

God Has Done It

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[0 : 0 0] again, Ecclesiastes 3, that I've really been thinking about for the last couple of weeks. And there's some appropriate scripture here for us as we think about a home going for Amy and God being in control of his world.

And he wants us to take comfort in knowing that. He wants us to be in awe of him. He wants us to fear him and keep his commandments. That's really the conclusion to the matter.

Solomon says at the end of chapter 12, and Solomon is prompting us, his readers, to question the purpose of life.

Why are you here? You know, what's it all about? What do you gain from all your toil living in this fallen world in the brief time that we have here? So today's section is probably the best known passage in Ecclesiastes.

So would you stand together as we read? We'll read verses 1 to 15. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.

[1 : 1 2] A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to break down and a time to build up.

A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.

A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to cast away.

A time to tear and a time to sow. A time to keep silence and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.

What gain has the worker from all his toil? I've seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time.

[2 : 1 4] Also he has put eternity into man's heart. Yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceive that there's nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live.

Also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all this toil. This is God's gift to man. I perceive that whatever God does endures forever.

Nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it. God has done it so that people fear him. That which is already has been.

That which is to be already has been. And God seeks what has been driven away. Amen. The word of the Lord for us this morning. Amen.

Let's pray. Father we thank you for the songs we have sung. Thank you for the praise team. And again their leadership in worship. And bringing us to an understanding of who you are.

[3 : 1 6] And our rejoicing in you and in the gospel. Father we know that as we look at your scripture today. That the most important question for us as we look at any passage of scripture is what does it say about you?

What about your character do we see in this text? And how do we read it through the Jesus lens? So help us we pray. Help our understanding.

As we lift again the family of Amy DeWall. Father who we know is in your presence. Enjoying happiness and holiness like she's never experienced before.

Lord we praise you for the faith and the hope that we have that we don't grieve as those who have no hope. We take comfort that knowing that you are a good father.

And you are in control of all things from the greatest to the least. You're in control of the times and the seasons. And we trust that you always do what is right.

[4 : 21] So let us hear your words of encouragement and hope again this morning from your word. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. You can be seated. Amen.

So there's a lot we don't understand about the complexities of our lives. Right? It's good to have a book like Ecclesiastes to challenge us to think about life under the sun.

If we're really honest when we think about the meaning of life, we tend to think about the things that make us feel valued, that make us feel worthwhile and fulfilled.

We tend to think about our accomplishments and the impact that we're making on the world. If you've seen the 1946 classic Christmas movie with Jimmy Stewart, It's a Wonderful Life.

You recall that George Bailey, he wanted to know what made life worth living. What difference would it make if George had never been born?

[5 : 34] George was so discouraged with failure that he'd experienced in his life. But along came his guardian angel, Clarence, who comes to his rescue.

And Clarence proceeds to show George all the lives that he has touched. The people's lives who have been changed because of his life.

And what the world would be like if he'd never existed. You know, it's a wonderful life. It's a great masterpiece of good fiction. Even though initially it bombed at the box office and didn't even break even.

But somehow, over the years, we've recognized that this is really a great story. But the author of Ecclesiastes, he's writing about real life.

It's not fiction. Life that comes with ups and downs, joys and sorrows. And he wants us to see that our lives are part of, our stories are part of a much bigger story.

[6 : 38] Our lives are governed by the presence of a sovereign and personal and gracious God. Your story is part of his story. And God, in his great love, he seeks a relationship with you.

He wants you to know him. He wants to know you. And through Christ, he's provided for your happiness and your holiness. See, our gracious God is in full control of everything.

And it's for our great good and his great glory that we trust him fully. And that we find our happiness and fulfillment in him. That we don't chase other things that are, as Solomon likes to say, the vanity of vanities.

That we don't chase after those things that are just meaningless. But we have our confidence and our happiness and our holiness in God.

Our creator God who knows what's best for us. Our good God, he's been fully in control from the very beginning of time.

