

Get Rhythm
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Intro:

Get Rhythm by Johnny Cash
Little shoeshine boy never gets low down
But he's got the dirtiest job in town
Bendin' low at the peoples' feet
On the windy corner of the dirty street
Well, I asked him while he shined my shoes
How'd he keep from gettin' the blues
He grinned as he raised his little head
Popped a shoeshine rag and then he said
Get rhythm when you get the blues
Hey, get rhythm when you get the blues
It only costs a dime, just a nickel a shoe
Does a million dollars worth of good for you
Get rhythm when you get the blues
Well, I sat down to listen to the shoeshine boy
And I thought I was gonna jump for joy
Slapped on the shoe polish left and right
He took a shoeshine rag and he held it tight
He stopped once to wipe the sweat away
I said you're a mighty little boy to be-a workin' that way
He said I like it with a big wide grin
Kept on a poppin' and he said again
Get rhythm when you get the blues
Hey, get rhythm when you get the blues¹

I think I know what you might be thinking. The title of this series is *Sad Songs Say So Much* and *Get Rhythm* is not a sad song. I realize it is not a sad song. As a matter of fact, it is a catchy little tune that seems on the surface kind of trite but there is something going on in the lyrics of the song with the working, joy and the rhythm that rings true in Ecclesiastes 3:1-15. We are going to see in these 15 verses that in the fabric of human experience God has woven times and seasons for every activity and experience under the sun and it is a sovereign rhythm.

Only two points this morning:

I. Life can be frustrating when we do not understand God's Rhythm for life under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

II. True gain is only found by enjoying God's Rhythm for life under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3:9-15)

I. Life can be frustrating when we do not understand God's Rhythm for life under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

¹ <https://www.lyricsondemand.com/j/johnnycashlyrics/getrhythmlyrics.html>.

The question the Preacher is going to answer in our text this morning is found in v. 9. The question comes at the end of vv. 1-8 to remind us that this is not simply the question for these 8 verses but it is the main question of the whole book. It also sets up vv. 10-15 for the Preacher's answer.

Look in v. 9 of Ecclesiastes 3. We find two the keys words in v. 9: *gain* and *toil*. We must also remember what the word *vanity* means and the phrase *life under the sun*. These keys help us get at the Preacher's intent as he proclaims his wisdom.

The Preacher is taking us through 8 verses of one of the most elegant and beautiful poems ever written. It is often quoted and the inspiration for many songs over the last three thousand years. The meaning of the poem is often missed because people do not read vv. 9-15.

- Verse 1:

- In v. 1, the Preacher introduces to us some new words we need to understand so we can move through the poem and ultimately get at its meaning.
 - Everything: In the Hebrew the word *everything* means *everything*.
 - Season: This Hebrew word is translated *season* does not simply mean a season like winter or fall. It carries the idea of an appointed time but it is not something you calendar. It is not like deciding when baseball season or football season will be. It is a season that only God can appoint.

So . . . yes, it is like spring or winter but our thoughts must continue to drill down into the word and remember that spring will arrive in Iowa when God has appointed for it to arrive. We may have it on the calendar as March 20th but let's face it—it is not spring yet. God has sovereignly appointed when spring will arrive and when it gets here we will know it because the trees will bloom and the farmers will respond to that season by planting.

But it is not just the seasonal weather patterns God has appointed but also the seasons of our lives. What vv. 1-8 are going to depict is the cycle of the seasons of life that we experience. From birth to death and all points in between God has ordained and they come to all of us in His time and according to His plan.

- Time: The word *time* focuses our attention on the rhythm of these seasons of life. The word *time* is repeated 30 times in these 15 verses. The repetition of the word not only states the rhythm of God's appointed seasons of our lives but repetition is the rhythm as well. *Time* is like the sky—it is just there. Both the Christian and the non-Christian wrestle with time. God is using time in these 15 verses to teach us about Himself as our Creator and ourselves as creatures.
- Every matter: This phrase simply keeps with the idea that every event has an appointed time.
- Under heaven: This phrase seems very close to *under the sun*. You might be asking why the phrase *under heaven* instead of *under the sun*. *Under heaven* is signaling to us that God's control is over all things. *Every matter* is His and under His control.

- Introduce vv. 2-8:

- Too often vv. 2-8 are sentimentalized and romanticized to mean that there are appropriate moments for people to act and if people act at the proper moment it can be a beautiful thing. That is not what the poem is talking about.

