

Everything A Season (I): A Time to Be Born and a Time to Die

Introduction

One of Bible's most enduring passages, even in the minds of those who have no other use for the book, is Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Popularized in a hit song by The Byrds 30 years ago, this passage assures mankind that there is a season for every occurrence and a time for every purpose under heaven, that nothing is truly new or truly over. Today, we begin a 14 part series on the couplets in this great passage with a treatment of the first part of verse two:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born,
And a time to die;”

Discussion

I. A Time To Be Born

A. Joyous Occasion

1. the birth of almost any living thing—from a flower to a bird to a human being—is a marvelous thing
2. it is not miraculous, but is essentially natural, for God made it so
3. the birth of almost any living thing is cause for rejoicing and hope
 - a. while we snuff out weeds and attempt to kill bacteria, we protect our flowers with fences, our animals with law and our children in their mothers' wombs
 - b. yes, the time to be born is one of rejoicing, except when the new life is unwanted and is attacked

B. Bible Births

1. Adam and Eve are the only human beings in all history to skip the first step of life in birth
 - a. Adam was created by God from the dust of the ground and even scientists will tell you that the composition of the human body is mineral and elemental
 - b. Eve was created when God saw that Adam was lonely and removed one of his ribs, from which he formed a helpmate
 - c. their odd birth made God rejoice, for mankind was the crowning jewel of creation and Eve was its sparkling brilliance; creation was good (see Genesis 1:31)
2. many years later, Abram and Sarah were about to go to their graves without ever experiencing this joy until God picked them out to be a part of his scheme of blessing upon Israel and the world
 - a. but in her old age, Sarah found the prospect of childbearing a curious impossibility and laughed
 - b. and when Abraham and Sarah did not see God's plan moving quickly enough, they tried to help him out by sending Abraham to a concubine, but God didn't need any such help
 - c. Isaac was soon born and the elderly couple rejoiced
3. no mother in the Old Testament is more demonstrative in her joy than Hannah, the mother of Samuel (First Samuel 1:1-2:11)
4. and then we hear Mary and Elizabeth singing praises over the births of their own sons, John and Jesus

C. The Time is Determined By God

1. so precious was this life, even in the soil, so to speak, that God protected it the same as he would protect any other human life (Exodus 21:22-25)
2. today, we live in a country in which a million such lives are snuffed out every year and few even stop to take note
 - a. abortion has been a legal practice, a matter of privacy according to the Supreme Court, since 1973 and 40 million souls have skipped both their births and their lives because of it
 - b. the Bible says there is a time to be born, but sinful people have aborted his will and

adopted their own, victimizing the most innocent of innocents in the process

c. Pharaoh and Herod in all their bloodthirsty insanity never approached such a lofty death toll as this

3. abortion is not practiced today because people enjoy the procedure, but mostly, because people failed to exercise self-control and in order to ease the consequences, they are eliminating the life they accidentally created

a. every time a man or woman, boy or girl, engages in sex outside of marriage, you are threatening someone's time to be born

b. the time to be born should not be to two young people who are not married, perhaps don't even love one another and can not support even themselves

c. the physical protection may even fail, but sexual immorality has no spiritual protection at all (First Thessalonians 4:3-8)

d. every time you engage in sexual immorality, you risk hastening your own child's time to be born, or pressure from somebody else to abort that event altogether

II. A Time To Die

A. Birth Portends Death

1. birth, even under the most ideal circumstances, sets a human being on an inexorable march toward death

2. in between is life with all its highs and lows, successes and failures, hopes and disappointments

3. death is the other of man's great curiosities (where do we come from and where are we going?)

4. Job, in his agony, wondered about this (Job 14:1-15)

B. Bible Deaths

1. Lazarus died and people wept over him; his sister told Jesus that he could have prevented it and so he did the next best thing by overturning it and raising the man from his tomb of four days

2. Jesus himself died and his death gave us a greater insight into man's demise

3. although his body was buried, his spirit continued to live

a. while he was still hanging on the cross and clinging to life, he told the penitent thief beside him that they would be together in Paradise that very day

1. he was not describing the tomb, for they did not share that cave at all, nor was it anything approaching paradise

2. and although paradise sounds like an apt description of heaven, Jesus did not go to heaven that day and not again until the ascension 40 days later

3. he was describing that part of the afterworld into which his spirit went to await the resurrection

b. in his ministry, he described this place (Luke 16:19-31)

1. sounds like paradise to me, at least Abraham's half of it

2. it was here that Jesus was comforted for three days until he arose in his resurrection, and it is here that we, his brethren and redeemed, will spend our time between death and resurrection when the last trumpet sounds

C. Not So Scary After All

1. death is supposedly man's greatest fear, but for the righteous, only dying is troublesome; death itself is welcome release from pain and decay

2. when he broke through the gates of hades which could not prevail against him, he overcame the power of death (Hebrews 2:14-16)

a. no more should we be subject to the mystery of death, for the truth has been revealed and paradise awaits the saint

b. the time to die for the Christian cannot be hastened by suicide or euthanasia, for it is also determined by God, but neither should it be feared either (First Corinthians 15:20-26, 51-58)

3. because the time to die holds such momentous stakes, we must always be prepared to face it (Hebrews 9:27-28)

4. the time to die promises a future in those mansions that Jesus went to prepare for us (Second Corinthians 5:1-11)

Conclusion

There is a time to be born and a time to die, generally separated by about four score years. What we do with those few vapors of time will determine where we spend all eternity. Death leads to paradise for the redeemed, but to torment for those who did not know God or did not obey the gospel.

Everything A Season (2): A Time to Plant and A Time to Pluck

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck what is planted;”

One of the immutable laws of nature is that planting season and harvest season can not be exchanged for one another or experienced without the other. And so this little bit of wisdom tells us not only that a healthy harvest depends upon a zealous effort, but also that plucking is as productive and necessary as planting. Let's explore this truth a little further as we press on in this series of studies.

Discussion

I. A Time To Plant

A. In Nature

1. every spring, hope and life are renewed in a world that is often ravaged by the cleansing force of winter

a. death and decay are swept away, along with disappointment and even accomplishment, as everything done becomes necessary to do again

b. this is the time when seed is to be sown, when preparation is to be made for the future

c. if the farmer becomes lazy and does nothing, his future will become most bleak (Proverbs 24:30-34)

1. if this is true physically, could it also apply spiritually?

2. if we neglect to tend the gardens of our souls, could it happen that we arrive at harvest time fruitless and unprepared?

2. we should recognize that God is trying to teach us things in nature

a. he reveals his divine fingerprint on creation and uses the natural world as a parable for the spiritual

b. his inspired writer asks, “Does not even nature itself teach you...” (First Corinthians 11:14)

c. one important thing God tries to teach us in the natural world is the immutable law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7-10)

1. no one sows tomatoes and gets peppers

2. no one sows nothing and gets something

3. no one sows something bad and gets something good

4. you can plant crops or tares as you prefer, but don't expect to reap anything other than what you have sown

B. The Word Of God Is Seed

1. Jesus compared the gospel message to a seed that is sown in very different types of soil (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23)

a. Paul said that now is the day of salvation (see Second Corinthians 6:2)

b. now is the time to sow that gospel seed upon as much soil as we can, knowing that the produce will have to fight for its very survival and that many will fall short of fruitfulness

c. that good seed can be swallowed up by the grackle of misunderstanding, wilted by the heat of tribulation and persecution, or choked out by the twin thorns of the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this world

d. the only hope of a healthy yield is to sow as much as seed as possible (Ecclesiastes 11:5-6)

2. the writer James used the figure of the seed to describe the effect that God's word has upon the heart (James 1:21-27)

a. if we can overcome misunderstanding, tribulation, and persecution and avoid being consumed with the cares of life or being deceived by materialism, we can know that the word has been im-

planted in our hearts and is bearing fruit

b. are we unspotted from the world—avoiding sin and seeking mercy whenever we fall into it? (First John 3:7-9, 1:8-9)

1. John makes the distinction between those who occasionally fall into sin and those who regularly and willfully practice it

2. if God's seed remains alive within us, we will not continue to make sin our practice, and although we will occasionally err, we will penitently seek to be aerated anew by grace

C. Are You Sowing The Seed of the Kingdom, Brother?

1. when that gospel seed takes root within us, it begins to bear fruit and part of that fruit is sowing the same seed elsewhere

2. back in Matthew 13, Jesus compared the gospel to a mustard seed, "which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches" (31-32)

a. compared to the veneer of grandeur coating the philosophies of the great thinkers and the mysticism of Eastern religions, the gospel of Jesus Christ may seem small and insignificant like a little ordinary mustard seed

b. yet while those doctrines create nothing more than deluded unsaved people, the gospel seed grows into something tremendous and reflective of divine glory (Ephesians 3:8-12)

3. even many Christians today have given up on the power of the gospel seed, seeking to improve its appeal by warping it into a social gospel; they are using a different seed when they resolve to reap spiritual things by sowing the physical

a. the gospel is God's power unto salvation (see Romans 1:16) and although another seed may look to have more potential, in the end you only reap what you sow

b. but are you sowing anything at all?

4. Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive and giving is sowing

a. his disciples must be about their father's business, sowing the good news in word and in deed

b. "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (Second Corinthians 9:6)

c. the Proverbs say it is possible to sow discord, strife and iniquity, but "he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward" (Proverbs 11:18)

d. plant the influence of Christ wherever you can by doing good and attributing it to him; who knows when that seed will land in good soil and bring forth fruit?

II. A Time To Pluck What Is Planted

A. Weeding The Garden

1. despite the fact that the good seed is so readily available in this world, its influence is limited to wherein good soil receives it and the devil tries to diminish that territory all he can (Matthew 13:24-30; 37-43)

2. there is a time to pluck the sons of the devil out of the world, but it is not yet and it is not ours to do

3. the harvest time is coming on and although judgment begins with the household of God, we understand what will become of those who do not obey the gospel

4. then the wheat and chaff will be separated on the threshing floor of heaven (Luke 3:17)

B. Personal Plucking

1. self-examination sometimes reveals weeds in the gardens of our souls and then we must work hard to overcome them

2. sometimes the fruits of the spirit are fighting with the works of the flesh for superiority and the Christian has to swallow hard and prune away that which is decay

C. A Time For Us To Pluck

1. we do have other plucking to do at times (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

a. Jeremiah's Israel was overrun by false prophets and heartless religion and it was his mission to uproot the error

b. our spiritual Israel today is harassed by false teachers and a religion evolving into a hybrid

of scripture and sectarian tradition

c. clearly, pruning is indicated when the bloom is off the rose due to complacency, compromise and ignorance

2. we are not only authorized to do the plucking but are required

a. we must mark the one who teaches damnable doctrines which will cause tender plants to perish (Romans 16:17-18)

b. we must mark also those who introduce error into the church which causes division (Titus 3:9-11)

c. we must even withdraw from an unruly brother who refuses to repent of his sin (Second Thessalonians 3:6)

3. we are not personally turning these ones over to the reaper for spiritual destruction, but are delivering their bodies to Satan that they might be shamed and their spirits saved (see First Corinthians 5:5)

a. everyone has seen the wind or a child blow the dried petals of a dandelion and seen the harmless looking wisps scatter across the field

b. those harmless looking wisps will be dozens of weeds in a short time

c. when we pluck out error or faction or sin, we identify and prevent their spread and this is God's wisdom

Conclusion

This is the time for Christians to be planting seed in their own lives and in the hearts of others. There is a little plucking for us to do from time to time, but the harvest is coming on when we will all be subject to the reaper's work. Will you be ready?

