Men's Conference | Session 2

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Preacher: Jim Hamilton

[0:00] Good morning. This morning, we're going to look at Ecclesiastes chapter 3, verses 1 through 8, which maybe! you're familiar with the lyrics of a certain song that takes these words and sings them! in our culture.

And I think in doing that, the group that produced that song, essentially what they've done is they've taken words from the Bible and then situated the Bible's words in our world.
And then people hear the lyrics of the song and they process those song lyrics through the way that we think about time. And what I want to suggest this morning is that what Solomon is doing is thinking about time in biblical terms.
So I want to back out now for just a moment and think about the way that earlier Old Testament scripture informs how we think about time.
And then think for just a moment about how things in the New Testament teach us to think about time. And all of this, I hope, will be in the service of forming and shaping our identity.
[1:16] How we think about ourselves, how we understand who we are, how we conceptualize our lives. So let's start with creation.

I would argue that in order to understand the Bible correctly, you need to read Genesis 1 and 2 and just embrace and accept everything stated there.
In other words, we should not try to take Genesis 1 and 2 and process it through a modern scientific worldview. What we should do is we should say, this is the way the Bible is teaching me to understand and think about the world.
And then we should recognize that much in the modern scientific worldview is theory. That people are theorizing about how things must have happened.
And they're really not factoring in the possibility that God can create with the appearance of age. So I would argue that the seven days of creation in the beginning, this is fundamental to our understanding of who we are as human beings.
[2:23] And essentially what God does is he works six days and then he consecrates the seventh day. I'm not a Sabbatarian, but I think this seven day pattern is significant for us as human beings.

He consecrates the seventh day. It's like what he does is he works, he completes his project, and then he takes up residence in the cosmic palace that he has built and he rests and enjoys the goodness of what he has made.
And I think there's an important pattern there, the one day and seven pattern that should inform how we think about who we are as human beings and how we think about how we live.
And then as we go forward through the Old Testament, remember what is said about time after the exodus from Egypt and the celebration of the Passover feast. This shall be the beginning of the year for you.
So what's happening is they're shaping their understanding, their concept of the year around God's redemption. And God's redemption at the exodus from Egypt marks a new year.
[3:29] And then every year they celebrate the Passover. And what they're doing is they're looking back on the way that God saved them at the exodus. And then they're looking forward to the way that God is going to save them at a new and greater exodus in the future.

And then when we come to a book like Ecclesiastes, I think that what Solomon is doing is he's assuming all this about creation. And then particularly in these reflections in chapter three, what he's going to do is situate himself and his own life, not only in the course of the ordinary events of a normal human life, but also he's going to understand himself against the broader biblical story.
And we'll talk about this as we go through it. But to get at what I'm talking about, let me invite you to think about some things that Paul says in first Corinthians to the Corinthians. He tells them, for

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instance, you are not your own.
He says this on a couple of occasions in the book. You were bought with a price. And when he tells them that they were bought with a price, he's using language that indicates that just as God redeemed Israel from Egypt, God has redeemed Christians through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.
And I think what Paul is doing is using the kind of narrative of the Old Testament and mapping that onto Christian experience and using this.
[4:56] He's essentially saying that these events of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in what has taken place in Christ and they're being fulfilled in our experience. So you have the Passover and the Exodus from Egypt.

We're not our own. We're redeemed slaves. We're bought with a price. And then Israel, they come out of Egypt and they get to the Red Sea and they pass through the waters of the Red Sea.
And Paul says in first Corinthians 10, he says, our fathers were all under the cloud and under the sea, the pillar of fire and cloud that led them to the sea. And he says they were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
And he's briefly teaching us how to think about baptism. We should think about baptism along the lines of what happened at the Red Sea. The redeemed, the people purchased by the Lord, they come through waters of judgment, through waters of death that destroy the Egyptians.
So in the Old Testament, you know, the waters, the flood, this is a manifestation of God's wrath, the closing of the Red Sea on Egypt. This is God's wrath on Egypt.
[6:07] And God has brought his people safely through those waters. So it's kind of like Paul is saying, just like Israel was baptized at the Red Sea, you were baptized into Christ.