The poem is about God's activity and not man's. It is about God's comprehensive activity and determination of all of the seasons of man's life. God has established the sovereign rhythm. Sure we make decisions and we think we are in control but all we are doing is responding to God's activity.

- When we look at vv. 2-8 we find 14 pairs of normal experiences of life. These verses are descriptive experiences of life. The Preacher is not being prescriptive. We may act in some of these activities but we are not in control of when these times come upon us.
- Zack Eswine groups these experiences in two categories. There are the experiences that cause *disquiet and delight*. The *disquiet* experiences are the negative or traumatic experiences of life: a time to die, pluck up, kill, break down, weep, mourn, refrain from embracing, lose, cast away, tear, be silent and war. The *delight* experiences are: a time to be born, plant, heal, build up, laugh, dance, gather stones, embrace, seek, keep, sew, speak, love and a time for peace.
- While the list is not exhaustive, it is a beautiful way of portraying the totality of experiences in life. Let's face it; we go through good times and bad times. We go through difficult seasons of life and then are times that are easier and everything seems to fit together in a very positive way. There are accompanying emotions and decision points that come with this rhythm and it takes wisdom to know how to respond.
- Walk through vv. 2-8

Application:

- David Gibson, in his book on Ecclesiastes, *Living Life Backwards*, says the Preacher sucker punches us in v. 9. He takes us through the beautiful poem about the rhythm of life and then asks us, "*What gain are you getting for all of this toil in life?*" What is our gain from all of the energy spent in the times and seasons of our lives?
- What is the answer? The answer is—nothing. We are not the captains of our own ships. All of our labor cannot alter the plan of God. We cannot guarantee the times of birth or times of planting a garden, healing or laughing or dancing or gathering or love or peace. All of this comes from God and He is the One who determines the seasons of our lives.
- Life east of Eden is full of flaws. The curse is in full swing and we need to let the Preacher pastor us well as we move through the rhythm of the seasons of our lives.
- The question is, are you prepared for these seasons of life? How can you be prepared?

II. True gain is only found by enjoying God's Rhythm for life under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3:9-15)

- Verses 9-10: As the Preacher moves from poetry to prose the Preacher also moves to the application of the poem.
- Verse 11:
 - "*He has made everything beautiful in its time.*" The Preacher is taking us back to Eden where God made everything good. While Eden is still under the curse God's purposes are still being carried out. Even east of Eden God's purposes still stand and in time He will fit all things together beautifully. We do not see it but there is a beauty in the rhythm that God has created when we understand He is in control of it.

Illst: Working under our pier and beam house in Hamlin.

- It was dirty, ugly, nails everywhere, snake skins and spider webs but above were beautiful hard wood floors, carpet, lights, warmth and usable living space.
- Life under the sun can be like living life under a pier and beam house.² Sometimes *in living life under the sun*, all we see are the cobwebs, nails sticking out, the curse of the snake skins everywhere but faith in God enables us to see and believe that God will make all things beautiful at the right time.

² All illustrations break down so don't take this illustration too far.

- When we understand that the times and seasons of life are in God's hands all of the sudden life under the sun is NOT like life under the pier and beam house. By faith in God, we move into the house and see the beauty of the rooms, how the nails have made beautiful hardwood floors, we understand how the roof keeps the wind and rain out and the windows let the breeze and light into the house.
- *"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."*
This statement sounds like some kind of philosophical statement, doesn't it? What this means is that God has given us a sense of past and future and yet we know there are times and seasons but we cannot figure out how everything works together. We long for it, we know there is something more in life and yet we cannot grasp it. *Eden is still in our veins and we yearn for an eternal purposed life without end.* But to grasp it is like a vapor and we cannot hold on to it. The problem is we are finite and God is infinite and so we cannot comprehend the big picture of what He is doing. We long to understand but we cannot. So the best thing we can do is vv. 12-13.
- Verses 12-13: *"I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man."*
 - We hear the familiar statement by the Preacher of enjoying God's ordinary gifts. This is not a negative statement. His point is not nihilism. His tongue is not in his cheek saying, *"Well . . . this is all there is. Good luck."* He is saying, *"There is nothing better than God's gifts!"* He is celebrating although; life under the sun is cursed God still reigns and His gifts are still good so enjoy them. It is the language of Eden that says, *"And God said it was good."* Get rhythm, we need to get God's rhythm.
- We finally get to the "Why" question in vv. 14-15: *"I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything was taken from it. God has done it so that people fear before him. ¹⁵ That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away."*

