

All In Good Time - Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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Introduction

All In Good Time... for many of us we have both heard these words spoken and have probably repeated them ourselves. To the little kid who wants it to be Christmas already or to the teenager who wants so badly to drive or to the engaged couple anticipating their upcoming wedding day we would say, ***“Well, all in good time.”***

But is it true? All in good time? Will you get everything you want in good time? Do good things come to those who wait? Possibly but certainly not always. *I would suppose it's dependent on how we would define good or rather Who would define what is good.*

If God (*who is the source of all goodness*) **is the one who defines what good is**, then the answer is absolutely **YES**. For the one who loves God and is called according to His purpose then yes, ***ALL in good time as God works everything together for our good and His glory.*** Really then we could change it to ***“All In God's Time”*** because they are one in the same.

Tonight, we come to the one of the most famous passages in the Bible **about time**. This passage that is before us is commonly used at memorial or celebration of life services for our loved ones.

While we live within the realm of time, there is One who the Bible describes as the Everlasting Father.

That famous passage of Isaiah 9 about the Child that was to be born and the Son that was to be given lists different names that this One will be known by and one of them is Everlasting Father.

Everlasting: length of forever

Father: founder, originator, one who causes something to begin

Father of Everlasting, Father of Forever, Father of Eternity, Father of Time, Architect of the Ages

Isaiah 57:15 says that God is the one who inhabits eternity. **Daniel 2:21** speaks of God as the one who changes the times and seasons.

He is the One who was, the One who is, & the One who is to come. He is the Beginning and the End.

God is sovereign over time and everything that happens within it. He is not only the Creator of time found in Genesis 1:1, *“In the beginning...”* but is the Sustainer of time.

We will find today that it is God who will make everything beautiful in its time and for the follower of Jesus, *this applies directly to our lives and the time that God gives us here on earth.*

From the cradle to the grave and everything in between, God is sovereign over our lives. We won't always know or understand all the whys but we can conclude from the Scriptures ***God is accomplishing His divine purposes on His divine timetable and all to the praise of His glory.***

Without this understanding the time that we have on this earth will be dreadful and draining, but with it we'll be able to see the limited time we have here in light of the unlimited time of eternity *and behold its beauty because of the God who makes it beautiful.*

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 & Pray

The Setter of Time (verses 1-8)

To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:

Solomon starts this chapter with a clear summary statement. Notice first that it's an all-encompassing statement using the words, *"everything"* and *"every."* *This is the same Hebrew word repeated twice meaning the whole of or the totality of.*

To everything there is a → season

Season: *zeman* – a set time, an appointed time, a specific time, a particular time, a fixed time, or a fitting time *Can also be translated as prescribed time with a predetermined purpose.*

A season is a fixed and definite portion of time. Everything under heaven has a beginning and everything has an ending. Nothing as it is now, is forever. *He'll expand on this in a moment.*

Using another Hebrew word similar to season, Solomon says, *"a time for every purpose."*

A time: *et* - suitable moment, right time, proper time

Purpose: *hepes* - event, matter, affair, thing, pursuit

There is the right or proper time for every matter, or event or affair or thing.

That is to say that what happens within time is NOT random, chaotic, and purposeless. It was **Benjamin Franklin** who said that was convinced that God governs in the affairs of men.

This is one of the major differences between a Deist & a Theist. A deist believes that God set the universe into motion like the setting of a clock and stepped back letting nature take its natural course. A theist, which the Bible teaches, is that God not only set the universe into motion but sustains it and rules over it providentially.

And then notice that he says, *"under heaven."*

In this unique book where Solomon lays out for us his search for the purpose of life apart from God, he normally uses the phrase *"under the sun"*. However, throughout the book such as in this third chapter, there are moments where Solomon speaks of life *from not just under the sun but under heaven* showing a perspective that includes God within it.

The implication behind this summary statement given what we find in the rest of the passage is that God is the One who **sets** the seasons and times of life. ***Time is under His authority.***

When asked about a timeframe of God's governing plan, Jesus says this to his disciples...

Acts 1:7

⁷ And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

Authority: power of choice, power of rule and governing, liberty as doing what one pleases, privilege, jurisdiction

With that said, we come to a poem on the events that take place within the time & seasons that are under God's authority. *This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does indicate the totality of life.*

Within these 7 verses, there are 7 pairs of opposites. In Scripture, 7 is set apart as the number of completion so that certainly goes into this poem on time. Within the 7 pairs of opposites, there are 14 contrasts (14 positive and 14 negative) and altogether 28 events mentioned.

