



PEERING OVER THE LOOM

Part 4 of Ecclesiastes

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 | April 06, 2003

Now, here's where we're at. Last week, we looked at something very important and that is that you will? Die. You're gonna die. I mean, it's a shock to some of you. It shouldn't be. You're going to die. So, in the meantime, you have some time to kill. And in that time to kill before you get painted up and put in a box and shoved in a hole, you should? Live. That's the themes of Ecclesiastes. You will die. In the meantime, live. And he picks up this theme in Ecclesiastes 3 and helps us to understand how we can live in the midst of a world that is sinful, fallen, cursed and crooked. And he has some great insight. And I will submit this to you. This is one of my favorite sections of Ecclesiastes and I come back to it continually in my life because it's so incredibly practical. Here's what he has to say beginning in Chapter 3:1. He says, "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under Heaven." We'll just stop there. This is the overarching theme for our time this evening. It's a great Biblical principal that was ruined by a hippie who made this into a song. It's still a good section of the Bible regardless of what the hippies have done to it.

The point is simply this. That what happens is you have to look at your life and the opportunities that God gives to live. And in doing so, you need to define what season of life you are in. There are overarching seasons of life that you will be in and there are specific times, he says, in there, opportunities that give you the ability to have joy. To have pleasure. To have satisfaction. To have worship. To have connection with God and his people. And so, you must be diligent and vigilant to walk through your life saying, "Okay, where am I? What season of life is this? And what opportunities provide themselves?", okay? And it's weird. He says that 38 times in Ecclesiastes, that life is a vapor. That moves so fast. It moves so quickly that you can completely miss the opportunities that God gives in every single day.

And one of my favorite philosophers, Blaise Pascal, he has this great statement. He says that, "Many of us live in the past, reflecting on a season that we have already been through; either regretting the things that we have should have done, reminiscing about the things we shouldn't have done; or we live in the future, planning, anticipating and expecting that some day, things will be good and I will be happy and I will have a good time." And what he says is, is if we live in the past or we live in the future, we never live because we always miss the present.

And what Solomon is going to call us to is that we can appreciate the seasons we have been through. We can look forward to the seasons that await us, but we must be ever careful to enjoy the seasons that we are in. And it's weird. Like, now being a father, having sons, it's really peculiar because I start to reflect back on various seasons of my life. My sons just remind me of how old I truly am.

(Laughter)

And how quickly time is passing me by. I have a son, Zack, who is three years old, who, occasionally, goes to the bathroom in the yard.

(Laughter)

Okay? And, you know, somebody will say, "Well, why does he pee in the yard?" The answer is simple. Because he can, really. I would too, if I wouldn't get arrested.

(Laughter)

He's in the season where he gets to eat cookies shaped like animals, to eat crackers shaped like fish and to pee in the yard. It's a great season for him.

(Laughter)

I remember that season. I enjoyed it tremendously. But, I can't do that anymore. That season is gone. If I just eat crackers and cookies and walk around with no pants, no one thinks it's cute, like it is for him.

(Laughter)

I'm in a different season. That season's gone. If I – I could sit around in remorse and say, "You know, golly, I wore pants all growing up. I wasted all my shot." Well, it's just too late. That day is gone. And as you age, you think through the fact – I remember when I was little, I loved baseball. It was the closest thing I had to a religion. I loved baseball. I remember playing little league. I remember playing up through high school. I remember playing up through legion ball. Love it. I remember when I was 17, I met Grace. We were in school. School was okay. After that, go to college. Start college. Become a Christian. A whole new season. Just all these transitions in life. Get married when I'm 21 years of age. Whole new season. I can't come and go as I please. I've gotta think of my wife. Graduate from college and realize, "Holy smokes. I gotta go get a job. I gotta figure out what I'm gonna do to

pay the bills.” Start the church. And then I gotta figure out what it is to be a pastor. I’ve never been a pastor. Actually, was never a member of a church until I started my own.

(Laughter)

You know? That’s sorta a lot to learn there. I’m like – you know, I told my wife right before we started, like, “I gotta preach every week now. I’ve never preached before. This could go either way.” It’s like learning how to drive on I-5 during rush hour with a stick. You’re like, “We’ll figure this out. It’ll be bumpy and dented, but we’ll get there.” And then, all of a sudden, we buy a house. We have a kid. Whole new season. Holy smokes. There’s fluids coming out of all of these orifices. I don’t know what all the fluids are.

(Laughter)

It’s a whole new season. Never seen this. And, all of a sudden, you got multiple kids. You gotta big church. You got all these things to do. It’s all good. And what I’m saying is this. Every season of life has got a beautiful opportunity to have something enjoyable in it. When you’re a little kid walking around with no pants, eating crackers, there’s opportunities there to love Jesus and thank him. When you’re growing up, there’s opportunities to enjoy life as God has given it. When you get older, that’s fine as well. And, you know what? Someday, I’m gonna be a crotchety old man. I’m already like practicing so that I can perfect it by the time I get there. I’m gonna be all wrinkled. I’m gonna sit there with beautiful, old, wrinkled wife. All our kids will be gone. We’ll be home alone. Hopefully, the grandkids will come over and we’ll spoil them rotten and send ‘em home to terrorize their parents.

(Laughter)

It’s all gonna be fine, right? We have a plan. And in every season, there are opportunities that God affords and that God gives for you to enjoy the life that he’s given. And the problem is sometimes this. That we’re so focused on the next thing that we have to do or the next task that we have to undertake, the next project that we have to labor in, that we miss the opportunities that God gave us right then for a moment of satisfaction and joy. And so, in those seasons, we have to grab those times.

