Christopher Rich – October 3, 2021

**VAPOR *| Finding Meaning Under the Sun | Ecclesiastes***

**PART V *|Time to Turn | Ecclesiastes 3:1-15***

**Introduction | What the Heck is Going On?**

Good morning! Good morning! Welcome to Mercy Fellowship where we are **Saved by Jesus Work,** **Changed by Jesus’ Grace**, and ***Living on Jesus’s Mission.*** This week we are continuing a sermon series walking though the book of Ecclesiastes called ***VAPOR: Finding Meaning Under the Sun.*** In life under the sun all seems to be vanity as we struggle to find our purpose and meaning apart from God. ***The message of this sermon of Ecclesiastes isn’t all of life is meaningless and nothing matters; it’s because of God as the source of all meaning, and goodness, as we live the life we are given EVERYTHING matters***. That includes the time, circumstances and seasons we find ourselves it. History, current events, and the coming future all matter to God. Which helps us ask and address an every pressing question that seems to grow each week. ***“What the heck is going on?”***

*Previously* we’ve seen a generation comes and goes, the sun rises and sets, wind blows in circuits. These were all signs of our finiteness and a source of pessimism for our lives under the sun because it meant this is all there is. Chasing meaning for the preacher (Solomon) meant looking down different paths of purpose. First looking at wisdom, what if I can just see the world properly, that led to great knowledge of the pain and brokenness in the world. Ok, what if I just live my life focused on my own self-interest and self-indulgence? As comprehensively as he was able to pursue pleasure and accomplishment it still left him empty. After looking at wisdom again over foolishness he found short term gain but the unjustness of death for all (the wise and foolish) lead him to hate and loth work that would quickly be handed over to another generation and eventually would be forgotten for all. While there is frustration, last week ended with hope, the curtains in the dark basement laboratory have been pulled back and now things can be seen clearly, with illumination.

**Verse 1 | A Time for Everything**

Ecclesiastes 3:1| For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

***There is a God who is Intentional*** - *What is your philosophy for looking at the world? Karma? Fate? When different things happen to you call out to “The Universe”?* Is there a force at work you cannot see but is both random and cold? *Is your existence and life experiences an accident?* When the world philosophies try to explain the apparent randomness and chaos of the human existence and natural phenomenon they do so apart from a concept of a purposeful intentional designer. This can’t help but lead to a fatalistic view of the world. When something good happens it’s just “winning life’s lottery” and we’re always one chance accident or incident away from total ruin or disaster. *Random is angst producing and fear inducing.* Life under the sun (apart from God) is meaningless. Yet we look at world events and life events and begin to recognize patterns, cycles, and seasons and while not always clear we begin to see there is less chaos and more intentionality than we’d like to admit. Verse one uses the phrase “*Under Heaven”* is not necessarily the same thing under the sun. Under the Sun is the world divorced from God. Here Under Heaven is the world ordained, watched over, planned and executed, by God. God is not just the Creator of the Universe (heaven and earth) but is also the master of all time. ***Intentionality is not good unless the intentions are good****.* Evil can have a plan for destruction, division, and death. God is not just intentional, but His intentions are unquestionably “good”. So if we look at verses 2-8 apart from God, or ruled by a God who is not loving; the predestination of seasons is more like a tyrannical prison then an artful masterpiece of a tapestry. So we won’t look at these patterns and season pessimistically believing the worse about God, we will see them an opportunity for Hope in the enduring character of God, and His power to bring life from death and hope from despair.

**Verse 2-8 | Poem Time**

Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 | **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 cast 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 cast 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.

***On Seasons -*** *This famous poem shows us the comprehensive nature of the times, seasons, and cycles of life.* God has set the times of everything forever for the purpose of us to stand in awe of him. Before you think this means God is an ego maniac remember that when you stand in awe of something you recognize you are experiencing something great. This is why we say for His glory and our joy. The two are linked. Because of the duality and familiarity of seasons we are either underwhelmed with life, and ultimately God. Or we are overwhelmed with the changing seasons and challenging circumstances apart from God being overall.

