

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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Date: 14 November 2017

Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] Thank you, Geffen. In the motion picture Interstellar, a crew of explorers seek to travel across space.

! But according to Einstein's law of relativity, the faster and further they travel, the! more quickly time passes by on Earth back home.

One minute spent on their mission could mean years lost. Michael Caine, who plays the leader of the space project, says, I'm not afraid of death, I'm a physicist, I'm only afraid of time.

Time rules over all of us, whether we like it or not. Time takes it all and shapes all of our lives, says the writer of Ecclesiastes, the preacher.

And the world that he has experienced is the real world, our world, a world where we need to face the limitations of life.

[1 : 13] We've seen him talk about the endless, repetitious, rolling empty set of life. A world full of fleeting pleasures.

And now in chapter 3, a world where time holds us in its grip. The preacher, he's both a realist about the world, but he's also a wise, God-centred optimist.

And to know and understand the limits that God has placed on us in this life is to begin to be free from fighting them and to enjoy life under the sun as a gift from God.

So to do that, this afternoon, he tells us three things. First of all, we need to face that we are servants of the seasons.

We are servants of the seasons. And the preacher reminds us what we already know in our experience in life.

[2 : 20] We are all subject to the strange movements and passages of time. Notice how time dominates this section in the book.

He uses that word, doesn't he, time, on over 25 different occasions. And did you feel the repetition? A time for this, and a time for that.

A time for this, and a time for that. He pulls us into the perception he has of the real world, where we are slaves of a routine.

He summarises his point in verse 1, if you look there. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.

All of life, he says, is governed by periods and rhythms and times. Like a year with its four seasons, there will be different moments in our lives that punctuate our experience.

[3 : 27] With good or ill. We are subject to events in time. We are subject to events in time that we did not choose and cannot change. And in the spectrum of time in life, there are these extremes, aren't there?

As the pendulum swings from one season to another. From birth to death. War to peace.

Weeping and laughter, and so on. And each of these extremes comes to us on a timetable that we have very little control over. We're swept along with time and its changing seasons.

And the rolling events of time dictate how we do everything in life. We find ourselves in situations where time tells us it is suddenly better to do one thing over another.

To plant rather than to pull up. To break rather than to build up. To embrace or to turn away. Loving or hating.

[4 : 40] The seasons of time rule over us. They say what goes in our lives. Just ask yourself for a moment. 20 years ago, did you predict what you'd be doing now?

Where you'd be? Are there things in your life now that even 10 years ago you did not picture? Things that you did not expect?

Even 5 years ago? Don't we often say to one another, Who'd have thought I'd be here now doing this? That's because we are less in control than we think.

We are servants to the seasons of life. And what goes for us as individuals is true of us as a generation as well, isn't it? One generation may find themselves in a season that the other generation has not.

A season of peace. Or war. I worked out this week that if I'd have been born 60 years earlier than I was, I'd have most likely been in battle right now.

[5 : 51] Men and women who we remembered only two days ago on Remembrance Sunday, Did not choose their season. They were ruled by the time that they lived in as we are.

We are doing what we are doing, Or not doing what we are not doing, Dictated by events that we have not chosen. We find ourselves serving the seasons of life.

Time is like a foreman on a building site, Limiting what we can do, And when we can do it, And how we do it. It limits us.

We are servants to the seasons. So secondly, He tells us then, That we must move with the seasons of life.

We must move with the seasons of life. True, That different seasons require different kinds of behaviour, Don't they? Think of the year. I don't wear a puffer jacket in summer, Do I?

[6 : 57] I don't eat salad in winter, Or at least I don't. Holidays depend on what season you are in, Don't they? Times in the year dictates how you behave.

How we work. Just think of a farmer. A farmer knows not to plough in winter. He knows not to harvest in spring. He knows what to do in each season.

And part of wise living is to see that life works like that, On the whole. We are servants to the seasons, And we shouldn't fight that.

Living as if we can choose the time or the season that we're experiencing. But we battle with the seasons of life, don't we? Young people want to grow up fast, And be older.

