

Ecc04 – Turn, Turn, Turn – Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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Today we look at easily the most famous chapter in Ecclesiastes – Ecclesiastes 3.

God has a plan and a purpose for your life. And that plan and that purpose includes *all the seasons* of your life. The question is, can you believe – *by faith* – that God is at work in *every* season of your life? Can you believe that God in his *unstoppable love* and in his *unexplainable sovereignty* is at work in every season? Whether the season is divinely *orchestrated by God* (where everything is put in place perfectly), or the result of this *fallen world*, or brought on by *our own choices*, or our lack of making *right choices* – God in his sovereignty is at work in every season of our lives.

No matter how the season started, can you say today that God is at work in *every season* of your life, past, present and future? God is at work. Can you say it? Can you say God is at work? I believe.

Now listen, for some of us, this is a traumatic moment, to say yeah, I believe. I've had people say to me in intense counseling situations “don't you say that God was at work in this situation in my life. There's no way he could have been.” And sometimes it takes a while for us to embrace that even in our darkest seasons, God is at work. And he is at work in his unstoppable love and his unexplainable sovereignty.

God has a plan and God has a purpose and God is putting together a perfect puzzle – like a tapestry. You look at the back and see a mess of threads and knots and you think, yeah, that's my life. But can you believe there is another side, another perspective and on the other side is this beautiful tapestry of a picture that God is putting together? And you – cannot – *comprehend it or understand it*.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, would you show us that though we can't comprehend it, that though we can't understand it, Lord may we believe by faith that you are at work for good in our lives. That you, in ways we cannot comprehend, are working all of the seasons, all of the turning, all of the events in our lives, together to create something of beauty that brings glory to your name. Lord, may we understand more fully your sovereignty and may we sense in a greater way your unstoppable love when you're at work in our lives. Show it to us today, Lord, please, in your name Jesus, amen.*

In the past six weeks, five core members of this church have had loved ones die. As a church we've done all we can (we've done a lot) to minister to each one of these families (with one still to go) and in the past four weeks I've done three funerals all for the core

members in this church who have all lost the closest people in their lives. And I can tell you today, if you want a healthy dose of the reality of “seasons” of this life, help three grieving families prepare funerals in four weeks. It’s been quite a wake-up call as we go through the Book of Ecclesiastes and it’s been overwhelming.

We’ve been focused on the extreme brevity, the vapor and mist of a life, and the comparative meaninglessness of this life “under the sun” here on this earth. Life is only meaningful as it connects to eternity that is not a vapor, as this life is. Today, Solomon turns to the seasons of every life “under the sun”.

Guys, if you listen to the stories of the oldest people in your life, you’ll find *if you’re actually listening*, that in a certain way, as they are *re-telling their life* you get a sense that they are *foretelling your life*. As they talk about the joys and struggles of their life, if you’re wise enough, you can hear them preparing you for similar joys and struggles in your life. How can we not?

It’s only when we are *so young* (and don’t take this wrong if you’re young) that we think we know it all, that we can’t make this connection. But there’s a time we start listening and saying, wait a minute. My grandfather is talking about me, it’s just things that haven’t occurred yet in my life.

This is the way that the seasons of life turn. There are similar joys and similar struggles, similar highs and similar lows turning in every life.

Open your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 3:1. As Solomon sees it, here are the seasons of every life under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NLT)

1 For everything there is a season, a time for every activity (every purpose) under heaven.

2 A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest.

3 A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up.

4 A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance.

5 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away.

6 A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away.

7 A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak.

8 A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.

To every thing (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
Just an old song for burned out Hippies?

NO, it's not.

I was surprised as I read some good Bible scholars who tried to go through these eight verses and define every one of those seasons. And I thought, how silly. Solomon is painting a picture of our lives in big picture format. Every one of us will go through – dare I say – every turn in these eight verses. This is not just written to be an old hippie burnt out folk song. This *is life*. This *is* how life turns. We will experience every one of these highs and lows, should we live long enough.

This life has a repeatable ebb and flow. It has a reproducible rise and fall. There are times, and seasons that your parents, and grandparents and great grandparents all went through and your grandchildren will go through them as well. There's just nothing new under the sun. And this life turns in seasons, it turns, and turns, and turns.

The questions are and the questions we must ask are:

- #1) Is our loving and sovereign God *involved* in the “ever turning seasons” of this life?
- #2) Are these “ever turning seasons” of life worth *anything* under the sun?

And Solomon begins to answer by asking the hard question in Ecclesiastes 3:9.

