

Ecclesiastes 3:11 – “The Tapestry of Time”

Sing: Hymn 54:1,5,6,8

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Sing: Psalm 31:8,9

Tempus fugit.

Time flees.

Or as we often say, “Time flies!”

And it never stops fleeing and flying either.

It’s Friday chapel again. Where *did* the week go? It just flew right by! Monday morning chapel, and then it’s lecture, lecture, lecture... take notes, take notes, finish readings, hand-in assignments, study... mark assignments, hand back assignments... and suddenly, before you know it, here we are at Friday chapel already. Time speeds ahead, and leaves history in its dust.

Time is tenacious. It does not slow down for anyone.

Time is unforgiving. What’s done is done. You can’t rewind the *chronos* (i.e., the span of time). And you can’t re-do the *kairos* either (i.e., a specific moment of time).

And time can be so frustrating. Because you can be as super-organized as you like, but still there are never enough hours in a day. You rarely seem to get as much done as you had hoped. The sand of time not only slips through the middle of the hourglass, it slips right through the fingers of your fist.

And yet, lest we become too frustrated with time, the Preacher announces, “There is beauty in time!” So in the midst of all your hustle and bussle, don’t forget to stop and smell the chronological roses. For just as our Creator made the rose, and he made it beautiful. So also our God “has made *everything* beautiful in its time.” Eccl 3:11

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At first this almost sounds unbelievable. Sure, God makes some things, even many things, beautiful in their time, but *everything*? How does that work?

Well, let’s look more closely at what the Holy Spirit says to us here through the Preacher. The Preacher is looking for some definite gain, some clear profit, on the time he spends working so hard. The question of Eccl 3:9 is the same question he started with in chapter 1:3. It’s this

question: “What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?” Well, the Preacher is still working on an answer to that question and now it comes back again, and now it’s related to time. Because it’s that *tempus fugit*... it’s that fleeing-ness of time which seems, so often, to get in the way of real gain. Do any of these thoughts resonate with you?

- “I could have made, and delivered, a better sermon in sermon session, if only I had *more time* to dedicate to it...” (at least so we think).
- “I could have prepared, and delivered, a much better lecture, if only I had *more time* to prepare for it...” (at least so we think).

More time, more gain, more profit. At least so we think. But time flies, and the profit slips away with it.

So in verse 10 the Preacher says, “*I have seen the burden God has laid on men.*” This sounds rather negative, but that word *burden* does not always have to be negative. The same word is used in Eccl 8:16 where we read, “When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe *man’s labor on earth*—his eyes not seeing sleep day or night.” Literally the word has to do with *being busy with things*. And being busy with things is not necessarily a bad thing. Even our first parents, Adam and Eve, were not just sitting back and doing nothing all day long. They did not just sit on a rock and watch the parrots and the peacocks all day along! No, not at all. Our Creator gave them a job to keep busy with. In Gen 2:15, the LORD says to Adam, “You have to work the Garden of Eden and take care of it.”

Being busy – in and of itself – is not a curse. Of course, ever since the fall our busyness did become burdensome because of the thorns and the thistles, the setbacks, the obstacles, the sinfulness, and the misery. But that’s not the way work was created to be.

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“Yes, fine,” you say, “but whether I’m writing an exam, or marking an exam, that clock on the wall keeps on ticking... faster and faster and faster... at least, so it seems. And life quickly becomes way too hectic. Being busy is one thing. Being caught up in the rat-race is another.”

Well, that’s true. “But,” says the Preacher, “Now take another – and a different -- look at time. Instead of always concentrating on how little time there is, and how much there is to do... stand back, for a moment,” says the Preacher, “and look at how beautiful God makes

everything in its time.” Do you ever do that? Do you ever take a moment to stop and admire the divinely designed beauty of time?

There is a *design* and there is a certain *beauty* built into time. Time is not just a bunch of loose threads and balls of yarn, tossed helter-skelter all over the kitchen floor! No! God manufactures the *chronos* (span) and *kairos* (moment) threads of all your hours, days, and years. And our God gathers up all those chronological threads and he weaves them into a beautiful tapestry of time—a time-tapestry that has all these incredibly beautiful, intricate, and colourful patterns in it. Undoubtedly you’ve seen those tapestries, those big wall-hangings, like a big curtain, but with a design or picture weaved into it. Well, that’s what God is weaving out of the hours and days of your life.

However, if you never take your nose off the tapestry, and all you do is say, “Oh, I’m so busy, so busy, so busy,” then you never see the beauty of the pattern that God is weaving. And this is the Preacher’s insight into time... he says, “Come with me, stand back a little bit and look at the tapestry of time which God is weaving.” There is the moment of birth. And yes, for the mother and the baby, that moment of birth has a lot of pain. The pangs of childbirth are a result of the fall into sin, but still, in spite of the pain, the whole journey from conception, to birth, to holding that little bundle of joy in your arms, there is something so inexpressibly beautiful about that.