Why has God done things the way He has done them? Why have they been ordered this way?—So people will fear Him. We will never figure out why this event happened or that event happened or this season happened at this time. We long for more. We long for answers because God has put this desire in our hearts but we will never understand the mind of God on all the details. Yet when we finally see how God has had made all things fit together perfectly we will stand in awe, in fear and marvel at our great God. Romans 8:28 echoes these two verses: *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*

Look at v. 15. When you think back over all these painful things that have happened in the course of the rhythm of the seasons of your life, they truly were very painful and some of them even horrible. Verse 15 teaches us that God will bring all of these into account. The phrase *what has been driven away*, literally means *he will seek what has been chased away*. Those horrible, painful moments in life may be like a poisonous vapor to us but they are not to God. God will give justice and meaning to the moments of vapor in our lives. We may not be able to get our hands on justice in this life but God will. Time will submit to God's control.

Application

I want to make my final application over the whole 15 verses. I want to ask the question: How does understanding God's rhythm help us in life under the sun? The Preacher is pastoring us so let's hear what He has said.

1. Understanding God's rhythm requires us to live by faith.

No . . . Solomon does not call for faith in this passage but it requires it nonetheless. Solomon has no way of proving God makes all things beautiful in its time except that, he like Abraham, Moses, and others, believed God would do it. He believed that God was governing all things and would eventually reveal how He has worked all things together for good to those who belong to Him. This requires us to trust God and that the One who is ultimately beautiful makes all things beautiful in their time.

Friend if you are not in the family of God this is your call to come to Christ who is the revelation of the Author of this passage. Jesus lived and fulfilled Ecclesiastes and all of Scripture that qualified Him to go the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins and be raised from the dead on the third day. He is calling you to confess your sins and trust Him as your Lord and Savior today so all the promises of God will be for you otherwise you bear your own sin before God.

2. Understanding God's rhythm prepares us for the seasons of life.

Many of our frustrations arise because we are *simply clueless* to God's rhythm of times and seasons of life. For example, if we are *unprepared* for the bad times then we will feel singled out by God or that He does not love us. On the other hand, when we go through good times we might be prone to think we are special and have a self-righteous attitude. We think we deserve the good things coming our way or that we have somehow earned it.

The Preacher is really saying there is a time for everything under the sun. If we understand God has a rhythm in this world and appointed times for us to experience things then we will go through it trusting Him instead of being frustrated with Him. Have you ever gone through a season of suffering? What about ease and pleasure? Have you ever had seasons where it seems like all of the financial bills came due at once? What about busyness at work? What about sickness and poor health? These are seasons and if we understand these are the normal rhythm of life we can go through them with faith and contentment. If we think they will never happen to us or that we somehow magically graduate and never go through it again because we've been through it once then we will be frustrated with God and life in general.

Our contentment and satisfaction will be strengthened when we realize that much of the time we are striving after and seeking satisfaction instead of living in the times that God has given us. We need to learn to receive the rhythm of gifts of God instead of trying to live in the mirage of some far off vapor we will never get our hands on.

3. Understanding God's rhythm gives us wisdom for relating to and loving our neighbors.

As a church, we need wisdom for seasons of life so we will know what to say and when to say it. Proverbs 15:23 says, "*To make an apt answer is joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is.*" Let me give you some examples:

- If a couple is experiencing marriage problems you don't treat them as you did at the wedding reception. It is not a time to dance and laugh. This would be insensitive. This is a time of silence and embracing. It is a time to lament.
- You do not treat couples who just had a baby the same as those who just had a miscarriage or had a baby die. You don't crack jokes and lighten the moments. You don't make minimize the pain they are going through. You don't say things like, "*Well it could be worse.*"

This is a time to weep and mourn. This is a time to sit in silence with your friends. Simple embracing is good but you do not have to speak. It is a time to love in their season of loss. Your prayer for them at this moment is going to be different than it was when you found out they were expecting.

- Consider work: Work looks and feels different when it is a time to tear down then it does when it is a time to build up. When you leave one job and go to another, things feel different. Emotions are filled with fear and anticipation. You need wisdom for helping someone process this season of life.