[7 : 46] And he wants us to fully trust him. That's really what this passage is about. This familiar poem that Solomon writes.

If you have your Bible or your Bible app, keep it open as we look at the text this morning as we go along. These first lines in chapter 3, they're really quite different than the way Solomon has been writing in the rest of his book.

He's gone from prose to poetry. And the first eight verses, they make up a poem about time. Something that we all care about, right? Everyone's life is governed by time.

I mean, even this sermon is governed by time. I know. And oftentimes the preacher is judged, you know, based on the time.

So I'm going to move along. So, but really, how many time pieces are there in this room? How many of you have more than one device that's keeping time?

[8 : 56] You know, the sun comes up and the sun goes down. For everyone, there's a time to be born and a time to die. And no one controls when or where or under what circumstance they're born.

And in God's providence, no one is in complete control of the end of life either. Time. 28 times in seven verses, time is mentioned.

And each of the seven verses in this poem has a pair. A time and a time. So 14 pairs that give a beautiful rhythm to the poem.

And the beauty of Hebrew parallelism is that it can be translated into any language and it doesn't lose its rhythm or its repetition. It doesn't lose its poetic beauty in the Spanish Bible or the Mandarin or the Cantonese or the Korean or the Bengali or the Arabic or any other translation.

That's amazing. You know, God in his wisdom chose Hebrew as the language of the Old Testament. It's a beautiful, beautiful poetry.

[10 : 08] One of the themes of this book is that life is short, right? Life is passing away. It's like a vapor that can form from your breath on a cold day. And that's the idea behind this Hebrew word for vanity, that it's just a, you know, pretend you're in the doctor's office and she has the stethoscope on your back listening to your lungs.

And you take a deep breath. Go ahead. Take a deep breath. Just take it in. And now exhale. So that's the picture Solomon is painting of our lives.

That's your life. He says. One good breath in light of eternity. That's just, you know, just a second.

A few seconds. That's life under the sun. But we know it wasn't supposed to be that way. Right? It wasn't supposed to be that way.

There wasn't supposed to be this cycle with a time to be born and a time to die and a time to kill and a time to break down and a time to weep. And a time for war.

[11 : 19] But unfortunately, because of sin and rebellion, that's part of the gospel. We understand part of the story of the gospel is the fall of man. Creation, fall, redemption, reconciliation.

The rest of the story. But our present reality is we live under the sun. We live under the curse of the fall. And all of us, we have, though as Christians we've been forgiven of our sin, we still have this disposition, unfortunately.

Right? And that's why we have to continually, that's why we need confession. We need repentance. It's how we grow. It's through repentance and faith. But Solomon, he doesn't leave us with this depressing reality.

You could say this is a depressing book. Yes. Okay. But remember, he's trying to depress us into dependence on another. He's trying to show us something better.

Something that offers us much more than the seeming meaninglessness of the vanity of life lived under the sun. There's an incident in the life of one of Judah's kings that demonstrates what Solomon is saying here, that our good God has been fully in control from the very beginning of time.

[12 : 39] And he wants us to fully trust him. In 2 Kings 18, we read about Hezekiah. Hezekiah was one of the most important kings in Judah.

And the scripture says he was 25 years old when he became king. And he reigned in Jerusalem 29 years. So from 25 to 55, he was one of the good kings.

You know, if you look at the kings in 1 and 2 Kings and Chronicles, there were good kings and there were bad kings. And Hezekiah was one of the good ones. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done.

Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. And I discovered that in 2015, they were doing an archaeological dig and they found the royal seal of King Hezekiah.

This stamped clay seal, it's also known as a bulla, was discovered by Dr. Elat Matzar at the foot of the southern wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

[13 : 48] And the impression on this, the clay, bears an inscription in ancient Hebrew that translates, It's belonging to Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, king of Judah.

2015. And in an interview on CNN, Dr. Mazar said, This is the greatest single item I have ever found. Amen. Finds like these are further evidence that we have a historically accurate book that we hold in our hands.

