

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Five)

Time and God

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 29-Jun-13; Sermon #1165

We are going to begin this sermon in the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:

Ecclesiastes 3:17 I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.”

Ecclesiastes is listed among those biblical writings termed “wisdom literature.” Its wisdom is not of that nature intended only for a few intellectuals that might grasp its instruction, even though it first appears difficult to understand. It is, in reality, *intensely* practical for Christian living. Much of its value lies in providing overviews intended to give long-range structure and order to one’s life by pointing out areas important to Christian life and the possible pitfalls that one must avoid. In brief illustrations it tells us what must be avoided and what must be sought in a life that pleases God.

Ecclesiastes 3 is truly one of the great chapters in all of the Bible, and much of its practical goodness for us lies in motivating us to always consider God’s sovereignty in all issues and circumstances of life. There are reasons why conditions are as they are, and we must always know circumstances are *caused*.

The first eleven verses of the book are particularly arresting because Solomon states, without reservation, in the second verse that life lived as the overwhelming number of people do is spent chasing a meaningless existence. That is the second verse of the first chapter where it says, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” That is dogmatically stated right at the beginning of the writing here.

In the very next verse he adds to that dismal assessment by asking, “What profit is there from investing all the labor one does just to live as mankind does under the sun?” Thus, combined with the second verse, life adds up to a big fat zero. It presents a dismal assessment.

Perhaps the key term in the entire book for properly grasping Solomon’s purpose is a

brief phrase appearing for the first time in verse 3. It is “under the sun.” By this phrase he intends we understand he means a life lived apart from God. God resides and governs from “over the sun.” Solomon is clearly showing us that a life lived apart from God—that is, living life only “under the sun,” as he terms it—will result in a life spent chasing vanity, a time-wasting one lived not much different from a hamster chasing endlessly in a wheel; a lot of energy spent with no profit.

My previous sermon focused on the subject of work, because that subject occupies a large portion of Ecclesiastes 2. Ecclesiastes 3 is probably the best-known chapter in Ecclesiastes, and this is probably due to the poem that begins the chapter. I believe that within the church this same recognition is *also* there because of the poem as well, but I believe that it ought to be due this respect because of what God reveals *besides* providing the intriguing poem. This chapter provides a fitting appreciation for the gravity of what God has revealed to this point about His personal involvement in the life and destiny of us human beings.

I want us to notice what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 3, verse 14. I am just going to touch on this briefly right now.

Ecclesiastes 3:14 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.

This verse provides a fitting summary of the point of what God has just revealed a few verses earlier. The use of the word “fear” does not do justice to what Solomon has just said. The use of the term “fear” tends to instill a sense of fright into our modern ears. The immense value of what he is saying is better understood, translated as, “God does it that men should *stand in awe* before Him.”

The word “awe” is far more positive and correctly expresses the scripture than does fear of what God has just revealed. Fear would have a tendency to actually turn us aside from what He has intended. What we need is a positive inspiration provided by a truth that is humbling, wonderful, magnificent, inspiring and gratifyingly motivating, but at the same time easily passed over.

In this case, when Solomon reaches a divisive point in his arguments and illustration, he does not summarize the subject’s conclusion at this point. Rather the comment is made to indicate that we have covered an overview of a truth very important to a successful life by paying attention to what is *over* the sun. The subject of this chapter is not merely

important, but *supremely* important if it is seriously believed by one attempting to live his life by faith. I mean a life in which one is very much aware of God's active involvement in one's life as it is being lived.

The overall subject of chapter 3 might be the most important to us for practical purposes in the entire book of Ecclesiastes once we become aware of its meaningful relationship to our calling. The major subject of this chapter is in one word—"time." Verses 1 and 14 grasp this very important subject.

Genesis 1 reveals that time is God's invention, and is one of His first gifts to mankind. Time began when God created the first day in preparation for mankind. A measure of time's importance to man is that time is acknowledged over 780 times in the Bible. It is not merely time by itself that is important to this chapter, but it is what God is *doing* within this time that is important. It is important to those of faith to believe and use and grow within, to stand in awe of, because they begin to appreciate what is happening to one so insignificant as one appears to be, to grasp time's importance. It is humbling to a person attempting to live by faith. We live within time. Time is constantly on the move. Time waits for no man.

