

## 'A Time For Everything'

1

### Ecclesiastes 3 vv1-15

What to preach on as a 'one-off' – always challenging for occasional preacher..Too late for Harvest – too early for Advent..Hallowe'en?? Then noticed four words in diary for today: *'British Summer Time Ends.'* So – some reflections on 'Time' this morning.

Amazing what you can do with time – waste > buy > serve > call > have > lose > gain > no time > all the time in the world > take > keep > beat > win > pass...And if all that seems too much, you can go off to somewhere warm in your 'timeshare' – and take 'time out'!

21<sup>st</sup> century western culture – we live in an instant & constant 'time driven' society' Lives are run by the clock and by deadlines to be met. *'A time to text' & a time to tweet, a 'time to facebook' on your smart phone & a time to avoid the person coming in the opposite direction doing the same.....*

The 'Teacher' here in Ecclesiastes Ch 3 says, not so much that you can do everything **with** time – but that there is a time **for** everything. And how we view time, its passing and the different 'seasons' of our lives, will depend on whether we see ourselves in secular terms – as prisoners of a mechanical time system – or as believers – and therefore as stewards of the time God has given us.

***'Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is mystery. Today is a gift – that's why it's called the present.'*** Quote attributed to Mrs Roosevelt or Joan Rivers!

Time is a very valuable commodity. More valuable than **2** money, because you can always make more money – but you can't make more time...

Time is the deposit that each one of us has in the Bank of God – the challenging thing is that no one knows the 'balance of time' left in our individual accounts. Can't go to a hole in the wall and get a printout of what we have left - maybe just as well ! **Clipboard survey in street this week: 'Was my will up to date?' !!**

Greek mythology has the picture of time being like a man with long hair in front, but totally bald at the back. An image of someone you must catch coming towards you, because once he/it is passed, there is nothing to grab!

And as we hear what is probably the most familiar portion of book of Ecclesiastes (and maybe the only bit we know!), so we listen to the rhythm of time – which affects us all. And some of these things will not necessarily be all that appealing or pleasant.

The passage begins with the reminder that there is a time to be born and a time to die – and we have no say in either of them – or do we? I'll leave aside the difficult issues of **abortion & euthanasia**. Not getting into those this morning – but maybe a question for the House Groups this week?

**Statistics** show that we are living longer (western world anyway): **88%** will reach the age of **50** – quite a few here have made that one. On morning of my 50<sup>th</sup> (can still remember it!) - on plane from Stansted to Paris – wearing a flashing badge that said '50 TODAY!'

- a free glass of champagne maybe, upgrade to 1<sup>st</sup> class?  
Nothing!

### 3

But nowadays we often see balloons and banners '*Happy 40th/50th*' etc. My own 60<sup>th</sup> birthday – another badge (!) - had to visit local bank – '*celebrating a special birthday, are we?*'

**Big '70'** next (not all that far off!) how to celebrate?? And over **70%** of us will reach '3 score and ten' > **17%** will live to **85** & beyond – as some here this morning at Wade St can bear living witness to! **Centenarians** increased by **73%** between 2002 & 2012 – from **7740 to 13350**.

Won't highlight any individual here – but recall one lady 90+ in our Berks church – body frail, mind sharp as razor – always a joy to visit and, ultimately to conduct her funeral. Time affects us in old age in different ways, of course – but **v2** reminds us that we are all mortal. Sudden death of loved always a shock - (**my own brother**).

Life is not all laughter – there will be a time to weep as well. All here can probably call to mind such a time & person mourned...

NT Greek has two words for time - '**chronos**' & '**kairos**'. The first refers merely to the actual passing of time – time measure on clocks, computers and calendars. Sermon has lasted...minutes – so far - that's '**chronos**'!

But the second word for time n NT Gk '**kairos**' is used for 'God's time' and 'seasons' in our lives. It's about the fullness of time & eternity.

So **Matthew 26v18** *'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near...'*

81 times in NT..