I had a couple of ‘em I’ll tell you about this week. As I was meditating on this and I was living my life thinking through this text, it was interesting. Friday was my mom’s birthday. We took my mom out to dinner. I love my mom. She lives locally. And after dinner, we came home and it was really, really late. The kids were super tired. I went to tuck my five year old daughter, Ashley, in and she looked really sad. She doesn’t hide it very well. And I said, “Sweetheart, what’s wrong?” She says, “I don’t wanna go to bed.” Of course, she doesn’t wanna go to bed. They never wanna go to bed. It’s weird. When you’re a kid, you don’t wanna go to bed and you don’t wanna take a nap. When you’re old, that’s all you wanna do.

(Laughter)

I wish I could take a nap. I wish I could go to bed early. I said, “Honey, how come you don’t wanna go to bed? Is there a reason or you just don’t wanna go to bed?” She says, “No, I need to cuddle. I need to cuddle.” Apparently, the tank was running low, so she needed affection. I said, “Okay, sweetheart. So, what do you need?” She says, “I need to cuddle in your bed with you and mommy and then I’ll be fine.”

(Laughter)

“Okay, sounds good to me.” This is a time in this season. Some day, she’s gonna get married. She’s gonna move somewhere else with her husband and he’s gonna get to cuddle with her. But, she’s five now. I gotta take this shot. This is my shot to cuddle with my five year old daughter. So, “Okay, sweetheart. Crawl into daddy’s bed.” It’s late at night. She snuggles up next to me. I’m brushing her hair. We’re hanging out watching her favorite program, which is the Food Network. Not necessarily my first choice.

(Laughter)

And I’m learning all about great seafood soups of the world.

(Laughter)

But, that’s okay, you know? Worse ways to spend your time. And it’s a time that God gives. Just a moment for me to hang out with my sweet little girl. Enjoy her. Enjoy her presence. Enjoy her company. She just started kindergarten. It’s really weird. I take her to school in the morning. We chat for 15 or 20 minutes and I savor those times because every one of those times is an opportunity that God gives me to enjoy her. She’s really creative. Really artistic. She’s really gifted. I just took her to the art stores and we’re teaching her how to do pastels now. And she works with a lot of different mediums. And I bought her this little tiny, nice little notebook so that every morning on the way to school, we visit and she draws me pictures about things that she’s done or things that she’s learning about her and I hanging out together; about things in the Bible that she’s learning. Whatever it is, she’s very creative.

And I wanna take every one of those times and I wanna save every one of those pictures. And I wanna savor every one of those conversations and when we have a chance to hang out to cuddle for her to get loved by her daddy, I wanna take those because this is a season that we’re in. And someday this season will be gone. Next season will be beautiful. And the season after that, we’ll have opportunities for joy as well. But, these are particular opportunities that I can’t let slide by.

Same thing yesterday as well. I was at home. Had to go officiate a wedding for a wonderful couple from this church and I was getting ready to go, so I had to get my suit on. And my three year old son, Zack, says, “What are you doing?” I said, “I gotta get my suit on. I gotta go do a wedding.” He says,

“We haven’t even fought yet.” He was just completely indignant. He, like my daughter, we have a son and a daughter, definitely, my son likes to fight. My daughter likes to cuddle. So, my daughter got her cuddle time on Friday. My son wanted his fight on Saturday, so we did.

(Laughter)

So, I said, “Well, I gotta go to the wedding.” He said, “Yeah, but now’s a good time to wrestle.” It is a good time to wrestle. I get on the floor, and we wrestled around for about 15 minutes. And he feels amazing love from his father. That’s how we bond.

(Laughter)

So, next thing you know, his little brother, who’s one year old, hears what’s going on; the mayhem and the carnage. And so, he kind of walks like a drunk guy. He doesn’t know he has joints.

(Laughter)

He’s sort of got this going on, you know? He hasn’t learned how to bend his legs yet and he’s got sort of a low center of gravity.

(Laughter)

And so, he comes and just flops right on me, belly flops, and starts sucking on my nose. [Arrrrr].

(Laughter)

It’s like opportunities that God gives for joy. Opportunities that God gives for life. And that’s what he’s talking about. It’s a season. You know, someday my kids are gonna grow up and move out. Someday it’s not gonna be cool to wrestle with dad. Someday, they’re gonna be so big, I don’t want to because they’re gonna hurt me.

(Laughter)

But, in this season, God gives these opportunities for you to have friends. For you to have joy. For you to learn. For you to repent. For you to worship. For you to eat your nails. For you to laugh when it’s appropriate. And that’s what Solomon says. “Life moves so quick.” You can’t determine whether you’ll have many days or few, but you can determine whether or not your life will be full or empty and whether or not you take those times that he affords you. He then goes through some different times and some cycles and what he says is this. Starting in verse 2, he says, “There’s a time to be born and a time to die.” Right? That’s where it begins and that’s where it ends. God knows the day of your birth. God knows the day of your funeral. “There’s a time to plant and a time to uproot.” Some agriculture there. He says, “There’s a time to begin a job. A relationship. A ministry. An activity. An endeavor. There’s a time that it comes to an end. It’s over. It’s done.”

Some of you don’t like change, so this issue really frustrates you because you like to think, “If I could just get everything in order and it wouldn’t change, then I’d have it all together. You need to accept the fact that life changes. That things change. And that you’re going to need to be flexible in them. Otherwise, you’ll be working against God and you’ll be continually frustrated. There’s a time when things begin. There’s a time when things end.

You know, I think back in the history of this church. When we started, we started with 12 people in my living room. It wasn’t a church with Bible studies. The church was a Bible study. You know, now all of a sudden there’s dozens of people. Just a different season. The way we did things then is different than the way we do things now. There were beautiful things then. There were hard things then. There’s beautiful things now. There’s hard things now. Some things start. Some things end. Life continually changes.

It says as well, “There’s a time to kill and a time to heal.” I think here, he’s talking about sickness. Seasons of your life where your health is great. You’re vibrant. You’re strong. You’re well. There’s times when you’re sickly. When you’re ill. When you’re injured. When your health is poor. Some of you are in seasons right now of sickness. You’re not in that great of shape. Some of you are in seasons of healing where you are getting stronger. You are getting healthier. God is bringing you through a season that was very painful or arduous, but your health is coming back. There’s seasons for both and in both, is it possible to worship God? Is it possible to be close to God? Is it possible to even find joy as those circumstances press you toward God? Yes. That’s what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians. That we should praise God in all circumstances because this is his will for us in Christ Jesus.