The use of these polar opposites is a poetical device known a merism which is used to suggest the totality of something. This can be seen elsewhere like in Psalm 139, "you know my sitting down and my rising up" (David was saying that God knew everything about him)

In the Hebrew manuscripts you'll find this list arranged in two columns so that the contrasts are clearly compared to one another. *There is a certain rhythmic beauty to it. It's very intentionally formatted and structured.*

The first one is the most familiar and what is often quoted at funeral services, "*a time to be born and a time to die*". All the events that are listed after this fall between these two inescapable realities, *life and death*.

And we must understand that it is God who determines when life and death happen. The Bible says that God has determined our pre-appointed times, when we would be born. In fact, our days were all written in advance in His book, our days being fashioned before we ever lived one of them.

But also, too our death. He has determined the number of our days.

Job 14:5

⁵ Since his days *are* determined, The number of his months *is* with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass.

Martin Luther

"You cannot live any longer than the Lord has prescribed nor die any sooner."

And if God has control over the bookends of everyone's life, you better believe He is sovereign over *everything in between*.

But do keep in mind, God's sovereignty and providence does not discount or diminish man's responsibility, rather it puts it in its rightful place. *What we do or what we pray was never intended to change God's will because that's impossible to do but to put ourselves in line with it.*

A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; - sowing & reaping, harvesting

³ *A time to kill, And a time to heal;* - there is a place for say the death penalty

A time to break down, And a time to build up; - sometimes it's best to tear down & to rebuild

⁴ *A time to weep, And a time to laugh;* - sometimes these even happen back-to-back

A time to mourn, And a time to dance; - a funeral vs. a wedding

⁵ *A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones;* - removing & adding something

A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; - being close & being distant

⁶ *A time to gain, And a time to lose;* - getting & losing

A time to keep, And a time to throw away; - keeping & getting rid of

⁷ *A time to tear, And a time to sew;* - similar to plant & pluck

A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; - oh the wisdom in that!

⁸ A time to love, And a time to hate; - love what is good, hate what is evil

A time of war, And a time of peace. - in this life war is sometimes necessary to bring peace

From earth's perspective, we have the power over these things. There is an appearance that we have the ability to set these things in motion from under the sun.

And yet from heaven's perspective, it's the Lord. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof and His plans and purposes are never thwarted. We might question His method and His timing *but there is nothing that falls outside of His scope of authority no matter how big or small.*

Matthew 10:29-31

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

There is no such things as "fate" as the world thinks of it. There is no luck, no chance. Nothing happens haphazardly and randomly. *God is the one who governs over all time, seasons, and events.*

Solomon goes on from here to reflect on these great truths in the following verses. If we left it here, there would still be some questions left on the table. *This next section gives us further clarity.*

The Lord is not only the setter of time itself, but He is the beautifier of it...

The Beautifier of Time (verses 9-11)

⁹ What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? ¹⁰ I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Solomon repeats his opening question here in v. 9 that was originally posed in chapter 1:3, *"³ What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?"*

In light of what was just said, he asks this question again, *is there any profit or value or purpose?*

The times and seasons in this life are ultimately beyond man's control. Someone could do everything "right" when it comes to say taking care of their body. 10,000 steps a day, 5-6 days of strength training, no processed sugar, no bread, high protein, supplements and still die before someone who smokes cigarettes and chows down on powdered donuts every day.

What assurance do you have under the sun that all your labor is actually going to profit it you anything? **YOU DON'T!** *This is the point that Solomon is drawing in his reader to.*

Everything under heaven changes so we must not put our trust in anything or anyone under the sun. If we trust in ourselves to make it happen, we will be sorely disappointed. If think that we have control, life will become very frustrating.

¹⁰ I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.

Solomon then says that he has seen this God-given task to mankind that he is to be busy with.

He made mention of something similar in chapter 1:13 where he described it as a burdensome task that God has given to the sons of men.

Ecclesiastes 1:13

¹³ And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this **burdensome** task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.

Solomon says that this is something that has been given to man by God. To seek and search out the meaning of this life. *He has deliberately designed dead ends down every road under the sun.*

To look to look at this list in verses 1-8 of what would be the monotony of life without realizing God's hand in it all would truly be burdensome. *If this is all life is then what's the **POINT** of it all?*

And yet it's NOT supposed to be burdensome, it's supposed to be beautiful!

The task of living this life is only burdensome when you try to control what you can't control. When you try to reign over that which only God has authority over.

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Beautiful: *yape* – good, excellent, proper, right, appropriate, pleasing

This is referring to not only the past but also the future. This is what God does. He will make everything, including what even is bad beautiful. *Evil won't have the final word, God will see to it.*

We might not know all the answers, we might even disagree and if we were God, we would do it differently, and yet there is a certain bliss that comes from trusting that in time God will make everything beautiful, good, and right. *He will do it, it is His work, not ours!*

It is only when we recognize this and trust His timing that we are able to experience the perfect peace that He promises to provide.