4

Other examples: **Mark 1v15** *'The time has come, Jesus said, the kingdom of God is near. Repent & believe the good news!'* >

*'..the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all – the testimony given in its proper time.'* **1 Tim 2v6.**

And here in this 'time poem' in Ecclesiastes, the Hebrew word **'eth'** is much more akin to 'kairos' time than 'chronos' time. The Teacher in Ecclesiastes is trying to make sense of life's ups and downs – as do we all. He concludes that, because we experience but a small piece of God's time, we cannot comprehend the full scope of God's purpose.

The author is trying to remind himself & us that God has a purpose and ***'for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.'***

Time is a God-given gift (**v11**) and within its span, we will live out all the diverse experiences and 'seasons' that God and time give us.

***'a time to tear down and a time to build..'*** - examples of our first (Essex) church – new build finally completed 6 weeks before we moved on to 2<sup>nd</sup> church. Back to our 2nd Berks church last month for their centenary – still seeking to *'tear down and to build'* – ambitious (£2 million) project.

Great to 'go back' to meet & greet old friends – to be reminded of our time there with them.

But, as drove back up M40, also recognised that *'time had moved on'* -for them & for us...

## 5

Even our 3<sup>rd</sup> (Huntingdon, Cambs) had some modest building plans – quite a relief in retirement to arrive at Wade St in 2009 to find all the re-building was done!

Enough on tearing down & building, back to our overall theme of 'Time'.

I can still recall, from my student days in London, travelling back from Euston – that delightfully 'scenic' route (in late 1960s) from Birmingham New St to Wolverhampton. Somewhere between – a large, painted slogan on a wall:

***'Eternity, Eternity, where will you spend Eternity?'***

Back then in my 'church less' and 'God less' days, I would look out at that painted question, each time I came home – and it would cause me at least to pause for a moment – on matters eternal.

But back then, of course, my own personal 'kairos' time/season of the Lord's revelation to me was yet to come.

***'Seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near' (Is 55).*** I recall a passage in a book by David Watson that described those special seasons in which God may be especially active in our lives – and we are called to respond – **1980s** for me – and for you?? (Tracy's recent testimony) -

Another **discussion for House Groups...**

After this time poem in Ecclesiastes 3, we come to the heart of the passage in **vv11-15**.

**6**

And to the apparent futility of life and time passing, suddenly we are given a new dimension. It is God who orders time and we are created not just for time on this earth, but also for eternity.

The 'Teacher' switches on his HD 3D plasma screen to give us another dimension on the fourth dimension of time. In a 'Peanuts' cartoon strip, Charlie Brown says to Linus,

*'Life is too much for me. I've been confused from the day I was born. I think that the whole trouble is that we're thrown into life too fast. We're not really prepared.'* And Linus responds, *'What did you want – a chance to warm up first?'*

Every day God gives us 86,400 seconds – and for this one day an extra 3600 seconds! By the end of the day, there's nothing left of them. And whilst we may sometimes wish that we could have a 'warm-up' first – in God's eyes – this IS the warm-up. The best & main event is yet to be!

So, maybe there is a balance to be had, as stewards of God's time. On the one hand, we are challenged to make good use of the 'chronos' time – the passing days, weeks, months & years. **Retirement** challenge! (Another **discussion** topic)

***('Well done good & faithful servant'*** – parable of the Talents).

But we also need to be switched on to 'kairos' time too. Those special times/seasons in our lives when God's

7

Holy Spirit may be especially active for us & in us – looking back over my own life & with the benefit of hindsight!), I can trace several such times:

Decision to go into teaching, not stay in Staffs, but off to London > 1<sup>st</sup> teaching post met future wife > birth of our children that led us back to God > call into ministry from teaching – and, yes, the call back to West Midlands & retirement & all the blessings of being a Grandad!

I believe God at work in all of that...not chance, 'luck', fate, 'good karma' (whatever that is!) nor even 'in the stars.'

Another chance for some sharing & reflections in House Groups this week.

***'that everyone may eat & drink and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God.'* v13**

***'Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is mystery. Today is a gift – that's why it's called the present.'***

So - on this day when we have all been given an extra hour of 'chronos' time, we here together this morning give thanks for God's gift of all our time, whether we're 25 or 95.

And give him thanks too for all our 'times' – that are all in his hands for now & all eternity – Amen.