And Hezekiah was a real guy, a real king. And in 2 Kings 20 and in Isaiah 38, we can read about Hezekiah. At one point in his reign, Hezekiah became very ill.

And God, in his mercy, sends his faithful prophet Isaiah. Isaiah, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, served as a prophet for 40 years. He sends Isaiah to the house of Hezekiah in order to tell him that he was going to die.

The Lord loved Hezekiah so much that he was going to give him heads up. That his time had come. And Isaiah goes to him and Isaiah says, God says you're not going to recover from this illness.

[15 : 05] And Hezekiah, he's deeply distressed by the news. And he weeps bitterly and he cries out in prayer to God to intervene. And Hezekiah says, Oh Lord, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart.

And I've done what is right in your sight. And God, in his compassion, Isaiah had already left. And he tells Isaiah, Turn around and go back.

And tell Hezekiah, I've heard your prayer. I've seen your tears. And I'll heal you. In fact, I'll give you another 15 years to your time on earth.

And also, I'll deliver you in Jerusalem out of the hand of the evil king of Assyria. See, God wasn't finished with Hezekiah. He still had work for him to do. He said, I'll defend this city for my own sake.

And for the sake of my servant David, God says. So for me, for my sake, God says. I'm going to use you to defeat this evil king of Assyria. And of course, Hezekiah should have been satisfied, right?

[16 : 11] With the word of the Lord from his great prophet Isaiah. But in his boldness and maybe a little lack of faith, he asks for a sign.

He says, How will I know that I'm really going to recover from this illness? And God is so merciful. God, in his mercy, he replies to him through Isaiah.

Okay, I'll give you a sign. With the movement of the shadow on the steps of Ahaz, your father. You remember the story, right? The shadow on the steps or the sundial.

We're not sure what exactly it was. But as the sun is traveling throughout the day, God says to him, Would you like the shadow to move forward 10 steps or backward 10 steps?

This is amazing. God is, you know, communicating to him through his prophet. What do you want me to do? I'm going to give you the option. And what would you like? And Hezekiah says, Well, it's an easy thing for the shadow to lengthen 10 steps.

[17 : 16] So let it go back 10 steps. See his boldness. And God was likely thinking, Okay, no problem. You know, I'm the one that spoke a word and the sun and the moon and the stars just flew into existence.

So, you know, I'm the one that made an axe head float. You know, I'm the one that four guys went into a fire and came out without even their hair being singed.

And not even the smell of smoke on their clothes. So I think I can do that for you, Hezekiah. So, the Lord made the shadow go back 10 steps.

You know, so don't believe anybody who tells you they know exactly how that happened. Right? Because there's a lot of speculation. And it's just like humans.

It's just like us to want to come up with a naturalistic explanation. And there's all kinds of theories out there. You know, did the earth rotate backwards as it goes around the sun?

[18 : 24] Or what happened? You know, did God Himself, His light, block out the sun? And He made this, you know. It doesn't really matter. God is the one who created physics.

He's in control of the universe and has always been. He's in control of the natural world. And He's in control of time from the beginning of time to the end of time.

He's the alpha and omega. The beginning and the end. And nothing is impossible with Him. In fact, if God wanted the second hand on your watch right now to go backwards, He could do that.

If He wanted the digital clock in your cell phone to start running backwards, could He not do that? Amen. This is what the chapter on providence in our Westminster Confession says about this.

It says, God in His ordinary providence makes use of means or normal methods, normal actions. Yet He is free to work without and above and against those methods at His pleasure.

[19 : 38] So God can do whatever He wants to do. And we've seen, we have many other stories of God doing just that. He wants you to trust in His sovereign control.

Just as He wanted King Hezekiah to trust Him for another 15 years. He wants you to trust Him that He always does what is right. God wants you to know that He's in complete control of the pendulum swings in your life.

You know, the times, good times. He's working His divine plan in the good times. And in the bad times, when the pendulum swings the other way, He's working His divine plan.