If you only thank God when you’re healthy and you only thank God when things begin. And you only thank God when things are well, you won’t be a person who is able to continue in relationship with him because sometimes you will be sick. And sometimes things will end. And sometimes things will be difficult. So, he says, “Look for the opportunities in whatever season you might be in.”

As well, he says, “There’s a time to plant and a time to uproot. A time to kill, a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build.” It’s like a construction metaphor. A building goes up on a piece of land. After so many years, that building is no longer functional or worthwhile. We tear it down and we build something else in its place. That’s life. You may move into a home and then, later outgrow it. You may buy a car and it falls apart and you’ve gotta trade it in for something else. You may begin a ministry and it may have a good run and then, all of a sudden, it’s no longer fruitful, so you tear it down and do something different. That’s the way life is. In your organizing of your home or your life, you may get systems and policies and procedures together. You might get your life in order. You may build a good life and then, all of a sudden, it’s just not working. It’s not functional. You gotta tear it down and reorganize your home. Reorganize your life. Start all over. It says there’s time for both.

As well as, “There’s a time to weep and a time to laugh. Some of you have been sold a Christianity that is, “I should always be happy and joyous, like

I'm on the best medication ever created. And, you know what? Sometimes you're gonna cry. Sometimes, you're gonna be sad. Sometimes, you're gonna be unhappy. Sometimes, you're going to have suffering and pain and injustice and evil. And that's the way that it is and it's okay in those seasons to shed your tears. When Christ came to the earth, he shed his tears on more than one occasion. And tears are not taken away until, we're told in Revelation, that he wipes them from our eyes.

You know, there are seasons where mourning is necessary or grief is necessary. You know, my parents are both healthy, but I anticipate at some point I will preach their funeral. On that day, I will shed my tears. You know, I hope and pray that if my wife and I don't die together, which is our prayer, that she dies before me and I preach her funeral. I will shed my tears on that day, but I will also have a time of laughter and joy, remembering that she was loved by me every day that I knew her. There's a time for weeping. And my wife and I had a miscarriage a few years ago. We shed our tears. And then, there's a time for laughter.

There's a time to enjoy your friends and enjoy your life and the levity of heart enables you to rise above your circumstances and breathe a little and laugh a bit. There's times for both. Some of you are in dark seasons right now where it's a time of tears. And some of you are in life seasons where it is a season of great joy and satisfaction. For me, honestly, I think this is the best season of my whole life, quite frankly. It just is. I mean, when we started this church, it was a lot of work, 100 hours a week. Not knowing what I was doing. Finding the landmines by driving over 'em like an idiot.

(Laughter)

It was painful. And now, we're finally at this place where things are unclogging. Things are moving or the church is growing. People are coming to know Jesus. People are turning from sin to faith. Where, all of a sudden, the quality of leaders that God is raising up is amazing. You know, even on this stage tonight, a lot of the people that were up here have been in full time ministry, have been full time missionaries. Many of them have more theological education than me. Many of them have been senior pastors at other churches. Many of them have directed large ministries. That's a pretty amazing season, really. It's a season where I've seen someone come to Christ, basically, every week for I can't count the number of months that we see 60 people a year fall in love and get married. Just all these great things. All these great things. It's a great season for me. I enjoy my wife more than I ever have. My kids are hilarious. I love the church. I love what God is doing. I get to teach the Bible. I could see this as a life's work. This is a season for me of great laughter. We just found out recently my wife's pregnant with our fourth child.

(Cheers and applause)

So, it's a good season. It's a season of laughter. It's a season of joy. It's like after years of hard work, there's, all of a sudden, low hanging fruit off the branches that get to be picked and eaten and enjoyed. And you know what? I'm sure after this, there may be, eventually, another season of tears. Another season of hardship. Another season of work. That's okay. That's okay. God'll be there too.

He says, "There's a time to mourn and a time to dance." Mourning there is in conjunction with repentance. You get convicted of your sin. There's a season where you should be on your face before God crying out for forgiveness. That you should realize that your sin has separated you from God. That you have done things you shouldn't have done. You've said things that you shouldn't have said. That you have scarred people that you shouldn't have scarred. And there should be mourning and grief and remorse and repentance. But, he says as well, "There's this – there's a time to dance." At some point, you accept the fact that God is a God of grace and that Jesus died for all your sins and that if your faith is in him, all your sins are forgiven and you get up from your weeping and you move on with your dancing. But, it's celebration and joy and enthusiasm and exuberance because as bad as our sin is, is as good as our God is. And we can throw ourselves into the depth of our sin and he will lift us up to the heights of his forgiveness and there, we can dance.

He says there's seasons for both. There's seasons to be broken. There's seasons to be restored. As well as, "There's a time to gather stones and a time to gather them" in verse 5. There's a debate as to what exactly he's referring to here. Possibly, if you've seen it in the Middle East, it seems like there's a lot of rocks and people pick them up and they use them for fighting. That may be what he's referring to. Stacking up all of your rocks so that if you need to, one day you can defend yourself. There is a time to prepare for conflict. There's a time to actually engage in it.