On occasion one will grow weary with telling someone something frequently. Often with a child we will impatiently say, "I've told you that time after time." I wonder how many times God has said that in regard to us. Some people have time on their hands. Others waste time. Others have time to burn, and others save time.

When we are young time seems to go so slowly. As we age it seemingly goes faster and faster. For some, time drags; and then time flies. We attempt to make up for lost time. We can point to a time when we were born, but no one (unless he is ready to commit suicide) has any idea at all when he will die.

We say, "Time heals all wounds." "In due time." We say, "He doesn't know what time it is." "A stitch in time saves nine." People mark time. Some people try to turn back time. "There's no time like the present." "In the nick of time." "Time flies when you're having fun." "Time and time again." "Time is running out." But then again, some of us "kill time" while others say, "Times are surely changing."

There are many clichés that we refer to without actually having to say the word. We say, "At the eleventh hour." "At the last minute." "Better late than never." "Two shakes of a lamb's tail." "Rome wasn't built in a day." "Come in under the wire." "A laugh a minute." "Split second." "A New York minute." "Just a cotton-pickin' minute." "Just a second." "A long row to hoe." "Spinning your wheels."

We use a number of instruments to mark time. Our watches tell time without saying a word. So do sundials. So do calendars. We use terms like days, weeks, months, seasons, years, decade, generation, century, and millennium to mark or measure time. There are markers even with our physical systems that sometimes very forcefully make us aware of the passage of time.

We start to school. Graduate from school. We observe holidays. Marry. Bear children in nine months. Then grandchildren and great-grandchildren come along. As we age, wrinkles appear in our skin. Our hair grays and men go bald. All of our muscles ache much more quickly. Our eyesight dims. Our hearing dulls. We lose our agility and perhaps our teeth. Time is irreversible and irreplaceable, and all of us are running out of it.

We all ask, from time to time, how we might best use it, and the last command—perhaps the most important one of all—I saved for last. I want you to turn with me to Ephesians 5 where time is mentioned and is certainly implied.

Ephesians 5:13-16 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep. Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil.

God invites us into His Family and then commands all of us to redeem the time, for the days are evil. Why be reminded of this? It is because to everyone *time is limited*. One of the unspoken themes of Ecclesiastes is that despite the way life may appear on the surface, everything in life matters to some degree. Why? It is a reality, because once it passes it is gone forever. It is irreplaceable. Nothing can be done about it.

What is done is not only affecting life in the immediate, but is also affecting its end as well. We cannot waste our life and the time given us on conduct and activities that are mindless fantasies that are nothing but a profitless waste. That is what Solomon began the book with. “What profit is there?” Bad choices are what cause it, and so once the time slides by, it cannot be recaptured.

Time does not mean the same thing to God as it does to us because we are human and we have nowhere near the control over things that God does, but an important aspect to us, even though we do not think of it every minute, is that we are going to die. We know that. That is a reality to us, but does it affect our choices? That is the main point here in

the book of Ecclesiastes. We ought to understand that right from the beginning. He has been focusing on time, time, time! How are we using it? What are we doing? He gives illustrations out of his life to show how he blew it, and he hopes that we will not follow the same kind of path that he did and blow the time on fantasies that accomplish nothing as it did in his life.

II Peter 3:3-9 Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days [we are living in the last days], walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? [See, a lot of time has gone by and He is not here yet.] For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 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. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Time on the surface appears far more significant to us than it does to God, and as time moves on we begin doubting in small increments and become weary with well-doing as a measure of anxiety builds in us. But perhaps we have misunderstood, while the scoffers appear justified in making their jibes against us, but brethren, we must not forget that we are surrounded and ruled over by scoffers. I have been talking about them the last number of weeks. They are right in that camp. They are the “nones” who do not know any better. They are ignorant of God and His power and His plan. Never forget that they are stumbling in their ignorance, not believing in God, but in themselves and in science.

This same series of verses was written to us as a gentle reminder that God does not look at time in the same context as man does. God looks at time from the perspective of the eternity in which He lives. Until God called us and as Ecclesiastes opened our minds to the awesome reality of our actually living in eternity within the same time-construct as God does, we are bound to the earth-time because that is the only perspective of time we are even remotely familiar with.

