

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 Continued

Ecclesiastes 3:9 "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?"

In the last lesson, we were discussing the fact that there is a time for everything. It is as if Solomon feels that man has no control over his own destiny. Man must take opportunity, as God provides it.

Earthly pursuits are unprofitable when considered as life's chief good, which was never intended by God.

Ecclesiastes 3:10 "I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it."

Solomon is wise, because God has given him the gift of wisdom. He does not, however, have enough wisdom to determine everything about God. "Travail", in this particular instance, is speaking of the work that man must do under the circumstances God has planned.

Man does not control the circumstances. He does, however, control his own attitude toward those circumstances. Many times, success or failure is because of the attitude, not the circumstances.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He hath made every [thing] beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

"Every thing": Every activity or event for which a culmination point may be fixed.

"Beautiful": This phrase echoes "God saw ... it was good (Gen. 1:31). Even in a cursed universe, activity should not be meaningless. Its futility lies in the fickle satisfaction of man and his failure to trust the wisdom of sovereign God.

Genesis 1:31 "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, [it was] very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."

"Set the world in their heart": God made men for His eternal purpose, and nothing in post fall time can bring them complete satisfaction.

God made everything good and beautiful; it was man's sin that caused it to become ugly and bad. Mankind is so attached to the world that he lives on, that it is in fact, in his heart. We are mortal, and cannot understand the entire plan of God.

Since our lives on this earth are, so temporary, it is even difficult for us to understand eternity. God is the author and the finisher. He is the Beginning and the End.

Ecclesiastes 3:12 "I know that [there is] no good in them, but for [a man] to rejoice, and to do good in his life."

It appears, Solomon has determined that there is no good in man himself. His goodness is of God. He decides that the thing for man to do, is do the very best he can under the circumstances. It does bring joy, when you know you have done good.

These words capture the goal of Solomon's message which he echoes and elaborates on (in 11:9-10 and again in 12:13-14).

Ecclesiastes 3:13 "And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it [is] the gift of God."

I personally believe that part of the joy in life comes from realizing you have worked, and done your best. It is a good feeling to work all day, and then, come home and eat food you have provided for yourself.

Psalms 128:2 "For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy [shalt] thou [be], and [it shall be] well with thee."

1 Timothy 2:2 "For kings, and [for] all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

1 Timothy 6:8 "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."

I believe God gave man a job to do, to help man. In accepting everything as a gift of his Creator, even in a cursed world, man is enabled to see "good" in all his work.

Ecclesiastes 3:14 "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth [it], that [men] should fear before him."

God created all things. Whatever we do, or whatever we are, is because God allowed it. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He never changes. God has set restraints upon the earth. The things that happen are by His permission.

Our lives are at peace, when we realize that God has a plan for our lives, and we submit to that plan. Acknowledging God's enduring and perfect work becomes grounds for reverence, worship and meaning. Apart from God, man's works are pitifully inadequate. The theme, "fear God"(also appears in 5:7; 8:12-13; and 12:13).

Psalms 119:90-91 "Thy faithfulness [is] unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth." "They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all [are] thy servants."

God is absolute. We cannot change Him, or His wishes.

Ecclesiastes 3:15 "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past."

The sad thing is that each generation fails to learn from the past, and seems to have to make the very same mistakes. The sins Adam and Eve committed are still being committed today. Even at the end, the Bible says it will be as it was in the days of Noah.

Luke 17:26-30 "And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all." "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;" "But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed [them] all." "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

Ecclesiastes 3:16 "And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, [that] wickedness [was] there; and the place of righteousness, [that] iniquity [was] there."

The place of judgment, here, is speaking of the place of those in authority. This is saying, that the judgment of these world authorities is wicked. The place of righteousness could be speaking of the church. It is such a shame that even there, iniquity is found.

3:17 I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for [there is] a time there for every purpose and for every work.

Solomon is sure of God's justice in spite of the lack of it to the observer.

The righteous are those in right standing with God. Their judgment will be for rewards. This time of judging, both the righteous and the wicked, is speaking of that time when the sheep are separated from the goats. The goats are sent to the everlasting fire. The righteous are sent to heaven.

Matthew 25:31-34 "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:" "And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth [his] sheep from the goats:" "And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:"

Matthew 25:41 "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:"

The culminating issue of Solomon's "appointed time" discussion is that there is a time for judgment (John 5:28-29). God's judgment is a central theme in Solomon's message for this book. Even where the word "judgment" is absent, the greater issue of divine retribution is often pervasive.

To the casual observer, man and animals share a common destiny. Both return to dust and no one can tell by observation where the spirit of either goes. However, Solomon does affirm (in 12:7), that the spirit of man returns to God for judgment. God does not clearly reveal to man all the events that will occur after him; therefore, man should be happy with the lot assigned to him by God.

3:18 I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.

This does not mean that man is just another animal. It means that man does not control his destiny, any more than if he were a beast. God allows things to take place that man might activate his own will, to do good rather than evil.

The man, who lets his flesh rule his decisions, is very much like an animal. The true difference in man and animal is that man has the power to do good, or evil. Man has a soul, beasts do not.

The ultimate fate of man and beast is to die. Solomon isn't looking at eternal destinies, but rather at what all earthly flesh shares in common.

3:19 For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all [is] vanity.

Man and beast are the same, in the sense that they both have been given the breath of life by God. All things live and die by permission of God. The difference in man is his soul. He is made in the image of God, and has the power to choose right from wrong.

A man who chooses to live for his flesh is living like an animal.

3:20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

Again, it is the flesh that returns to dust. The spirit within that flesh lives on.

John 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

We see from the following Scripture, that the spirit of man does not remain in the grave.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 "So also [is] the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:" "It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:" " It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

Man differs from animals, in the fact that man has a spirit.

Genesis 3:19 is alluded to in the broadest sense, i.e., all of living creation will die and go to the grave. Neither heaven nor hell is considered here.

3:21 Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

The beast remains in the grave, and is not raised.

Man's breath or physical life appears on the surface to be little different than that of an animal. In reality, man's soul differs in that God has made him eternal (verse 11).

3:22 Wherefore I perceive that [there is] nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that [is] his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

We must accept by faith that we will live eternally in heaven. It would take no faith to believe in heaven, if we had already been there and back and saw what it looked like. It is as if Solomon is saying we better enjoy the fruit of our labor here, in case we do not make it to heaven.

Matthew 6:34 "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day [is] the evil thereof."

There is no actual proof that we can see with physical eyes that would cause us to believe in heaven. Faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ is our ticket to heaven.

One again, death becomes the overshadowing reality.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 Continued Questions

1. What is it as if Solomon is saying in verse 9?
2. "Travail", in this particular instance, is speaking of what?
3. Man does not control the circumstances. He does, however, control what?
4. Success or failure is because of the _____, not the _____.
5. How did evil enter the earth, if God made everything good?
6. Why can we not understand the entire plan of God?
7. Solomon had determined there is no good in _____.
8. His goodness is of _____.
9. Where does the author believe part of the joy of life comes from?
10. Having food and raiment let us be _____.
11. Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be _____.

12. Our lives are at peace when we realize what?
13. What is sad about every generation?
14. In the days of Lot, it rained fire and brimstone from _____.
15. What is the place of judgment speaking of?
16. Where is the place of righteousness?
17. Who are the righteous?
18. When do the righteous and wicked stand together for judgment?
19. What happens to His sheep?
20. What happens to the goats?
21. How are man and beast alike?
22. What is the true difference in man and beast?
23. All things live and die by permission ____ _____.
24. The _____ returns to dust.