But there is also a pattern. And the time of birth is balanced out by the time of death. Now, the time of birth is painful, but the time of death is also painful, in its own way. There are tears, there is sorrow. But there does come a moment when the earthly tent falls to the ground all worn and rent, and it is so obviously time for that child of God to go to his or her eternal home. Yes, death is still sad, but there is the beauty of the eternal hope as well. And that balance, that alternating pattern in time—birth, death, birth, death—in the big picture, you see a little something of how God fits it all together. Each event is fitting and appropriate for its own time.

But let’s turn to a completely different example. You may have a rough day at work. It is, as the Preacher says, it’s “a time of tearing down,” or perhaps for some of us, it’s a time for tearing up: the paper, the summary, the lecture notes that just aren’t working out. We tear it down, we push the delete button. Very frustrating! Not at all beautiful, you say! No, but then

you start again, and you build up, and you try it a different way. And that's not always easy either, but under the Lord's blessing you see that there was a purpose to that tearing down. And when you see the connection between the tearing down *and* the building up again, and how the Lord taught you things through it all, well, once again standing back a few steps from the tapestry of time, you start to see something of the beauty of how the Lord weaves things together.

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There is only one problem that comes with this blessing. And that is that soon as you notice some of the patterns that God weaves into time, your curiosity easily gets the better of you and you want to know more. You want to figure out all the whys, and the wherefores, and the wherefroms, and the whereuntos of God's work on the warp and woof of time. In short, you want climb up, higher than time itself. You want to climb up the *eternal* throne of God, where you can look down on all things past, present, and future. And then from there you hope to see how it all fits together, including especially the timeline of your own personal life. That's the desire for eternity that lives in our human hearts.

And do you know where this eternal desire comes from? It's connected to the fact that human were created in the image of God. The animals, which are not created in God's image, are simply different. You see, an elephant could care less about eternity. So long as an elephant has some leaves that he can chew on, and so long as he has some water that he can drink and spray on his back, and so long as he has some elephant friends to run around with... well, that elephant is happy, and he has no desire to dig into the deep things of the eternal perspective on time.

Well, that is fine for the elephant because it was not created in the image of the eternal God. But we humans are different; we are created in the image of the eternal God. And something of God's nature of being eternal is reflected, like a mirror, upon us. No, we are not eternal in the same way that God is. But, without fail, as soon as your eternal curiosity gets the better of you, you will discover, just like the Preacher did, that no matter how much you want to climb above time and see it everything from beginning to end, and no matter how much you want to figure it all out, *you simply cannot do it*. It's impossible!

You cannot do it, first of all, because you are creature. You are created in the image of God, but you are *not*, and you *never* will be some kind of second god. And beyond that, now we're living after the Fall and dealing with all the ignorance and crippling effects of the Fall into sin. So, it's no wonder that we can't figure it all out! Fallen human beings can hardly sort out their agenda for a single day, let alone fathom the entire pattern of the tapestry of time.

Now this might leave you frustrated, but it does not have to be that way. Instead, we have to know our place. As human beings we are curious about seeing things from the eternal perspective, but as human beings we do not have the capacity to see things the way God sees them. *We cannot* – you see there is our lack of capacity – *we cannot* fathom what God has done from beginning to end. So, let's stick within our capacity, and do the best we can, in the time we are given. Let's stick within our capacity and take a moment here and there to appreciate the beauty of how God puts everything together. But then, let's also leave the eternal perspective, and leave the fathoming of the beginning from the end, up to God. Because he has more than enough sovereign capacity to handle those matters. Let's not try to play God... not when it comes to sovereignty, but not when it comes to chronology either.

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But there is one more thing. The Preacher says, we cannot “fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end.” And that's true. We cannot figure out the whole Alpha (the beginning) to Omega (the end) of world history, and what God is doing with his creation. But we do know, and we do confess that Jesus Christ is *the* Alpha and *the* Omega (Rev 22:13). And since he is the Alpha and the Omega, he is also every letter, and every pinpoint of time, between Alpha and Omega. Our beloved Savior is the beta, the gamma, and the delta, just as much as he is the Alpha and the Omega.

Jesus is Lord over the whole clock just as surely as he is Lord over all creation. Christ rules the clock. The clock does not rule Christ. And you, brothers and sisters, you are servants of Christ. So, that also means that Jesus Christ is your master, not the clock. Your watch does not rule your life. Your monthly agenda book does not rule your life. Your calendar app in your smartphone does not have sovereignty over your days. And if you are starting to let your clock

or your calendar dominate and domineer over your life, then you have a problem that needs to be resolved because you're drifting in the direction of idolatry.

There is One, and there is Only One, who has paid the precious ransom price of blood for you. And to be absolutely clear, the Clock was *not* crucified for you, but Jesus Christ certainly was! And that means *he* is your master. And it is a much more enjoyable, and much more rewarding to serve the Christ as compared to serving the clock.

So, yes, time marches straight ahead. And sometimes that makes things a little bit hectic, but brothers and sisters, be glad and grateful! Time is marching ahead to the return of Jesus Christ. Time is marching ahead to the glory of the new heavens and new earth. And with that in mind, please, we pray: O Lord, please do not slow down time. If anything, speed it up. Come, Lord Jesus, Maranatha, come... SOON! AMEN!