He goes on to say as well that "There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain." There are times when you will hug your friends and say "Hello". There are times when you will wave goodbye. Some of you have had painful relationships end. People that you loved. People that you adored. People that you embraced with your heart and with your life and with your arms and at some point because they decide to go a different direction, they get different conclusions. Something happens that goes unforgiven and bitterness creeps in. All of a sudden, the relationship comes to an end. Sometimes, our relationships are just, quite frankly, built on the fact that well, we work together; or we go to school together; or we live near each other. And when those common threads that bind us together are severed, we're no longer tethered one to the other. And those friendships come to an end. And he says, "You know what? That's the cycle of life too. That's the way it goes." Sometimes, people are in our lives for a season and then, they go out. And, perhaps, they will come back in another season. Perhaps, they will not. And there's seasons and times for both. Some of you have friends that it's probably time to sever a lot of your time with. Some of you, it's time, as God brings people around that love you, to embrace them and to begin relationships with them. That takes discernment. He says as well, "There's a time to embrace, a time to refrain."

Verse 6, "A time to search and a time to give up." "I'm out looking for the perfect car. I'm out looking for the good deal on the house. I'm out looking for the perfect job. I'm out looking for a sweet wife. And there's a time, you say? (Blowing raspberry). I can't find it. I'm gonna live in this dumpy apartment. And I'm gonna drive this old car. And work this crummy job (Sigh). And eat dinner by myself until Jesus shows up and gives me an option because I just can't find it. I've looked everywhere. I've looked everywhere and I just can't find the job. The car. The house. The wife I'm looking for, so I will make do with what God has provided until he provides otherwise. I give up. I give up. That's okay."

He goes on as well to say, "A time to keep and a time to throw away." Some of you are shoppers. Some of you like to buy things. Some of you buy vehicles much larger than you need because you know that you're going to put things in it.

(Laughter)

And, what happens is, there's a time to gather, right? There's a time to get all – there's a time to go shopping. A time to buy all your stuff. And there's a time to chuck. Throw it away, right? Most of you don't need a bigger house. You just need to start throwing stuff away. That's the truth, right? But, here's the problem. We buy things on sale. Now, things that we're not going to use, but we save so much money –

(Laughter)

– buying these things we'll never use. And then we can't bear to throw them out because we spent money on it. How many of you really have clothes that don't fit? You know they never will.

(Laughter)

You know they never will, right? But, you keep them because, "I spent so much money on them." There's a time to give up. And there's a time to throw it out, right? Because you say, "Well, do these make my butt look big?" No, your butt makes your butt look big.

(Laughter)

Those are just pants. So just give up and chuck 'em away, you know? Go get something with elastic.

(Laughter)

Just embrace the future and throw it all away.

(Laughter)

There's a time to shop. A time to clean the house and chuck out all the junk. How many of you have got stacks of stuff all over, stacked? And you think, "Well, look, I cleaned up the house. It's all in piles."

(Laughter)

No, chuck it away. Chuck it away. Chuck it away. Chuck it away. Two things you could do. One of these is, in particular, advice for the men who are married. Put a box near the front door of your house. One of my friends does this. And if they're not using something, they put it in there. And if they haven't used it in a few weeks, they throw it away. That's a good idea. Just a chucking out box. And if one of you can't bear to part with it, move the box into the garage. It's still technically and legally on your property, but it's halfway to the dump. You're making progress, okay?

(Laughter)

And when they're not looking, take it to the dump, right? Take it to the dump and if they yell out you, quote the verse and say, "Thus saith the Lord", so we're going to the dump.

(Laughter)

Verse 7, as well, he says, "A time to tear and a time to mend." Tearing here, in the mourning process, the grieving process, a loved one would die, something catastrophic would happen, you would tear your clothes as an indication of mourning. And you would throw yourself into grief. He says, "There's a time for that." There's a time to shed your tears and to miss those people that have died that you loved. There is a time when, perhaps, things have gone very badly and you're in a very difficult circumstance where it is a good season to grieve and that's good. But, as well, he says that there is a time to mend. That you heal from that. That you bandage up your wounds, as it were, and that you move on. Some people get stuck in these cycles of grief where they just can't escape. They can't go from crying to dancing. They can't go from grieving to healing. And what he says is, "You need both." Throw yourself into your grief and then that'll help you spin out of it into your healing, you know? And the issue is this. That in the seasons of our life we can't avoid difficulty and the best way is through it. If it's gonna hurt, go through it. If it's gonna be painful, go through it. It's like that Solomon says, you know, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death", you've gotta walk through it. You've just gotta go through it. And as you do, that's what changes from one season to the next is that you've walked the course through that painful circumstance. You've shed the tears you need to shed. That you've repented of the sins that you needed to repent of. That you have acknowledged the suffering that you have needed to acknowledge. And at some point, that turns into the next season of life.

He goes on as well to say that, "There's a time to be silent and a time to speak." Is that still true? Are there times that you've said things and you wanted to just reel it back in? Just say, "I – man". Isaiah says, "I'm a man of unclean lips. I come from a people of unclean lips." That's me. That's me. I'm a guy who has to learn to be increasingly more careful with his words. There is a time when there is nothing to say.

Sometimes, when – I even found this as a pastor – sometimes people's heart is really hard and there's nothing you can say to get through it. It's just like bullets off a rock, right? You're just looking for an angle. "One of these has gotta penetrate here. I gotta – I'll just say the right thing and it'll get in there. No, maybe not." Maybe, rather than speaking to you, I need to pray that God would change your heart because all of my words are doing nothing. We're not making any progress. There's a time to be silent. There's a time to let people live their life. There's a time for

letting people make their mistakes. There is a time for letting people figure out the hard way, if that is, indeed, what they have chosen. And in the meantime, you can be silent and love and pray and wait for the next season, perhaps, where they will repent or they will recognize what they have done and then you can walk with them in that season. And as well, when you're angry, when you're frustrated, when you're sick of it, it's usually not the best time to speak.

I had it recently with a guy. He said, "I wanna talk about this issue theologically." I said, "Why do you wanna talk?" He says, "I wanna prove you wrong." I said, "I can't talk to you." He said, "Why?" I said, "What I say will not be good just because the attitude of you wanting to attack me over something that I don't even care about, it's not worth my words. It's not worth my time. And it's not worth destroying the relationship with you. I could win and be right and then we would never speak again. And we would have wasted our breath and our years. There's nothing to say other than, 'I love you' and that's all I'm gonna say. It's a time for silence."

