

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] In 1895 H.G. Wells published his newest novel *"The Time Machine."* It was about a man who invented a machine that allowed him to travel back in time. He was hardly the first to write about time travel, but his book captured the world's imagination. Because we long for the ability to escape the cruel bounds of time. None of us have enough. You might not have wished for a time machine, but you have certainly wished for time to change. You may have wished that you could slow down time and enjoy a moment just a little bit more. Or maybe you've wished you could speed up time and get through a line at the DMV quicker. Or you wish you could go back in time and have one last conversation with that loved one, or change that decision you made that you always regretted. But we have no time machine. I about we will ever make one. Because part of what it means to be human is that we are trapped in the present.
2. [Need] Rather than simply wishing for time machines we need to understand how to make the most of our time. Or at the very least understand what the Bible has to teach us. Because we are made from dust and are all heading back to the dirt. We have a limited time in between our dustiness in this life. We need to make sure that we make the most of it.
3. [Subject] This passage is all about how to have the correct relationship and perspective on time. Let's dive in and take a look.
4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 3

Time is limited and out of our control. Time is limited and of our control.

This is one of the great frustrations of humanity. We have mastered the oceans and are conquering the stars. We've gone from log houses to skyscrapers. But we cannot control time. It eludes our grasp. Only in our stories can we imagine those with the ability to travel through, or control how they experience time. But we can't.

This chapter begins with a poem. It's arguably one of the best-known poems in the Bible. Most of you have probably heard at least snippets of it

even if you have never read the book of Ecclesiastes before. It's so beautiful that those who are not Christians can be captivated by it. It's so profound that it gets read at secular funerals.

It actually reminds me of an experience I had with a piece of art. I was taking a class called "Christian view of art" at Dallas Theological Seminary and found myself on a class trip at the famous Dallas Museum of art standing in front of Jackson Pollock's painting "Cathedral." And I was captivated by it. If you don't know much about Pollock, which I didn't, he was an abstract drip painter. It means he would lay the canvas on the ground and then walk around it just letting paint drip onto it.

I used to just mock this kind of art and call it childish and silly. But standing in front of it I was transfixed. I found it absolutely beautiful. And it is beautiful, but I found that I needed someone to explain it to me. Hey, I really like this, but I need you to tell me about it. This poem is like that. We might all be drawn to its beauty, but we don't understand what God is trying to communicate.

Let's take a closer look and see. Verse 1 **"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven"**

Season and time. Time is repeated over and over throughout these verses. It is said 28 times in 14 pairs. And the poem is meant to cover the full spectrum of life. It begins with "a time to be born" Then "a time to die"

Life and death. War and peace. Laughter and weeping. Mourning and dancing. Embracing and loneliness. Seeking and losing. Keeping and throwing away. Silence and speaking. Love and hate.

In these verses, we see the beauty of ordinary life and experience. But we also see the pain. We get glimpses of the suffering of loneliness, losing, tears, and death. All of us know that there are times when life is just hard.

What does this all mean? Some believe that this is just meant to show us the wonder and beauty of life. That its honesty and poetry should move us to worship. I agree this should make us worship, but I think something deeper is going on here.

Look again at Verse 1 **“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven”** Everything has its time. It happens for a moment, or a few moments and then passes.

I think this section is about reminding us that time and life are totally out of our control. None of us had any say in when our births were. You did not get to choose the day you born. You did not get to choose the generation or year you were born in. Maybe you wish you were born years later, or many years into the future. But you don’t get a say. We don’t get a vote when death comes.

If we had control, then we would also choose life and joy. We would pick laughter, keeping, embracing healing, and peace. But we don’t. Those times and seasons come whether we like it or not. The seasons we love are too short and the seasons we dread too long.

I don’t want to get bogged down in examining each pairing in these 8 verses. Because the poem is not about the specifics of each time and what happens. The point is that it’s all limited and out of our control.

[Transition] This limitation is frustrating to us. It leads us to our conundrum in point number 2.

We long for more time and control. We long for more time and control.

Our natural response to our circumstances is to wish for more. We wish that we could gain more time. We don’t want to run out and old age comes faster than you thought. And we want more control over time. We wish we could make moments slow down or speed up.

Verse 9 **“What gain has the worker for his toil?”** That’s the central question of this entire book. What do we gain from all our beautiful and terrible time? Not much. We just die.

Verse 10-11 **“I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time.”**

This desire inside ourselves is natural. God created the seasons and times to work this way. We spend our lives in small moments that fade and pass on quickly. And there is profound God-created beauty.

But it is more than that in the rest of verse 11 **“also he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”**

God stamped our hearts and our innermost beings with a longing for eternity. A desire to go on and on and on. Humanity was not designed with an end date in mind.

Sin and death were not created by God. They are the enemy. The serpent entered the garden and death came with him. And we long for Eden and eternity. We long for a return to life as it should be. But from our perspective, we cannot find it.

The rest of verse 11 **“yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”** We do not get to see the whole plan. We are like sailors on a ship bound for a new world that we have only heard of in dreams and stories. Eternity is in our hearts, but not in our experience.