Everything A Season (3): A Time To Kill and A Time To Heal

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to kill,
And a time to heal;”

One of the things that worries me most about the practices of book banning and book burning is that books that talk about evil but condemn it might be destroyed along with the ones that uphold wickedness. You see, the Bible is that kind of book. It talks about sex, violence and murder perhaps more than any other book, but never gratuitously and always with a moral ending that condemns wickedness and upholds righteousness. In this passage, God explains that there is a time for killing and a time for healing. He is the Great Physician and has within his power the ability to do both at will. Even among his servants, there is a proper time to employ one or the other practice.

Discussion

I. A Time To Kill

A. The Sixth Commandment

1. in the King James Bible, the sixth commandment of Moses forbade killing, but the intent of the Hebrew word was more precise and was limited to murder, as later translations indicate (see Exodus 20:13; e.g., NKJV)

2. as a matter of fact, the Old Testament is filled with killing, much of it demanded by God himself and those killings were not sin

a. the patriarchs and their families killed animals both to eat them and to sacrifice them and this was no sin

b. Israel fought a major war in conquering Canaan and millions of pagans were killed off the land to make room; they were trying to thwart the will of God

c. the same law which contained the sixth commandment also legislated capital punishment for certain offenses against God's will, among them murder

1. and so there is a distinction between killing done in the name of thievery, vengeance, pride or malice and killing done in the name of justice

2. this distinction will help us to understand the propriety of capital punishment today

B. Some Times to Kill

1. Achan was killed because he stole the riches of Jericho and hid them in his tent when God had said to leave them alone

2. when Jericho was conquered, only Rahab and her family were preserved from the Israelite army

3. sweet Samuel hacked King Agag to pieces when Saul refused, for it was God's will that the enemy be punished

4. all this occurred under the Old Testament code, which was both a religious and civil standard

a. one theocratic governance covered both social and spiritual matters

b. the Old Testament was becoming obsolete when Christ was born, for the law of Moses could only be heeded within the framework of the Roman occupation of Israel

1. the emperor and his deputies replaced the Davidic kings upon the throne of Jerusalem and limited what the elders could do in answer to the law of Moses

2. this arrangement would evolve over time and around the world, but remain basically the same—the New Testament would not be a civil government, but a spiritual one only

3. laws of the states would exist separately from the unchangeable law of Christ

5. therefore, the members of the body of Christ were not empowered to execute wayward members or wage physical wars over land or principle

- a. the Inquisitions and Crusades of the last millennium were misguided attempts to maintain or transfer spiritual authority to a physical realm and they failed
- b. the right to kill humans was invested solely in the state (Romans 13:1-7)
 - 1. sometimes Christians, by occupation, become agents of the state as police officers, corrections officers, soldiers or special agents
 - 2. there were some in the Bible as well, for soldiers came to John the immerser asking what they needed to do to be right with God (Luke 3:3, 12-14)
 - 3. Cornelius believed and was baptized for the remission of sins by Peter and company without a word being spoken about him giving up his soldiering for Rome
 - 4. if acting as an agent of a legal authority, the Christian has a much right as anyone else to execute the ultimate measure of justice as soldier, officer or agent

C. Figurative Murder

- 1. although there is a time to kill, it is not through hatred of a brother (First John 3:13-18)
 - a. again, the word hatred here is defined more broadly than we might assume; it includes not only outright malice but also indifference toward a brother in Christ
 - b. hatred is shown to a brother by doing him harm or by refusing to do him good
- 2. let us be careful that we do not allow our closest associations to turn sour by insensitivity (Matthew 5:21-26)

II. A Time To Heal

A. The Difference Between Rahab and Her Neighbor

- 1. we know that when the armies of Joshua approached Jericho to conquer it, they met a harlot named Rahab, whom they did not kill in the invasion even as they summarily sacked the rest of the city and all its people; why preserve Rahab and not her neighbor?
 - 2. was God a respecter of persons, an arbitrary healer?
 - a. no, God was a respecter of faithful obedience and Rahab unexpectedly assisted the Hebrew spies as an expression of her belief in Jehovah and submission to him
 - b. she was saved while people like King Agag and even her own neighbors were not because of faith

B. Healing The Wayward

- 1. when ancient Israel encountered a heretic, a wayward brother or a criminal, the nation killed him
 - 2. in spiritual Israel, the church of Jesus Christ, we are consumed with the mission of restoring that soul to a right standing with God in his assembly and take other steps to accomplish that
 - a. as the word of God is profitable for reproof and correction (see Second Timothy 3:16), one's brethren are responsible for showing him his error when he strays (Galatians 6:1-2)
 - b. often times that works (James 5:19-20)
 - c. doing nothing at all for a straying brother always fails
 - 3. but what happens when a brother or sister insists on continuing in sin, or promises to quit but does not?
 - a. when sin returns to the life of a Christian, it is evidence that the old man of sin has been resurrected and is walking zombie-like through him again
 - b. that resurrected old man of sin requires another burial and it is up to the faithful to deliver him to Satan (First Corinthians 5:1-13)
 - 1. those Christians had elected to tolerate him and his sin, but the Holy Spirit would not
 - 2. have we killed a brother when we justly withdraw ourselves from him?
 - 3. no, hopefully we have wounded the old man of sin, though
 - 4. and apparently God's plan worked in this case (Second Corinthians 2:5-11)
 - a. sometimes the one who is withdrawn from never returns
 - b. but the other objective in this plan is to keep the church pure and marking the impenitent is necessary to do this

C. Healed Slightly

- 1. prior to Paul's rebuke, the church at Corinth was on its way to being every bit as tolerant and big-tent as the self-help social gospel churches of today

2. even in old Judah, there was a time at which God had a prescription for healing his people, but it was bitter and strong medicine and the prophets and sinners preferred a placebo, or something to relieve the pain without treating the source of it
 - a. as the Babylonians approached to overthrow Judah, God said the defeat was inevitable and that the Jews should surrender
 - b. but that hurt their pride and so they hired prophets to tell them what they wanted to hear (Jeremiah 8:7-13)
3. on the operating table today, a man can come into surgery with a broken leg and blood pouring from the wound
 - a. through the power of suggestion, a doctor can give a terminal patient a placebo to make his mind think the disease is improving when in fact it is not
 - b. he feels better, but he is doomed
 - c. spiritually, preachers have the same power to heal their hearers self-esteem without ever attacking the parasite, the germ that is the sin which afflicts them
4. teaching that heals is teaching that identifies the problem and presents the cure
 - a. John told those grifting publicans and intimidating soldiers to repent and quit it
 - b. Jesus told the woman at the well that her domestic relationship was a sin
 - c. Paul told Peter that his dining habits were hypocritical
5. to paraphrase Foy E. Wallace, Jr., when we develop better manners than the New Testament or become more dignified than the apostles, we are worth nothing to the defense of the truth or to the cause of Christ

Conclusion

There is a time to kill and a time to heal among Christians. When it comes to that old man of sin, he should be buried once and left there. Perhaps tonight, you are prepared to come to Jesus and leave the man of sin behind to take on a new life in faith. He is buried in baptism and that act of faithful obedience separates you from newness of life.

Everything A Season (4): A Time To Break Down and A Time To Build Up

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to break down,
And a time to build up;”

Just a few decades ago, millions of dollars, hundreds of men and more than a few years were contributed to the construction of the Bank One Building in downtown Fort Worth. It was a time to build up an impressive edifice, but now the time to break down is nearly upon us. Why the change in such a short time? The building is damaged, dangerous and useless in present form. In its current condition, it is beyond repair, and before the property can be used for anything productive again, its current occupant has to be broken down. Spiritually, we find likewise that rebellious, sinful and worldly souls are much like that building with plywood over the windows and caution tape around the entrance. Before anything spiritually productive can occur or exist there, an attitude of defiance has to be broken down by the gospel wrecking ball. Then God’s word can begin to edify, to build up a person fit for service.

Discussion

I. A Time To Break Down

A. Examples

1. God has a long and exciting history of breaking down the constructions of men when they interfered with his will

2. the Bible says that God created man upright, but he has sought out many devices, devices to defy righteousness and serve self

a. the flood in Noah’s day was nothing more than God’s attempt at spoiling the corruption man had inflicted upon the Earth; it was a time to break down and start over

b. no less notably, he broke down a later generation’s attempt at self-deification (Genesis 11:1-9)

1. these folks believed that they could mimic the pagans and approach God on their wavelength

2. God objected and sent them back down

c. because of its widespread sin, God broke down Sodom and Gomorrah and replaced them with ashes

d. during the conquest of Canaan, God directed Israel to break down one city after another, from Jericho to Ai and all the way to Jerusalem, so that he could build something productive in its place

B. Fleshly Israel

1. when Israel’s sin multiplied and could not be turned back, God broke down the temple and all of the city, to preserve only a faithful remnant who could return and rebuild (Second Chronicles 36:17-21)

2. that last verse hints at the edification that would follow when God was ready (Second Chronicles 36:22-23)

3. yet this second temple and even a third were built up and then torn down in due time, finally when Christianity had taken hold and it was time for Judaism to be abolished

C. Application

1. the mission of Jesus when he came to this Earth was first predicted at the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis three (Genesis 3:14-15)

a. the seed of Eve would come and, although the devil would bruise his heel, the Seed would bruise the devil’s head

b. this cryptic language predicts that Eve’s descendant would deal a fatal blow to the devil’s

authority, despite being slightly afflicted by the devil's wickedness

c. Paul identifies this Seed as Christ (see Galatians 3:16) and we witness the gospel era as one in which the power of the devil was assaulted

2. Jesus cast out demons and invaded the darkness of sin with the light of truth, breaking down the tempter's stranglehold on mankind with hope (Luke 10:17-20)

a. he declared war on the adversary and began tearing down his kingdom, subject by subject

b. but the devil fought back and enlisted the aid of the apostle, Judas Iscariot, whose loyalty was purchased for 30 pieces of silver, over which the potential redeemer would be killed and buried

c. as the devil hatched this plan through the agency of the Jewish leaders who hated Jesus just as much, he expected it to bring him final victory and prevent God from tearing down his power

d. little did he know that he was playing in to the hand of God all along, that ironically, it was Christ's crucifixion and subsequent resurrection that would break Satan's power through death and enable men to tear down a life of sin and damnation and rebuild a life of faith and salvation