And so the question is, where in your life are you tempted to doubt Him, to doubt, to trust Him, that all things are working for your good and His glory, as the Scripture says?

It's perfectly okay for us to ask Him why He's allowed some circumstance or why He's doing it this way. It's okay to ask Him to intervene as Hezekiah did.

[20 : 44] It's okay to say, I don't understand. Father, I don't understand. What are you doing in this situation? You know, I wish it were different. And because of Christ, He hears our frustration, right?

He hears our prayers, like He heard Hezekiah's prayer. He sees our tears as He saw King Hezekiah's tears. He's given us His methods, right, by which more grace comes to us.

Grace comes to us when we kneel down and humble ourselves at some point in our life and we trust in Christ and we receive Him as our Savior and we become a new creation in Christ.

But there's more. There's more grace, right? He doesn't just give us one big load of grace and that's it. And then, you know, we kind of meet it out as we go along. But there's the means, the methods that He helps us to develop greater trust and confidence in His fatherly care.

He strengthens us and our faith through our worship. Through what we're doing this morning. Through listening to the Word preached to us and explained our times of prayer, personal and corporate prayer through confession of sin and unbelief, through celebrating the Lord's Supper.

- [22 : 06] Another opportunity for more of God's grace to be poured out to us. And He wants us to center our lives around Christ and His people. We said it's so important to have a church, to be part of a family of God for good times and for bad times, right?

When we have good times, we celebrate and others enjoy with us our celebration. He wants us to have our lives right in the center with Christ and the church, His people in the center and everything else revolving around that.

Christ in me is the power to believe in God's sovereign grace. Because I'm united to Christ. And that is the power to keep me in perfect peace.

When things go, you know, go wrong from my perspective, when things seem to be falling apart from my perspective, He wants you to know that He's a good, good Father who has you in the center of His hand.

He wants you to believe that and to be in awe of Him because of His control and because of His care for you. So another point that Pastor Solomon is making in this passage, I think, is this.

- [23 : 29] God has placed limits on our understanding so that the best we can do is to seek our happiness and holiness in Him. You know, after crafting his beautiful poem in the first eight verses, Solomon asked this question that he's asked before.

We've seen it before where he says, What gain has the worker from all his toil? And that question follows because most of the categories of his poem could be classified as part of our labor or the toil that we do in this fallen work, like the work of planting, the work of healing, of breaking down and building up, of mourning, of dancing, of tearing and sewing.

Tearing, the idea there is that, you know, you tear your clothes, rinse your garments because of sorrow, because of sadness. And then at some point you have to sew them back up.

Making war, making peace. You know, in all the decisions we have to make between our first breath and our last, the best thing we can do, Solomon says, is stay humble before God and recognize that He's in control.

From birth to death, God is in control of everything in between. The NIV reads in verse 10, I've seen the burden God has laid on the human race.

- [24 : 59] He's made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end.

I know there's nothing better for people than to be happy and do good while they live. Be happy. There's a song about that, right? Not based from this scripture, probably.

But that's the encouragement for us, right? That we find our complete happiness and holiness.

Fear God. Keep His commandments. I know that there's nothing better for people than to be happy and do good while they live, that each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil.

This is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it. Why?

- [25 : 57] So that people will fear Him. The reason God is saying, I'm in control and I'm controlling all that, He knows what's best for us. He knows the best thing for us is that we would fear Him and keep His commandments.

That we would be in awe of Him. That we would worship Him. God is with us in the joys of life, like when we celebrate the birth of a child or we celebrate a wedding like we had here yesterday.

Anna Wiersma, a beautiful wedding that she was, I'm sure, a beautiful, happy bride. You know, those times, those joyous times are wonderful and God is with us.

We know at those times and we don't slip out of His firm grasp when sorrow and trouble come our way. He's there when the child is born, when the couple is married, and He's there when we take our last breath.

In fact, Scripture says that our death is precious in the sight of God. Psalm 116 says, Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful servants.