In verses 12-13 he says something similar to last week. I warned you that this would be repeated throughout the book and here it is again. **“I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they love, also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil - this is God’s gift to man.”** Here the focus is on the fact that the finiteness of time is actually a gift. It is good that we only experience one moment at a time in sequence. We were not made to transcend our time limitations.

God gave Adam and Eve all of creation. He only had one limitation, don’t eat from that tree. But they couldn’t resist and now people die. They had all the gifts in the world but still wanted more.

And we do something similar when it comes to time. We don’t appreciate the few moments we have as gifts from God, but want more of them and more control. Again this is not just a generically spiritual “appreciate each moment.” I think this passage wants us to stop fighting.

I see this with my own children. They are still really young. And one thing that happens with young kids is they grow fast. When they are first born every few weeks they make another leap. And sometimes there I wish

I could just slow it down and pause. Or stretch it out and stop them from getting too big so fast.

Each moment of pain is a countdown to a time when that will be no more. There is no crying in heaven because there is no sorrow. There are not cemeteries in heaven because there is no death. And each moment of pain makes us long for eternity and Jesus. That's a good thing and a strange gift.

Verse 14 **"I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it so that people fear before him."**

Verse 15 **"That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been, and God seeks what has been driven away."**

These verses mean that God is the one in control of time. Whatever He does lasts far into eternity, while our actions fade. We cannot take the strings of time out of His hands. And we should fear God. Not that we should be afraid and shaking in terror. We should be in awe of His might and power. This should lead us to worship Him. Instead of trying to be in control, we should worship the God who is in control.

I am somewhat of an organized person. Every now and then I get ambitious and get out a calendar, or a planner and start making plots. I try to plot out my preaching and teaching. I have the rest of the year through December plotted out and planned each Sunday and I am working on 2023 already. I even try to plan out my weeks and days in 30 minute increments.

Part of the reason I love to do this is that it gives me the illusion of control. Now that something has been planned it will happen! But the problem is that my plans often get frustrated. I wanted to have the sermon mostly written by Thursday, but it didn't happen. My great 30 minute schedule gets thrown off by toddlers and sickness. Because the world does not run according to my schedule and my calendar. I wish that it did because then it would all be more efficient and how I like it.

Now you might not have a planner, or by quite that organized. But all of us long for control over our time and our lives. And it is frustrating when we can't. But instead of sitting in frustration of the things out of our

control, We should accept the gift of time God has given us. We should submit to the King of Time instead of trying to become sovereign ourselves.

[transition] Our time is limited and we always want more, but we should simply accept the time God gives us. But we cannot just sit back, kick up our feet and do whatever we want. Because our time is actually more important than we know.

Point number 3 **Our limited time is eternally significant. Our limited time is eternally significant.**

Yes, our time is limited and we cannot control it. Yes, we should enjoy the limited time that we have been given. But this does not mean that we can do whatever we want. We shouldn't just spend our limited time on earth however we want. Because the reality is that our limited time is eternally significant.

What you do today, even right now in these few moments of gathered worship will have consequences not just for the rest of your life, but for the rest of eternity and time.

Despite this fact, our world is filled with evil. Verse 16 **"Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness even there was wickedness."**

There is nothing new under the sun. The wickedness of today is not greater than the wickedness of the past. Everywhere Solomon looks he sees wickedness. Where there should be justice, Places like the courts, the throne room, and governments, In those places of justice, there is just wickedness.

And in the place where there should be righteousness, there is more wickedness. Places of righteousness like the temple and places of worship. The seminaries and gatherings of righteous people are just filled with the wicked.

Even though our time is eternally significant, Most of humanity spends it wickedly and unwisely. But instead of despairing and whining about the good old days look what he says in Verse 17 **"I said in my heart, God will**

judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work."

He puts his hope not in the present. Not in his current experience of reality, but in the reality to come. He finds comfort in the coming judgment of God.

Because **"God will judge both the righteous and the wicked."** Everything they do is seen by God. It does not escape His notice.

And he is recognizing not just that God will judge, but that this is the time before judgment. **"For there is a time for every matter and for every work."**

It is not time for the judgment of the righteous Judge yet. That will come. But that means that today is a time for the wicked to thrive. It will not last forever, but it will exist now.

So widespread sin and injustice should not shock or surprise us, It is time for it. But its time will fade one day.

Verse 18 **"I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts."** God is allowing this time of wickedness to continue as a test. And we are all taking the test at this very moment.

This is why our time is eternally significant. God is watching and testing our every word, every action, every day. Our every moment. Each decision that we make. Every interaction we have with strangers and families.

And what makes each of these moments eternally significant is that one day God will grade our lives. Remember the end of the book of Ecclesiastes in 12:14 **"For God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing whether good or evil."**

And there are no do-overs after judgment. There are no second chances after you die. This life right now is the test. And when we die our time is up. The next few verses are brutal. They again remind us of our coming deaths.

Verse 19 **"For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They**

all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over beasts, for all is vanity."