D. Some Things Need To Be Torn Down

1. so many people walk through life in tents of ease that prevent them from ever approaching God

a. some have built scaffolds of pride, of material sufficiency, of atheism, of idolatry, of complacency, etc.

b. around them, they perceive a wall of protection, but it is truly no more infallible than the walls of Jericho that fell by the hand of God

c. the things that we think are providing security may in fact be keeping us from the sufficiency of God and hope

2. there is a man of sin within us that rejects God and instead seeks contentment and purpose in things that all perish with the using; this is an inner man or woman that needs to be torn down if anything productive is ever going to come from life

a. the purpose of life is to fear God and keep his commandments (see Ecclesiastes 12:13)

b. whatever we build up that harms this objective is property that needs to be condemned, dynamited and laid desolate so that something good can be built in its place

II. A Time To Build Up

A. Examples

1. our God is known for his massive building projects

a. no ship has ever been built—not even the Titanic—that rivals the ark of Noah

b. from the seed of Abraham and Sarah, God built a family as numerous as the stars in the sky

c. and once God had conquered Canaan, he set about rebuilding the land in his glory; altars to idols were destroyed and a temple was constructed at great expense in Jerusalem

2. when sinful things are broken down, even in the hearts of men and women, it becomes fit property to rebuild something to bring glory to God's name

B. Building Saints Where Sinners Had Been

1. imagine the change in the character of the land of Canaan after the Israelites took over from the pagans

2. gone was a land soaked in idolatry, immorality and crime; in its place was a people devoted to divine law and goodness

3. the gospel has the same power to replace that crucified man of sin, that torn down person of iniquity, with something that can be pleasing to God and accepting of grace

a. reclamation is possible for that condemned property, deemed unfit because of sin and pride (Romans 5:6-11)

b. but it has to be completely torn down, hauled away, buried, and replaced with a pristine structure (Romans 5:18-6:7)

c. the old purpose is replaced (Romans 6:12-14)

C. Edifying the Saints

1. like the tower of Babel, but justified, the Christian becomes a construction project aimed at heaven and ongoing until it arrives

2. we are built upon the foundation rock of Christ and stabilized by constant increase (Jude 20-25)

3. it is both the work of the church and of the brethren individually to build up oneself and one another (see First Thessalonians 5:11)

Conclusion

God created you right, but if you destabilized the structure through pride, sin and false security, it is time to tear down your effort and start over again in faith. Bring Christ your broken life, so marred by sin, and allow the gospel to create for you a second chance.

Everything A Season (5): A Time To Weep and A Time To Laugh

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to weep,
And a time to laugh;”

Children can often be heard to remark about this or that, “It’s not fair!”. I have imposed upon my own daughter a strict limit of one such exclamation per day with violations punishable by loss of privilege, a policy she also finds most unfair. It is pure childishness to expect that everything should always go your way and that times of disappointment or melancholy can be completely eliminated. Hopefully, as adults, we learn to accept the fact that there are expected times for both weeping and laughing, and that both can be done in the best interest of the spirit. In this fifth installment in our series on seasons, we stop to consider that there is a time to weep and laugh and we must be ready to respond justly, whether it seems fair or not.

Discussion

I. A Time To Weep

A. There Are Times of Sorrow (John 11:1-15, 32-36)

1. I am afraid that sometimes we are misled into believing that emotions of sorrow and disappointment are somehow disallowed in the Christian

a. although we seek to be a joyful people and resign ourselves to the occasional hardship while anticipating the glory of heaven, we can become convinced that it is wrong to mourn and weep in difficult circumstances

b. I actually heard one brother even scold those who would mourn over the passing of a Christian, reasoning that such was pure selfishness and a lack of faith

c. yet here is Jesus weeping over the passing of a disciple, joining his tears to those of Mary and Martha

2. a hope for life after death does diminish the terror of death and sadness at the passing of a loved one, but it does not immediately relieve the sense of loss

a. tears shed for the deceased do him honor and do not damage the faith of the living at all

b. death is a time to weep

B. For Those Who Weep

1. Paul encourages Christian to weep with those who weep in Romans 12:15 and to suffer with those who suffer in First Corinthians 12:26

2. to be touched by the despair of one’s brethren is sure evidence that the body is knit together in love and mutual concern (First Corinthians 12:20-27)

a. it is the law of Christ that we bear one another’s burdens (see Galatians 6:2) and this we cannot do unless we are in communication with one another and so mutually connected that one harms you cannot help but harm me

b. if you can witness your brother in tears without being moved to sympathy and compassion, you are missing out on a great blessing that God wants for you and you are not being the great blessing to others that God wants you to be

3. sympathy is a time to weep (Ecclesiastes 7:1-4)

C. When Drawn By The Devil (James 4:1-10)

1. earlier in this great epistle, John pulled back the curtain on the drama of sin to reveal that “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (1:14-15).

a. the Holy Spirit describes the pleasures of sin as passing and temporary and asserts that

their ultimate consequence is eternal death

- b. thus sin is hardly the bargain it seems when the devil is drawing us in its direction
2. the proud man, even the proud Christian, will try to go it alone, feeling that he can handle a little indulgence without losing his faith, not realizing that such a statement reveals it is already going, going, gone
3. the humble man will sit down prayerfully in the ashes of destruction like the weeping prophet, Jeremiah, and submit himself to God
 - a. Paul tells us not to give place, or opportunity, to the devil (see Ephesians 4:26)
 - b. giving in is cause for a weeping soul (First Peter 5:6-11)
4. the self-esteem movement says that we always feel good, even when we are faring poorly or deviating morally
 - a. naturally that philosophy fails, for it is earthly, sensual and demonic wisdom
 - b. God demands that sin touch our hearts the way it touches his—painfully, so that the child of God will learn not to wander so near the devil’s flame again

II. A Time To Laugh

A. For Sarah (Genesis 18:1-2, 9-15)

1. aged Sarah had just enough energy in her old body to laugh when the Lord promised that it would still bring forth a child despite all her gray hairs and weak limbs
2. why did Sarah laugh?
 - a. whether it was simply doubt or a little mirth, Sarah laughed because the stated plan of God seemed impossible and her place in it did not help
 - b. the Lord’s reply is how he answers us today when his plans seem impossible, unlikely or incomprehensible (“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”)
3. when bowed down by disease, or facing death, or in desperate financial straits, God asks that we trust in prayer and providence
4. when confronted with persecution and tribulation or our own self-doubt, God tells us to be faithful and patient
 - a. experience would tell us to comply but the world and its cynicism recommend doubt, that we secretly laugh within ourselves
 - b. the God we believe in has always made promises that sounded impossible or accepted challenges that would have cowed lesser beings (Ephesians 3:14-21)
5. when we refuse to pray or trust, we are picking the wrong time and wrong circumstances to laugh like Sarah

B. When Angels Rejoice (Luke 15:1-7)

1. I think it somewhat odd that when this building is witness to a baptism or a restoration, those assembled here smile and rejoice and laugh with glee, but that the rest of the world does not even notice
2. the Bible even tells us that such an event causes great joy and laughter to break out in heaven, as the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents, but the world is beyond care
3. what did the Ethiopian eunuch do after he was baptized? (Acts 8:36-39)
4. while Saul of Tarsus waited to hear the gospel, he sorrowed, but when he obeyed the truth, his gloom was turned to glee (Acts 9:1-9, 17-19)

Conclusion

If you are outside of the body of Christ or have returned to the mire of sin, then today should be a day of weeping for you. It does not have to end that way, though. If you will obey the gospel or be restored to Christ, we can all join God’s angels in heaven by laughing and rejoicing together tonight.

Everything A Season (6): A Time To Mourn and A Time To Dance

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to mourn,
And a time to dance;”

This couplet is strongly related to the previous one which considered a time to weep and laugh, but there are enough distinctions to draw a second lesson. Tonight, we focus our minds on the blessings inherent in participating in both joy and pain.

Discussion

I. A Time To Mourn

A. Better To Go The House of Mourning (Ecclesiastes 7:1-4)

1. this same book extols the good lessons that can be learned in the time to mourn
 - a. no doubt when we first saw the title of this lesson, we thought that the time of laughter would be the better, but perhaps the time of mourning holds more blessing within it
 - b. it is sad to say but man learns far fewer life lessons from blessing than he does from hardship and the death of a loved one is often the most stunning teacher of all
 - c. how many have reconsidered their complacency and rededicated themselves to Christ because a faithful loved one has passed on to Paradise or an unfaithful loved one has gone to torment?
2. the sight of a spiritless body and a room full of mourners must always remind everyone of us that some day we shall trade our place for his and only our life's legacy and a date with the judgment seat on high will remain
3. the writer of wisdom argues that mourning heals the heart, that ignoring the ultimate fact of life only prolongs the injury
4. great wisdom is granted in the house of mourning and so it is not to be avoided due to its discomfort (Acts 9:36-42)

B. The First Parcel of the Promised Land

1. a time of mourning actually occasioned the first tiny possession of a part of the promised land by Abraham
 - a. back in Genesis 12, God promised to give Abraham and his descendants a great land and this promise was fulfilled once Joshua's raiders invaded Canaan and expelled the heathen squatters
 - b. but it was Abraham's mourning over the death of his wife, Sarah, that led him to purchase the first plot of land in Canaan (Genesis 23:1-20)
 1. Abraham thought he would only be able to purchase the cave which would have left the surrounding land in the hands of another, but Ephron offered the field also for free but valued at an apparently inflated rate
 2. Abraham refused to take the land for free, perhaps because such charity would have dishonored the worth of his wife
 3. his mourning caused him to deposit Sarah's remains in Canaan
2. we wish that the time of mourning could always be about depositing spirits in Paradise with the promise of heaven awaiting, but, despite the verbiage of so many funerals, we know it is not so
 - a. the time of mourning is eased when we have some degree of certainty about the deceased's eternal fate and we can hope for a blessed reunion over there
 - b. but still we know that as only a few of the original pilgrims from Egypt ever reached the promised land, so only a few who are born will actually arrive at heaven's pearly gates (Second Corinthians 5:1-10)

C. The Lesson Learned

1. some who mourn at funerals rededicate themselves to righteousness and carry through with their resolution while others soon forget their like any made on New Year's Eve
2. working through the agency of his sword, the word of God, the Holy Spirit endeavors to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (see John 16:8-13)
3. the beatitudes teach, "Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4)
 - a. now, mourning does not ever seem to be pleasant when it occurs, but afterward it yields wisdom through advancing experience and applying knowledge
 - b. it is the mourning over one's sin that leads to the blessing of the comfort of grace
 1. Simon the sorcerer is told by Peter that he is in sin and at risk of damnation and he fearfully prays for mercy and grace and receives comfort and renewal (Acts 8:18-24)
 2. the church at Corinth is excoriated for tolerating sin and makes up its mind to withdraw from their unruly brother (Second Corinthians 7:6-16)