Now the “thousand years” statement by Peter is really a generalization to illustrate that

God perceives time differently from us. Please do not allow yourself to think that God is not concerned about time, or that He can do things any old time He wants to. On the contrary, He is *very* concerned about time. He knows we are human far better than we do. He is very concerned about time, so do not let yourself think that He is unconcerned about how the passage of time affects us despite what life may look like to us. He runs a smooth ship in which everything happens right on time—*His* time, not ours—and that is a reality we must come to accept and live with. Do you?

God's universe runs on His time, not ours, and that universe includes us, and we have to learn to live within that time, fully understanding the way God thinks about time. It is a major aspect of our faith, and we have to put our hope and trust in the way God looks at it rather than emphasize the way *we* look at it because it will affect our feelings, our emotions, very greatly. It will affect our faith if we do not begin to look more at time in the way God does.

So it is *His* time, not ours. That is the reality that we must come to accept and live with, and those of us living by faith must adjust our thinking, knowing that things will happen exactly when His perception of time says that *now* is the right time.

Time is of enough importance to God that the word "time" is used 31 times in this one chapter in addition to the word "eternity" and "forever," which suggests *endless* time. Eternity stretches both backwards and forward, and thus man, with his spirit, is able to think of ancient times, present time, and future time and do it all in the same context.

Animals are aware only of the present, and to those who know, we are not endued with an immortal soul from birth, and therefore will most certainly die. The term "eternity," as it is used in verse 11, is to remind us that God Himself has planted thoughts of eternity—both backwards and forwards—within us. He did it. He did it in a way in which it has meaning. People without the Spirit of God can think backwards and forward, but do they do it with understanding? God put that in us! It has to be developed, but He put it in us so that we can think of it anciently in the way He does, and we can think of it in the present in the way He does, and we can think of it in the future as we are learning to think of it.

It is significant that in this chapter concerning time, it is clearly linked to many of the same thoughts he expressed in chapter one. I am going to give you some thoughts here to show that from the very beginning Solomon (God) has been building toward this crescendo here in chapter 3.

In Ecclesiastes 1:3, where the subject is "quality of life," it asks the rhetorical question

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by saying, "What profit has a man from all his labor which he toils under the sun?" In chapter 3, verse 9 it responds with a similar rhetorical question where the subject is time. One chapter the subject is life. The next chapter the subject is time. "What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?" It changes a couple of words.

Ecclesiastes 1:4 states, "The earth abides forever," as cast within the seemingly fruitless quality of life as the issue. In chapter 3, verse 14 it responds within the context of God's involvement and management-of-time issues, "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever." Life and time are linked inextricably in both chapters.

Again, in chapter 1, "That which has been is what will be. That which is done is what will be done." Ecclesiastes 3:15 adds, "That which has already been, and what is to be, has already been." And so Solomon is reminding us in a real general way, in a trite way really, that "what goes around comes around," whether the event is life or time. They are unbreakably joined so much so that in the Hebrew language it had no precise word for time. Can you imagine that? It had no precise word for time like the English language does. To them they did not mark the passage of time by means of a clock. Rather, they marked it by an event that occurred. That is how they told time. They marked it by event.

The Greek did, and does, have a precise word for time. Time might be the most repetitious thing that we are aware of in life, and overall, I believe that these verses are tending to show that time and life are so intermixed that it is virtually impossible to separate them, and he is showing us, that *as time slips away from us, life also is slipping away too*.

I think it is beginning to become obvious that God wants us to think an awful lot about time, and the hook is to know that life and time are unbreakably joined. You cannot separate them. How we spend time is also how we are spending life. Do you get it? It is that simple.

We have the proclivity of getting so caught up in our daily routines of life that it is easy to forget that time is valuable. However, the subject material of chapter 3 is, I believe, coming to our rescue by giving more precise sense to our lives. By "our" in that previous sentence, I mean to the rescue of God's converted children.

