my life. There are all sorts of seasons that have to do with what's happening in our lives. There's a season to fall in love. There's the season of maturing love. There's the season of taking on more and more responsibility, and working hard, and there's a season for letting go of responsibility. There's a season for simplifying, and paying attention to just the one thing that God has given you to deal with today. But no matter what season we are in, we are the same. No matter what season we are in there's something about it that just isn't quite complete, that we just wish we could change a little bit. There's some change we pray for because we have hope built into us. That's what guides us to God.

Isn't it interesting? It seems to me that our God is a God who loves change. And I think He loves the

change in season, whether it's the seasons of nature or the seasons of our lives. It's interesting to me that when C. S. Lewis wrote a story to try to illustrate what a world would be like when God was absent and removed out of the world, the way he chose to describe that world was a world of constant winter—bleak midwinter, when the water was stone. It never changed. Always winter, always frozen, never Christmas. No change. But when Christ shows up, and the thaw begins, the buds of hope appear. My prayer is that when you find change in your life that is where you will see God at work!

Two practical pieces of application come from this scripture and I will close with them today:

Number One: Sometimes you just have to decide. We cannot always make sense out of why this season exists—should I go this way or that way, should I take this new job or not? It's not until after we decide that we realize why that season came about and why that made sense. The point is to make a decision that God can bless. Make a decision out of hope. Make a decision that lives out the hope that God has put in you. That is the decision that God can bless. And then, watch what happens. See how he works in that decision. I read a story a while back about a man who wanted to go to seminary. He had a wife and children and it was going to be an extreme sacrifice for them all. When he went and talked to a seminary professor about the possibility the professor told him that he needed to seek God's timing for this season in his life. You see the man had a passion for preaching but the season of his life was to be a husband and a dad. Sometimes we have to make choices that are not always what we plan.

Number Two: Focus on the only thing you can change—your own heart, your attitude. God hasn't given us dominion over the time and the seasons. He's only given dominion over our response to them. So focus on the relationships that connect you to eternity. If you want an easy way to do that, look for a way to bless someone. Look for a way to be a blessing in someone's life, and you'll discover the joy, and that joy is what will connect you to eternity.

In short, I can sum this wisdom up by saying, Live *in* the moment, but not *for* the moment" Live in the moment, but live it for eternity. In the midst of living, I hope you have the time of your life.