II. A Time To Dance

A. An Act of Praise

1. some words in the Bible have very broad definitions that can be misunderstood and misapplied without caution
 - a. the word "wine" includes both fermented and unfermented juice from the grape and thus is used both ways, but never to uphold the validity of intoxication or even social drinking
 - b. the words "elder" and "deacon" can mean any older person or servant or an overseer of the church and an appointed worker, as the context defines it
 - c. so the word "dance" may describe only an innocent show of praise in Old Testament times or a lewd display of sinfulness now
2. please understand that this passage is not advocating that there is a justifiable time to commit lewd movements
3. dancing that was justified in the Old Testament always involved the praise of God in an expression of extreme joy, but the risk of crossing over to lewdness was always near
 - a. Miriam led a dance of praise like the one that Ecclesiastes encouraged (Exodus 15:20-21)
 - b. Jephthah's daughter also danced in this way-not to be lewd or suggestive or in concert with men-to show her happiness at the return of her impetuous father (see Judges 11:34)
 - c. as much as the Psalms validate the use of instrumental music in worship under the law of Moses, they also validate dance (Psalm 149:3 and Psalm 150:4)
4. dancing that would not fall under Ecclesiastes 3, however, is also indicated in the Bible
 - a. the Hebrews back at the camp while Moses and Joshua waited for the ten commandments used dance as a way of playing with idolatry and provoking God's wrath; it was an act lacking restraint
 - b. at Herod's birthday party, his stepdaughter danced, not to praise God, but to please the man (Matthew 14:6-11)
 1. unlike Queen Vashti in the book of Esther who refused to become a spectacle before a band of drunken men, this young woman whom Josephus identifies as Salome, happily agrees to perform for them
 2. brother L.A. Stauffer comments that the "rash vow made by Herod after the dance implies either a semi-drunken state, a fever's pitch of carnal lust, or a combination of the two. It is difficult to view this in any way other than a sensual dance and a carnival atmosphere" (*Truth Commentary on Mark*, 138)
5. the kind of dancing that was employed to praise God and was justified in the Old Testament was not of a lewd nature, nor did it involve males and females coupling to dance socially¹
6. such a dance is lewd and there is no time for lewdness
 - a. listed among the evident (see explicit) works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19 is lewdness (see from the Greek *aselgeia*, defined by Thayer as "wanton acts or manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc.")
 - b. dancing is not prescribed by the New Testament as an authorized act of worship any more than instrumental music and in its lewd forms are clearly forbidden; there is no time for lewd dance

¹ Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'GAMES'". "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia". <<http://www.studylight.org/enc/isb/view.cgi?number=T3655>>. 1915.

B. The Time To Dance Is A Time To Rejoice

1. Christians are sometimes accused of being a sour and morose people, often scowling and always pessimistic

a. I suppose that is just the prejudiced opinion of unbelievers, for the children of God should be the happiest people on Earth (Romans 14:16-18)

b. as the Ethiopian eunuch went his way rejoicing after his conversion, we ought to treasure up such satisfaction and anticipation in our hearts that no sorrow can destroy our contentment and joy

2. it is a time to rejoice when our brethren are blessed, so that we might rejoice with them (see Romans 12:14)

3. it is a time to rejoice when angels rejoice over the reclamation of one lost soul

4. it is even a time to rejoice when death takes the aged saint, for after the mourning there is strengthened hope

Conclusion

There are times to mourn and times to dance throughout life, but don't be afraid of either one. Learn from sorrow and live in joy and you will be blessed in this life and the next.

Everything A Season (7): A Time To Cast Away Stones and A Time To Gather Stones

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to cast away stones,
And a time to gather stones;”

Depending on what your mission is at the moment, the presence of stones can be either valuable material for construction or annoying impediment to planting. Therefore, there is a time to cast away stones when planting and a time to gather them up when building. Stones were also useful in executing justice in ancient Israel, but sometimes they were used unlawfully as in the case of Stephen. Stones impeded the growth of some Christians in Christ's parable of the sower of seeds but then illustrated the growth of the church into a holy temple of the Lord which itself was founded upon a rock. Appreciation of stones is all in timing and perspective, but there is a time to cast them away and a time to gather them up.

Discussion

I. A Time To Cast Away Stones

A. Stumbling Blocks (Second Kings 3:14-19, 25)

1. here the prophet commanded the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom to gather stones that were really only good for casting away
2. it was an act of sabotage to punish the king of Moab for rebelling against Israel
3. these were the original stones of offense, stumbling blocks in their own little way
 - a. to heathen like the Moabites and even supposed believers like the Hebrews, Jesus Christ became a stone put in their path that was good only for kicking away
 - b. when their descendants tried, they stumbled over their salvation and fell to their spiritual doom
 - c. but still a few of each group, Jew and Gentile, chose rather to build upon the rock (Romans 9:30-33)
4. why do men continue to stumble over Christ today instead of founding their faith upon him? (First Peter 2:7-8)
 - a. modern Jews continue to seek Messianic signs and ignore the record of Christ's life; modern Gentiles bow at the altar of secular wisdom-self-help, positivism and sorcery (First Corinthians 1:18-25)
 - b. without realizing it, so many Americans stumble over Christ because pseudo-science tells them the gospel cannot be true; their souls are starved even as eternity looms

B. No Room For Roots (Matthew 13:1-3, 5-6, 20-21)

1. our Lord was preparing his disciples for the often frustrating results of spreading the gospel seed
2. among the troubles presented to the sower was the fact that some seed would fall upon hearts likened to shallow soil concealing layers of rock beneath
 - a. here the seed could not descend far into the ground and so the plant sprang up immediately, showing what appeared to be great promise, but almost as quickly wilted away
 - b. the stones there prevented the plant from taking root and the harshness of tribulation and persecution withered that one's faith like the hot Texas sun robs our lawns
3. some new converts appear to be joyous and zealous on the day that they obey the gospel, but at the first hint that not everything about Christianity is positive and pleasant, they wither away
 - a. some have hearts just soft enough to be touched by truth for a moment, but just hard enough also to maintain an unhealthy skepticism about faith and allegiance to the material
 - b. shallow soil over rocky layers is the heart that is always only moments away from casting its lot back with the devil when the matter of the cost of true faith is about to be levied

c. they are the souls like Demas, who forsook Paul because he “loved this present world” (Second Timothy 4:10)

d. harboring a carnal mind in a body supposedly committed to the spiritual is the shallow soil hiding a rocky layer (Romans 8:1-8)

C. Hard-Heartedness

1. the Bible is filled with hard-hearted people like Pharaoh, the Pharisees and rulers of Christ’s day who believed but would not confess, and the men who stoned Stephen when they could no longer debate his issues

2. some today are hard-hearted against the Bible as well

a. because of years of being taught the same error, they are unable or unwilling to consider that passages like Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38 and First Peter 3:21 may actually mean what they say

b. others have been hardened by the presence of hypocrisy in the church around them; so disgusted were they by that hypocrisy that they fled the church and sentenced themselves to eternity surrounded by even greater hypocrisy—they became the ultimate hypocrite

3. hard-heartedness is a condition that may even develop in the saint, if he indulges his carnal impulses just enough and becomes talented at excusing his failures and justifying his apostasy (Ephesians 4:17-21)

4. it is the season to cast away stones of hard-heartedness if you find yourself comfortable with a little sin

II. A Time To Gather Stones

A. To Cast At Sinners

1. the Old Testament required that certain cases of sin be considered capital judgments and that those convicted be dragged out of the city and be stoned with a pile of stones

2. on more than one occasion, Jesus was nearly stoned and the apostle Paul was also forced to escape this end

3. in fact, Stephen became the first Christian martyred for the faith when he was stoned by the audience he accused of apostasy and murder (Acts 7:51-60)

a. sadly, the prevailing sentiment among Christians would condemn Stephen’s tone and method as much as the men who killed him

b. Stephen’s sermon was pointed and stepped on sinner’s toes; one wonders who cast the first stone here—was it Stephen himself, by preaching this hard, accusatory lesson?

c. figuratively he did cast the first stone and it was thrown back, but he spoke by the Holy Spirit, whose mission was to convict the world of sin (see John 16:8)

4. on another occasion, a group of men wanted to stone a woman they found in the very act of adultery (John 8:2-11)

a. Jesus cast the only stone here, at the hypocritical men who dragged this woman away from her sin and left her partner in crime to walk away unpunished

b. they had assembled, not from righteous concern for the law, but self-righteous concern for their own waning influence and envy of the Lord

1. Mosaic law said she and her partner should be stoned to death but Roman occupational law reserved the power of execution to Pilate

2. hence, they had Jesus on the horns of a dilemma again, until he stooped down and wrote reflectively on the ground

3. he turned the tables when he said the first sinless man should go ahead and cast the first stone

4. they knew they could not legally comply and conscientiously they knew they were all unworthy hypocrites

5. how well do we deal with our worldly friends and relatives today?

a. because the law has changed and we are not without sin ourselves, casting real stones is not the right tactic

b. but if we meet abusers like those who stoned Stephen, we should respond forcefully and mercilessly like Stephen

c. when we meet harmless hypocrites like these men in John 8, we can try to prick their consciences like Jesus did

d. and when we confront people living in sin like this woman in adultery, we can respond

by not condemning her immediately to doom, but by pleading with her to sin no more

B. Building Up The Temple of Christ (First Peter 2:1-6, 9-10)

1. the process of teaching and baptizing believers is the work of gathering stones to build up the temple of Christ
2. it is a holy temple, invisible and intangible, but real and mighty and a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (see Ephesians 2:19-22)
3. now is the time for us to be gathering living stones to enlarge the church, the temple of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20)

Conclusion

Is it time to cast away stones or gather them? Every day probably brings opportunity for both, but now it is time to provide for them to be gathered into God's holy temple. Will one tonight become a living stone; has seed found good and rich soil in one heart to bring forth fruit?

Everything A Season (8): A Time To Embrace and A Time To Refrain From Embracing

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to embrace,
And a time to refrain from embracing;”

God himself exemplifies that there is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. His deepest desire is to embrace his people always, but like wayward children, sometimes they get too big for that degree of affection. They wander into sin and God must refrain from embracing them, lest he give the impression he approves of error and thus perpetuates their rebellion. For man, there is also a time to embrace and another time to refrain from embracing. That is our subject in this installment of our series on Ecclesiastes 3.