One of the questions almost everybody eventually asks themselves is, "Why was I born?" "What in the world is going on?" "Is there a purpose for life?" Now Solomon is not completely answering the question in Ecclesiastes, but he does give us a nudge in the right direction. Ecclesiastes *assumes* an eternal purpose is being worked out, but

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Solomon does not directly say what it is. He is addressing, in a general way, a part of the “Why was I born?” issue in terms of time and the multitude of events occurring within any given expanse of time, and the events are described by the poetic device called the *merismus*.

Let us turn there, to Ecclesiastes 3, verse 2. I pronounced it “merisma.” That is the correct pronunciation. I called them “merisms” before, but I looked it up again and found out that I was wrong that time. This time I am right. It is “merismus.” Let us read them very quickly.

A time to be born, and a time to die;

A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal;

A time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to gain, and a time to lose;

A time to keep, and a time to throw away;

A time to tear, and a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;

A time of war, and a time of peace.

There are 14 pairs—(called “the merismus”)—of opposites that ***virtually everybody***

experiences either literally or in principle during their lifetime. Did you hear what I said there? I mean everybody, seriously, whether called or uncalled.

Now half of those 14 is usually considered to be good. The other contrasting half is usually considered burdensome, and almost nobody wants to experience them. However, they happen anyway, and they are actually needful to God's purposes. In fact, they are all good. Every one of them is good regardless of what *our* judgment of them is, and brethren, each and every one of them happens in its time.

Solomon covered them so they begin with birth and death—"A time to be born, and a time to die"—and they end with "A time of war, and a time of peace." It is as though the experiencing of these events goes full circle, and it probably does in everyone's life. I am not saying that they are all going to end in exactly the same place. They do not have to. This is just a literary device that Solomon is using.

The rescue that Solomon does for the converted sons of God is clearly found by connecting the very important verse 1 with the thoughts expressed in verses 10 and 11. The very first phrase is important.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 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.

What I want you to first pick up on here is what Solomon says in the very first line. These merisms are *God-given*. God is causing these things to happen in peoples' lives. It is part of His governance. It is why He reminded the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 8—"I tested you, because I wanted to know what was in your heart."

What we see here is a listing of the kinds of tests that He gives everybody, but most especially to His children because He wants His children's lives to work out because they are making the right choices by faith, and that they are using their time and their life to refer to their relationship to Him, and that their relation to Him guides the circumstances and the choices that they make doing them.

I want you to go all the way back to the New Testament because the apostle Paul builds on this very principle, that these things are God-given.

Turn to Romans 9. I will not do a lot of expounding because once you know what is

going on here, you begin to see how clear it is.

Romans 9:13-24 As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated. [Why? God made that choice. Even before they were born He was already messing around in their lives because of what He wanted to accomplish in them.] What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” [By whom? By God’s children.] Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Are you drifting along with me? Are you going along with me, because what I am getting at here is God is not only working in the lives of His children, brethren, the indication is that *He is working in the lives of every person born on the face of this earth*. He has purposes that He is going to use them for to His glory. Are you beginning to understand why He says there that we should stand in awe of Him? How does He keep track of all that is going on? I do not know. All I know is how insignificant I am, and yet for some reason He knows me, and He is working in my life to get me to voluntarily give my life completely to Him to use.

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

This is drifting us in a way—or maybe "driving" would be a better way of saying it—something regarding us. I will tell you what it is because it is on my mind. I said earlier that we stand in awe that He would pay attention to someone so insignificant, but the flipside of that coin is that we are not insignificant at all. We are the most significant people on the face of this earth right now! Do you think He has forgotten you? No. Not one iota! If He can keep track of billions of people, He can keep track of us, and guide and direct our lives. If we think we are just living completely alone, insignificant, that God is not even aware of us—oh, yes He is. Do not ever doubt that.

What we have just read is mind-boggling, to say the least. When we consider how much individually direct attention God is giving to those living on earth, and even if we consider only those in the church, it is still mind-boggling; however, the implication is the number is far greater. The church and its history are not the only entities God is directing. What is He doing with physical Israel? Do you think He is not directing things there? And the twelve nations that make up physical Israel? What about the other nations that impact on Israel? What about those God is working with in their individual lives because He is planning on calling them?