[27 : 07] So that's a special time in your life. All those other special things. We don't think about death as a precious time. Right? But from God's perspective, it is a precious time because we know we're going, if we are trusting in Him, immediately our spirit's absent from the body, present with the Lord.

Right? We know we're going to be with Him, rejoicing with Him. And Solomon is reminding us that we won't fully understand the complexities of our lives because there are God-given limitations.

Right? There's a veil over the heart of man so that he can't see all that God sees. As one writer put it, God will not let the creature be His equal. Right?

We can't find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. But even with those limitations to our understanding, we can still find meaning and enjoyment and purpose in life in Him.

Right? He's made everything beautiful in its time. And the word beautiful is also translated appropriate. About half the translations are translated appropriate. The other half beautiful.

[28 : 21] And the idea I think Solomon is making is that God does everything right. And everything right on time. Wisdom tells us that we're to eat and drink and take pleasure in all our toil and in the gifts God has given.

So enjoying one's labor is a gift from God. Have you ever thought about that? That's kind of countercultural. Right? Because we tend to live for Friday.

Right? Friday is coming. For the weekends. When we can get away from work. And that's important too. We need the rhythm of rest and work. But work is a gift from God that He wants us to enjoy our labor.

God is preparing for us His gift of complete holiness and happiness with Him in eternity. You know, if it's true what Pastor John Piper says, that God is the happiest person in all the universe, then we can be certain that heaven is going to be a very happy place.

Right? We'll be the happiest people we have ever been. Right? The smile is going to get tired on your face. You know, the muscles are just going to be really tired.

[29 : 41] Because it'll just be one smile for eternity. You know, at a time when the disciples were troubled in spirit, you remember how Jesus comforted them in John 14, 1-7.

He said, Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I'm going.

And Thomas, the doubting disciple, he says, Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way? Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life.

And no one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. So if you know Jesus, you know the way.

[30 : 52] Right? You know the way to the Father. If you know Jesus, you know the Father. And God wants you to find your comfort and joy in him in this life, even with its trouble.

Whatever he's done or will do endures forever. Solomon says in verse 14, that nothing can be added to what God has done, nor anything taken away. And the purpose, again, for God doing it this way, it's so that we would trust in him, so that we would fear him, so that we'd have a deeper awe of him, a worship of him, a relationship with him, so that we would desire him, desire to know him more and to make him known.

It's so that we would also rejoice in his gifts that he's given to us. Have you been somewhere where there's a beautiful Persian rug that's down a hallway or placed in the middle of a beautifully decorated room?

Maybe you have one in your home. In college, I worked for an expert in Persian rugs, Dr. Hussein Massoud. Dr. Massoud is a well-known and well-respected pediatrician in Chattanooga who died about 10 years ago.

He actually has a wing at T.C. Thompson's Children's Hospital named after him. But he was also fond of Persian rugs. He was from Iran, and he had connections there, and he and his wife had a business in Hickson, Massoud's Oriental Rugs.

[32 : 28] And I learned a little bit about these beautiful and very expensive rugs. These are not the rugs you go to Dalton, you know, to purchase. The value of one of these pieces of art depends on the size of the rug and how long it took to make it by hand.

Depends on what type of materials were used, like wool or cotton or silk or sometimes animal fur from goats or sheep. It depends on the age. If a rug is 50 years old or older, it's worth a lot of money.

If it's in good shape, it depends on the complexity of the patterns from the knot count or the density of the rug. The value depends on who made it and from what village it may have come in Iran or Turkey or India or Pakistan.

Some of these rugs were valued at thousands and thousands of dollars. And occasionally, one of the other guys who worked there and I would deliver a rug to someone's home, usually a home on the mountain.

Imagine if we went to this person's home and placed the rug upside down in the room and left it there, you know, for them to enjoy.

[33 : 40] That would have been pretty frustrating, right? For them to look at the underside of the rug that showed all the knots and the threads. They wouldn't be able to enjoy the beautiful artwork of the patterns and designs that the maker had in mind when he was creating it.

