

The Seasons of Life

preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on September 16, 2018

This morning we are turning to the fourth sermon in our ten part series on the book of Ecclesiastes. Written by Solomon, Ecclesiastes is the reflection of a king of Israel near the end of his days where he ponders the meaning of life. Today's reading is from Ecclesiastes, chapter three, verses one through eight.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: 2 a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; 3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; 7 a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

One of the most bizarre experiences I have ever had in my life occurred during my time in the military when I was doing basic training. On one quiet evening, when I was in the common area of my barracks, sitting on a couch, busy polishing my boots, out of the blue, a fellow officer cadet with a playboy reputation, sat down beside me and started confessing his sins in detail, in a penitent manner. It was really weird.

For the next half hour or so as he recounted the many immoral acts that he had committed as a teen and as a young adult, I kept thinking to myself, "why are you telling me this?" Whatever his reasons, it was clear to me from hearing him speak, that my fellow officer cadet, knew that his party lifestyle was wrong, that he deserved divine judgement, and he felt burdened by it all.

In today's Scripture reading, I believe a similar thing is happening as King Solomon describes the seasons of life. As we have noted throughout this sermon series, Solomon, who was near the end of his life when he wrote Ecclesiastes, had a divided heart. On the one hand, he was still the king who pleased the Lord when he asked for wisdom to rule God's people justly. He was still the king who built the Temple of the Lord, and who was present to see it filled with the glory of God on its dedication day.

On the other hand, he was also the king who allowed foreign religions to enter the land of Israel and take root. He was also the king who had indulged in a hedonistic lifestyle that had caused his heart to drift away from the Lord. While there were many good things that he could point out about his life, there were also many wrong things that he knew were worthy of judgement.

In fact, God had already drawn his attention to these things. In 1 Kings 11, Solomon had already been informed by God that his sins had reached a point where they merited the undoing of his kingdom. When he died, Solomon was told, his kingdom would disintegrate, and all that he had spent a lifetime pursuing would become undone.

With this in mind, let us go over the verses that we read this morning. As we do so, remember that they are sandwiched between two rants about the meaninglessness of work.

In verse one, Solomon writes, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” In this verse, Solomon implicitly acknowledges that there is a God in heaven whose divine order governs all creation. And no one, no matter how rich they are, no matter how powerful they are, and no matter how smart they are can change this reality.

All creation runs by God’s decrees. This is the established order that applies to everyone, including Solomon, and he knows it beyond a shadow of a doubt. This is the frame of reference that allows Solomon to know in the core of his being that he has displeased God with many of his lifestyle choices. This is the frame of reference that allows him to know in the core of his being that the judgement God has pronounced upon him is just. While part of him is bitter about it, another part of him is glad that God’s order rather than his disorder will prevail.

Thus, as Solomon reflects on his life, the part of him that rejoices in God’s rule and reign prevailing in his life writes, there is “a time to be born, and a time to die.” In this verse Solomon confesses that God is the one who ordained his life. His life was not an accident. It was the product of divine will. It came into being at exactly the time that God ordained and it would wind down in exactly the same way. God, not Solomon, was “the master of his fate and the captain of his soul.” Given Solomon’s tendency to wander astray, this is a very good thing.

Continuing in the same line of thinking Solomon notes that there is “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.” In this confession, Solomon recognizes that it was God who planted him on the throne as king of Israel, and it was God who built him up, and it was God who used him to bring healing to the land. For just as God had established his father, David, the eighth son of Jesse to be king, God had planted Solomon on the throne in his father’s place, instead of many of his older brothers. As Solomon describes the seasons of life, he recognizes that throughout his days, God had been planting, building and healing according to His divine plan.

That being said, because of his sins, Solomon knew the time was nearing for God to pluck up what He had planted. For just as God had removed Saul from the throne for his disobedience, Solomon knew that the time had come for him to be plucked up as well. As his life drew to a close, Solomon knew that the time to kill the works of sin that he had planted had come and

that the time for God to heal the land from the sin that he had sown had arrived. In his end times, Solomon knew that the time to break down the idols that he had introduced to Israel was near, and the time to build the things of God was at hand.

