

CHASING THE WIND – “TESTING TIME”

If you've been with us for any of this series, by now you should know that God had given Solomon **“wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.”** (1st Kings 4:7) You will also hopefully recall that even though Solomon was blessed with incredible wealth and fame, he grew disenchanted with life – even to the point of despair and depression. As he perceived life wearing blinders that prevented him from seeing anything other than what was **“under the sun”** he decided that the wisdom of God was lacking, and started **“chasing”** after answers elsewhere.

One of the things that Solomon found particularly frustrating in his investigation was the way time was slipping away. I'd be surprised if you haven't had similar feelings. Think about the things we say: *“There's not enough hours in the day”* or *“days in the week.”* / *“If only I had more time.”* / *“I'd like to help, but I just don't have the time.”* Ever tried to *“buy”* more time or *“kick the can down the road”*? Though I often read **Ecclesiastes 3:1-14** at eulogy or memorial services, it is more than appropriate for this discussion.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil - this is the gift of God. 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.

Do you hear what he is saying? There is a time or a season for everything in life, but there wasn't enough time for everything he wanted to do. The seasons were too short, and by man's standards even a long life isn't nearly long enough. Throughout his discourse in Ecclesiastes, he laments the brevity of life over and over again. Here are some excerpts...

(Ecclesiastes 3:19-20) Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

(Ecclesiastes 6:3-6) A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man - even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

(Ecclesiastes 8:8) No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death. This too is meaningless. (8:10)

(Ecclesiastes 9:4-6) Anyone who's among the living has hope, but even a live dog is better off than a dead lion. For the living know that they'll die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, hate, and jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

You get the idea. He was so pre-occupied with the passing of time, that he wasted time on foolish pursuits. And he was so consumed with the fear of death that he lost an appreciation for life. It appears that he grew lethargic in his sober moments, but almost cavalier at other times. He was perhaps the founder of the motto *"Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die."* That happens to more of us than you might think.

Though it is true that our life on earth is short, letting it get us down or spending all of our time partying down are extremes to avoid. In fact, the New Testament encourages us to embrace the truth of the brevity of life and make the most of it. **James 4:14** says, **"What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."** But then it goes on to tell us to make plans accordingly, always submitting our daily agenda to the will of God.

The apostle Paul urges us to **"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, (redeeming or making the most of the time) because the days are evil."** (**Ephesians 5:15-16**) Did you ever stop to think that we will answer to God about how we spend our time?

I don't know how much time I have left. None of us do. I may live to be a ripe old age, but even if I do, there are more years behind me than there are in front of me. How long will I be able to continue doing what I do? How many more years can I expect to have the privilege of this pulpit? I pray I have the wisdom to know when it's time to retire. With advanced age, comes increasing limitations for most, if not all people – and I do not expect that I will be an exception. We'll talk more about that next week.

It was Moses who wrote these words in Psalm 90: ¹⁰ **The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.** ¹² **Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.** How ever many days you have, make them count.

My brother-in-law David Oberst battled cancer for several years. After surgery and a series of grueling chemo treatments, he was blessed with a few years of remission. We celebrated that time together, praising God for the extension, but the dreaded disease later returned with a vengeance and though Dave fought valiantly, this time it only worsened. Tim McGraw had a song in the country charts that became Dave's mantra. **"Live like you're dying."** He went into his office when he could hardly hold his head up, spending his breaks curled up on the floor in pain. He was often nauseous and would get violently sick. Yet, he was at his kids ball games in the freezing rain or sitting on hard bleachers at recitals, cheering them on in spite of how he felt. He was at church when others with much less severe maladies stayed home. He *"lived"* and *"loved"* with every ounce of strength until his last minute on this side of glory was spent. Dave was one among many who showed me what it means to number our days - and to make our days count.

Of course **the supreme example of this principle is Jesus**. He realized very early on that His time here was limited and He made the most of every minute of every hour that He had. In John 2:4 He told His mother that **"His time had not come yet"** to begin His public ministry.

Later, on in John 12:23, He announced to His disciples that **“the hour had come”** for Him to be glorified – and then in Mark 14:41 that **“the hour had come”** for Him to be delivered over to those who would crucify Him. I am so thankful He used His time wisely, aren't you?

What is it time for you to do? What have you been putting off until a more convenient time? What are you convinced you need to do, but haven't taken the time to do? Remember that time is passing by quickly and none of us has a promise of another hour, let alone another day, week, month or year. Don't waste time chasing after more time, take advantage of the time you have. Seize the moment.

In Romans 13:11-12 Paul said this: **“And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”**

I have seen that hanging on to any moment, once it's gone, can deaden us to the joys and lessons of the present. Dwelling on the hopes or fears of the future is an illusion that robs us of present life as well. A friend of mine often said that, *“Yesterday is history. Tomorrow, a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it's called ‘the present.’”* Learn from the past. Plan for the future. But live for today. And do it for the Lord.

Listen to Hebrews 2:14-15. **Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.** Jesus died and rose again so that we can live life to the full without the cloud of the fear of death looming over us. Live and love like He did in the time that God grants – anticipating that an eternity in heaven lies ahead for all who put their faith in Him.