And sometimes, it's a time to speak. You need to speak truthfully. You need to confront someone in sin. You need to hold high the standard of righteousness. You need to be honest. And it's a great discernment that God will need to give you. In prayer, "God, is this a time to speak or is this a time to be silent? Is this where I let my words go or is this a time where I hold them back until there's a better time to speak? Or per chance, God, are you already at work and there's nothing that I need to do or say and you will take care of this in due time and I need wait patiently and prayerfully?" He says, "There's times for both." Some people say, "I never open my mouth and say anything." That's not Biblical. Some people say, "Well, I don't keep my mouth shut. I tell 'em what I think." That's not Biblical either. Biblical wisdom and discernment is, what season is it? And is this the time that I should speak or not?

He goes on to say, "There's a time to love and time to hate. A time to love and a time to hate." Is it okay to hate? Christians really struggle with this. Really struggling. "Can't hate anything. Can't hate anybody." You must. If you love God, you must hate sin. You must. You must. There's a righteous anger. There's a righteous indignation. There's a righteous frustration that rises up. It says in Psalm 5 that, "God hates all who do evil." It says in Proverbs, I think it's in Chapter 6, that "There are seven things that the Lord hates" and he talks about specific things that people do that very much anger him. You should hate sin. You should.

And there is a time as well for love. Where you love those people who sin, though you hate what it is that they are doing and you hate the wreckage that ensues in their trail. There's a time for both. Some people say, "I just like conflict and I say what I think and I get at it." Other people say, "Oh, I don't. I like – I don't like conflict. I don't like ruffling feathers. I don't like upsetting anybody. I just love 'em." You know what? There's a time for both. There's a time for both.

And the last one he says is this. It's interesting in light of what's going on in our world today. "There's a time for war and a time for peace." Now, we can argue whether or not this is a time for war, but we can't argue if there is a time for war. You need to know this. You live in the most liberal, left-leaning, Godless bent city in the United States of America. And there is a misunderstanding of human nature that pervades our city and leads to great stupidity and naivety. And that is this. We're all good people. If we could just do aromatherapy, hold daisies, sit in a circle and tell our story, we wouldn't need violence.

(Laughter)

That's not true. That is not true. We are crooked, flawed, bent, depraved violent people. And, sometimes, the only way you get peace is by killing all your enemies. That's how God works. You look to the left of Ecclesiastes, you'll see a flood. It happens, right? You read to the right of Ecclesiastes in the Book of Revelation, Jesus comes back as what? A guy with a sweater, puts you on a trolley to go see King Neptune?

(Laughter)

No. No. You're gonna see Jesus in Revelation 14:19. "Come with a sword to slay the nations of the earth." To cut down all of his enemies. And then, he's – all his enemies are dead. There's two ways to get peace. Negotiation and conquest. Jesus, right now, is offering the Gospel out to the world. "Repent of your sins, lay down your arms, come to me". There's a time. At some point, that season is over and there's just justice and there's war. God getting his glory and declaring war on us. This is a time where we can prevent being under his hand by repenting and turning from sin and death. He says there's a time for both. There's a time for both. Some people think, "If we could just talk. If we could just work it out. You know, why can't we all love each other?" because we're wicked. Because we're selfish. Because we are broken, and bent, and crooked, and flawed, and evil to our core. And as long as their people who refuse to live in harmony with the rest of us, sometimes our only option is to remove them. And if you strongly disagree with me on this, that's okay. There's a time for war. You're gonna have to deal with that.

And there is a time for peace. There's a time when we don't drop bombs. There's a time when we don't pull the trigger. There's a time when we don't declare hostility and we can argue whether or not this is the time for war or the time for peace. But, as God's people, we can never hold hands with those who say that we're all good and all we want is peace because those who are crying for peace are saying, "You know what? We want peace." Well, you can cry for peace because there was a war that gave you free speech. There was a war that gave you freedom of assembly. There was a war that gave you freedom of religion. And there was a war that gave you the right to vote. And so, it is war that has led to our season of peace. And we need not be naïve and foolish. We have the warmongers. We need not be violent people. But, at the same time, we need not be foolish. There's a time for both.

These are your seasons. These are the seasons that you're in. You're in a season of war. Some of you are in a season of laughter or a season of tears. A season of sickness, a season of health. A season of friendship, a season of loneliness. You're in a season of fruitfulness, you're in a season of dryness. Here's the key. Here's the frustration. Verse 9, "What does the worker gain from his toil?" What's the point? You ever wake up in the

morning and say, "What am I doing? I'm working so hard at my job and on my life and with my stuff and all the things that I have to do." Why? Are you ever going to finish everything that you need to do? No. If you did finish it, would it come undone right away? "Hey, I did the laundry." "Hey, I mowed the lawn." "Hey, I did the dishes." "Hey, I paid my bills." "Hey, I fixed my car." "Hey, I organized my house." It's all done. Not forever.

(Laughter)

It's gonna come undone again. It's always coming undone. Not only that, what you do is never done. If you get it done, it comes undone. And if you do get it done and it doesn't come undone, what happens? Everything changes and that doesn't matter anymore. You gotta do something new.

(Laughter)

Have you noticed that? As soon as you get your life in order, it changes. You finally have it figured out and something happens and you gotta start over. And he says, "What is the point of even trying?" Here's the key. Verse 10, "I have seen the burden God has laid on men." This doesn't come from fate. This doesn't come from Satan. This doesn't come from karma or chance. This comes from God. "He has made everything beautiful in its time." We'll get to that. "He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end." Here's the problem. We long for eternity. We were created to live without end and we die. We want our work to endure forever. We want our joy to endure forever. We want our pleasure to endure forever. We want our life to endure forever and it doesn't.