This is where Romans 8:28 comes into play perfectly...

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

*This is **ONLY** true if God really is sovereign over time and seasons and events.*

This is a perspective that is transcendent from this world. This is the eternal perspective which is something that is actually put within us by God.

Also He has put eternity in their hearts.

He has put: to place, to set

Same word was used in Genesis 1 when it says that God set the lights in the firmament of the heavens and in Genesis 9 when God said, "I set My rainbow in the cloud."

Eternity: *olam* – everlasting, forever, unlimited duration of time with a focus on the future

God has placed eternity in the heart of every person; this is the inner person.

This means that every person has an *internal knowledge and awareness inherently of eternity.*

Someone once said, "that humans are bound by time, but they are wired for eternity."

Eternity or that which is everlasting, is really a description of God Himself.

He is the everlasting God known to have everlasting strength and everlasting kindness who gives everlasting salvation and whose ways are everlasting.

Romans 1:18-19

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who **suppress the truth** in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is **manifest** in them, for God has **shown it** to them.

Suppress: to restrain, to hold down physically

Manifest: to become clearly revealed or widely known

Shown: to cause to become clear

The Bible makes the case that there is no ultimate atheist. That the person who claims to be an atheist has to fight against eternity that God has put in them. He has to suppress the knowledge of God that He has clearly revealed within them.

C.S. Lewis

“If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”

except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

While we might have eternity in our hearts, it does not mean we have a full comprehension of the ways of God. *The Bible says the God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out!*

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways, God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts according to Isaiah 55. *The Bible says that secret things belong to the Lord our God but those things which are revealed belong to us.*

Matthew Henry

There is a wonderful harmony in the divine Providence and all its disposals, so that the events of it, when they come to be considered in their relations and tendencies, together with the seasons of them, **will appear very beautiful**, to the glory of God and the comfort of those that trust in him.

Though we see not the complete beauty of Providence, **yet we shall see it**, and a glorious sight it will be, when the mystery of God shall be finished. Then everything shall appear to have been done in the most proper time and it will be the wonder of eternity.

We are incompetent of being good judges because of this now. We didn't see the beginning, and we don't see the end. We only see the here and now, and any picture mid drawing or house mid building won't show the true beauty of what it will be. We only see the **middle of God's work** which is why we must wait and trust the Scriptures that He will make everything beautiful in its time.

SO WHAT DO WE DO IN THIS MIDDLE GROUND?! Thought you would never ask!

The Giver of Time (verses 12-13)

¹² I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, ¹³ and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

In light of God making everything beautiful in its time, putting eternity in our hearts, and us not be able to understand all that God does now, Solomon concludes here that the **BEST** thing we can do is to rejoice and do good in our lives.

This is along the same kind of thinking that he started at the end of chapter two.

Ecclesiastes 2:24

²⁴ Nothing *is* better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, **was from the hand of God.**

That's the emphasis here. That this is from the hand of God, this is the gift of God to enjoy the lives He has given us.

WE REJOICE! We choose joy over complaining. We choose joy over worry. We thank Him for the beautiful stuff now and do good, not to control our life but as a response of gratitude.

Since we are not the one who is sovereign over time, then the best thing we could do is rejoice and do good. *Enjoy and be thankful for the good things that God has given us when He gives them.*

R Kent. Hughes

"The good things in life so easily become our gods, which is absolute vanity, as the Preacher has already told us. But the way to resist this temptation is not by avoiding everything. Rather, we avoid idolatry by gratefully receiving the good things of life as blessings from God. Do not be a user and taker' be a receiver and thanker. This is all part of offering back to God what He has given to us in joyful service, while we have the time."

James 1:17

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Rather than freaking out, enjoy His good gifts. We enjoy the time He gives us and the life He gives us recognizing that everything good in our life is from Him! Rather than stressing out, we enjoy the blessings He has provided you and be a good steward over them. **ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD**

Years ago, there was a sweet lady at our church who when you were to ask her how she was doing she would say, *"Too blessed to be stressed!"*

Psalms 128:1-2

Blessed *is* every one who fears the Lord, Who walks in His ways. ² When you eat the labor of your hands, You *shall be* happy, and *it shall be* well with you.

It doesn't mean everything is perfect now we know it's not, but we choose to do everything for His glory trusting that He will make everything beautiful in its time. Whether we eat or drink, we do it all to the glory of God!

Enjoying life as a gift from God verses pursuing enjoyment in this life as the goal are two very different things. Jesus said that in the pursuit of your life you'll actually lose it. We can often go so far in the other direction we begin to equate misery with godliness but that's not biblical.

Ecclesiastes 2:25 NASB95

²⁵ For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?