Ecclesiastes 3:9 (NLT)

9 What do people really get for all their hard work?

Solomon is not afraid to ask the question *Is it all worth it?* Am I going through these “ever turning seasons” in order to get something here on this earth (under the sun)? What do we *really get* for all our struggles as we go through the seasons of this life?

In Ecclesiastes 3:10 Solomon says,

Ecclesiastes 3:10 (NLT)

10 I have seen the burden (the work) God has placed on us all.

Solomon is saying, I've seen the things God has given each of us to do, the burdens that God has placed on us, these are the things that we are going about doing *while* the seasons of this life are “turn, turn, turning.”

Wherever you're at in life, whatever it is that God has given you to do, you do that as the seasons of your life turn.

I think of my wife and her being such an incredible mom. First an incredible wife. Then an incredible mom, and then an incredible grandma (Oma). And in between the mom and Oma thing there was kind of a season of what now? There are times when what we're doing feels out of joint, out of place. But my wife is still doing the same thing she was doing when I met her at fifteen years old. She is still the same person. She is still carrying the burden that God has made her to carry, but the seasons have changed so many times around her and around us.

In verses 9 and 10 Solomon is saying, I've looked and I understand from an "under the sun" perspective... looking at it from a *human, vapor of a life* perspective, if the times and seasons of this life are just going to *keep turning* then *what is the use?*

But Solomon is not afraid to ask questions from the perspective of *this life* AND he is not afraid to *force us* to look at the same things from *God's perspective*. And here is God's perspective.

Ecclesiastes 3:11(a) (NLT)

11(a) Yet God has made everything beautiful for (in) its own time.

The burden (work) we've been given by God, and the turning seasons of this life, they come from the *loving sovereignty of God*.

God is fashioning a tapestry of your life with all the *turning* and all the *seasons* and he will make *all the parts* of your life beautiful in its time. He will use even the parts you can't imagine God could use.

This verse is the Ecclesiastes version of Romans 8:28 found in the New Testament.

God makes All Things Beautiful – in HIS Time

The Hebrew word translated "*beautiful*" is "most literally" translated PROPER. The word means – to make something SUITABLE, RIGHT, APPROPRIATE.

God makes All Things Suitable, Right, and Appropriate. in their own Time

And that means God is at work in *every* season and in *every* circumstance and when the giant tapestry of your life is all put together, and when you see it from *God's side of eternity* you will see that God made everything *suitable, right and appropriate – in its time*.

And in order to cause us to *desire* to see things from God's perspective... God has planted his perspective in each of our hearts. Look at Ecclesiastes 3:11(b).

Ecclesiastes 3:11(b) (NLT)

11(b) . . . He has planted eternity in the human heart . . .

God made us for eternity and he planted the *desire for eternity* in *our hearts*.

God ultimately made us
to *LOOK* for
to *REACH* for
to *LONG* for --- *ETERNITY*

And the world and the Prince of this World are both *working non-stop* to *cover that up*.

But even though God has planted eternity in each of our hearts, we still cannot see the whole scope of God's work *while* we live in this *vapor of a life*.

Ecclesiastes 3:11(c) (NLT)

11(c) . . . but even so (even though we have eternity in our hearts), people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

You CANNOT SEE *God's perspective* from this side of *eternity*. When you *get there*, you *WILL SEE* (as Paul says – then ***You will know, AS you are known***).

But here, you CANNOT know God's *sovereign tapestry plan* for your life. It's a matter of faith. We cannot believe because *we see*, we must see because *we believe*. We must say God I know you're at work in my life, not because I can see it, but because I know ***YOU***. And I know your promises so I *know* you're at work in my life and that allows me to see *by faith* that you're at work in my life.

You CANNOT see it
You CANNOT understand it
You CANNOT control it...

So, Solomon – *wisest man who ever lived*... WHAT DO WE DO? And Solomon says, I'm glad you asked.

Ecclesiastes 3:12 (NLT)

12 So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can.

This is the vapor life side secret of Ecclesiastes. Not speaking *sinful enjoyment* but simply enjoying what God has given to you *AS* he has given it to you. So many of us are *so busy* keeping the hamster wheel turning, that we can't even stop and thank God for the life he's already given us. We can't stop for one minute and just *be happy* and just *enjoy* the season *God has us in*.

Whether it's good or bad, high or low, easy or difficult there is *something* in this season of your life *right now* in *this season* of your life that you can *thank God for*, and that you can have *joy in*. Even if it is just knowing that God is *with you* and that God is *at work* for your *eternal good* and for his *eternal glory*!!