*The beginning of verse 2 is the umbrella that everything else is under.* ***Birth and Death.*** These are the biggest moments of our lives. We know we won’t be late on the day of birth or on the day of our death. These days are fixed and while we can be active with a lot of different things we have no real control over these days. Psalm 139 is clear each of our days are numbered by God and the preacher knows it. The poem is comprehensively realistic about the life we experience drawing out the outer limits of what we will do, feel, and see with-in the range of the day of our birth and our death. *Within life we will undoubtedly participate in both creative and destructive endeavors.* Planting, healing, building AND uprooting, killing, breaking down. But while we have both participation and responsibility for these types of activities we are not God we are not sufficient for all these activities, verse 10 tells us God has given us this business and we saw last week we were created for purposeful work and fruitful activity. Within our experiences and endeavors, since some are productive and other are destructive will also have various times and seasons of wide ranging emotions both privately (weep/laugh) and publically (mourn/dance). Our relationships also have cycles, patterns and seasons. People you were friends with you are no longer. Those you have been estranged from you may have restoration with. We go through seasons of gathering, building a business, a home, filling it with furniture, filling it with children. And there will be a season of sending off, of clearing out, and handing over. There are times where you are working on restoration of something broken and there are times of growing separation. Times to speak up and speak out and times to be silent. We individually, corporately and even nationally experience seasons. *Which season are you in now?* That is a challenging question for many reasons:

***Seasons are not always self -evident –******Seasons are not always perfectly delineated and segmented.*** *Sometimes it’s rainy in summer sometimes it’s balmy in winter. Different seasons can be happening at the same time for different people. Which of these stand out? That might give you an indication of how you see or experience the world. Death and mourning or laughing and dancing?* No one choose a time to weep and mourn. In fact some of the greatest times of celebration, laughter, and joy are time we did not plan or even foresee. Take a moment to reflect on your life, were you are today and ask yourself is this how you imagined your life looking like? For better or worse? Think of your responsibilities and duties. Are they what you thought would drive you? So if we are placing our purpose and meaning and enjoyment of life only in the seasons were we are experiencing good we will be disappointed. ***Different seasons are necessary.*** You need plating to have harvest. If you are doing any renovation or building you’re going to have ground breaking or demo day. When there is evil, war is necessary for there to be real peace. We can hate sin because it robs life.

***Seasons are meant to be experienced and embraced not just endured or avoided.*** *We don’t determine seasons, we navigate them.* We all talk about “seasons” all the time in the church. I am in a season of trail. Or I can really sense that I about to enter a season of joy! Hey that’s great but….. ***You don’t get to decide when you’re going to leave one season and enter another.*** You cannot simply say I am not going to be in winter any more. Winter lasts as long as it does. What you can do is attempt to see what God is doing in your life and try to more accurately assess what type of season you’re in. It is important properly identify what seasons of life you’re in, because there is a dissonance with seasons are out of-wack or mixed up. If it’s spring or summer, go ahead and take your winter coat off. If it’s fall or deep winter stop pretending it’s sunny and warm out. But when you find yourself in a season or period of time don’t you like or understand, pray to be moved from it, but also make sure you’re seeking how God is trying to grow and shape you in that season. Rather than hoping in the next season, remember God is with you in the time and season you are in now. So what season are we all in now? I don’t know, but it *seems* like a time of breaking down and tearing in our culture and country, we’ll see. Here it says there is also a time of building up and mending. ***We can hope.***

**Verse 9-13 | God’s Business**

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13| **9**What gain has the worker from his toil? **10**I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. **11**He has made everything beautiful in its time. 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. **12**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.

***More than hope, we rest in the promises of God who is working***. We are given life as a gift, we are given tasks, treasures, and because of sin toil. We can and do experience enjoyment in this life, but we are not meant to be entirely self-sufficient. The question from chapter 1 about what gain and purpose is there in our toil is beginning to get an answer. *Where is our great hope in all these seasons and cycles?* Enter Verse 11!! ***He has made everything beautiful in its time!*** This is an incredible statement to make when we look at the halves of the cycles/season that are negative. ***If the season isn’t beautiful, that means it’s time has not yet come.*** We can have, and are given hope, in the cycles of life that mourning, tearing down, war and weeping, death and loss are not destinations. We have to be aware of the bigger story of our lives and God’s story. We are far too quick when thing are terrible to believe this must be the ***new normal.*** If the new normal sucks than I don’t want it to be normal. I want better. I am encouraged when something looks terrible it means it’s not done yet. Romans 8:28 |And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ***God | Works | All Things | For Good | Loved & Called***