You are going to die just like beasts and animals. Just like dogs, or cats, or even flies. We all die. Being a human might be better than being a beetle, But the reality is that we will still die just like them.

Verse 20 **"All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return."**

All of us will return to dust. Whether we get buried in the ground in a beautiful box, Or whether we are cremated and turned to ash. All of us will become dust again. Just like the animals and beasts of the world. We die.

God's hope is that during our time of testing we will recognize that we are dust. That we will see our limitations. Instead of turning to the gifts, or to ourselves, we will turn to God for help.

Because after we die we are going to face judgment. The wicked will be punished for all of their sins. The things we see and the things that they have done in secret places. Murderers, rapists, and abusers will face true justice. Those who thought they got away with their sin will find out that God was watching.

And the righteous will also be rewarded. Verse 20 seems not exciting, None of us wanted to be reminded that we are made from dust and to dust we shall return. There is a peculiar blessing in being from dust. It is a blessing because the dust of our lives will last.

You might be made from dust. But the actions that you take will reverberate throughout eternity. Even your most ordinary boring actions matter. Your decision to get out of bed and come and worship Jesus this Sunday is noticed and eternally significant. Your decision to give to that poor person even though you weren't sure if they would waste it is eternally significant.

We might be dust. We might all disappear as our bodies decay and fade into the earth. But we can be dust that matters for all eternity. But only if we pass the test.

Because after you die that's it and our test is over. You will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And your every action will be held up against the rubric, or teacher key. And it's a pass-fail kind of test. You have

to get every single answer right to gain eternal life. You cannot just do more good than bad. You cannot just be 51% righteous. The problem is none of us can pass the test.

We need help. So before you go before the judgment seat you need an advocate. You need someone who begs for mercy. Someone who can give you the extra credit you need to pass.

[transition] But how? Not just how can we pass the test, but how can our dust matter forever? It is only found in one person and found in the gospel.

Point number 4 **Jesus redeems our time. Jesus redeems our time.**

Jesus is the only one who can help us. The gospel is our only hope to have our finite moments matter in eternity. He is the only way that we can escape the just punishment of hell. Jesus is the only hope.

Both of these last two verses are questions. They repeatedly ask "who?"

The first one is in Verse 21 **"Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?"**

This is a rather pessimistic verse. It has led some to argue that the author may not believe in eternal life. Maybe he truly doesn't get it. I don't think that's true.

He is just acknowledging that none of us alive know for sure. We do not have definitive or scientific proof. Our experience is too limited.

But there is someone who knows where the spirit of man goes. There is someone who knows what happens after death. That person is Jesus.

Because Jesus Himself died. And before He died He lived a perfect life. And He passed the test with flying colors. God judged Him perfect and righteous. And when He died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. He died in order to make it possible

Verse 22 **"So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. who can bring him to see what will be after him?"**

Again he asks the question if anyone can take us into the life to come? Is there anyone who knows what comes after death? Anyone who can take us by the hand, Guide us into death and bring us back to life?

The answer is yes. That person is Jesus. Because of Jesus, we can rejoice. We do not need to fear death. We look forward to the resurrection and eternal life.

We must be dust, But humanity is the most blessed dust on the earth. Jesus died for dust. He looked at us and did not see dust. He did not see beasts. He did not see atoms that are only the result of chance. He did not see creatures randomly evolved from the ooze. He saw someone He loved.

And Jesus is the one who redeems our time. He makes the time that we spend on this earth matter for eternity. He redeems and blesses our obedience.

Your every ordinary moment spent giving your life to Christ will echo in eternity. When every nation and empire crumbles into dust and lost to history, Your decision to follow Jesus will be rewarded.

And those who give their lives to Jesus. Who repent of all the time they have spent sinning, disobedient, and far from God. Their time is redeemed too. There is no life that has been too wasted. No sinner is too far gone. There is nothing that the blood of Jesus cannot undo.

The forgiveness of Jesus is like a time machine that undoes your every sin. In the eyes of God it is like you never sinned.

And there is no such thing as a wasted life with Christ. Even if you spent your whole life in wickedness and far from God. If you came to Him. If you repented on your deathbed, Then your life is not over, it has only begun.

In heaven and in the Kingdom of God there are no beggars. There are no village idiots. There are no people who do not belong. No one is on the outskirts. All of us are in the family of God because of Jesus.

And He redeems our time. Even the time we believe we have wasted. If you do not know Jesus, Repent and come to faith.

If you do know Jesus. If you have called yourself a Christian but have lived your life doing whatever you wanted, It is not too late. Come to the arms of Jesus. He can redeem all the time you've spent and all the eternity

you have left. All you must do is ask for mercy. Because everyone who asks for it will find it.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] We don't control time even though we want to. And our time is more important than we know. But Jesus can redeem it all if we come and are born again.
2. [Challenge] The peculiar blessing of dust is this. Jesus died for us because He loves us. And our bodies may fade to dust, but they will return anew in the resurrection. We will no longer be dust, but sons and daughters of God in the new heavens and the new earth.