



OVERVIEW

Author: King Solomon

Date: c 931 BC (end of Solomon's reign)

Purpose: to reveal the vaporous nature of life without God; to instruct us to use what we have been given in thanksgiving to God; to encourage enjoyment of and contentment with present blessings.

Outline:

I. 1-2 Solomon's Quest for Wisdom

II. 3:1-12:8 Pearls of Wisdom

- A. **3:1-8: Poem: All of Life Is in God's Hands**
- B. **3:9-15: The Poem's Explanation and Implications**

III. 12:9-14 Postscript

(Adapted from James Bollhagen. *Ecclesiastes*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: CPH, 2011)

This Bible Study is brought to you by Issues, Etc. Listen on demand at www.issuesetc.org.

Issues, Etc.



Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio
www.issuesetc.org

Around the Word Bible Study

Trinity, 2015

Contentment Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Opening: Psalm 131

¹O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not | raised too high;*

I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvel- | ous for me.

²**But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its | mother;***
like a weaned child is my soul with- | in me.

³O Israel, hope | in the LORD*
from this time forth and for- | evermore.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

v. 1-8: "For everything there is a season"

This poem affirms that all of life is in God's hands. Every activity "under the sun" has its God-appointed time. See, for example, v. 2a (birth and the length of one's life); see also verse 11: "*He has made everything beautiful in its [appointed] time... he cannot find out what God has done from beginning to end.*"

Notice the pairs of opposites in each verse. This is a common feature of the Hebrew language (merism) where opposites are used to express totality (e.g., v. 2a, "life, death, and everything in between").

Luther: "Therefore you should understand this as follows: All human works and efforts have a certain and definite time of acting, of beginning, and of ending, beyond human control. Thus this is spoken in opposition to free will. It is not up to us to prescribe the time, the manner, or the effect of the things that are to be done; and so it is obvious that here our strivings and efforts are unreliable. Everything comes and goes at the time that God has appointed. He proves this on the basis of examples of human works whose times lie outside the choice of man [e.g., birth and death]... how can someone who is uncertain about the future determine something about the future?... Therefore one should commit to God and make use of present things, refraining from a lust for future things," (AE 15:49-50)

God's Name is never mentioned even once in the book of Esther, yet God quietly remains in control of everything that happens. See Mordecai's words to his cousin Esther in Esther 4:14. What comfort can we take from the fact that God remains in control of history, even when life isn't going according to (our) plan? See

Romans 8:28.

See Psalm 131. How does this psalm address our desire to be in control of our lives? What comfort can we find in the fact that we are not in control? See Psalm 31:15 and Romans 8:32.

While there are appointed times for some activities, Basil the Great reminds us that every time is appropriate for prayer: "It is necessary to bear in mind that for certain other tasks a particular time is allotted, according to the words of Ecclesiastes: "All things have their season." For prayer and psalmody, however, as also, indeed, for some other duties, every hour is suitable, that, while our hands are busy at their tasks, we may praise God sometimes with the tongue (when this is possible, or, rather, when it is conducive to edification); or, if not, with the heart, at least, in psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles, as it is written (Col. 3:16). Thus in the midst of our work we can fulfill the duty of prayer, giving thanks to Him who has granted strength to our hands for performing our tasks and cleverness to our minds for acquiring knowledge, and for having provided the materials, both that which is in the instruments we use and that which forms the matter of the arts in which we may be engaged, praying that the work of our hands may be directed toward its goal, the good pleasure of God," (ACCS IX:217-8).

Is there ever a time when it is inappropriate to speak the Gospel? See Matthew 7:6; Proverbs 9:7-8; 23; Romans 16:17.

For the most significant appointed time in Scripture or human history, see Galatians 4:4; Mark 1:15; Matthew 26:18; and John 17:1.

v. 3: "A time to kill"

In verse 2, the positive actions were stated first; here in verse 3, the order is reversed and the negative action is given first. Here Solomon affirms the legitimate ending of life (e.g., capital punishment, among those who have been authorized to bear the sword [e.g., soldier or police officer]). See Romans 13:3-4.

v. 6: "A time to seek"

What do the parables about the lost sheep, coin, and son in Luke 15 teach about the human condition? What has Jesus done about it, and how does heaven respond?

v. 7: "A time to keep silence and a time to speak"

The fifth through seventh commandments call atten-

tion to the damage we can do to our neighbor with our hands (murder and theft) and sexual organs (adultery). The damage we can do with our tongue (the eighth commandment) is disproportionate to its size.

