

- ***READ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*** We recognize that these words of the Preacher here in **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8** highlight to us the reality that we experience many different times or seasons in our lives. Sometimes we experience the joy of birth, and other times we experience the pain of death. Sometimes it is necessary that we plant, and other times it is necessary that we uproot what has been planted. Fourteen times in these verses we find contrasting seasons that we might experience in our lives, and this leads us to the understanding that different times in our lives will bring about different circumstances. And yet there is one constant that remains regardless of the season that we might find ourselves in...we are still within a season of time because there is still the presence of time.
- There are some circumstances that others face that we might never face, and there are some circumstances that are our realities that others might very well never face. However, we all face the reality that we live in a world that is governed by the presence and laws of time. Our circumstances and experiences may change, but time will always remain. Just think for a moment about the way that we communicate to one another. I would challenge you to communicate to your spouse about what is going to take place on a day to day basis without the use of time. Nearly every day I get asked the same from Katie, "What time will you be home?" Would it be possible for me to answer her without using time phrases? Even if I did not say a specific time, would I not have to talk about afternoon, evening, or even something along the lines of "after Olivia wakes up from her nap?" The reality is that we exist and live in a world that is inundated with the influence of time.
- And if this is the case...then what are we to do with time? What does God expect of us when it comes to the way that we approach the reality of the presence of time within our lives. The Christian's Approach to Time will be our subject of consideration for this evening. We might not think that this is a subject that addresses much throughout the Bible because we often take the concept of time for granted, but I hope we are impressed by just how much God, through the Bible, speaks to us about how we approach time. Our considerations will begin by looking at four very important truths that are presented to us within the inspired Word of God, and then we will look at three takeaway points.

I. 4 Important Biblical Truths About Time

A. God is not constrained by time.

1. Though we recognize that we live and exist in a world that is governed by the presence of time, we must likewise recognize that our God does not exist in such a way because He exists in a reality where time is not a governing agent. Everything that we see around us exists in a reality that is described very often by the Apostle Paul as being "temporal." In **II Corinthians 4:17,18**, the Apostle Paul tells us that he is willing to endure afflictions of this life because he recognizes them as being "momentary." ***"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*** Very clearly we see that Paul is drawing a strong distinction between our present reality and the reality that we will experience once we are beyond this life in eternity. It is at that point that we will exist in the same reality that God exists in and it will be very different from here because God is not constrained by the laws of time.
2. What I mean by God not being constrained by time is that He exists outside of time. **Genesis 1:1** is a verse that even the youngest among us can recite, and it tells us plainly that it was at the point of the beginning of time that God went about His incredible work of creating the world. And yet, how was it that God was able to establish something like the beginning? How was He able to be before there was even a beginning? The answer to this question can be summed up by the Moses in **Psalms 90:2** as he states in his famed prayer which very well might have been the very first ever recorded Psalm, ***"Lord, You have been our refuge in every generation. Before the mountains were born, before You gave birth to the earth and the world, from eternity to eternity, You are God."*** (CSB)
3. Yahweh always has been. He has no beginning and He has no end. He simply is as He described Himself to Moses, ***"I AM."*** (**Exodus 3:14**) Jesus, God who allowed Himself to take on flesh and experience time, was still able to state in **John 8:58**, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."*** There was

a reason why the next verse tells us that the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus. They recognized that Jesus was making a claim of deity when He stated that He existed even before Abraham was born. God always has been, is, and always will be. This is what makes Him God. He is able to exist outside of even what He creates. He is able to exist in a way in which *“one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.”* (II Peter 3:8)

B. Time has been given to us by God.

1. This might make us begin to wonder why it is that He felt the need to establish something like time in this reality in which we live, and I think that we would do well to recognize that the concept of time that He has given us is actually a gift. Again, think about something as simply as trying to get on the same page with your family as far as what a day will contain without the concept of time. It simply wouldn't work, and that is entirely even more evident when we consider history and how we would be unable to comprehend history without the usage of time.
2. As Wayne Jackson rightly states, *“Time provides the historical framework in which things happen, but time has no innate ability itself.”* What this means is that time is something that we use to quantitate our existence and experiences, but time itself is neither good nor bad. We will make of time what we decide to make of it. Our time given to us by God can either be used for good or it can be used for evil. It can contain experiences that are positive or it can contain experiences that are negative. Time simply is, but we must recognize that time is not indefinite.