Moving to verses four through eight, they too can be viewed in light of Solomon's life and the coming season where the kingdom would be removed from him. In all instances: the time of weeping, mourning, throwing away stones, tearing, hating, and the time for war all nicely describe the coming judgement that would fall upon Solomon and all his works. Conversely, the time to laugh, dance, gather stones, embrace, seek, speak, love and the time for peace reflect God's redemptive plans for the world in response to sin.

Adding to these thoughts, in verse fourteen of chapter three, Solomon writes, "I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him." In verse seventeen he records, "God will bring to judgement both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed." Again, God is in control of the times and seasons. And all are bound by God's divine order: Solomon included.

These are the reflections of Solomon's heart that are consistent with the part of him that rejoiced in God's rule and reign. This part of his being still influenced much of his thoughts and actions into his later years, and allowed him to acknowledge that he had sinned and that God's judgement upon him was good and just.

The problem, however, was that Solomon never did anything about the things in his life that he knew were out of order. Whereas he should have repented by destroying the idols he allowed to enter the land, and removing the false religions, he did not. Whereas Solomon should have repented by paying more attention to leading the nation in the ways of God rather than pursuing a life of grandiosity, his lifestyle remained the same.

For me, this is the reason why so much of Ecclesiastes feels dark and depressing. It is not because life is meaningless. It is not because work is meaningless. It is not because the world has been abandoned to corruption, injustice, and a miserable death, as Solomon laments throughout his writing. No, the dark thoughts he expressed were the product of unrepentant sin eating away at his soul.

For unrepentant sin is like a cancer that gnaws away at us, slowly sucking the life from our body even as we are surrounded by the goodness of God. It is a horrible thing. We must get rid of it. For if we hold onto it, it will destroy us. Like it did Solomon.

This almost seems to be a self evident truth. Which begs the question: why do we hang on to

our sin? Why did Solomon, a great man of God allow his life to be ruined by it?

A couple of things come to mind. First, in this fallen world, life is hard; no matter what station of life we inhabit. Even for the super rich, like Solomon, life is incredibly difficult. As a result, we are eager to embrace quick fix solutions to the burdens of life. And sin offers an easy escape. Furthermore, given that temptation abounds, especially when you are rich, it is no wonder that people get led astray. This is true for believers and unbelievers. Walking down the straight and narrow path is hard!

A second thought. It is much easier to blame other people and other things for the failures in our lives than to take responsibility for our actions. That is why Adam blamed Eve for his sin. Eve then blamed the serpent. Neither of them fully owned their sin. Why? Because it is so much easier to blame someone else. After all, if we can pin our guilt on someone else, we don't need to bear the burden of being responsible for our actions.

In Ecclesiastes, this is what it appears to me that Solomon is doing. Like Adam and Eve, he is blaming God and God's creation for his shortcomings. In the face of the challenges of life, and being overwhelmed by the temptations of life, Solomon is simply giving in to what is easy, expedient, and convenient even though it means holding onto sins that will destroy his body, and taint everything that he touches.

And the truth be told, we are all guilty of doing this to some degree in various areas of our lives. Like Solomon, we too have divided hearts that are loyal to God in some areas, and loyal to ourselves in others.

In response to this reality, the words of Ecclesiastes three reminds us of the good news. God is in control of His good creation and God is working in the world and in our lives in a redemptive manner.

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; 3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.”

As God works in a redemptive manner in our lives, may He lead us so that we die to self, and are born again, may He uproot all sin, and plant seeds of righteous, may He kill our ego and heal our heart, may He break down our pride, and build up our trust, may He cause us to weep over our iniquity and lead us to a place of joyful dancing and laughter as we delight in our salvation through Christ the Lord. May God draw us into His kingdom as we acknowledge the ways of Jesus who has appointed “a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.”