***Don’t confuse Our Moment with His Story -*** Don’t look at one snap shot and believe it’s the whole story. We’ll see in the next section part of that “making beautiful” is His perfect righteous judgement. But we can have more peace even in these seasons when we know there is a Big God over them and in them. We want control over that but we can’t. so we exhaust ourselves trying to turn winter into summer artificially. We are too focused on ourselves we forget to see what God is doing in the world and our lives. The Preacher is saying after his poem about time is this section is NOT primarily about the seasons we experience, but about the God who is the master over all seasons and times. ***He has put eternity into our hearts.*** What that means is we are never going to find ultimate satisfaction in anything temporary. So while there is enjoyment in these seasons they will change and we will be back to places of longing. Are you dissatisfied in your life at all? If so it may be a gift from God for you to seek and fine your lasting satisfaction in Him.

*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you*. – Augustine

***Comfort Now-*** We are made to desire more then what is directly in front of us. We are not capable of seeing the entire fullness of God’s plan and design. We need to understand we don’t understand as much as we think we do. We see and know only a fraction of the world’s movements and design. If the history of the world, or humanity, was a movie we don’t know how long it is, and our experience of it is barely the length of one frame of one scene, yet we believe we’re able to accurately judge what the entire film is about and how it ends. We have our faces pressed up against a painting we’re told is great. We wonder why because we only see the paint splotch in front of our noses. We want to understand more we have been told God makes Beautiful in it time through the Gospel. ***Creation – Fall – Redemption – Restoration in Jesus.***

***Enjoy Gifts and Work today while anticipating Eternity tomorrow.*** God is a giver, He gives us business to attend to, He gives us a sense of eternity (past and future), and he gives us the ability to have enjoyment in our toil! This is all good news! I*n light of this big God how are we to live out our days and navigate these seasons*? We’re called to “do good” and have joy TODAY. “*As long as we* *live*” reminds us there is a time this will all end. Is our hope only in the future? No! There is purpose and life now. Where chapter two talks about eating in drinking paired with toil and vexation now it’s only married to Joy! *What’s the difference?* ***The sovereignty of God!!*** Man center pessimism gives way to God glorifying faithful optimism. What has been an unhappy business is now seen as God’s business! ***Is time a prison yard or a playground?*** That depends on your relationship with God Is He your judge and jailer or your adoptive father? God is good all of the time.

**Verse 14-15 | God’s Character – Time for Jesus**

Ecclesiastes 3:14-15 | **14**I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything 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.

***God answers our eternal longing with enduring satisfaction, while we keep looking to temporary solutions.*** Questions from the beginning of Ecc began to get answers. Where can security and refuge be found in this world with it’s unending cycles? I can be found in God and His character. ***“I know, or perceive”*** is restingin God’s character and a resolution in our call. When God does something it is unlike anything we are able to accomplish causing us to be in awe of Him: ***Permanent*** – Whatever God does is FOREVER!!! That applies to both judgment and mercy, it applies to beauty and meaning. It endures!!! ***Complete-*** Nothing can be added to it, because nothing needs to be added to it!! Our work never adds to God’s work. All we accomplish is hidden with-in the realm of what He accomplishes through us and for us. ***Secure-*** No one can come and take what God has granted or done, none of it will be eroded away. You put these three together and you have great cause to stand (or fall down) in awe of who God is and how amazing his work is. God is in control and nothing we can do will overwhelm that! God in control should lead us to rest!! What is, is what will be, is not fatalistic when God is in the picture. ***He pursues us in our separation.*** Romans 5:6 For while we were still weak, ***at the right time*** Christ died for the ungodly. ***Jesus came, Jesus died Jesus Lives Jesus Saves. It is Time for Jesus!*** Mark 1:15 | “***The time is fulfilled***, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” The Byrds song version of Ecc 3 “Turn Turn Turn” is call to repent, the song ends with the only other original lyrics *“I swear it’s not to late.”* There is Gospel Truth to those words. We are all between the day of birth and death so it is not *too late* for repentance and salvation, but there is a day coming where it will be. We all face death and need life today. ***We need to anchor ourselves to something that does not change to keep from being overwhelmed by the seasons, and circumstances of our life.*** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Heb 13:8) *When our kingdoms are shaken God is unshakeable* Heb 12:28 | Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe. ***This is time to turn from sin, rest in God, live with gratitude and awe as we Trust Jesus.***