

Teach Us, *Qohelet* (Part 5)

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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The writer of Ecclesiastes is *Qohelet*, our gatherer and teacher, who most likely is Solomon. *Qohelet* was given wisdom, power, and wealth by God. He had no limitations in what he could pursue or attain. He pursued worldly wisdom, but came to the conclusion that the world is too crooked to be straightened, and that the things that were lacking could not be counted. Then he pursued pleasure, but found that everything under the sun could not satisfy, and that every moment he was still relentlessly approaching death. Based on these conclusions it seems that the world is terrible.

But in chapter 3, perhaps one of the most famous passages in Ecclesiastes, *Qohelet* tells us that the world isn't all bad. It's more nuanced than that. The world is frustrating not because it's all bad, but because it is a mix of good and bad. It's frustrating because no matter how many good things there are, they don't last; and the bad things are also innumerable. As easily as we can find good things for which we should thank God, we can also find as many bad things in this world. When *Qohelet* says there is a time for everything, he doesn't mean there is a time to do everything, but rather that there are times when different things happen. It's not about how we should behave. He's not telling us there are times when we should kill and other times we should heal, but rather that killing occurs sometimes, and healing occurs other times.

We know from experiencing life that *Qohelet's* words are true. There are times we rejoice, like at the birth of a child. And there are times we mourn, like when someone we love dies (v. 2). Although we believe in eternal life through Jesus, death is still something to lament over. We celebrate Jesus' victory over death, but we still recognize death is not a good thing, that's why we want it to be defeated. The anniversary of my mother's death and both my cousin's and mother's birthday fall in June. So I am reminded that in life there are times of birth and of death. Likewise there are times to plant and times to uproot. We plant with the hope of a new crop, but sometimes we must uproot when our crops wither and die. There are times when people are killed, and times when people are healed. There are times to tear down and times to build up (v. 3). I think of the time when our old B-Building was torn down. Though we wanted to renovate it, it was still a little sad seeing the demolition. There are times of weeping and of laughter, mourning and of dancing (v. 4). There are times of scattering stones (as one would do

to an enemy's field to prevent them from planting on it), and times of gathering stones (in order to plant). There are times to embrace and times to refrain (v. 5). I think of how I teach my sons to give brothers and sisters a hug at church, but to stay away from strangers in the supermarket. Verse 6 says there are times of searching, (like when my wife was looking for her engagement ring which ended up being in her pocket), and times of giving up. Sometimes we keep, and sometimes we throw away that which is no longer useful, which our family likes to do. There are times of tearing garments (such as during mourning) and times to mend them. There are times we are silent, such as when we are justly reprimanded, and times to speak (v. 7). There are times when we love, when our relationships are healthy, and times when broken relationships lead to hatred. There are times of war and times of peace in this world (v. 8). The world is full of these inconsistencies and contrasts, full of ups and downs. Nothing good lasts forever. So from vv. 9-11 *Qohelet* explains that this inconsistency is what makes the world frustrating. Verse 11 doesn't mean everything is beautiful, but rather that everything has its appropriate time. It doesn't last, but yet God puts eternity in our hearts. We long for that which will last, something that is consistently good. But that's not the way the world is. All good things come to an end. We all know it and accept it, but none of us like it. This, perhaps, is the greatest inconsistency of all – that we desire “eternity,” where things are steady and consistent, but are left for a time in this kind of chaotic world.

Therefore in v. 12 *Qohelet* tells us that we are left just to find joy in simple things. This is not indulgence or excesses, but rather to enjoy the simple gifts God gives us rather than become so upset by this inconsistent life. Often we are prevented from enjoying God's provision because we think we should have more. People use social media to make their lives seem awesome, but it's a lie. Nobody's life is that perfect. Don't be fooled, and don't be the one who fools others. We shouldn't expect life to be one big vacation filled with interesting experiences. The only thing we can count on is that things will change; just ask anyone who has been through parenthood. Believe in what *Qohelet* says, not what Facebook says. *Qohelet* knew how the world is and why we are frustrated. He was a smart man, so let's listen to him.