The Christian more than anyone should be able to ENJOY the good things found in God's creation more than anyone else because we have someone to thank for them! And we know that they are not an end in and of themselves but simply good gifts from our good heavenly Father.

Sometimes our view of God is all wrong. We think that if we enjoy our life too much then He doesn't like that. We need to suffer or be sorrowful. **WRONG**, God is a good Father who loves when His children enjoy His gifts to them. It only grieves him when we make it our pursuit rather than Him.

1 Timothy 6:17

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Nehemiah 8:10 NAS

¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Then finally, similar to our first point of God as the setter of time, Solomon brings it back to this unshakeable truth that God is the Master over time and does what He does so we might fear Him.

The Master Over Time (verses 14-15)

¹⁴ I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. ¹⁵ That which is has already been, And what is to be has already been; And God requires an account of what is past.

Solomon brings this topic of time altogether by bringing it back to the sovereignty of God.

While we might crave control because of this sin nature within us traced all the way back to the garden of wanting to be like God, *we must realize that He is the master over time.*

Solomon presents here the truth of God's unalterable & unchanging purposes from eternity past.

The permanence of what God does: *¹⁴ I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever.*

The perfection of what God does: *Nothing can be added to it,*

The preservation of what God does: *And nothing taken from it.*

This very truth should put us in awe of who God is. There is truly no one like Him. He stands alone in His power, His greatness, and His sovereignty.

God does it, that men should fear before Him.

Why does God do what He does within time? He does it that men should fear before Him. God does what He does for His glory. As we consider the work of God within time the only appropriate and reasonable response is to fear Him, to revere Him and be in awe of Him.

Isaiah 46:10

¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'

AND AS A BELIEVER IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST THIS SHOULD ABSOLUTELY CAUSE US TO REJOICE AS WE REVERE HIM AS GOD ALMIGHTY

Why you might ask? Knowing that this principle of the permanent, perfected and persevering plan of God will come to pass *rightly applies to His work in our lives.*

Philippians 1:6

⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

*NOTHING WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM OUR GOD
NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO PLUCK US FROM HIS HAND
ALL THAT GOD HAS SAID WILL COME TO PASS
WE MUST FEAR HIM AND TRUST HIM AS GOD*

Because of this we should be able to say what the psalmist said....

Psalms 31:14-15

¹⁴ But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." ¹⁵ *My times are in Your hand*; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, And from those who persecute me.

My times are in Your hand! Thank the Lord because if My times were in my hands I'd be in trouble.

¹⁵ That which is has already been, And what is to be has already been; And God requires an account of what is past.

To God that which is (*present*) has already been and what is to be (*future has already been*).

God knows the end from the beginning because He is the Beginning and the End.

2 Peter 3:8

⁸ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

It's at this point that the unbeliever wouldn't just simply say well then what's the point?

If what is has already been and what is to be has already been then what is the purpose of my life?

And outside of a relationship with the eternal God, you will find no purpose to your life.

But just because God is sovereign over time doesn't mean you won't be held accountable for your actions and your choices. *God will require an account of everyone's life.*

For the unbeliever, that should bring terror to your soul because it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, for He is a consuming fire.

But for the believer, it is this accountability that actually brings value and worth to everyday of our lives. It is God alone who is able to answer the question posed in verse 10 and bring profit from our labor under the sun when and only when life is lived in the fear of God as we give Him the glory.

ONLY THEN does it have any meaning, profit, or purpose.

To FEAR GOD is to trust His timing, His plans, and His ways knowing that He is in total control of all time, seasons, and events.

Verses 14-15 point to Solomon's ultimate conclusion in chapter 12...

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. ¹⁴ For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

WHAT WE DO NOW REALLY DOES MATTER IN ETERNITY

Charles H. Spurgeon

"Time is short. Eternity is long. It is only reasonable that this short life be lived in the light of eternity."

Psalms 127:1-2

Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain. ² *It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.*

The tapestry of life which if viewed from the back seems like chaos but when the tapestry is completed, we will step back and see the purpose behind each placement of thread and see the beauty that God created.

Matthew Bridges in his hymn, "Crown Him with Many Crowns" refers to Jesus Christ as the Lord of years and the Potentate of time. And truly He is.

As the Father of Time, the Architect of the Ages, the Beginning and the End, the One who was, who is, and who is to come, the One who inhabits eternity stepped into **TIME ITSELF** in what Paul would describe as **THE FULLNESS OF TIME**.

Galatians 4:4-5

⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Romans 5:6

⁶ For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Due time: suitable or advantageous time for a particular purpose

Because He came in the fullness of time, in due time, it makes today the accepted time and the day of salvation...

2 Corinthians 6:2

...Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.

But that window of time will come to a close. This is the age of grace.

Call upon His name, come to the cross, come to the Christ, the Savior of the world.

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.