Young people want to grow up fast, Young people want to grow up fast, The elderly struggle not to hold on to the past. Young parents battle with raising children, Or advancing their careers.

[8 : 07] More often than not, We find ourselves wishing that we were in a different season to the one that we are. Or experiencing a different time.

It's winter for me, And I wish it was summer. We want to laugh, When really the time for laughter has ended.

We want to plant, When actually it's time to pluck up. It's time to be quiet, When I want to speak.

And as the pendulum swings, All too often we think we can choose our seasons, And we can't face the season we're in, And what it demands from us.

Now for some of us, That might mean, That it's time to plant new things, And take on new endeavours. But we don't know how to start, We just keep hitting snooze.

Others of us though, Maybe, We don't know when to stop, When it's the time to cease. We try to keep building, Maybe, What needs to be torn down.

[9 : 19] We hold on to things from a past season, And we need to let go of those things, And let others take over, Maybe. Some don't make the best of a good season, Of good health, And of opportunities, Of relationships.

We take those things for granted, And we moan, As if it's winter, When actually it's summer, And we need to tan up, Grab life, And go for it.

Even when it's time to laugh, And love, And make peace, We think, God must be playing a trick, And we're waiting for the next fall, And we don't grasp our opportunities properly.

As servants of time, We cannot control our seasons, For good or for ill, So we must move with them, To tell the time, And live accordingly.

We're restless, We're restless, Aren't we, With our seasons, We obsess about the future, And we dwell far too much on the past, But it's learning to ask, What time is it?

[10 : 31] The time I'm in, In the course of life. So the couple that now have a baby, Well, No more nights out, But it's time to seek, And to plan.

The family whose children leave home, It's now quiet, It's time to lose them, In a sense, But it's time to reflect, And be thankful.

Maybe my time is a time to advance my career, So I'm looking for opportunities to serve. The time comes when a grandparent's sight or body fails, A time to learn to be more dependent.

I meet a future spouse, Time to think of being hospitable, Or we lose a lifelong love, Time to know God's comfort much more, In all of these things, We ought not to live as if we were somewhere else, Or should I say actually, Some time else, Living in the past, Or hoping things will just get better, We're slaves to the seasons, So we need to move with the season that we're in, So how can we do this?

How does this work? How can we be content, With the hand that time has dealt to us? Content with our lot in time, To face the responsibility, That time brings to us, To take the opportunities, Or to refrain from taking them, While thirdly, The preacher shows us that, All is in God's good time, All is in God's good time, I wonder if there are, Seasons of life, That you have spent, And committed your whole lives, Trying to avoid, We go through life, Thinking that bad things will never happen, Or maybe we go through life, Thinking that good things, Are never going to happen either, But time and chance, Happen to all, He says in chapter 9, We can't control the future, Stop thinking it will get better,

[13:01] And stop thinking it will get worse, Move with the times, But how? Well whatever season, We find ourselves in, The preacher shows us, That while time rules over us, There is one, Who rules over time, Just look down at verse 14, I perceive that, Whatever God does, Endures forever, Nothing can be added to it, Nor anything taken from it, God has done it, So that people fear before him, He is saying there, That there is only one, Time Lord, God, We are not, Lords of time, We are servants of the seasons, But God is working, All things in his inscrutable plan, All that he does is fixed, Can't take away from it, Can't add to it, It lasts, It endures,

And it holds meaning, He says in verse 11, God has made everything beautiful, In its time, God has made every season, And time, And every matter, Under heaven, And under the sun, Work according to his counsel, Time, Although it feels like it to us, Is not a chance, Arbitrary thing, It's not just blind, Pitiless chance, Whatever time we are experiencing, And plunged into in life, It is God's time, The God who is eternal, Outside, Of time, Peter in his second letter, Chapter 3 verse 8, He says that a thousand years, In God's sight, Are but yesterday, When it's past, Or as a watch in the night, Just imagine that kind of perspective, On time, How much has happened,