Discussion

I. A Time To Embrace

A. Embrace Wisdom (Proverbs 4:1-9)

1. the writer asserts that if we embrace divine wisdom, she will crown us with glory and grace
2. wisdom is the principal thing, not money and romance and pride, but wisdom
 - a. to hear Solomon’s wisdom, queens came from around the world and yet the humblest women could also approach to hear him decide their maternity dispute
 - b. wisdom is priceless, which makes it affordable to those of us who are economically challenged
3. the hard part about getting divine wisdom and understanding is distinguishing it from earthly wisdom (James 3:13-18)
 - a. the wisdom of this world has thankfully exposed itself as being inspired by self-interest and we can see it clearly for its origin in hell
 - b. the wisdom of this world is about looking out for number one
 1. it is the wisdom which has caused divorce to explode on America, as amorous husbands abandon their wives and children to seek renewed joy and youth in a younger woman and flashier car or unfulfilled wives to walk away from their homes and leave their children to be raised by somebody else if at all
 2. it is earthly wisdom that excuses absentee parenting with catchy lies like “quality time”
 4. earthly wisdom relegates faith to some place behind the flesh and suggests that the Christian can live life with one foot in the church and the other in the world
 5. divine wisdom is more black and white and makes no excuses for the narrowness of truth
 - a. divine wisdom in the heart of man is to keep God’s commandments and live, to use the Bible as a manual for both life and worship (Mark 12:28-34)
 - b. you see “embracing wisdom” is more than just making an academic study of the subject or flirting with the notion
 - c. embracing wisdom is about giving yourself over to its control and yielding your own opinions to its truths
 - d. when we embrace wisdom, we crave her and exemplify her
 6. the ornament of grace and crown of glory are her rewards (Second Timothy 4:6-8)

B. Embrace Your Brethren in Christ (Acts 20:1, 36-38)

1. the closeness that develops between brothers and sisters in Christ, sometimes for no other reason than the faith, is beautiful
2. too many of us are afraid to risk getting into that kind of relationship or are content to exist on the fringes of the church and remain a mystery to the others

3. if you refuse to embrace your brethren, you are forfeiting one of the blessings that Jesus emphasized as a reward for faith (Mark 10:28-31)
 - a. when you are separated from your family because of distance or your beliefs, you can always have fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters in God's house
 - b. some people who do not have children or grandchildren of their own end up adopting some by faith because they embrace their brethren
4. Romans 16:16 demands it (Romans 16:16)
 - a. greeting our brethren is a commandment and the holy kiss is just one means of doing it
 - b. embracing is another, but the embrace should also be holy

C. Embrace The Promises of God (Hebrews 11:13-16)

1. when we talk about a time for embracing, we are talking about a serious commitment to something, a commitment so serious that one is willing to sacrifice and take risks
 - a. here the writer discusses the faith of Abraham and Sarah who embraced the promises of God concerning their legacy and took flight from everything they knew to pursue the promises
 - b. when you yearn for a better and heavenly country, you will embrace those promises so tightly that no one will be able to take them away from you
2. our promises are greater than those that motivated the patriarchs (Second Peter 1:2-4)
 - a. the Ethiopian eunuch embraced the promises and stopped his chariot to be baptized into Christ
 - b. the rich young ruler liked the promises but he embraced his money more and refused to make the sacrifice that would have saved his soul from pride
 - c. Saul of Tarsus embraced the promises and gave up his bright future in Judaism to become an apostle of Christ
 - d. Nicodemus did not embrace the promises but sought to live life as a secret disciple lest he be made to confess the faith he was hiding and starving in the shadows
3. when you embrace the promises, you will take up the cross and follow Christ (Mark 8:34-38)

II. A Time To Refrain From Embracing

A. Don't Embrace Fornication (Proverbs 5:15-20)

1. the temptation to commit sexual immorality is no greater within people today than it was in the past
2. what has changed is the reaction that they can expect to receive from the family, the church and society in general
3. sexual immorality is celebrated and most every element of stigma has been removed because it is perceived to be too judgmental and tied to an objective code in a subjective world
 - a. young people who abstain from all sexual activity until they are married appear to be in the minority and the pressure from peers to keep up is hard to resist
 - b. so prevalent is adultery and divorce and remarriage that we hardly blink anymore and rarely blush
 - c. the family of missing Washington intern Chandra Levy had no shame whatsoever as they compelled Congressman Gary Condit to admit he had an affair with their daughter
 - d. women's and teen's magazines have joined men's publications in celebrating fornication, especially in forms short of intercourse
4. when this demonic wisdom has prevailed, misery has followed (unwanted children roam the landscape without love or supervision, disease becomes epidemic and morality in other areas declines likewise (Proverbs 6:24-28)
5. unmarried friends, guard your virtue until you make a vow so that you can present yourself chaste to your mate on your wedding night
6. societal and family standards may shift and certain churches may stumble, but God's word is forever ("Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4)
 - a. flee the embrace of immorality like Joseph fled the enticement of Potiphar's wife
 - b. uphold the sanctity of your marital relationship (First Corinthians 7:1-6)

B. Don't Embrace Ash Heaps (Lamentations 4:1-5)

1. the Jews were embracing ash heaps because they had ignored God's warnings and pressed ahead with their idolatry and iniquity until he quit embracing them and allowed the Babylonians to destroy their nation

2. some have experienced the tragedy of watching their own homes burn down, weeping as they watch powerlessly and everything they own is consumed by fire

a. snapshots and portraits, trophies and mementoes, furniture, clothing, sometimes pets and even people—all gone

b. Jeremiah was witnessing this on a national scale, watching his neighbors who had refused his warnings as they embraced heaps of ashes in the ruins of their homes

3. a day is coming when those fires will seem like nothing and God will destroy not a nation, but the world (Second Peter 3:1-13)

a. will you be embracing an ash heap or winging your way toward the clouds with the redeemed?

b. you know, even the ash heaps will be obliterated in that day, and your soul will be beyond embrace

4. as Jesus wanted to embrace Jerusalem the way a mother hen hides her chicks, so God now wants to embrace you; Jerusalem was not willing, are you?

Conclusion

There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. Embrace wisdom, but avoid the embrace of immorality.

Everything A Season (9): A Time To Gain and A Time To Lose

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to gain,
And a time to lose;”

I have never entered a race or bought a stock without the hope of gain being mine by the end. We all wish that life that could be nothing but gain from beginning to end, but we all know that sometimes we are required to be the gracious loser. In life, there are seasons for gaining and there are seasons ruined by loss. While we can rejoice with gain, we can be educated by loss. The key to a successful life in God's service is learning to make the most out of the least.

Discussion

I. A Time To Gain

A. Grow in Grace and Knowledge

1. the bitter irony of youth is that you wish it away hoping to be older, only to get your wish in time and regret it terribly

a. every single day of our lives should be considered a unique gift, one that will never be repeated exactly again

b. time is not a renewable resource and eventually, we will all run out of tomorrows

c. for this reason, we are taught to “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16)

d. how many have a purse or cupboard full of coupons, many expired because you did not redeem them in time?; like every day of our lives, once they pass, they can not be bought back

2. because life is so short and opportunities to gain are so few, we must spend our days finding out the will of the Lord

a. no day should be counter to spiritual growth, but certainly no day should be stagnant either

b. a plant that does not grow will die and a fig tree that does not bear fruit is destined to

wither

c. every day on Earth should take eternity into account and do nothing to hinder that progress (Second Peter 1:5-12)

3. if you do not progress in truth, you will digress into error, ignorance or complacency (Second Peter 3:17-18)

a. we are reminded of the Bereans who were noble-minded than the Thessalonians because they searched their scriptures daily to consider the doctrines that were brought to them

b. these are the words by which we shall be judged and they need not be a mystery to us

c. we can be blessed with intellectual gain every day when we mine God's word for wisdom to bring light into the dark recesses of our minds and illuminate the path we should own

B. Harvest Souls

1. one day, our hands will be weakened with age and our minds won't compute the way they once did and then one day, we will be silenced forever by death

2. or it may that the final trumpet will sound first and the day of judgment will descend upon man like a thief in the night

3. however the end of our toil comes, it will come, and the opportunity to make converts for Christ will close forever

a. how many of us will want to race to loved ones with whom we had never shared the gospel when we hear that horn?

b. the time to work, though, is upon us and with all the urgency that the end will have (Matthew 9:35-38)

4. do all you can lawfully do to make the point and win souls (First Corinthians 9:19-23)
 - a. are you sowing the seed of the kingdom, brother?
 - b. or did you never mention him to me?

C. Invest Talents

1. God has endowed us all with talents and abilities which relate to those in the parable, some which are public and others which are less obvious, but so many of which can be used in service to God and men (Matthew 25:14-30)
2. we invest our abilities and increase our prospects for gain whenever we use them to benefit the kingdom or bless our neighbor
 - a. God is not satisfied that we merely return to him what he gave to us; he did not give us our gifts to maintain the status quo, but to storm the devil's compound and lend grace to those who require it
 - b. we bury our talents in the ground when we refuse to use them and they deteriorate from lack of use
3. sometimes the ability we have is to share (First Timothy 6:17-19)
4. other times, we can be exhorters (Hebrews 3:12-13)
5. some can serve publicly and others can serve privately, but all can serve, for all have talents

II. A Time To Lose

A. The Cost We Counted (Luke 14:25-33)

1. the thing about counting the cost is that eventually, you may be required to pay it
2. some will strain family relationships because the cross is controversial and religion is very personal
3. others will find struggles in the work place, persecutions in school and discomfort on the playground because of the cross
4. when you prepare to obey the gospel, you must count the cost and make certain you are willing to pay it, so that you will not begin the project and end up abandoning it when the going gets tough
 - a. in Nehemiah's day, the people of Jerusalem were rebuilding the city walls when their pagan neighbors noticed and decided to stop them (Neh. 2:17-20, 4:6-9)
 - b. the people continued to struggle with doubt and Nehemiah continued to encourage and protect them until the wall was built
5. sometimes the costs are intangible, but not less painful to pay
 - a. being a Christian means entertaining guilt over sins that the world would just overlook
 - b. it means caring when no one else cares anymore
 - c. it means turning the other cheek when others would derive base satisfaction from pursuing their own revenge
6. the cost you counted implied you would pay even this and now it is required of you; will you be true to your commitment or slink away under the devil's hand?

B. A Lost Harvest

1. while there are souls to be gained, the soul-winner quickly realizes that some he labored with and rejoiced over have withered on the vine and fallen away like a scorched rose (First Corinthians 3:5-15)
 - a. truly it is God who gives the increase as it is God who prospers the vine and adds fruit to its branches
 - b. but God has made his increase dependent upon the toil of us his servants, for we must sow the gospel seed and water it through constant admonition
2. when we see fruit borne in conversions to Christ, we rejoice
3. sometimes, however, those same souls wander back into the world and we weep doubly, for one is lost and that one was our work
 - a. but that loss will not endanger our souls at all
 - b. our work-those souls-may be burned up, and we will suffer their loss, but we will be saved on the basis of our relationship with Christ, not someone else's

C. Make the Most of the Least

1. the church at Smyrna made the most, although they had the least (Revelation 2:8-9)
 - a. while poor in things, they were rich in faith and works

- b. the richest person here may have the least in his wallet, but the most in his heart
- 2. the apostles made the most of being imprisoned by singing hymns and praying and by sharing the gospel with anybody who would listen; Paul converted some in Caesar's household while a convict in his penal system
- 3. there is a season for life to hand you a bag of lemons; what you make with them will determine what kind of person you become
 - a. some make the best of a bad situation and learn from mistakes or hardships to appreciate the good times
 - b. others make bad times worse, or become complainers or ingrates (Philippians 3:7-14)

Conclusion

There is a time for every purpose under heaven, a time to gain and a time lose. Learn from both and you will be better prepared both for life and afterlife.