Are you beginning to see why I have been trying to get across to you that Ecclesiastes is teaching us that ***everything in life matters***? Now it does not all matter to the same degree. Some things indeed are more important than others, but it may very well be that nothing in our life with God is really unimportant at all because everything impacts on what we are going to become by the time He is done.

Do you know why God prohibits the worship of idols? The answer is simple. No idol reveals the glory of God—does not even come close. They are not even a shadow, and every idol is a lie, and it teaches falsehood about God. God is a God of truth, and that truth is in His Word. Do we spend time, brethren, attempting to conceive truth about God Himself found in His Word? That might be the most important thing we study: God Himself.

He is the God who operates the controls of His creation, and His purpose needs no advice from us, and He seeks none from us. The purpose of our prayers is to help us to think about Him in reference to us and to the church and to Israel and to the whole world ultimately and eventually. He requires of us, for our good when we live by faith in His Word, submitting to His truth while allowing Him to work out His purpose in us in His good time.

Brethren, we are not an insignificant afterthought. He has been planning on us being in

His family a long, long time, and thus chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes is written in such a way as to let us understand and believe that God is managing very, very much of what is happening within time, and He is doing it on a highly personal basis—person by person; not just nation by nation, *but person by person*. Like I said before, I do not know how He does it. I do not have His mind to be able to conceive that. I only know that it is in His Word and His Word does not lie, and He is thus suggesting to us that we explore the cause of what is happening in our life.

Remember, I said earlier that circumstances do not just happen. They are caused. That does not mean that God has caused everything. Sometimes we are the cause. Sometimes it is other people who are the cause. Sometimes the nation that we live in is the cause.

So just because we are going through what we might call one of the bad merisms, that does not mean that we have actually caused them. Maybe God caused them. But along with other people in the nation, we have to go through what the nation is going through, and we have to be able to understand this: that what the nation is going through is partly because of the man God put in office. He is there right now, and he is ruling over us, and some of the decisions that he is making make me hit my forehead, and I wonder, “Where in the world did that come from?”

I do not know whether you saw it, but yesterday an email circulated through the United States about the cover on the latest *Newsweek* magazine. It is almost priceless. Do you know what it said? “Hit the road, Barack!” This is coming from a very, very liberal publication. Even they are beginning to see it. But what I am getting at here is that just because we are going through something, it does not mean that we have been the actual cause of it. Sometimes it is God. Sometimes it is the nation. Sometimes it is people in the neighborhood, but they bring things on us and present us with opportunities to make a choice regarding the way we live our life. That then is what God directed to occur. So everything matters.

How then, brethren, can we make the very best use of time?

I want to draw our attention to what is perhaps the most important overall point regarding this in the book of Ecclesiastes. The answer, in a sense, is right there. Regardless of what we are going through, this applies.

Ecclesiastes 12:10-14 The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one

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Shepherd. And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Verse 13 is the answer to the whole book: "Fear God and keep His commandments." And so the end result of Solomon's battery of experiments, meditations, reasoning and urgings and admonitions regarding life and the way it should be lived, is that in order to give the best and receive the most rewarding experiences and the greatest benefits through passage of time is to fear God, and at the same time show that respect by keeping His commandments.

Please understand that this is not merely a random thought Solomon threw in at the end of his writings. It is the major issue in life for all of us through all of life's experiences within time.

Let us go back to Ecclesiastes 3:14 because I want to touch on that because it is such a meaningful scripture.

Ecclesiastes 3:14 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.

Solomon revisits the issue of fearing God five times, not just in chapter 12, but five times in Ecclesiastes, including the one which we just read as his conclusion.

Fearing God is to reverently respect Him above all; not only just all people, but all circumstances. Indeed some translations use the term "revere," thus adding a sense of awe and devotion and perhaps even worship to its meaning. I prefer this translation that I picked up from a commentary that reads in this way: "I know that whatever God does endures forever. Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done this so that all should stand in awe before Him."

Brethren, it is He who keeps His eye on the sparrow. Is He going to lose sight of one of His children? In order for one to stand in awe before God, one has to know Him well, and if one knows Him well, what is one going to do with the use of one's time? The answer to that ought to be obvious.