C. Time is finite.

1. Yes, God has given us the concept of time, and He has blessed each of us with the gift of time to live upon this earth, but again we would do well to remember that the time that we have on this earth is described as *“temporary.”* It is temporary because it has a beginning at our births, and it has an end point once we take our final breath. This life experience has a beginning and end. This life has days which are always 24 hours long from beginning to end. We might not all get the same amount of days, but every day we do get is the exact same length.
2. Even the way that we look at history shows us the definite nature of time. We often use phrases to help us understand a point of time in history, and this can be seen even throughout the way we look at the history of the Bible and God's interactions with mankind. We often look at the Bible and we divide it up by saying that there was the time in which God's relationship with man was established with individual patriarchs and their families. We would then say that time period ended and a new one began when His covenant was made with the entire nation of Israel. We say that this time period continued on until Jesus came and closed that chapter by giving up His life on the cross and being raised on the third day. Through His actions, God now has a covenant that is to be with all men so long as this life continues on until the coming of Jesus when time as we know it shall end and eternity with God begins.
3. We see clear beginnings, endings, and points in time in history which help us to understand God's relationship with His creation, how it has evolved overtime, and it is all made possible by God giving us the gift of time and its comprehension. Even inspired writers leaned upon this type of language to help the readers understand what was going on in their writings. Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:23**, *“But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.”* The finite nature of time really helps us when it comes to understanding the workings and happenings of this life.

D. Time only moves forward.

1. And yet, we need to recognize that this gift of time and its finite nature aren't things that we can manipulate to our own desires. Time has one direction in which it flows and that direction is forward. I doubt that anyone here would argue with this point, and I would especially be confident in this being the understanding of others when it comes to our children and watching them grow up. I know I'm not the first dad who has held a second child in my hands and the only thing going through my mind is that it just seems like yesterday that my first born was this tiny. I'm not the first dad who has looked at his first born and wondered where that completely helpless and reliant baby girl has gone because she is now growing into a strong and ever increasingly independent young lady.

2. This is simply our reality in this life that is governed by time. It will continue to move forward and only move forward. It is interesting to me that out of all of the incredible and amazing feats that Jesus accomplished on earth...He walked on liquid water, He calmed nature with His words, He transformed the molecular structure of water so that it would become wine, He even gave life to bodies that were dead. And yet, I can't think of a single time where Jesus manipulated the laws of time. I can't read of a place where he stopped the clock from moving another second forward. I can't think of a single time where He turned the clock back. It isn't that I don't believe that He couldn't, it just seems interesting to me that we don't have any recordings of Him doing such a thing. Even with God walking the earth with miraculous powers...we continue to see the clock continue to move only forward.
3. Some Biblical writers recognized this reality and spoke of it. David said of his now deceased child in **II Samuel 12:23**, *"But now he has died; why would I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go too him, but he will not return to me."* David recognized that he had no power to either bring the child back to life or turn back the hands of the clock to a time before he passed. If David could do such a thing then surely he would go way back in time and make different decisions when it came to Bathsheba. Paul also recognized that his past was behind him and that was where they would have to stay. *"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* (**Philippians 3:13,14**) Paul recognized that there was only one direction in which time was flowing, and that was forward. There were no do overs. The past was the past, and it was reality. Time only moves forward. It stops, slows down, and moves backwards for no one. We only have that which lies before us to look forward to experiencing.

II. Our Takeaways

A. We need to live with eternity in mind.

1. Paul's words in **II Corinthians 4:17,18** ought to have a tremendous impact on us as far as the way that we view this life, what it contains, and the next life that awaits us. It should really move us to understand that Paul was willing to endure temporary suffering in this life because he didn't want to experience never-ending suffering in the next life apart from his Heavenly Father. He was willing to endure temporary suffering so that he would be able to take hold of eternal glory. He lived with an eternity-focused mindset, and we would do very well to do the same thing.
2. It ought to be our prayer, as it was for Moses, that God would *"teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom."* (**Psalms 90:12**) We need to be people who recognize the brevity of this life and the eternal nature of the next life. We need to live in such a way that our decision making process in this life takes into account what impact such decisions will have on eternity. It is in the temporal life that eternal consequences are often established, and we need to recognize the truth of C.S. Lewis's words, *"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next."* Our eternal destiny rides on our embracing of this eternal mindset.