Everything A Season (10): A Time To Keep and A Time To Throw Away

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to keep,
And a time to throw away;”

In May, I purchased a shiny, new laptop computer to replace the old PowerBook that was slow, bulky and unresponsive. I bought that old machine back in 1996 and when I did, it was cutting edge, sleek and new. I never imagined then that just five years later, I would be dropping it into a wastebasket. Yet there was no reason to keep a machine that would no longer even start, especially when it had been replaced by the latest thing. So there is a time to keep and a time to throw away. While things are useful and productive, they should be kept and maintained. When they become useless or counterproductive, their time to be thrown away has arrived. What things should Christians consider to be keepsakes and what things are worthy of disposal? That is our pursuit in this tenth installment of our series, *Everything A Season*.

Discussion

I. A Time To Keep

A. Our Hearts (Proverbs 4:20-27)

1. wisdom dictates that we keep our hearts and maintain them in a state of moral purity and heavenly focus

a. our physical hearts are embattled muscles, challenged by foot races and scary movies and susceptible to disease

b. our spiritual hearts-our minds, consciences and souls-are likewise challenged by the allure of sin and susceptible to moral hardening

2. to keep one's heart means to make it a fountain from which good flows continually (Matthew 7:14-23)

a. when you let down the guard over your heart, it is no longer kept clean, and devolves into the evil thoughts and evil things that spring forth into the mind and mouth to defile us

b. the Lord has special designs on our hearts and wants to use them to edify the world and us (John 7:37-39)

1. if Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit, we ought to count it our duty to keep the temple clean and commodious, for he will not continue to dwell where he is clearly unwelcome (First Corinthians 6:17-20)

2. a heart that is not kept is thrown away and its influence is like salt that has lost its savor, being good for nothing more than to be trampled upon (see Matthew 5:13)

3. we need a pure heart to have fellowship with God (Psalm 24:1-5)

B. Our Selves (Jude 20-21)

1. few would think it necessary to command Christians to keep themselves in the love of God, but the Holy Spirit does not waste words

2. it is not possible to cause God to stop loving us, but it is possible to cast off one's love for God (e.g., the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4 had left their first love)

3. furthermore it is possible for a child of God to be disinherited due to his own decisions (Galatians 4:1-11)

4. and so we keep ourselves in God's love by a constantly growing faith, vigilant prayer and happy anticipation of the return of Christ and eternal redemption of the saved to heaven

5. keeping ourselves in the love of God means in that frame of mind that holds God is high esteem and grateful affection (First John 4:15-19)

C. The Commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

1. it is strange how the little things in life can take on a largeness of their own and overwhelm the truly major considerations
 2. we get distracted by things that will be forgotten a week from now or certainly a 100 years from now and take care of the temporal while neglecting the eternal
 3. this passage says that buying a second car, adding on to the house and even getting a college degree are all things of secondary importance
 4. the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep his commandments; everything else is tangential
 - a. anything that conflicts with fearing God and obeying him is not worth it
 - b. nothing can take priority over fearing God or keeping his commandments without becoming an idol and a snare
 - c. your priorities in life will show how much attention you are lending to your whole duty
- (Luke 9:57-62)

D. The Unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-6)

1. unity, then, is no accident, but is something that must be attended, nurtured and maintained like a powerful machine
 2. our walk is only worthy if we are striving to keep Christian unity through conformity of doctrine and mutual love and patience
 - a. the bond of peace binds together brethren who walk in unity and agreement on those things mandated by the Lord (see Psalm 133:1)
 - b. the church of God is to be a place of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (see Romans 14:17)
 3. unity is kept when peace and holiness are loved equally (“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).
 - a. true peace cannot be obtained without holiness
 - b. we cannot compromise the holiness of truth to make peace, nor can we
 - c. yet unity should not be threatened by the pressing of opinions or loss of meekness either
- (Romans 12:17-21)

II. A Time To Throw Away

A. Expedients That Are No Longer Expedient

1. when we discuss Bible authority, we recognize that certain things are expedient, or useful, in carrying out God’s commands
 - a. they are first lawful and then expedient, not deemed lawful because we find them expedient
 - b. Paul found sailboats an expedient means of traveling to take the gospel into the whole world because travel was authorized by the great commission
 - c. meeting houses became an expedient place to fulfill the command to assemble because the elements and enemies made public meetings untenable
2. sometimes expedients lose their expediency, however, and can be thrown away
 - a. when a thing ceases to be expedient, it ceases to be useful to obeying God’s commands
 - b. song books, church buildings, overhead projectors and more are all expedients but if they lose their usefulness, the time comes to replace them

B. Sinful Relics (Acts 19:11-20)

1. these Ephesian illusionists were bringing forth fruits of repentance as they walked up to the bonfire and tossed in the books that had taught them how to trick people and take their money
 - a. if the psychics of today would smash their crystal balls and the astrologers would shred their star charts, we would see in them such fruits as well
 - b. burning their books was more than symbolism and more than a statement, although it did make one
 - c. burning their books assured that no one would ever use them again to commit sin
2. when we obey the gospel, it is very possible that our homes will contain relics from the time in which we did not know Christ
 - a. refrigerators filled with beer, cabinets of wine, drawers with lewd magazines and shelves with aberrant books

- b. our very lives may be pockmarked with the relics of sin in the places we went and the people who influenced us
 - c. if put in a box in the back of the closet, those sinful relics will whisper at first and then shout in moments of weakness to come back out
 - d. were they thrown away, they would be powerless, but now they demand nostalgic attention just when your resistance is weakest
3. take extreme measures and rid yourself and the world of the relics of sin (Matthew 5:29-30)

C. Debunked Ideas

- 1. remember the Bible character who said, “Behold, I thought?”
 - a. Naaman was a slave to false ideas but his servants freed him by the truth and he threw error away to be washed clean
 - b. so many are burdened by the errors of Romanism and Calvinism, but begin to see what the Bible actually says
 - 1. they may exclaim, “Behold I thought that the Pope was “God on Earth” as the Cardinals said or “Behold I thought that baptism was unnecessary to salvation”
 - 2. but there the scriptures say that Christ is the only head of the church and that baptism is for the remission of sins, so the truth has set me free from error
- 2. those debunked ideas can continue to plague us if we believe the truth but fail to act upon it, instead keeping the error around because it was mother’s or it was easier than the truth
 - a. when Peter learned that he was wrong about keeping the gospel from the Gentiles, he went straight-away to the centurion’s house
 - b. when Apollos and some whom he had probably taught learned they were behind in knowledge about baptism, they made immediate correction without regard to appeasing error (Acts 19:1-5)

D. The Pressing of Opinions (Philippians 2:1-4)

- 1. truth should not be compromised but matters of opinion are a fertile ground for meeting in the middle
- 2. as many churches split over opinion as split over doctrine, but meekness on both sides of any opinion should prevent that
- 3. you don’t have to throw away the opinion, for we all have them, but you must throw away the aggressive attitude that leads you to press them even to the destruction of the congregation and cause of Christ where you are

Conclusion

There is a time to keep and a time to throw away. Whatsoever things are useless or counterproductive are worthy of disposal, but cling to what is good and keep it close to your heart.

Everything A Season (II): A Time To Tear and A Time To Sew

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to tear,
And a time to sew;”

I hope I don't embarrass my wife, but on occasion I have watched her sewing a new dress, only to collapse in frustration, realizing an error and having to tear the garment apart at the seams to start over. This series of lessons turns to the fact that life has seasons for both tearing and sewing, for giving up on an errant pursuit and starting over with something new.

Discussion

I. A Time To Tear

A. Tearing Up The Word of God

1. almost nobody but the worst atheist would condone tearing up the word of God, but in fact it happens every day

a. individuals tear it up when they go their own way, churches tear it up when they leave its authority and denominations tear it up when they elevate their creeds over it

b. the pages may seem to be in tact, but that Book is not to be an ornament on the end table or a relic on the shelf and when it is purposely bypassed, it is effectively shredded

2. Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me, but with justice" (10:23-24).

a. it is easy to trace trouble with God throughout the Old Testament on both an individual and national level to a violation of this sacred precept

b. when men and women begin to think it is within them to direct their own steps apart from the influence of the Holy Spirit, they begin to experiment with error and suffer the inevitable explosions and poisonings

1. Eve ate the fruit, although God said it was poisonous, because the serpent convinced her that a better plan was to be found outside divine authority

2. King Saul pretended to be a priest when Samuel delayed his coming, although he knew it be unlawful, because situation ethics suddenly looked better than having to face fear (First Samuel 13:5-14)

3. just having a king in the first place was a deviation from God's plan, but the people demanded to be like the heathen nations instead of being like God (First Samuel 8:1-22)

3. one king in Jeremiah's day went so far as to tear the scripture and then burn it, but all he destroyed was himself, not the word (Jeremiah 36:20-25)

a. Jeremiah rewrote his words of truth and God added to them and the king met his fate

b. the words of God are still torn today for the same reason, though (people just don't like them

1. proud people cannot stand to be told they are wrong or have chosen a doomed path and so they attack the messenger or dispute the message

2. some have gone so far as to employ the king's tactics on the New Testament when it interfered with the acceptance of modern morality

4. and yet the most solemn warnings in all the Bible involve the sin of adding to or taking away from the revealed word of God (Revelation 22:18-19)

a. but this is what happens when individuals amend God's word to allow for a little intoxication or lust and when churches change the application of scripture to introduce their own forms of worship and leadership

b. the Bible is effectively torn up and cast into the fire; it will survive, but the sinner will perish without it

B. Tearing Soiled Robes (Ezra 9:1-6)

1. Ezra was himself innocent but he wept and tore both his garments and his own beard over the sin in the nation that he loved

a. it is a combination of anguish, frustration and assumed guilt that lead a man to behave this way

b. one of the most cherished metaphors for grace is the notion of washing one's garments in the blood of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:4-6, 7:9-17)

2. Ezra discovered that day that his countrymen were stained by unlawful marriages and that the problem was as epidemic as unscriptural marriages are today

a. he did not tear his robes symbolically or melodramatically, but sincerely in a state of sorrowed amazement

b. today, people are just as likely to institute a cover-up or assemble a list of justifications and false teachings to keep their stains and pretend they are clean

3. sin should cause us to tear the robes of our hearts and commit to doing whatever it takes to get washed

a. those in Ezra's day were compelled by law and by penitence to put away the wives they had no right to and such would be the bitter pill to swallow today as well if men and women made up their minds to abide by Matthew 19:1-10

b. but in other areas of sin, there are robes to be torn and consciences to be washed (Hebrews 10:19-23)

C. Tearing Away From Bad Influences (First Corinthians 15:33-34)

1. on just a few occasions, Paul prefaces some statement by saying, "Be not deceived."

a. he does this to add emphasis to the utter truth of the statement and the fact that the majority of the people will ignore it anyway

b. most people recognize that we can be subtly and slowly influenced by those around us, but most will also consent to flit around the flame anyway