Right in the roadblock of this desire for eternity sits our grave and it's frustrating. In addition to that, we wanna know what God's doing. I want the big picture. What's the plan? But, he says, "We cannot fathom what God is doing from beginning to end." We don't know. Here's why you get up and work. Here's why you do what you can. Because you don't know what God's doing. This is where faith comes into play. This is where trusting that God is good and God is in charge and God is gonna work out all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose, comes into practical reality. Here's the beauty of it. How many of you – any of you weavers work on a loom? Do tapestry, right? You look at it from underneath. There's a great metaphor here that I took from one of the commentators. He says, "If you look underneath a loom, is it beautiful from the underside?" It's not. What do you see? Knots, snarls, it's a mess. There's nothing beautiful about it. That's what Solomon calls life under the sun 29 times in Ecclesiastes. It's life under the loom, just looking up saying, "This doesn't look very beautiful to me. This looks like knots and snarls and frayed loose ends. It doesn't look like anything beautiful to me. It doesn't look like there's any great artists up there weaving together a beautiful piece of tapestry called history."

And then, all of a sudden, what you see is, from God's vantage point, it's beautiful. It's beautiful. He's weaving history together exactly as he desires. And from under the loom, it looks horrific. From above the loom, it is glorious. You see symmetry and color and orderliness. And from God's perspective, he sees from beginning to end and all we get is this little sliver of our life. The short few years and these couple of deep breaths that we call our existence. And what we want is we want to see as he sees. We want to understand what he's doing. And the beauty of it is, for those who trust in him, there will be a day where we die and we rise and we sit with him above. And we see, from beginning to end, that God has made everything what? Beautiful in its time. In its time.

Do you think you've ever worked a day in vain? Do you think you've ever shed a tear in vain? Do you think you've ever read a verse in vain? Do you think you've ever confessed a sin in vain? Do you think a bullet has ever been fired in vain? Do you think a meal has ever been eaten in vain? No. God makes everything beautiful in its time. In its time. Our great God uses guys like Herod, who killed Jesus, like an ax in his hand for his purposes. He used betrayers like Judas Iscariot to fulfill prophecy and to bring about the redemption of his people. We have a God uses everything, everyone, every day, every minute, every opportunity and he bends it all back toward his will. Bends it back toward his beauty. And one day, if we trust in him, we'll sit with him and we'll see what he's done from beginning to end and it'll be a glorious day. And it's just not time yet. We'll see the fabric of our lives as part of that tapestry that is weaving through history.

And Solomon clings to this faith that, It's not as I see it because I only see in part." "And then I shall see in full", as Paul says, "and I will know as I am fully known. And I will see him face to face." So, what do we do in the meantime? We got time to kill, right? It's called life. Here's what we do. I know that there is nothing better for men to do than to be happy. Be happy. Why not? I mean, the other options aren't that good when you really think about it. Be happy. You say, "I'm not happy." Well, then, be happy. "Well, I can't make myself happy." You make yourself miserable.

(Laughter)

Just flip it. It's not that complicated. Just be happy. You say, "But, not everything's good." Well, of course, not everything's good. But, you know what? In whatever season you're in, is God there? Of course, God's there. Has God given you opportunities for happiness in the middle of it? Of course he has. All you gotta do is be on your Easter egg hunt, out looking for it. "Oh, here's something here. Here's something here. Here's something here. Here's an opportunity for me to be happy." And I would just submit this to you. Every morning you should pray and ask the Spirit of God to open your eyes. That as you're walking through your life, you're not, you know, living in light of your past or living in light of your future. But, you're really savoring your present and ask God to keep your eyes open so that you can see the opportunities that he has given you where his kingdom breaks in. You could be happy. And when you get 'em, journal 'em. Write 'em down or take a mental snapshot or make a prayer. Something to remember the goodness in the presence of God.

You know, I had one this week. It was great. I came home this week and I opened the door and I hear, "Daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy!" They scream and yell like I'm some sorta super hero. And the kids run. We got hardwood floors and they're all racing to see who gets to me first, my three kids. And they grab my legs and they jump on. And my son always looks at me and he gets these big eyes and he always says, "Daddy, I missed you and I love

you so much.” And my heart just – oh, I just about cry every time I hear him say that. And he usually asks me for something. He knows he’s setting me up. But, anyways.

(Laughter)

And my daughter always gives me a present. She’s an artist. She drew me a picture. Every day, she draws me a picture, draws me a card, draws me something. “Daddy, I drew this for you today.” And like, today, I got one where it was her and I. She’s in a beautiful dress and we’re holding hands and it’s just her and I enjoying one another’s company. And then my littlest son, Calvin, he’s one year old. He always throws his hands up in the air like this. He’s all bow legged and chubby and he’s usually got something to eat in his hand. And he’s always just like this.

(Laughter)

And he always says, “Mama, mama, mama, ma”.

(Laughter)

Because every time he says “Mama”, he gets picked up. So, he thinks mama means pick me up.

(Laughter)

You know, and I just – I remember walking in the door and then I looked at my wife. Gracie was in the kitchen and I saw her peer out around the corner and she had that look in her eye. You know, that look like, “I love you. Welcome home.” And I remember closing my eyes and I remember asking God, “God let me think of her face like that all the time.” There’s a time right here. There’s a time right here that God has given for happiness. And I need to grab that. I need to remember that. I need to hold that. I need to cling to that because there may be a time where my wife and I are having a hard day or my children are like midget demons. They’re not so cute, right?

(Laughter)

There may be a hard day and I need to cling to those memories and those seasons and those times and those opportunities that God has given us for happiness. And to take that and to embrace it for everything it’s got and to live right there. And you know what? God does that for us all. But, sometimes, we’re so busy just regretting our past and living in lethargy. Or we’re so anxious about our future, trying to figure out what we’re gonna do next, that it’s like we’re not even like, eyes open, at the world in front of us. It’s all rearview mirror or straight into the future and there’s just no peripheral vision of our horizon. Solomon says, “Be happy.” When God give you a shot, enjoy it. Enjoy it.

