

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Pastor Keith started series on Ecclesiastes gave us a great overview of the book and picture of Solomon and all that he had.... Wisdom, wealth, fame, pleasure, influence, position, etc. He also shared that Solomon's conclusion was that of themselves, all these things were meaningless or vanity.

Vanity – emptiness, futility, vapor, that which vanishes quickly and leaves nothing behind. A great description of vanity is “whatever is left after you break a soap bubble. “ The pursuit and achievement of these things did not bring happiness,

3 week series is the “pursuit of happiness.”
Happiness is something our culture is obsessed with

Books

1. Climb Your Stairway to Heaven: The 9 Habits of Maximum Happiness
2. The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living by Dalai Lama
3. The Pursuit of Happiness: Discovering the Pathway to Fulfillment, Well-Being and Enduring Personal Joy
4. Mary Lou Retton's Gateways to Happiness: 7 Ways to a more Peaceful, More Prosperous, More Satisfying Life
5. Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience
6. 101 Great Ways to Improve Your Life
7. Field Guide to Happiness: Finding Happiness in its Natural Habitat

Songs

Happiness is a Warm Gun

Don't Worry be Happy

Latest Magazines – most titles I wouldn't read in church

Feel Happier Every Day: 58 ideas to Lift Your Spirits

So what does this very familiar passage of scripture have to do with happiness? It gives us seemingly random list of things that there is a particular time to do and then concludes with a statement about eternity.

1. Vs. 1-8.
2. Vs. 9-13
3. Application and a challenge

3:1 Solomon's Statement – everything has its time

Time: There is a diversity of time – nothing is perpetual, we don't do one thing continually or do everything at once. God has created and given us time. The video - we all have the same number of hours, minutes and seconds each day. Time was designed by God.

Season: an appointed occasion.

Activity: people's deliberate, willful acts

Solomon follows this with a poem of 14 opposites, each of which happens in time. The use of a multiple of 7 suggests the idea of completeness and the use of polar opposites is a poetical device called merism – which suggests totality. After birth and death which God alone determines, there are couple of ways to look at this list of acts.

1. “though the meaning of some of these activities is uncertain, Solomon intended to affirm that ALL a person’s activities, both constructive and destructive, and all his responses to people, objects and events happen in their times.”

2. The remainder of the verses are deliberate acts. Man is responsible to discern the right times for the right actions, and when he does the right action according to God’s time the result is “beautiful.” (vs. 11)

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God has prepared works for us to... there is a time for us to do those things.

Vs. 2 Plant – uproot

Vs. 3 kill - heal depending on what commentary you read... this is not the word for murder.....some say it is the result of sickness not war or self defense... other say just the opposite... it is war...In one way or another it is the ending and the saving of human life

Tear down – build up - could have to with cities, walls, etc.

Vs. 4 Display of emotion: Weep – laugh sadness and happiness

Mourn – dance this is stronger - great sorrow - uninhibited joy

Vs. 5 Scatter stones – gather them --- perhaps refers to the gathering or rejecting of building materials or this was an agricultural society stones were a detriment to growing things... sometimes people would put stones in other fields...gathering stones... to make your fields more productive...

Embrace – refrain display of affection present day could be used to show discretion in physical touch; maybe it is sensitivity and discretion in the physical area

Vs. 6 Search – give up as lost.... Not giving up in a defeated sense
Keep – throw away

Vs. 7 Tear – mend

Be silent – speak – how well do we do with the first one

Vs. 8 Love – hate time to hate may refer to next part war & peace.. or perhaps things that we as Christians should hate

The important thing is not to get caught up in the specifics of each of these but to see that he means to incorporate all of life.

It is interesting to me that God, who is not bound by time or space makes a point in scripture to speak about “the right time” not just in this passage but in others.

Esther 4:14 Mordecai to Esther: And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this

Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the unrighteous.

(Side bar here)

Obviously this idea that there is a time and place for everything, is not an excuse to do whatever we want. It does not mean that there is a time to sin. When interpreting scripture it is important to make sure that your interpretation lines up with the rest of scripture.

Vs. 9-13 all hang together.

Vs. 9 What does a worker gain from his toil? The word means to toil or work to the point of exhaustion, and yet experience little or no fulfillment in your work.

(Wiersbe)

Insert a couple of personal experiences.... Balance is the key.

1. Piano story - I coasted – many of us do that as Christians.... End of message..... I will bring this back
2. Marriage Conference: My spouse is a workaholic
Busy with things or activities even spiritual ones

BALANCE

Vs. 10 -13 Solomon answers his own question and comes to 3 conclusions.

1. Man's life is a gift from God....(Vs. 13) Viewing life this way affects our attitude. Our outlook helps to determine outcome. The burden that God places on men is not the work. The burden for us is determining how we approach our work and all of life. Or it is all a burden without the right perspective. Finding satisfaction is a gift from God.

2. Verse 12 is that Man's life can be enjoyable now –

3. 3:11 This may be the key verse of the entire book. Man's life is linked to eternity “eternity in our hearts”.... Created in God's image... different from the rest of creation

(Wiersbe) - “nobody can find peace and satisfaction apart from Him.” As the guy in the video said “we want our lies to count for something”. That desire, that “sense of eternity in our hearts” is what drives all of mankind. We sense that there is something more than just this life. Our work or our life is “toil” - working to the point of exhaustion, and yet experiencing little or no fulfillment in our work if we don't have this eternal perspective. We are driven to achieve fame, fortune, pleasure, influence, etc... because we know that something is missing. Those things will never satisfy because they are temporal. Only the things that are eternal will completely satisfy.

End of. Vs. 11 God accomplishes His purposes in His time, but it will not be until we enter eternity that we will begin to comprehend His total plan” (Wiersbe)

The big question for each of us is:

Where do we look for fulfillment or happiness? Do we try to find it in wealth or fame, or power or pleasure, or influence perhaps even false humility.... and many other ways.... Chasing after the wind. Or do we chase after what God sees as important. We cannot grasp the whole plan God has for our lives but we must take steps to discover and fulfill the duties to be done each day.

So let's get practical

What do we do? What do we pursue? What gives our life meaning so that it isn't meaningless?

John 10:10 Jesus said, I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

1 Cor. 15:58 Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Mark 8:36 For what should it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.

Psalm 90:2 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

How do we not “Waste our lives?”

I would like to suggest that we pursue three things. These are not new... In fact you have been hearing about them in various ways for the past year in our “Journey towards Christ Likeness”

Pursue our relationship with God...The abundant life that Jesus spoke about only comes through a relationship with Him. Once that initial decision is made it is important for that relationship to grow. For us to invest in it. In January we had a 13 week study on Spiritual Disciplines. How many of us have continued to work on at least one of those since the series was over/?

Pursue deep relationships with other people: Small groups, serving together on a ministry team. Building authentic relationships with people who aren't Christians.

9/11 everyone knew where they were.. immediately called someone they loved put things in perspective Invest in Family members, develop deep friendships, demonstrate care for those you hardly know...

Self Care or Invest in yourself.....health, knowledge, relaxation...

There is a time and place for everything (not sin) But there must be balance and a focus on eternity.

Conclusion : I read part of a book this week by John Piper

Piper – Don't Waste Your Life

Jonathan Edwards - resolutions

Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.

Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live

Resolved, that I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die

Frank Laubach Story

Why do I exist? To glorify God or to be happy? Either you glorify God or you pursue happiness.

“If we try to display the excellence of God without joy in it, we will display, a shell of hypocrisy and create scorn or legalism.”

That is the wasted life, A life without passion. The pursuit of happiness is futile. The pursuit God brings happiness and joy.