If you are at the very lowest point of your life you can know this: GOD IS WITH YOU. Is that something to be thankful for? Amen. When you cross into eternity, you're going to be really thankful for it. You can be thankful now. What if that is all you have? Isn't it enough? Didn't we sing earlier this morning, all I need is you?

So, if you're in the place where all you have is Jesus, guess what? Be happy! Be happy! Be happy! Don't say, well God, I know, I know, I know. But I want a whole bunch of stuff that is going to burn up in the fire any second. I want a whole bunch of stuff that I might lose tomorrow when I step off the curb at the wrong minute. I want all that meaningless stuff. Don't do that. Don't do that.

Say, God, you're awesome. You're incredible. You love me. You're at work. You're creating something beautiful in my life. I want to thank you for it. I want to enjoy what you've given me.

Solomon says, take a minute. Get off the hamster wheel and just *be happy* that the loving and sovereign God is *at work in your life* and *be happy* with what that *loving and sovereign God has given you*. God has an eternal inheritance waiting for you that is undefiled and does not fade away and is kept in heaven for you. He has a home in heaven for you for eternity. He's going to make you right before God if you're saved and committed your life to him. Be happy about it! It's okay! In fact, it's required.

The loving and sovereign God is at work in your life. We can say, in this season of my life what have you given me that I can be happy for? What have you given me that I can enjoy, even for one moment?

Ecclesiastes 3:13 (NLT)

13 And people should *eat* and *drink* and *enjoy* the *fruits* of their *labor*, for *these are gifts from God*.

Again, not an encouragement to live sinfully, but simply enjoying the gifts God has given you. So, if you have a piece of bread and a cup of tap water, be happy. Enjoy it. Eat and drink your bread and tap water, that's the fruit of your labor. (And I would say, as a side note, if all you have is a piece of bread and a cup of tap water, maybe there should be a little more labor in your life, so you can get some ice to put in the water). But whatever it is you have, sit down and be happy and say Lord, you're with me. You're with me. And if I have food and drink, I'll enjoy them because you're with me. These are gifts from God.

We've got to find some joy and thankfulness right in the *current season* of our life. It may not be easy to quickly find it, but it is there... because God is there. It is so critical. That is what this section is about. The seasons in your life are turning, they're changing. Whatever you're in now, it's going to change. There is another season coming. God is the only constant. *God is the only constant.*

I promise you, no matter what season you are in today, there is *SOMETHING* that God has given you that you can be *thankful for* and that you can find some *joy in*. It takes faith to embrace that.

And though it may be difficult in some seasons of life, Solomon says we must learn by faith to trust in and to rest in the sovereignty and the immutability of our great God. You say, God I know you're working because I know YOU. And because I know your love for me and I know your sovereign work that I know something good is happening, though I can't see it or sense it.

We've got to learn to trust the sovereignty and the immutability of God.

The SOVEREIGNTY of God means: ***God is God – and you are Not – so stop acting like you are***

The IMMUTABILITY of God means: ***God Never - Changes***

And we must learn – by faith – to trust in and rest in the sovereignty and the immutability of our Great God. God is God, we are not. He is the one who understands. He is the one that's making the tapestry out of our lives. He is the one who has the plan and the purpose laid out for us. And because he never changes, his love for us will never change, his promises to us will never change. His good plan for us will *never change!* Yeah, there's some knots on the back side that he is re-working and he is using to make other parts of the tapestry. But he is never going to stop bringing about something good in your life.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 3:14(a),

Ecclesiastes 3:14(a) (NLT)

14(a) And I know that whatever God does is final (will endure forever). Nothing can be added to it or taken from it . . .

God's work is *absolute* and it *will endure* forever. There is something eternal going on in your life right now as the seasons of your life change, God is doing an eternal work. You can kick and scream. You can whine and demand, but God's sovereign work *is forever*. *Nothing can be added to it or taken from it*. God is still going to bring his plan to pass. We need to have faith in that. And his plan for his children, listen, is to share his glory!

In the end, Solomon says that is a reason for us

#1) To find JOY and THANKFULNESS *right in the season* that we are in

#2) To RESPOND to God's sovereignty *in reverence* and *in awe* of who he is

Can you catch this phrase for me: *in reverent awe*? When was the last time you were face down in the dirt before God? Face down before God in reverent awe where you just feel like the Apostle John in Revelation Chapter 1 where he can't stand in the presence of the glorified Christ – he is face down in the dirt. Like Peter when he realized who Jesus really was, he said Lord, depart from me, I am not worthy. I'm not worthy to be in your presence. *THAT* is reverent awe. The Bible calls it the *fear of God*.