So we can think of our lives right now. This is an illustration that has been given many times before. But think about this, right? In the fallen world, we're kind of looking at the rug from the underside.

It's as though we're under this rug and we look up and we see the knots and we see all the work that's done. And one day, we'll be able to see the beautiful patterns and how they fit together to create this masterpiece.

But for right now, from our perspective, we don't see all the picture that God sees. He sees the full beauty and how everything has its appropriate place.

But for right now, that's over our heads. We're limited in our understanding. But we know by faith that there is this beautiful work that God has done and is doing in his redemptive plan in history.

[35 : 02] So for now, it's by faith we live. It's by faith we believe that he's a good, good father who never lets go of us. He's never caught by surprise, either by the joys or the sorrows that come into our lives.

He's in control. He's always in control and he always does what's right. And it's always right on time. So we seek our joy and our purpose in him, right?

We rest in him that our holiness is a work that he has done for us already through the sacrifice of Christ. So even in our desire to be holy as God is holy, our desire to grow in him, it's a resting in somebody else's holiness, right?

That has been transferred to our account, that has been put into our account as our sin was transferred to him. So are you fully resting in the work of Christ and trusting him by faith for your salvation?

Maybe somebody's here that you're trusting in your own works to make you acceptable in God's sight. Maybe you sense God saying to you even now that he wants a relationship with you through repentance and faith.

[36 : 19] He wants you to finally come to the place of humility where you say to yourself and you understand, I can't do this. I can't make myself good. So if you believe you've never fully committed your life to him in faith, we'd like to pray with you about that today, right?

That's why the church exists, right? To win people, to come to an understanding of faith in a good, good God who's in control. And if you're a follower of Christ, maybe there are areas in your life where you think God has turned away from you or he's turned some part of your life over to chance.

He's kind of let go. Or maybe you're tempted to believe that some hardship has come to you because of something you've done, that you deserve it because God is punishing you.

Maybe you need to repent and believe again that Jesus paid for all your sins, past, present, future, right? With his body and blood. And he's empowered you through his Holy Spirit.

He's given you meaningful work to do in his kingdom. He wants you to share the good news of that kingdom with others who are themselves searching to find purpose and make sense out of their lives in this fallen world.

[37 : 36] So we all love Jimmy Stewart, right? And it's a wonderful life. Our family was able to visit Jimmy Stewart's childhood home in Indiana, Pennsylvania.

A small town in Pennsylvania. And they're really proud of him. They have a nine-foot statue right in the center of town honoring Jimmy Stewart. George Bailey, you know, his character, found comfort and meaning in life through knowing he'd made an impact in others' lives.

And we would just add, as Christians, we would just add that as God's people, we find purpose and fulfillment, really, in identifying with Christ and serving Him above all else.

And because of His life, because of what He has done for us in His death. Not because of what we have done. Not because of what we do. Because of His death and resurrection.

We're empowered to serve others so they too can identify with Him. So they can live their lives in union with Christ. Christ is your life. He is your fulfillment.

[38 : 45] He is your joy and your satisfaction. He is your source of happiness and holiness. He's the song that we sing.

Right? The song that turns our mourning into dancing. Amen? Amen. Let's pray and give Him thanks. Father, we thank You for the time that we've had this morning to look again at Your Word, to come together as a family, a church family, to sing these songs of joy that make us want to clap our hands and dance and raise our hands in praise to You because it's real in our lives because of faith.

By faith we live and we have a relationship with You and we thank You for the good news of the Gospel that reminds us of our need for You every day. We thank You that even though we do grieve, we don't grieve as someone who grieves without any hope.

We have a great hope in our Savior. We have great hope that when someone leaves us, leaves this life, because of their faith in You, we'll see them again and we'll join them before long.

So we just pray that You'll continue to keep us humble. Bless us now as we go to the Lord's table, as we commune with You. Bless our time there as well.

[40 : 16] In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.