B. We need to make the best use of our time.

1. Possessing that eternal mindset will surely help us to allow the writings of Scripture to weigh more heavily upon our hearts so that our actions are directed in the most godly way possible. One of the ways that our godly character will show through is our willingness to make the best use of the time that God has blessed us with. Every single day in which we wake up should be a day in which we are looking to consider what good we can accomplish by the strength and providence of God. David said it well when he wrote during his time of hiding from Saul, *"Let me experience your faithful love in the morning, for I trust in You. Reveal to me the way I should go because I appeal to You."* (**Psalms 143:8**)
2. Our appeal to God on a daily basis should be that we have opportunities to serve His kingdom, His people, and the lost sheep of this world. This was not just David's mindset, but it is also the instruction of the Apostle Paul in **Ephesians 5:15-17**, *"Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what he will of the Lord is."* If we want to be those who are wise, then we must be a people who are making the most of the time that has been given to us by God, and there is much in this context as far as what God would have us to do with our time.

- a) We first need to use our time making sure that we come to know the will of the Lord. Daily reading and meditation upon God's Word will never be time poorly spent. **(5:17)**
 - b) We need to spend our time striving to be filled with the Spirit. Not only should we read God's word, but we need to allow it to have a strong influence over who we are and what we do. **(5:18)**
 - c) We can use our time well by spending time in worship to God with our brothers and sisters who are in Christ. Praising God and teaching one another is a great use of our time! **(Ephesians 5:19)**
 - d) Time spent giving glory, honor, and thanks to God is certainly time that we are using wisely to God's glory. If He is the one that has granted us the time then we must be people who are actively praising Him and thanking Him for such time. **(Ephesians 5:20)**
3. If we are wasting the precious time that God is blessing us with then why would we expect to have any different of an end from the man whom his master gave one talent and he went and hid it until his master's return? **(Matthew 25:14-30)** He had the same amount time to do something with his talent as the rest of the servants, but instead he wasted it by doing nothing. Our wasting of time, resources, and ability will only lead to a similar result for us. In no way is our time better spent than in serving God.
- C. We need to not take the time given to us for granted.**
- 1. The only time that has been guaranteed to us is all of the time that is in our pasts and the currently moment in which we are living. Not a single second in the future is guaranteed for us which is one of the reasons why we must be busy using our current time in a godly and productive manner. However, the lack of a guaranteed future doesn't stop many people from behaving as if the future is guaranteed. James wrote about this in **James 4:13-17**, and here are a few considerations from that text:
 - a) We do not know if tomorrow will be or what tomorrow will be like if it does materialize. Living as if tomorrow is guaranteed makes us arrogant and foolish.
 - b) We must embrace that our lives are truly a vapor in the grand scheme of eternity. What we experience here compares in no way to experiencing eternity.
 - c) If we are blessed with another "today" then we ought to make sure that we thank God for another "today", and then we need to get busy doing good.
 - d) Our failure to do that which is good when we have the opportunity before us is sin in the eyes of God. If He has given us the time in which to do what is right in service to Him and we do not do it then we are neglecting His blessing and it is a slap in the face to Him.
 - 2. Therefore, with all of these things in mind...we need to remember that any good thing that we need to accomplish today gets accomplished today if we have the ability to do so. If we have the time to do that which is good now and we let the time slip away...we don't know if we will ever get that chance again. Maybe for some of us that good thing is correcting a past mistake. We need to recognize that the old adage of time healing all wounds isn't true with the sins we commit against our God and our neighbors. Sin is not alleviated simply because much time has passed. Only through confession and repentance for such sins is God willing to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. **(I John 1:9)** If we don't use the time that we are currently in to do what is right then we are only gambling on another opportunity presenting itself, and a soul is not something that I am willing to gamble over something like time that is not guaranteed.

Each of us experience different aspects of life on a daily basis, but each of us are presented with opportunities on a daily basis as to how we are going to use 24 hours that lays before us if the Lord so wills to give it to us. While there are many different ways in which we could use those hours, minutes, and seconds...the reality is that there is no better use of our time than to commit ourselves fully to our God. If we are willing to do such a thing then we are setting ourselves up for an experience in which we will never meet an end. Eternity with God in paradise is the ultimate prize for those who are willing to use their little time in this life to His glory. Let's make sure that we are doing that very thing this week.