In the last thousand years, Let me read to you a few things, 1066, The Norman Conquest, 1271, Marco Polo travels to China, 1387, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, 1503, Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, 1564, William Shakespeare was born, 1642, The English Civil War, 1788, Wilberforce's, Parliamentary ban, On the slave trade, 1812, The US declares war, On Britain, 1859, Darwin's origin, Of the species, 1941, Japan invades, Pearl Harbor, 1990, Nelson Mandela, Freed, From 25 years, In prison, All of that stuff, And more, Like yesterday, To God, Like Monday, A thousand years, Like a moment, What kind of God is he? We know that in Genesis 1, God himself creates time, He says, Let there be light in the sky, To separate the day from the night, He creates the boundaries of time, The patterns of creation, Morning and evening, In eternity, He is never ending, He is infinite, No beginning, No ending, He bends and fills, And uses time for his purposes, He's never late, He's never early, He's the ancient of days, And yet he does new things, He never overworks, Or puts things off, He's never surprised, Or bored, He never wastes time, He does all things, At the right time, Everything beautiful,

In its time, So we learn, To enter each season, With contentment, Knowing that, While we are ruled, By time, And events, Time is ruled, By this God, Our seasons, For good, And ill, And we can face, Those seasons, With comfort, And security, The Apostle Paul, In that famous verse, He says, God works, All things, For the good of those, Who love him, Some things, Most things, All things, Arranged, And made beautiful, In their time, For his praise, And for his people's good, Are you the kind of person, Who asks lots of questions, In films, They're so annoying, Those kind of people, Aren't they, You're watching a, A complicated story, And they're asking loads of questions,

[18:09] Why is he doing that? Whose car is that? Why is he wearing a mask? Who's that? Where's he going? Questions all of the time, And the only answer to that, Is well, Just watch the film, I don't know, See how the film plays out, But aren't we so often like that, In life?

We spend too much time, Speculating, And second guessing God, The preacher tells us, We cannot find out, What God has done, From the beginning to the end, Verse 11, We just don't know, The big picture, So whatever you're facing, Watch the film, And find out, With this confidence, That we can move, With our seasons, And live appropriately, Within them, This confidence, Is the confidence, That Paul the apostle has, Isn't it?

He says, To the Philippians, I've learnt, In whatever situation, I am to be content, I know how to be brought low, And how to abound, In any and every circumstance, I've learnt the secret, Of facing plenty, And of hunger, Of abundance, And of need, I can do all things, Through God, Who strengthens me, It's not a natural thing, That is it, He's learnt that, And we see, Jesus Christ, Who did not fight, The times, The seasons, Of his life, He knew the time, To weep, And the time, To mourn, He knew the time, To embrace, And to let the rich man, Walk away, He knew the time, To tear down tables, And the time, To start building, His church, He knew the time, To speak, And the time, To be silent, He knew the time, To be born, And the time, To die, He faced his life, Under the sun, In time, Trusting in, His father's will, And moving with the seasons, And the hours, Appointed for him, Trusting, The Lord of time, For his good, He was a servant, Of the seasons, Moving with his, Times, All in God's, Good time, And I don't usually, Do this, But I want to finish, By reading a poem, To you, And it's, You'll recognize it, It's by Isaac Watts, It's written in, And it's often sung, Along to music, We sung it on Sunday, In our church, I can't give you, Every verse, Because it's, It's quite long, But I'll give you a few, Speaks of God, As Lord of time, One in whom, We find contentment, In all the seasons, Of life, Our God, Our help, Our help, In ages past, Our hope, For years to come, Our shelter, From the stormy blast, And our eternal home, Before the hills, In order stood, Or earth, Received her frame, From everlasting, Thou art God, To endless years, The same, A thousand ages, In thy sight, Are like an evening, Gone, Short as the watch, That ends the night, Before the rising sun, Time, Like an ever rolling, Stream, Bears all its suns away, They fly forgotten, As a dream, Dies at the opening day, Our God, Our help, In ages past, Our hope, For years to come, Be thou our God, While troubles last, In our eternal home, Let's pray together.