You know what? Some day my kids are gonna grow up and they’re gonna be gone. Is that gonna be a season filled with times of joy? It will be. To see them become adults. Love Christ. Get married. Bring grandkids over to my house. That’ll be great. I can’t wait to be an old, crotchety, wrinkled grandpa, right? Just love ‘em, wrestle with ‘em. I hope I live long enough to see my great grandkids. Each of those seasons is gonna be great. There’ll be hard days, but there’s opportunities for happiness in every single one. You know, some day – some day I’ll preach the funeral of my lovely wife. Some day I will preach the funeral of my dear parents. That’ll be a good day, too. God’ll provide something there to make me happy. I just gotta be looking for it. I’m not worried about it. Not anxious about. Just knowing that the same God who showed up every day ‘til now is not gonna leave when I need him most. He says, “Be happy” and what? “Do good.”

There’s other – have you noticed that there’s other people? Just, in general, if you look around, there’s lots of people.

(Laughter)

And sex being what it is, I anticipate there will continue to be lots of people.

(Laughter)

Just as a rule. And those people, some of them know God. Some of them don’t know God. Some of them are happy. Some of them are not happy. Some of them need you to do good. In fact, all of them probably need you to do good. Maybe an embrace. Sitting down to shed a tear. Telling a joke. Making ‘em laugh. Be happy, take that happiness and give it to somebody else. Run an errand. Wash your roommate’s dishes, right? Take out the trash for your spouse. Teach your kids how to fish. Whatever it is, do good while they live. You know, these opportunities, they pass quick. That everyone may eat is the theme in Ecclesiastes, and drink, and find satisfaction as toil. This is a gift of God. God enables you to what? Eat. When you eat, okay, I’ve repeated this many times. I’ll say it again. When you eat, sit down to eat. Don’t eat food cooked by a high school kid ordered through a clown.

(Laughter)

Eat something good. Don’t drink wine from 7-11. Don’t drink light beer. Eat good food. Drink good wine. Drink good beer. Have good friends. Live a full life. Sit down and enjoy and savor. Do. Do. Do. And as you do, realize, these are opportunities that God’s given for happiness, right? If you like tea, drink tea. If you like meat, eat meat. If you like cheese, eat cheese. Today, I had good cheese with my daughter. My daughter’s one of the few people on the planet that enjoys good cheese. “Honey, this is gouda. This is smoked sharp cheddar.” We’re discipling her and –

(Laughter)

– I sit down with my little girl and we eat cheese. And you know what? That’s a moment for happiness. “Mmmm, doesn’t that taste good? “Yeah, oh, I

like that." "I don't like that. That's too sharp." We're having this little cheese dialogue, me and my disciple. My cheese disciple, we're having this conversation.

(Laughter)

You know, eat, enjoy, talk. Because, see, the point of food is this. The point of food is friendship. The point of food is community. The point of food is this. That the end of the age, according to Isaiah in Revelation, there's gonna be this great feast where all of God's people sit down. So, in the meantime, when we eat and we drink, we should do so together like Jesus did with his disciples. And we should do so in joy and it should be an opportunity for us to get together and be happy.

It says later in Ecclesiastes that "A feast is made for" what? Laughter. Ecclesiastes 10, I think it's verse 19. "A feast is made for laughter." Is it good, sometimes, to sit down with friends and eat a good meal and laugh hard? And then not be in any big rush? And then spend a few hours just lingering over conversation and then close with a really fat dessert? Right? And then go lay down and slip into a coma. Ohhh.

(Laughter)

And sleep like a Christian who has a sovereign God, that even when you're asleep, he's still on the throne. So, it'll be fine when you get up. That's what he's talking about. "That everyone may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his toil. This is a gift of God." He says in verse 14, "I know that everything that God does will endure forever. Nothing can be added to it. Nothing can be taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him." What he says is this. God's working out human history. He's got a plan. And God knows you. He made you. God has seasons of your life that are set out. And every season, he's got opportunities for joy. It's like breadcrumbs leading you to him. And that he does this so you'll respect him. So you'll fear him. So you'll revere him. "That the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom", Proverbs 1 says. And within this, then, what you realize is, "When I live in rhythm with God, and I live in harmony with God, and I live out of love for God, and faith in God, I actually enjoy my life, despite my circumstances." And there is an ease. And there's an orderliness. And there's a purposefulness to my existence, even when things are arduous and tough. So, he says, "Don't fight God. Respect him. Don't try and carve out your own existence and fight against the rhythm of creation. Don't try and have sex outside of your marriage. Don't turn your feasting into gluttony. Don't turn your drinking into drunkenness. Don't turn your humor into coarse joking. Work in rhythm and conjunction with the God who has made you and your life will flow in his time and in his way. And you'll be happy and satisfied. And he'll give you that gift of satisfaction.

Here's the key. Whatever has already been and what will be has been before. This is what he says. "There is a rhythm in life. And that there are people that have gone before us and they've made the same mistakes that we'll make. They've learned the same lessons that we need to learn." You need people around you. And you need to learn from them. You need to know history and learn from history. You need to learn church history and learn from biography. If you haven't done this, please be a people who commit yourself to reading biography. I'm reading like my sixth or eighth biography now on a guy now named Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Fascinates me to no end, learning from his life because things tend to work similarly in our lives as they have in the lives of people before us because "There's nothing new under the sun", like Solomon says.

As well as, you should get to know people that are older than you, that you are in different seasons of life. How many of you are students in high school, junior high? Some of you are here tonight. You need to talk to college students. "What am I getting into? How much is this going to cost?" How many of you are in college, right? Hundreds of you. You need to talk to single people who are working jobs, paying off their school loans. "What am I getting into? What do I need to know?" How many of you are unmarried? Many of you. You need to know married people. You need to ask them, "What do I need to know? Does my outfit match? Is this gonna work?"