This section that we have just passed through is very important to our appreciation and admiration of God and the closeness with which He is working with each of us. Not one thing that He does for or with us is in any way done haphazardly or off the cuff, as we might say. All of His creative efforts are done with deliberate purpose. Now etch that into your mind.

There is a song that we sing fairly frequently. It is right in our songbook. It says, "For it is God who orders life." Do you believe that? For it is God who orders life, who sets it where He wants it to go, and gives us the opportunity to voluntarily choose what He has determined is to be the path that our life is to follow. It is God who orders life, and in order to do that He has to know us personally inside and out. He knows our past. He knows our present. He knows our future toward which He is heading, and He wants us to head in the same direction.

I just gave you the overall direction. Whatever circumstance we are in, **keep His commandments**. Sometimes it will be painful to do that, but nonetheless it is the right thing to do, and if we cooperate with God, life will not be meaningless. Life will be filled with profit, and as we just read, it will be beautiful in its time.

Now here are some examples of God arranging time-events. Of course it deals with those He has invited into His Family, just like us, because that is what strengthens us the best—when we see that it happened to others that He put in the same position before He put *us* into that position. We know God is a God who changes not, and that He follows His pattern, and therefore, if He did it for them, He is going to do it for us. So in Genesis 18, we find in this particular case that it has to do with Isaac's birth.

Genesis 18:9-14 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

Genesis 21:1-2 And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son

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in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

The set time was set by God. Sarah was just a tool in that sense. Are we willing to be tools? We had better be. He used her to produce a child.

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

The way that is stated there is that Jesus began testifying of the good news at exactly the right time. He had reached a deadline.

John 7:28-30 Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, “You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me.” Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.

That can give one the impression that His being taken by authorities for His trial and crucifixion *may* have been—(Notice I said “may.” I am not real sure.)—timed to the hour. God is very precise.

John 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

Matthew 26:17-18 Now on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?” And He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”’”

His time was at hand. He knew it.

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Romans 5:6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Jesus died at the right time.

Matthew 24:29-31 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

I read that scripture to give you a brief description within that entire prophecy to show that there is pretty good indication within it that everything there is timed. Everything. Not just one. *Everything* is timed.

We are now going to go to go to Ephesians 5. We are going to revisit a scripture that we used before.

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The word that is translated “redeeming” is in the Greek *exagorazo*. With the prefix “ex” it strengthens the root word *agorazo*. *Agorazo* literally means “to buy up.” The adding of the prefix turns the root word into a more expansive figure of speech, and that figure which Paul uses here means “make the most of every opportunity.”

The figure of speech implies that if one misses this opportunity, it will be gone. It is almost like Paul is a salesman and he is selling this product, and he is saying, “If you don’t get in here and buy up yours, then by the time you decide to do it, they’re all going to be gone.” The opportunity will be past.

That is what God is saying here. Use time in such a way that you do not allow opportunity to submit yourself to God to pass. *Do not miss that opportunity*. The figure of

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speech then implies that *if one misses this opportunity, then the opportunity will be gone, perhaps never to come again*. So in this context it implies that you turn every circumstance to your best advantage spiritually since no advantage will remain if this opportunity is missed. What Paul is saying here is to *never miss the opportunity to submit yourself to God*.

Paul might be saying that God's way is not just for a few hours on the Sabbath, but the will of the Lord applies in every situation in life every day. He is urging us to take advantage of every situation to imitate Jesus Christ. Every second of our life is precious in the building of character, because everything matters. There is no doubt that life is difficult and much of it is confusing, but the wise person will always take God and His purposes into consideration when he makes his choice in life.

In Isaiah 45:7 God says, "I form light and create darkness." Both of them incidentally are references to time: day, night, and so forth. He says, "I make peace and calamity"—the merisms. "I the Lord do all these things."

There are reasons why there is death, poverty, disease. There are reasons why there is prosperity, good health, and eternal life. The major reason that all of us blunder through life is that God is not considered enough because God is either considered unknown completely, or He is not sought sufficiently even by those who do know Him somewhat. Perhaps above all of these things, He is not believed or trusted.

Solomon in Ecclesiastes is working to help us understand that we must seek God seriously and consistently, knowing that He is working always to form us into the image of His Son, and that the life that we go through is very important to Him in His process.