2. this passage tells us that bad company corrupts good morals and that the light of your faithfulness can be extinguished if surrounded by people living blissfully in darkness

a. their coarse language, low standards, weak rationalizations and rebellious attitude can gradually be transmitted into your heart if they become your major influence

b. it is for some the hardest sacrifice to make, to realize that your faith is in jeopardy to your friends and one or the other will have to go

c. while we cannot go out of the world or cut ourselves off entirely from this corrupt civilization, it does become necessary that we protect our hearts on another plain

d. we remain available to teach and to shed influence, but we protect our hearts with the breastplate of righteousness, lest we be led away into sin (Second Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

3. sometimes those influences are not human, but are material (Philippians 4:8-9)

II. A Time To Sew

A. Sewn Together in Friendship (First Samuel 18:1-4)

1. the Proverbs say that when families move apart, friends can replace them in proximity and concern (Proverbs 18:24)

2. it is possible to be brethren in Christ without being friends, but there is so much more to be gained and shared by being both

a. the friendships we will treasure the most will be the ones that are build on a like, precious faith and maintained by heavenly wisdom

b. we cannot expect others to make all the effort and do all the giving; we must show ourselves friendly

B. Sewn Together in Brotherhood (Colossians 2:1-3)

1. more than one preacher lately has tried to evade scrutiny by claiming there is no such thing as a brotherhood and yet Peter told us to "love the brotherhood" (First Peter 2:17)

2. the brotherhood is the fraternity of believers throughout the world and is not limited by any line other than primary fellowship with the Father in Heaven

3. we are knit together with brethren throughout the world so that if travel far and wide, we are

extended trust and love by otherwise perfect strangers

4. but brotherhood exists within the congregation's members as well, who must be knit together in love in order to depend upon one another from day to day

a. this knitting is accomplished when we assemble and admonish one another in song and when we study together in Bible classes

b. but it also accomplished when we spend time together outside the meeting house and become intimately acquainted with each other so that we develop that trust and mutual concern

c. sharing hard times and good times knits people together in a way that helps withstand attempts to sever them down the road (Colossians 2:18-19)

C. Sewn Together For Battle

1. Israel had a claim against Benjamin and was preparing to make war (Judges 20:8-11)

a. you might expect victory to come in the next verse, but instead defeat follows for united Israel

b. they lick their wounds and ask God if they should pitch another battle and he says yes and they lose again

c. now you might expect them to come apart at the seams and surrender but instead they inquire of God and are sent back to battle (Judges 20:29-37)

2. when Christians are knit together for battle, they are better prepared for the occasional defeat, an embarrassment or failure

a. we are Christian soldiers marching as to war, not as a guerrilla force or a lone sniper, but a company of the redeemed (Second Corinthians 10:3-6)

b. through Christ, we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:36-39)

Conclusion

There is a time to tear apart sinful things that are not working righteousness and a time to sew together relationships that will redound to glory.

Everything A Season (I2): A Time To Keep Silence And A Time To Speak

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to keep silence,
And a time to speak;”

Wherever men and women have gone with the hope of restoring Christianity to its New Testament pattern, the plea has been to "speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent." Truly we find that throughout life, there are times to keep silent and times to speak, but that we should always be quicker to hear than we are to speak. Silence may get you into trouble, but it takes longer than words spoken hastily.

Discussion

I. A Time To Keep Silence

A. Where The Bible Is Silent

1. until recent years, most every professing Christian recognized the Bible as a standard of authority to some degree
 - a. differences existed as to whether or not the Bible was inerrant and especially as to how a reader should treat the silence of God on certain matters
 - b. nowadays discussions of Bible authority are rare and many have placed doctrinal importance only upon matters that they consider important
2. controversy is not limited to areas in which God has not spoken, but such areas should be easier to recognize
 - a. Martin Luther set the stage for most of today's Protestant denominations by arguing that "whatever is not contrary to scripture is for scripture and scripture for it."
 - b. in other words, as long as the Bible does not specifically say, "Thou shalt not," thou mayest
 - c. Luther was not ready for how far his ideas would eventually go, but it enabled him or those who followed to justify instrumental music in worship, denominationalism and sprinkling in place of immersion for baptism
3. we would happily confess that "Thou shalt nots" do not exist for many of these and others including having milk and cookies on the Lord's Table and calling the church "Lutheran"
 - a. we would also recognize, however, that no "Thou shalt not" prohibited a Jew from acting as an Old Testament priest, but that absence of condemnation did not condone it (Hebrews 7:12-14)
 - b. since Moses spoke nothing concerning a Jewish priest, there was no authority for it, despite the fact that there was no explicit condemnation
4. some today in denominations object to big orchestras in their worship, yearning instead for the old days of a simple organ, but the same authority that gets you your organ gets them their orchestra - Lutheran authority, not scriptural
5. the Bible is silent concerning infant baptism, sprinkling or pouring, Baptist churches, church gymnasiums and many other things, but that is not permission to go ahead with them
6. you see how we can be united when we respect the silence of scripture and refrain from rushing in to fill some void that we imagine exists because God has not seen fit to speak on something we consider important, but he did not (Revelation 22:18-19)
7. Nadab and Abihu tried to speak where God had been silent (Leviticus 10:1-3)
 - a. intruding into God's silence is like bursting into a king's court and demanding to be heard
 - b. why should such disrespect be overlooked?

B. Before God (Hab. 2:18-20)

1. the Israelites who were given over to idolatry would craft their gods and then pray to them and

never get any response, because their masters were their own lifeless creations (Isaiah 44:6-20)

2. you can see them there shouting at these things, begging like idiots for any response
3. on one occasion, Elijah challenged them to a contest on Mount Carmel to prove who was the true God (First Kings 18:22-29)
 - a. when it was Jehovah's turn, Elijah simply announced that fact and God proved his presence undeniably
 - b. one was better off learning when to keep silence before the true God than spending his days beating on his idol to get it to do something
4. we spend so much of our time trying to make much noise to get God's attention that we often miss it when he answers our prayer
 - a. sometimes we should even be thanking God for saying no when it turns out we were asking for the wrong thing and he did not comply just to make us temporarily happy
 - b. sometimes he answers providentially and we do not realize it because we are only tuned in to the asking, not the receiving or thanking
5. if you are living a meek and humble lifestyle, the whole world may forget you are there, but God will know
 - a. your prayers do not have to be on the street corner to get his attention and actually what you say to him in private is as likely to bring a sweet aroma to his throne
 - b. keep silence before him; give him a chance to respond and learn to identify his answer

C. Turn The Other Cheek

1. the Bible says that a soft answer turns away wrath, but that meek and humble spirit we just mentioned is becoming so rare that many people would rather confront and enjoy wrath than turn it away
2. both men and women can be seen and heard involved in explosive arguments over issues minor and major
3. some progress into violence and it gets to the point that nowhere is safe anymore
4. whatever happened to turning the other cheek? (Matthew 5:38-42)
 - a. do not answer a fool according to his folly, for you will merely look as foolish to those who support him
 - b. realize that you will be thought wise until you open your mouth to return his insults and expose that you are no better than he

D. Be Slow To Speak (James 1:19-21)

1. Jesus says that we shall be judged for every idle word that we speak and how many times do we put our feet in our mouths by speaking without thinking first?
2. there is a time to keep silent and we must all acknowledge that before we start World War III in our homes and in the church (Proverbs 17:27-28)

II. A Time To Speak

A. Where The Bible Speaks (First Peter 4:10-12)

1. if any man decides to speak in the service of God, he should speak only as the oracles of God have revealed the divine will
 - a. no man should make up his mind to add to or subtract from God's word by means of human creeds
 - b. this obligates us to be true to all of God's counsel whether it happens to be in season or out (Acts 20:25-27)
 1. Paul was innocent concerning all men's souls because he had never shunned to tell them what they needed to hear, even when it was not what they wanted to hear
 2. he told dying men they were dying when sin had overwhelmed them, regardless of their wealth or power or kinship
2. it is always easy to preach about love and salvation, but often is hard to preach about sin and condemnation; preach it anyway (Second Timothy 4:1-5)

B. The Good News (Acts 4:8-22)

1. Edmund Burke said, "All evil needs to prevail is for good men to do nothing."
2. had the apostles and early disciples feared the Jewish stones or Roman nails greatly enough to shut their mouths, the gospel would have spread more slowly and the saved would have been fewer

3. when it becomes apparent that men are willing to speak for and to die for such a cause, others are inspired to take that risk as well

4. when you are willing to speak the good news of a risen savior to any and all who will hear you, the gospel will see its chances of spreading improved day by day

a. if good men and women choose to keep their faith a secret, then cultism and denominationalism will fill the void and infect people who might have believed otherwise

b. don't wait for preachers or elders to visit your workplace, schoolhouse or neighborhood; take the name of Jesus with you wherever you go and resist the pressure to keep silent when the gospel should be spoken (Luke 19:37-40)

c. be living stones that cannot help but cry out

Conclusion

Everything A Season (13): A Time To Love And A Time To Hate

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to love,
And a time to hate;”

The Bible says that "God is love," and his capability and yearning to love cannot be exaggerated. Yet while God is love, God does not love everything. He hates evil and expects his children to hate it just as much. The conflict between love and hate arise on two different accounts. First, sometimes we love people so much that we learn to tolerate a little evil instead of hating it and that just perpetuates error. Second, sometimes we hate evil so much that we forget to love the person and treat him despicably and ruin our chances of reforming him and winning him to Christ. There is a time to love and a time to hate and no Christian is complete without observing both, but in their proper seasons and for the proper reasons.

