Living with the End in Mind: Weathering the Seasons of Life

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

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In chapter 1 the Preacher introduced his main thesis: death puts our lives into perspective; our lives are a breath, so very short. In chapter 2, the Preacher taught us that all the pursuits and pleasures in which we find our meaning will slip through our fingers with little lasting satisfaction; instead we should receive life as a gift from God. Now in chapter 3 the Preacher begins to explain why our lack of control of this life is the very thing that can give us hope. We must learn to accept two things: first, we are bound by the limits of time, and second, God is not! “Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever” (3:14). We are each building our lives, but as we do so, we are neither the architect nor the site manager.

Ecclesiastes 3 is a very beautiful chapter, with famous words of poetry often read at funerals. But the beauty of the Preacher’s poetry in verses 1-8 is only half the story; we need the punch of his statements in verses 9-22 if we are actually to find any joy and hope in the poetry.

1. The Poetry – To Everything There Is a Season (1-8).
   1. The Poem’s Structure
      1. This list of opposites is made up of 28 items in 14 pairs.
      2. The list can be divided in 4 groups of seven.
      3. The number seven which pictures a complete whole throughout the Bible.
      4. This list of opposites emphasizes the entirety of the seasons that occur in a human life.
   2. The Poem’s Beauty
      1. The poem expresses the beautiful complexity of life.
      2. Good times and bad times:
         1. Birth and death (2)
         2. Sowing and harvesting (2)
         3. Killing and healing (3)
         4. Demolition and Construction (3)
         5. Weeping and laughing (4)
         6. Mourning and dancing (4)
      3. Uncertain times:
         1. Time to cast away and a time to gather (5)
         2. Time to embrace and a time to refrain (5)
         3. Time to get and a time to lose (6)
         4. Time to keep and a time to cast away (6)
         5. Time to rend and a time to mend (7)
         6. Time to keep silence and a time to speak (7)
         7. Time to love and time to hate (8)
         8. Time of war and time of peace (8)
   3. The Poem’s Problem
      1. The seasons of life teach us that we live in a sin cursed world.
      2. The seasons of life teach us that we do not control the seasons.
      3. Verse 9 teaches us that the changing seasons of life on this earth cannot bring us lasting satisfaction!
2. The Point – God Is in Control (9-22).
   1. The Comfort (9-14)
      1. It is God’s will that we press on through the seasons of life as difficult as many of them may be (9-10).
      2. God will make all things beautiful in his perfect time (11).
      3. God has placed eternity in our hearts (11).
         1. “World” is a translation of the Hebrew word “Olam” which means, “for ever, long time, constancy, all (coming) time, for all time, for ever, long time ago, the dim past.” The reason “world” was chosen in this context is that the world’s age is far beyond our own.
         2. Ecclesiastes 3:14 “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever (olam):”
         3. The concept being taught here is that God has put an awareness of the eternal in our hearts which the passing seasons of this life cannot satisfy.
         4. 1 Samuel 27:12 “And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever (olam).”
         5. Psalm 61:8 “So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever (olam), that I may daily perform my vows.”
         6. Genesis 49:26 “The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost of the everlasting (olam) hills:”
      4. We can’t see the blueprint of our lives, but we can rest in the fact that God does (11).
      5. Therefore, we should rejoice in the life God has given us (12-13).
         1. We must rejoice that God knows all.
         2. We must do good knowing that God is in control.
         3. We must receive every moment as a gift from the hand of God.
      6. We rest in an eternal God who knows all and is in complete control (14).
      7. We can rest in a God that lives beyond time and will deal justly with every injustice (15-17).
         1. God will bring every injustice into account (15).
         2. God will judge wickedness wherever it is found (16-17).
         3. All will die, and all will stand before their maker (18-22).
   2. The Challenge
      1. Since God lives outside of time, sees all things, and will judge both the righteous and the wicked, we must stop trying to be in control of all that happens to us and rest in the God Who controls all.
      2. The passing seasons of our lives teach us to adjust our expectations that change is a part of life, and God has willed it that we walk through these ever-changing seasons hand in hand with our Heavenly Father Who knows the way.
      3. We must learn not to seek satisfaction in the time that God has given us, but instead seek to be satisfied in Him as we receive life as a gift.
      4. When it comes to weathering the seasons of our lives, we must realize that we are not the gods of our own lives. Instead, we are God’s little children, living in a fallen world, but walking hand in hand with the God of the universe Who wants us to enjoy the life He has given us while trusting Him to guide our path and set all things straight one day.

Conclusion:

1. What things do you seek to control that are actually beyond your ability to control? What might it look like to surrender control to God in those areas?
2. In what areas do you need to embrace change? Do you need to embrace change to prepare for future change?
3. Knowing that God will judge every injustice, what difference can that truth make to the worries you have right now?