

## **Ecclesiastes 3:11-22**

### **November 16, 2008 - Skip MacMillan**

**Appointed Time** is not about "human determination of events or even human discernment of times and seasons. It is about God's activity and the appropriate human response to it. Although the text refers to the human 'worker' (9), the principal actor/doer turns out to be God (vv. 10-15). Indeed, the activity of God overwhelms and overshadows the activities of humanity in this chapter" -Seow.

"There is an unmistakable focus . . . on the activity of God and the appropriate human response to whatever God does" -Seow.

#### **Pivotal verses: 9 and 10**

Transitions from "under the sun" to "beyond the sun," God's existence and sovereignty. From haphazard, chance, chasing after the wind to God's appointed times and God's nature/ability.

#### **God:**

God has made everything beautiful in its time (verse 11).

God has set eternity in the hearts of men (verse 11).

God gifts people with satisfaction, happiness.

Everything God does endures forever.

God will call every single person to account as the righteous judge.

God makes it clear to man that without Him we are but animals.

#### **1. "God has made everything beautiful in its time" (v. 11)**

The times God has created are beautiful, not dark and meaningless.

*Yapheh* = right, proper, appropriate, good; some say it is not an aesthetic judgment:

5:17 - "it is right (*yapheh*) to eat and drink".

***What God creates he makes "yapheh", good and beautiful in its time (Genesis 1-2).***

Creation, times and seasons, you and me.

What else in life can do such a thing? Qohelet found nothing.

#### **2. God "has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (v. 11)**

**God has "set eternity in the hearts of men".**

**Ha'olam** = transcends time, that which is timeless, standing in contrast to time; eternity, forever.

"The same God who has given humanity a 'burden' (v10) due to our sin, the Fall, has given humanity eternity" -Seow.

Burden = under the sun. Eternity = beyond the sun (under heaven, Eccl. 3:1).

1. Every culture has some concept of eternity, god/s, afterlife; WHY?

2. Skeptics struggle to undo this, to be content in this life 'under the sun,' but with all the smothering we still hear the eternity within.

"We have the capacity for eternal things . . . and have a sense of something which transcends our immediate situation. . . . Our consciousness of God is part of our nature, and the suppression of it is part of our sin (skeptic) (Rom. 1:18-21)" -Eaton.

"Augustine's maxim: You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you" -Eaton.

**"Yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."**

We have a sense of eternity, but we are unable to grasp it.

Solomon was frustrated that his wisdom was not enough to figure out "eternity."

You will never fathom eternity with our human wisdom and "under the sun" philosophy and knowledge.

What God has set in our hearts we cannot now take into our own hands and figure out.

God must illuminate what He has set, teach what He has written in Scripture, and disclose what is true. John 14-16: the Holy Spirit discloses, teaches and reveals the Word of God.

God must reveal what is beyond the sun.

**Two Things:**

1. This sense of eternity within each one of us is to drive us to God! To seek what is eternal.
2. We are to live in today in such a way as to invest in eternity.  
I cannot fathom all the complexity of how I got here or where I'm headed but I can live in this appointed time, today, in such a way so as to invest in eternity (God, People, Scripture).

**3. God Gifts Men**

"I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God" (vv. 12-13).

2:24-26, more simply stated earlier, further developed here.

We are to actively pursue good and happiness; to eat, drink and find satisfaction (not meaning) in our work (enjoy the fruit of your labor).

1. God takes what is a curse "work" (Gen. 3) and helps us find satisfaction in it. This is God!
2. All the meaningless projects of chapter 2 are now able to provide some satisfaction (not meaning) because of a gift given by God.

God is the only difference between chapters 1-2 and chapter 3.

**4. Everything God does endures forever**

"I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it" (v. 14).

"forever (eternal)" = whatever God does will not be confined by time, but transcends time, not bound by time; same word as in 3:11 - "eternity in the hearts of men".

**Contrast God with Humanity**

Human activities are transient, temporal; the palaces and temple of Solomon were destroyed.

God's activities are not restricted by time, endure time, exist outside of time.

Furthermore our works can be remodeled, spun differently, added to and taken from.

God's work is permanent, effective, complete, eternal, with no possibility of failure or change.

This is the God of the Bible: God's work endures forever.

## **5. Reverence, "God does it so that men will revere him."**

The reason God does all this (made everything beautiful, set eternity in their hearts, blessed humanity with satisfaction) is that people will "seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27).

Revere = be in awe before Him, inspire reverence, fear (distance between man and God, God is God and people are people; He is sovereign and we are not).

## **6. God is Judge of all mankind**

"And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment – wickedness was there, in the place of justice - wickedness was there. I thought in my heart, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked . . . ."

Contrasting with men, "under the sun," wickedness will always pollute our judgment and justice. There is no pure justice among men, only versions thereof.

The sin of man permeates all areas of life, even when we try to do right.

"The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live" (Eccl. 9:3).

Even in the one place justice is expected, the courts, it cannot be found in its pure form.

God is the only righteous judge; there is no justice without Him. God's justice is its purest form.

## **7. God tests us**

"As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals" (Ecc. 3:18-21)

### **Our similarities with animals:**

At a general and fundamental level, there is no difference.

Organisms, same breath; we are born, live, eat and sleep, mate, and die and return to dust. Psalm 49:11-13, 21; Sons of Korah would agree that "like sheep (we) are destined for the grave".

Science says we are 99% chimp.

1. All this tells us that man is not God; we are created beings.

Instilling humility among all of us and putting a spear into the heart of arrogance.

2. Alternative interpretation is "that God is making it clear to them so that they may see that they – they by themselves – are animals" (3:18).

Without God we are nothing more than smart animals.

"Man by himself becomes a 'naked ape' " -Eaton.

With God we are the pinnacle of God's creation, "in His image", imago dei.

"the spirit returns to God who gave it," Eccl. 12:7, Job 34:14-15; Ps 104:29ff.

We have eternity set within us by God himself.

## **Solomon's Questions**

2:25 - "for without him who can find enjoyment?"

3:21 - "who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

3:22 - "For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?"

What kind of questions are these?

Who can find enjoyment without God? Who does know if the spirit of man rises upward? Who can bring us to know what will happen after we die?

**These questions are driving us to move beyond the sun.**

**Questions like these cannot be answered in a philosophy or religion created by man.**

**These questions can only be answered by God Himself.**

Only God who creates beauty, sets eternity within us, gifts mankind with good things, only the God whose actions endure for eternity, only the God who is to be revered and who alone is the righteous judge can answer such questions for you and me.

1 Timothy 6:15 calls God, "the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light".

This is the purpose of these questions and God is the one who can and does provide the answers to our deepest questions.

Jesus: "the Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42).

Seek Christ beyond the sun. He is nearer than you think; He is close at hand. Call on Him, open yourself up to Him, ask Him to reveal Himself to you.