Discussion

I. A Time To Love

A. Love God With All Your Heart

1. the second commandment of the Law of Moses clarifies the distinctions between hating God and loving God (Exodus 20:4-6)
 - a. the decision to hate God has ramifications that can endure for generations of your family
 - b. if two parents decide they are indifferent to God or that loathe the notion of Jehovah, they will likely implant that bitter seed in their children's minds and it may take generations to eradicate
 - c. likewise, their decision to hate God will lead them down a path of selfishness, sin and misery that will dominate their children's upbringing
2. a love for God however brings wisdom into the family and an abiding affection that improves living (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)
 - a. but remember that loving God is more than just saying that you do; how many husbands claim to love their wives as they abuse them and cheat on them?
 - b. loving God is not a matter of talk, but of practice (Deuteronomy 10:12-14, 11:1)
3. it is a simple thing to claim that you love God and many people can be found waving their arms, tears pouring down their cheeks with that claim on their tongues
 - a. but the proof is in the doing (First John 2:3-6)
 - b. sometimes children will shower their parents with affectionate speech and behavior as a diversion to the rebellion they are planning for later and sometimes we do the same thing with God, but neither parents nor our heavenly father are to be fooled (Second John 4-6)
4. there is a time to love God and that time is always and everywhere, but loving God involves obeying his will, for in it are law and love combined by wisdom and grace

B. Love Your Parents and Children

1. there is a time to love your family and that time never expires as well, yet the way love is expressed sometimes may be tough
 - a. if you were to remove discipline from its context, it would just like hatred
 - b. without the context of crime and justice, it looks like hatred to imprison a man or send him to the death chamber, but understanding the rape or murder that put him there changes our perception
 - c. to spank or ground a rebellious child would look like hatred, but in the context of doing wrong and being chastened, our perception is likewise clarified
2. fathers are duty bound to raise their children in Christ's nurture and admonition and children are required to respect their parents and avoid becoming disobedient, under penalty of eternal condemnation if not corrected
 - a. some parents claim they do not have the heart to chasten their wayward children, that they

love them so much they cannot bear to punish them and see them hurt

1. that sounds like love, but the end result proves it was either indifference, weakness, or utter foolishness and maybe all of the above (Proverbs 29:15, 17)

2. God corrects all the children of his that he loves and so a parent is expressing selfless love when he has the heart to punish a child who has asked for it (see Proverbs 3:12)

b. if you do not have the heart to chasten your children and see them hurt a little by it, you will likely live to see them punished by life and hurt desperately by it and you will rue the day you gave up and gave in (Proverbs 19:18)

3. punishment should leave no lasting scars, physically or emotionally, but should yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it

4. children, you should also love your parents in every season, for the day will come when you will have to return the favor of their selflessness and sacrifice when you were young

a. your parents are owed your respect and submission while you dwell in their house, and running away is not a sinless solution either (see Colossians 3:20: "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord")

b. and charity begins at home when you get older and they get very much older, according to the Holy Spirit (First Timothy 5:8, 16)

5. love in the family is always to be in season

C. Love Your Self, But Not Too Much

1. Paul writes that no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it as he loves himself

2. a certain amount of self-love is necessary to get through the day, but too much of it leads to pride, selfishness and a fall

a. Paul also wrote that it would be a perilous time when men became lovers, or worshipers, of themselves

b. when we put ourselves first, we ruin our marriages because our opinions are too worthy to compromise

3. Paul writes again in First Corinthians 10:24: "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being."

a. while it is good and right to love yourself and tend to your soul, you must remember that you are not an island and that the things you do will affect other people and that looking out for number one all the time is a sinful love of self

b. the Holy Spirit reports that even Christ pleased not himself, but loved mankind to the point of self-sacrifice (see Romans 15:3)

D. Love Your Neighbor Like Yourself

1. love of neighbor, or fellow man, is demanded in the law of Christ and is defined as the ability to show mercy unto all who require it, since we are among the all who will eventually need mercy from others (Luke 10:25-37)

2. loving your neighbor is a golden rule (Matthew 7:12)

3. loving your neighbor is the origin of James's discussion of faith and works (James 2:14-18)

II. A Time To Hate

A. Never Hate People

1. we have heard the mantra long enough to know it by heart ("Hate the sin, but love the sinner")

2. it is so easy to do in principle, but often so difficult to do when the sinner is intent upon his sin and dissatisfied that you choose only to love him and not his misdeed

3. but hatred is a journey into spiritual darkness that destroys the Christian's relationship with the God of love (First John 2:9-11, 4:20-21)

4. hatred of God's wayward creation is a work of the flesh which ensures that we will spend all eternity with the one whom we could not stand to spend a single moment with on Earth

a. hatred tortures the soul of the hater more than the hated and leads him to compromise his convictions to do battle against his foe (Ephesians 4:25-32)

b. we must exercise physical and mental self-control to go on hating the sin, but wishing repentance for the sinner

B. Never Hate God

1. why would anyone hate God?
 - a. because they misunderstand the origin of sin and misery and blame God for the whole devilish package
 - b. have you not seen people in times of great tragedy blame God for not averting the disaster or come right out and accuse him of causing it?
 - c. sin was not God's creation; it came from the devil and was given legs by man (James 1:12-17)
2. there is a time to hate, but God should never be its object, for God does nothing worthy of disdain, but offers hope and life to all who want it while punishing those who choose evil over good
 - a. God did not cause your problems, but he is the answer to overcoming or dealing with them
 - b. he is a benevolent father who would work no evil upon his children, but sometimes suffers them to face the consequences of their actions or the natural and unnatural effects of nature and wicked men
 - c. times of tragedy call for the patience of Job, who likewise was afflicted by the devil and protected by God (James 5:10-11)

C. Hate Every False Way

1. "You who love the Lord, hate evil" (Psalm 97:10)!
 - a. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate" (Proverbs 8:13).
 - b. "Through your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104).
2. if we hate every false way, we will not see how many steps down its path we can take before committing ourselves to it, but will avoid the disastrous route altogether (Ephesians 5:8-17)
3. we will avoid every form of evil (see First Thessalonians 5:22) and give ourselves continually to prayer and good works, lest we be deceived and destroyed

Conclusion

Everything A Season (14): A Time of War And A Time of Peace

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3 reads in part:

“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time of war,
And a time of peace;”

It was nearly a year ago that I envisioned this series of lessons on Ecclesiastes 3 and at that time, I never could have envisioned that I would come to the final couplet about war and peace and find my own nation plunged into the former rather than enjoying the latter. Yet here we are, at war with an almost anonymous enemy. In fact, though, Christians have always been at war with an invisible enemy, the devil, and peace from that struggle exists only on the other side of life.

Discussion

I. A Time of War

A. When Nations Go To War

1. as we contemplate fighting a war for the world against terrorism wherever it is found, we understand how difficult and costly the battle is going to be

2. but we also wonder about the justification for going to war in light of the New Testament scriptures

a. this war is unlike any other in that it was spurred by a grave injustice committed on American soil; a crime was committed and this war is an attempt to bring to justice all those who were involved and the government was given this duty by God himself (Romans 13:1-4)

b. although it may be hard to imagine, the United States would be shirking its responsibility if it did not wage this war to bring criminals to justice

c. vengeance belongs to God and he has shared none of that right with the individual, but has enlisted the agency of government authorities to protect and prosecute when wickedness occurs (Romans 12:17-21)

3. the question then often arises (does the Christian have the right or duty to participate in these approved acts of the state?

a. this is sometimes called the war question, but also encompasses the duties of a policeman and others who may be asked to kill for their governments; conscientious brethren have differed through the years in their application of these principles, but I believe the silence of the scriptures needs to be respected here

b. first, if it is right for the government to pursue and punish criminals and to wage wars of justice, then it cannot be wrong for Christians to participate, unless we have decided that we shall not convert so many people that the armed forces would be dangerously diminished in number

c. secondly, would we not be better off with Christians in command of these efforts since we could trust them more implicitly than worldly people?

d. thirdly, we have some examples in the New Testament of government officials coming in contact with the gospel; these soldiers were not told to desert their uniforms, but to wear them honorably (Luke 3:8-10, 14)

4. killing in a just war like this one is no more murder than putting to death a convicted murderer

B. The Christian Is Always At War

1. Satan long ago declared war on humanity and he has amassed an impressive list of casualties along the way

a. he is the father of lies who is willing to employ any nefarious device to defeat our faith and claim the prize of our souls

b. Peter warns us to set a watch against him (First Peter 5:6-10)

2. his chief weapon is fleshly lusts (First Peter 2:11)

a. if we are wounded by temptation and conquered by sin, the crown of victory that was to be ours is forfeited because we lost the war (James 1:12-16)

b. for this reason, we must discipline our bodies and make our minds captive to Christ that we can fight the battle so as to win

3. brethren, this is the good fight of faith that we refuse to belittle our mistakes or justify our sins, but instead fight to overcome every weakness and give no place to the tempter at all

a. we do not fight alone, but beside a decorated captain (Hebrews 2:10-18)

b. every time we give in to sin, a battle is lost and the war becomes more perilous; every time we overcome temptation or arise from defeat through repentance, our prospects brighten

C. We Must Be Armored (Ephesians 6:10-18)

1. if you are not prepared to stand, you will surely fall

a. you must stand fast and root your feet in the foundation of Christ and hope to withstand the lifelong onslaught of the devil

b. this set of armor contains no protection if you decide to retreat into compromise or back into the world; your back is exposed

2. gird your waist with the truth, allowing pure knowledge to tie together every facet of your life, so that no part is left without divine influence

3. put on the breastplate of righteousness and protect your heart by living faithfully and proving your convictions, for every victory makes you stronger for the next challenge

4. cover your feet with the gospel's preparation, making yourself thoroughly equipped to stand and fight, not run and hide

5. take the shield of faith to deflect every fiery dart the devil casts in your direction simply by responding to temptation, "It is written ..."

6. take the helmet of salvation to protect your thoughts and maintain your senses and priorities

7. take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and be ready to do battle against error and ignorance when you find fellow travelers in this world in the darkness of the devil's captivity

8. and add daily prayer to your arsenal, that you might never forget from whence true strength flows and why you are fighting in the first place

D. Our Battle is Not Physical, Nor To the Destruction of Others

1. Millions around the world have taken the side of terrorism, at least when it is against someone else, proclaiming a *jihad*, or holy war against the United States

2. centuries ago, Catholicism made a similar error in their crusades and Inquisitions

3. our warfare is not carnal (Second Corinthians 10:1-6)

a. our spiritual battle may assault false doctrines and idolatrous religions, but it will not threaten a single hair on a single infidel's head

b. faith is not born of intimidation, but persuasion and this Islam does not comprehend

II. A Time For Peace

A. Among Brethren

1. God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, and the message of reconciliation which brings us together should foster peace among brethren united under the banner of the New Testament

2. the wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy, good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy, for the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by them that make peace (see James 3:17-18)

3. Jesus calls us to be peacemakers in the beatitudes, to accept the terms of peace with God and share them with others

4. Paul orders simply, "Be at peace among yourselves" in First Thessalonians 5:13)

5. this we do by walking the same path (Second Timothy 2:22-26)

B. Despite the Battle (Second Thessalonians 3:16)

1. genuine faith is stronger than the devil and he knows this; that is why he tries to exploit the weaknesses he finds in our convictions (First John 5:1-5)

2. a belief in Christ that is not coupled with submissive discipleship is little troubling to the devil, for he is content to have you deceive yourself if you will

3. we can enjoy a tentative state of peace despite the daily battle if our trust is in the Lord; "And

let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful” (Colossians 3:15).

C. After the Battle

1. that peace can be threatened by the daily grind, however
2. unbreakable peace is ours when this life concludes and we are crowned for eternity as good and faithful servants (First Corinthians 15:54-58)
3. the tempter's access to us will be denied and we can safely remove our armor and rest from our works (Hebrews 4:9-11)
 - a. the treasures we laid up in heaven will be our reward and we will happily reap what we have sown
 - b. there will be no more war, death or fear
 - c. we will eat from the tree of life and be clothed in white robes, worshiping every moment the God in our midst and no longer beyond the clouds

Conclusion

There is a time for war and a time for peace as there is a season for every purpose under heaven. As our nations girds itself for a war against terror, we are reminded daily of the spiritual battle we wage each day with a terrorist of the soul, but also of the age of peace in heaven to come.