

“The Right Time”
Ecclesiastes 3:1-13
January 7, 2006, 8:56 Rejoice!

- I. Getting started
 - a. I have a huge problem getting started sometimes with a challenge.
 - i. Right now, I have a huge collection of old 8mm movies in a box that are of my childhood. The idea behind them is that I need to convert them to DVDs. This won't be a real easy task. If the 8 mm projector gets bumped, it will mess things up. I have to remember how to set up a projector too. If I could put a label on this project, I might call it “too hard” but I do plan on doing it.
 - ii. Amy could probably attest to about a dozen things like that around the house. I have video games that I have only played once or twice because I couldn't get into them – thankfully, they were all very cheap. I have my dad's old remote control airplane he build from scratch that I want to hang up in my study, but I haven't gotten around to doing it. I have books I wanted to read but haven't even started.
 - iii. Usually, at this time of the year, we are all making resolutions about what we need to do in the coming year to make our lives better, but for me, I just keep looking back at those things I meant to do last year but didn't even start.
 - iv. But ... I am very good at rationalizing my laziness – or at least my inability to get everything done. I just decide that it isn't time for me start on that yet. It just wasn't the right time.
- II. What is the right time
 - a. Now, let me say that there are some things that you really want to wait on for the “right time”. Getting married and having children are things you should wait on. Changing jobs is something that you need to wait on.
 - b. We definitely live in a society that doesn't like waiting at all. People see a new car and decide to get it right away – even if they can't afford it. Growing up, people use to call it “keeping up with the Joneses” and even though no one really uses that phrase anymore, it is a challenge for us all. We all want to be the envy of our neighbors. We all want things now. But perhaps it just isn't the right time for that.
 - c. On the other hand, there are all sorts of things that there is always time for – or at least there should be. It is always the right time to spend time with your family, spend a moment in prayer or looking up something in scripture, straighten up the area that you are working in, washing your hands, taking your medicine, etc. These are things that are essential to living. They aren't just things that we do because it would be nice. These are the “wants” but the “needs”.
 - d. Yet, it seems in our lives, it is so hard to determine the difference. The wants are always competing with the needs for our time and finances and those things that simply consume us.
- III. Ecclesiastes

- a. So, the challenge is to know what to do and when. My response to the 8mm project seems more and more fitting the more I look at scripture.
 - b. Ecclesiastes seems to talk about it, but it doesn't give any really solid answers. It begins with simply that there is a season for everything – an opportune time to do things. And then we hear this familiar list that there is a right time to do this and a right time to do the opposite. For most of those things, we like one far more than the other. You read it and read it, and you don't feel like you know much more after you finish it beyond thinking "Wasn't there a cool song in the 60s by the Byrds like that?"
 - c. To me, the challenge of the book is summed up in the last verses of this passage – just passed the "right times". It says:

"But in the end, does it really matter what anyone does? I've had a good look at what God has given us to do – busywork mostly. True, God made everything in itself and its time – but he left us in the dark, so we can never know what God is up to, whether he is coming or going. I've decided that there is nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That's it – eat, drink, and make the most of your job. It's God's gift."
 - d. Now, if that was my message today, "Eat, drink and be merry," then I imagine a group of people might be meeting to talk about the associate pastor today. But that is the problem of life – does it really matter what we do? Ecclesiastes comes up with a very cynical answer – everything is busy work, and so, no, it doesn't matter.
 - e. And in our dark moments, we might agree with that statement. It seems like no matter what we do, nothing gets better. You could diet every day and never lose a pound. You could work your fingers to the bone at work and never get noticed – and yet the person who is lazy gets all the breaks. You could easily look at these words and say, "This guy makes a lot of sense."
 - f. But I would say, "Read on." You see, the Book of Ecclesiastes is sort of an experiment by the author – some say it is Solomon but the guy calls himself "Quoholeth" or "The Inquisitor". Whoever it was, he is trying to find the meaning of life. And in the last words of Ecclesiastes, he kind of stumbles upon it. "Fear God and do what he tells you. And that's it. Eventually God will bring everything we do into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it is good or evil." And with those words, the book ends.
- IV. Now, as cynical or harsh as these words are, I think Quoholeth was onto something here.
- a. If we believe God is God – the all-knowing, all powerful, all seeing God – then we have no choice to fear Him. We might get frustrated with Him, we might complain, but in the end we have to remember where we stand. He is God. He brought us in to this world, and He can take us out – to quote Bill Cosby. That doesn't mean that God doesn't love us. It just means that His love is His choice. He could have been like a god on Mount Olympus. He could have been uncaring and overbearing. Instead, our God loves – even when we might not want Him to.
 - b. If you believe that God is God, and that God is loving, then you want to do what He want you to do. That is easy. It took Quoholeth 12 chapters to get there, but I think we can all figure that one out. If God was evil, He might tell you to do

something stupid, but that isn't God's way. God is good and loving. That is proven by both the New and Old Testaments.

- c. Now if you believe that, you don't need to consult with Dr. Phil or Miss Cleo's hotline to get some advice on what to do. You know to trust in the one who doesn't "think" that this is the best course for you, but actually knows.
- d. Now here is the hard part: how do we know what God wants us to do? Well, first you must ask Him. I don't mean casually saying to God, "Hey God, what do you want me to do?" Prayer isn't a mathematical equation or magical incantation but it is a conversation with our Lord. Sometimes, in the process of taking our problems to Him, we find the solution. We just realize what we are suppose to do. Other times, we finish and don't feel any better about things. In that case, I would suggest that after you pray, to sit in silence and ALLOW God to respond.
- e. And even after that sometimes, we don't know what to do. And I would tell you to persevere but hold off on making a rash decision until you find some peace. Sometimes it seems like we never hear anything, and you have to decide right away and you don't know what to do and so finally you just make a decision. My hope is that the time in prayer will lead you to make the right decision in that moment.
- f. The challenge, though, for all of us is not usually knowing what is the right thing to do in the right time, but actually doing it. We all know what God desires of us, we know when he places something on our hearts, but sometimes we just don't want to do it. We make excuses to the one who knows everything – which is pretty silly – and then go on like that is good enough. But it really isn't. And God can be worse than a nagging co-worker when He desires us to do something, or worse, when we decide to do the opposite of what He has shown us. Our conscience gets the best of us. That isn't to say guilt – God doesn't guilt us into things, but we can make it guilt if we decide to ignore God time and time again and do nothing to correct our lives.

V. Change is hard

- a. Now, all this sounds easy, but it isn't really. It is hard to change the way we do things. We like making our own desires a reality. We like making today the right time for the things we want and making "another day" the right time for things that we don't like. But when we claim that we trust in God, that means we work in His time. And that is a challenge.
- b. Sometimes we need accountability to make God's will happen. It is good to share with someone else what God is doing in your life so that it won't simply be you bragging, "I think God wants me to work in the soup kitchen" because the inevitable response is going to be, "When are you going to start?" And later that person will ask you, "How is the soup kitchen going?"
- c. We need that in our lives. It isn't nagging. It is accountability. It is a reminder of what we felt was important at one moment needs to be accomplished.
- d. And I think that is the key to all of this: what is really important in the eyes of God? What is it that He wants us to be doing? If we do that in this coming year, it will be a great year. If we do our own thing, we may just feel like we are back to our busywork. Which work do you want to do in 2007? What is God calling you to do?