What do the following texts teach about the tongue? Psalm 141:3; James 1:19 (in light of this text, consider the fact that God has given us two ears but only one mouth); Proverbs 10:19; 13:3; 16:24.

v. 8: "A time to love and a time to hate"

What does Psalm 97:10 say we should hate? What does Deuteronomy 6:5 say we should love?

How do we reconcile Jesus' command to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43) with passages like Psalm 26:5 and Revelation 6:10? See Romans 12:19–21.

While we love and pray for the repentance of our enemies now (see Luke 23:34), we also pray that those who refuse to repent would not be allowed to continue in their wickedness forever and finally be brought to justice (see Philippians 3:18–19).

v. 8: "A time for war and a time for peace"

What does Ephesians 6:10–17 teach about war? Specifically, who is our enemy, and with what weapons do we fight? How do Exodus 14:13–14 and Joshua 24:12 provide us with comfort as we struggle against Satan and the forces of hell? When does this warfare end and peace arrive? See Isaiah 65:17–25.

What is the origin of war and bloodshed? See Revelation 12:7 and Luke 10:18. Notice how sin often manifests itself through violence (Genesis 6:11 and Matthew 15:19).

How does Genesis 3:15 function as a divine declaration of war against Satan? How does God, despite our rebellion (Isaiah 1:2), make peace with us? See Colossians 1:20.

v. 10: "I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with"

Luther: "This is a clarification of everything that has preceded it [3:1–9]. "In all those labors," he says, "I have seen that men cannot achieve anything by themselves unless their appointed time is here," (AE 15:52).

v. 11: "He has put eternity into man's heart"

How does Genesis 1:26 affirm what Solomon teaches here about God putting eternity into our hearts?

Luther points out that to give something into the heart is a Hebrew way of saying or doing something in a sweet or flattering way. That is to say, God gives that which is present so that we might use it with joy and thanksgiving; see Acts 14:17 and 1 Timothy 6:17.

v. 11 man "cannot find out what God has done"

See Romans 11:34. There are many things we have no control over and cannot know. Therefore, Luther counsels us to say, "Lord, it is up to Thee to give future things; meanwhile I shall enjoy the life that is present and that has already been given by Thee," (AE 15:54).

v. 13: "Everyone should eat, drink, and take pleasure in all his toil"

Is this verse suggesting the pursuit of personal pleasure if man's highest good? See Romans 16:18. Recall also how Solomon evaluated of his test of personal pleasure in Ecclesiastes 2:1–11.

Yet, God also wants us to enjoy what He has given. In what should we rejoice, according to Ecclesiastes 3:22; 5:19–20; 10:19; 11:9?

v. 14: "Whatever God does endures forever"

What does Psalm 2:1–6 say about those who would defy God and try to affect the course of history? How did God respond to the people's defiance in the Babel account of Genesis 11:1–9?



Recall a time when your sinful actions have had a negative (or even tragic) outcome. What comfort does the truth that God is the God of history, and all of life is in His hands give us? See Genesis 50:15–20.

What contrast does Isaiah 40:6–8 highlight between the Word of God and the work of man?

Luther: "As I have said, [Solomon] is using antithesis to compare our efforts with the efforts of God. Our efforts are directed toward neglecting what we have, growing bored with it, and looking to what we shall have. God, on the other hand, follows through on what is and preserves in His work, so that what He does may be stable. The efforts of the pious are of this kind also," (AE 15:56).

v. 14: "so that people fear before Him"

To fear God is, according to Luther, to "have God in view, to know that He looks at all our works, and to acknowledge Him as the Author of all things, both good and evil," (AE 15:55).

How, according to St. Paul, should we live our lives in response to the Gospel? See Philippians 2:12–13. Notice that this passage affirms that on the one hand we do indeed work, but that it is God who works in us. Compare also Ephesians 2:8–10, 1 Corinthians 3:6, 12:6, and Hebrews 13:20–21.

Closing: Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise (LSB, 802; st. 3)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR Rev. Eric Andersen (rev.ena40@gmail.com) is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Summit, IL and Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hodgkins, IL. He is also the Associate Editor of Brothers of John the Steadfast, co-host of Steadfast Throwdown, Bible Study Editor for Around the Word, and teaches theology at Wittenberg Academy.