(Laughter)

Some of you that are married, you don't have children yet. If you're anticipating being parents, you need to get around people that are parents and say, "Well, you're one season ahead of me. What's it like up there? What lessons do I need to learn in this season that'll help me prepare for that one?" Because that's how God knits our lives together. In this season, there's things to learn that prepare us for this season where there's things to learn, that prepare us for this season where there's more things to learn. And we grow and mature through all of it, unless we're fighting God and then we live long, but we don't live well. And that's one of the reasons, if I can hammer the community groups and such, that's why we don't do strong age divisions in the church. I want 60 year olds to have friendships with 11 year olds. because there's a lot of life that really could be imparted and very helpful. Very helpful.

And here's the beauty of it. Verse 15, the very, very glorious end. "And God will call the past to account." You're gonna die much sooner than you think. And God is gonna call your name, as he did Lazarus, and he's going to call you out of your tomb and you will stand before him. Hebrews 9:27 says, "It's appointed once for a man to die, and then for judgment." And you will stand before God and he will take your life and he will bring it to account. Literally, it'll be as if we took your life and we played it as a film. All the things you did when you thought no one was looking and God was. All the things you did you never caught for. Your all-knowing God brings them all up and he brings your life into account. Is that gonna be a good day? Is it possible that that could be a good day? That could be a beautiful day.

For those of you who don't know Christ, I will tell you this. You will see all of your sin and that is all. And then you will see God declare war on you and you will have no peace. For those of you that are friends with God through Christ, will that be a good day? That'll be a great day. Any sin that I happen to see as God brings it into account, I will know that Jesus Christ has died for all of that and I am that loved and I am that forgiven. It'll be a great day.

In addition, if I have lived in rhythm with God and taken the grace that he has enabled me to live under, and taken the times in the seasons that he has afforded me, could this not be a beautiful day? When God brings my life into account and I say "Ahhh, that's where I met Jesus. I remember that. That's where I learned that section of Scripture that opened my understanding. Ahhh, that's where I was repenting of that habitual sin that was gnawing at me and God forgave me and gave me the grace to rise above it and I'm not stuck. I wasn't stuck in that anymore. And that's where God brought along those friends that I encouraged me, that I enjoyed so much. There's the moment I fell in love with that person that I married and had a good life run with, holding hands and laughing loud. There's the kids that we raised. There they are when they're little. There's me playing ball and wrestling and cuddling. I remember that. Yeah, there's my kids when they went to school and I was all freaked out because they weren't with me all day. Oh, there they are as they got older and there they are. They love Jesus and they're there. They're reading their Bible. And there they are. They got married. And there's my grandkids. And there's my funeral. And there's all the people who love Jesus and loved me, talking about the day that they long to see me again because we don't die. We just go to be with the Lord." Could that be a beautiful day? That could be a beautiful day.

That's what Solomon's talking about. Solomon's talking about beginning with the end in mind. "I'm gonna die and stand before God and my whole life is gonna play like a film. Well, in the meantime, I better put together a decent plot."

(Laughter)

"By God's grace, I better live this thing in such a way that at the end, when he's showing the film, I'm not just going, 'I am sorry. Please. If you could just fast forward through my 20s and my 30s and my 40's, that would be great.'

(Laughter)

'Maybe the 50s, too. The 60s weren't bad. I didn't do much. Sorry.'" You know, you wanna hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Come on into your rest." There's two things you take to Heaven with you. I'll close with this. Your friends and your memories. That's all you take. Your friend and your memories. So, what should you put yourself into as a life pursuit? Your friends and your memories with Jesus. Solomon is calling Saul to redefine how we perceive our wealth. If I said, "Are you wealthy?" Most of you would say, "No, I'm not very wealthy."

Wealth is not just eating good food, but enjoying the food you eat. Wealth is not just drinking good drink, it's enjoying whatever it is that your drink, even if that's just water. Wealth is not having a lot of stuff, it's enjoying whatever you have. Wealth is having memories of the times that God enabled you to be happy. And wealth is having people you love to be happy with and to do good for. That makes you wealthy. I don't want you to miss this. I love you. I'm your pastor. I don't want you to miss your life. I don't want you to be so frantic and forgetting about the hand of God that one day you die, and at the end, you watch it and you realize that God was everywhere and your eyes were closed and you missed every opportunity he gave to laugh. To eat. To drink. To cry. To work. To save. To spend. I don't want that for 'ya. I want you to live with Christ. I want you to die with Christ. I want you to rise with Christ. And as he brings it all to account, I want you to celebrate with Christ. Will you do that with me? Please do that with me. Please do that with me. Your friends and your memories go with you. Christ has gone before you. Confess your sin, follow him, and you'll be fine.

Father God, as we come into a moment of reflection, I pray you would open our hearts and our understanding so that we could realize that our life, as your Word indicates, is indeed a breath. It's a vapor. It moves really quick, that some of us can't believe how quickly the years have gone. God, that we will all die more quickly than we anticipate. God, thank you so much that you have come, Lord Jesus, to live in a perfect way. In my behalf, that you have died for all of my sins so that at the end of my life, when you bring all of my life to account, I need not sit there and try and find a way to pay you back for my many sins because I know that isn't possible. I thank you that Jesus has already paid for all of my sins, that I need not taste death and judgment because he already has. Thank you so much, Jesus, for taking care of me.

As well, Lord God, I pray that at the end of my life, I would be able to, by grace, see your account of my life as a joyous, beautiful, wonderful thing. That God, every time I have to embrace my wife, that I would do so. That every time I have to kiss my kids on the forehead, that I would. That every time that I have to be happy and do good, that I would take it and I wouldn't miss an opportunity. And that, God, my life, whether it be long or short, I pray it would be full and that it would be happy. And I thank you that you invite us all to this. And I thank you that, in addition to that, you enable us through your Son to have the grace to actually taste it. God, may we eat. May we drink. May we work. May we laugh. May we cry to your glory and joy. Amen.