Ecclesiastes 3:14(b) (NLT)

14(b) . . . God's purpose (in his sovereignty) is that people should fear him.

Not FEAR in the sense we normally use the word. But a reverent awe that brings us to our knees with an *overwhelming understanding* of *WHO* God is and what he has done in our lives and what he is doing now in our lives – in this season.

What do you have *right now* in *this season* of your life that would bring you to a reverent awe of who *God is* and what *he's done* as you acknowledge his *indescribable sovereignty* and his *unexplainable love* for you.

*Lord, I am in Reverent AWE – Of ALL you've Done in My Life –
You have Guarded and Protected me – You have SAVED Me - and MADE me your own
Lord, I thank you SO MUCH, that you have kept MY Family Protected, and Close, and
Strong – thru all the years in Every Season –you have Provided for us, and Kept us Safe
You have been our Strong Tower, our Rock, our Safe Fortress
You have overcome the schemes of the enemy who seeks to Divide and Conquer us.*

And Lord, I – AM – THANKFUL!!! And I bow in reverent awe to your sovereign, loving hand of grace that has been our guide through every season – good and bad – high and

low. Lord we are thankful and we are in awe of your love and of your awesome sovereignty.

Listen, I want you to know something. No matter what it feels like, no matter what you think, if you belong to God or if you *will* belong to him, he has been with you in every season and every circumstance of your life. Including the ones that you can't believe that he was at work in. I'm not saying he caused it, I'm saying he was at work for good in it. And that should give you a reason to have this reverent fear of God, this awesome fear of God.

Psalm 145:8:

Psalm 145:8 (NET)

8 The Lord is merciful and compassionate; he is patient and demonstrates great loyal love.

Right now, right in the midst of whatever season you are *in today*...

Regardless of your CIRCUMSTANCE

Regardless of your OUTLOOK and

Regardless of the current strength of your FAITH

THE LORD is *sovereignly at work* in *this season* of your life. And he is MERCIFUL and COMPASSIONATE and he is PATIENT and he will faithfully SHOW YOU – Great Loyal Love!

Don't miss it!!

Right where you're at, right in this season – Look and see *Gods' mercy, God's compassion, God's great patience* and most of all, see *God's great faithful love* for you.

And finally, we've got to know that *as the world turns* God is at work. As the seasons continue to turn, God is at work, over and over again.

Ecclesiastes 3:15 (NLT)

15 What is happening now has happened before, and what will happen in the future has happened before, because God makes the same things happen over and over again.

This is *not* a fatalistic view. Solomon is saying *God is working IN the same seasons – over and over again*. The seasons of life that God has been *working in before... he will work in – again*.

The seasons of life repeat and God *continues to work*. If you are on the top of the world right now, guess what is coming. Valley. If you are the valley right now, guess what is coming. Mountaintop. But guess what comes after the mountaintop. Valley. And then what? Mountaintop. Stop focusing on it. Stop being so consumed about it.

The reason Paul says in Philippians, *whether I abound or abase, have plenty or suffer need I can do all things through Christ*, he is saying my circumstances don't matter. My relationship with Jesus Christ supersedes my circumstances. So, my circumstances are passing by, but Christ is the constant. That's what this is about. Let's start being consumed with eternity.

We said last week this life is a vapor – it is a mist. It's gone as quickly as the morning fog and this season that you're in, whether it is the BEST season or your life or the WORST season of your life...

IT – IS – A – VAPOR

So, let's STOP being consumed by it, and instead let's start being consumed with ETERNITY and with what the eternal God is doing in our lives and with what his sovereign PLAN and PURPOSE in it all – is!

And in reverence and awe, may we begin trusting God and resting in his *absolute, incredible, loving sovereignty*.

If you've never made a commitment to God to surrender to and trust in his loving sovereignty that is at work in every season of your life, I want to give you a chance to do that right now.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, make that real to us, please. That there is a moment Lord, where we must surrender to you as the sovereign and loving God of our lives and we must continue to surrender to you. To acknowledge that you are God and we are not, and that your love and your promises and your unchangeability guarantee that you're doing something beautiful in our lives.*

If that's you, if you've never made that commitment – make it now. *“Lord, I surrender. I surrender to your sovereignty. To your work. To your purpose and your plan. I give you what you have never lost, control of my life. I get out of your way, Lord, and say, lead me and guide me for your name's sake. Take over my life, Lord. Take over. I trust you with the tapestry that you are making of my life. And I thank you for it. And Lord I can't wait to see it from your eternal perspective. Please fill my life, take control of it. For your glory, and in your name, Jesus, amen.”*