- A time of war will change a peacetime understanding of life. The rhythm is different and we relate differently. We have several families who sons are in the military. Some are here and others are deployed. Our prayers for them are different. The wives, kids and parents concerns are real. They hope for safe return of their kids and that their families can endure this time of separation and hardship. We need wisdom for relating to those who are in this season of life.
- I think you get the idea of the wisdom that is needed as we relate to our friends and neighbors as they go through seasons of life. When you sit in your small groups you will see people that are in all different kinds of seasons of life. Some are just getting started in life, in high school or college. Some are single and want to be married and that has not happened yet. They are wondering why they are not married. Is there something wrong with me? Some are paying off school loans and hoping to buy a home. Others are buying homes and having babies. Some want to have babies but have been unable to have kids. Some have kids that are they are launching into the world and they are becoming empty nesters and worry about their kids. Some are aging and their health is failing and others have even had their spouses die. People are in all kinds of different seasons of life and it takes wisdom to relate to them. *"To make an apt answer is joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is."*

4. Understanding God's rhythm gives us wisdom to help others who are struggling with the lack of control of time in their life under the sun.

Time, as the Rollin Stones sang, is not on your side. Time can be a stressor and we are not in control of it. It is like the sky—it is there and we must deal with time.

How we spend the time in our lives is always a question. If you plan lunch with someone, you have to ask, "What time exactly?" We are constantly dealing with times, seasons and schedules. The old soap opera *"Days of our Lives"* used to begin the show by saying, *"Like sands through the hour glass so are the days of our lives."* They nailed it. Time is constantly rubbing up against all of our lives and we sense the lack of control the older we get.

- a. Some people feel that all they have is time and they strive to cherish the feeling. Other people struggle that this is all the time they have.
- b. Other people feel awe or loss and wonder—"Where did the time go?" This is how I feel about my kids. I see pictures of Sam, Alex, and Mac when they were children and I wonder where the time went and there is this ache in my heart that I did not make the most of that time. I want to grab the memory or feeling but it vanishes like a vapor.
- c. Some people may feel frustrated that there aren't enough hours in the day. They have so much to do and time keeps on slipping into the future. So in order to meet their expectations, they become work-a-holics and burn the candle at both ends.
- d. Some people have a sense of urgency when it comes to time. They set their alarms in the mornings and have their schedules on their smart phones in order to not waste time. There is some biblical warrant for this. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians that we are to make the most of our time because the days are evil but it does not mean become a work-a-holic.
- e. Perhaps you are like some people who feel a sense of grateful anticipation when it comes to time. Perhaps there is something you have been waiting for to happen and it has finally come. Up until that point perhaps there was restless waiting—"When will my time come?" Joe: you and Amy probably felt this way as you were seeking where God would have you pastor.

- f. Some people will have painful regret when it comes to time. They look back over their lives and they see all the time they wasted. I remember hitting the age between 35-40 and looking back and thinking my life is half over and I am not where I wanted to be in life. Now the older I get I am simply hoping to make the finish line in one piece.
- g. Perhaps you are looking back on a wonderful memory and what you do is remember a wonderful time you had. Perhaps it was a vacation or trip to a special place or just a very enjoyable evening or meal.³
- h. Time is so much a part of our lives. Whether you are a Christian or not, we all live in the context of time and the seasons of life that come our way. In v. 1, the Preacher is teaching us that there is an appointed time and season for everything under heaven. The Preacher is trying to help us, pastor us, and mentor us as the sands slip through the hourglass in the days of our lives. We are living life under the sun but Eden is running through our veins because eternity is in our hearts. We long for more.
- i. Can you relate? We all understand time but most do not understand it from God's perspective. Your lost neighbor understands time and you can connect with him or her as a human who lives under the "sky" of time. Your neighbor will keep trying to grasp time but he cannot because it is a vapor? Time is something we all have in common. How can you help him understand how God has designed the time and seasons to work? Can you help him get God's rhythm by showing him Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 and then pointing to Jesus?
- j. Life under the sun is challenging and it will help us to understand to get God's rhythm. If we will get God's rhythm we will find joy in our toil. We will find a satisfaction and contentment that comes from trusting God.

Conclusion

Jesus understands the times and seasons for He, Himself stepped out of Heaven and came to earth in what the Bible calls, "*the fullness of time*." Scripture tells us He was born of a woman and under the law. He was born in a time of war, for Rome occupied and ruled Israel. The people were looking for a king who would lead the people into battle but Jesus was not that kind of King.

Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb and raised him from the dead. He came to seek and save the lost by losing His life for our sake. Jesus came into our silent planet and spoke truth to us in His gospel and when it was time for Him to die He stood silent as a lamb before the slaughterer. Jesus knew what it was like to be abandoned. He understood when His time came to die and so He loved us to death because He hated the curse we were under. He made war with our enemy and now has made peace between us and God. If you will trust Him today He will cast away your sin from your life.

³ Zack Eswine, *Recovering Eden*, 124-126.