And then in the wilderness, they're eating manna from heaven and water from the rock. And Paul says that they all ate the spiritual food and drank the spiritual drink.
And I think he's paralleling the manna from heaven and the water from the rock with the Lord's Supper. And it's as though he's saying Israel experienced a type of baptism and the Lord's Supper after coming out of Egypt.
And now you Christians, you've experienced the fulfillment of the Exodus from Egypt, and you're experiencing the fulfillment of God's provision, manna from heaven. Think of the way that the Lord Jesus speaks of Moses not being the one who gave you the bread of life.
In John 6, he says, I am the bread of life. So the Lord has provided Jesus, really, to keep us alive as we make our way through the wilderness to the fulfillment of the land of promise, which is the new Jerusalem, the new creation, the new heavens and new earth.
[7:18] But on the way, after Israel comes out of Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea, they come to Mount Sinai. And Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, he says, to those under the law, I became as one under the law, not being myself under the law, but being in the law of Christ.

It's almost like he's saying, in the same way that Moses went up on the mountain and gave to Israel the Ten Commandments, the Lord Jesus ascended the mountain and gave his people this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, which he refers to as the law of Christ, I think, in 1 Corinthians 9 and Galatians 6 too.
And what he's doing is mapping what has been fulfilled in Christ onto this old covenant storyline.
And then similarly, another piece of this, at Mount Sinai, Israel receives the tabernacle, and Paul says to the Corinthians, don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you?
So we don't have a tabernacle, we are the tabernacle. And all these elements, they track with the old covenant. So here's what Paul is doing. Paul is teaching us to think about our lives.
He's forming our identity. And the identity that's being formed is an identity that says, I am living in this biblical storyline.
[8:40] It has a beginning point in creation. The introduction of conflict comes with man's sin and rebellion against God. And then the resolution of the conflict is this big story of salvation, which I'm now folded into.

So I think of my life in terms of, I was bought with a price, which was like being an Israelite, a slave that's redeemed, brought out of slavery.
I wasn't a literal slave, but I was a slave to sin. And I got liberated from that. And then I'm baptized, as it were. I passed through the Red Sea. And then I'm eating the Lord's Supper.

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I'm being provided with manna from heaven and water from the rock that's keeping me alive through this wilderness destination to the fulfillment of the land of promise. So I think Paul is teaching us in 1 Corinthians how to think about the past, how to think about the future, how to think about who we are, how to think about why we're here.
And all of this factors into how we think about time. I mean, compare that with the way that people think about their lives in our culture. Many people think, all right, I'm going to go to high school and then I'm going to go off to college.
[9:50] And for the renegades and scallywags in our culture, what they're going to do at college is chat GPT everything and major in beer and women. What a waste of time.

What a squandered opportunity. I mean, my son is a freshman at Carson Newman University and he was commenting on his classmates and it's not far from the University of Tennessee and he was telling me about all the debauchery and how pervasive it is for college students to be using AI to complete their homework assignments.
And I just texted him back, we are doomed. I mean, what we need is a great awakening. We need a great awakening so that people recognize with this opportunity they have to be educated, I need to be shaped and formed by what I'm learning.
You're not learning anything if what you're doing is figuring out how to get AI to do your work for you. So you think about four years of partying and then you think about the drudgery of work for the rest of your life.
That's how people conceptualize time. And what the Bible is teaching us to think about is, no, I was made in the image of God and my destination is the new Jerusalem.
[11:07] And then I've got this biblical storyline of salvation in between. That's forming my identity and it's reinforced every Lord's Day when I come to worship.

And praise God, I see someone baptized. And praise God, I eat of the fulfillment of the manna from heaven. I drink of the cup of the new covenant, which tells me every time you hear those words, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.
It's reaffirmed. The old covenant is over. Christ has brought me into the new covenant, which anticipates the new creation. And in fact, I'm part of the new creation.
First Corinthians, second Corinthians 5, 17. If anyone is in Christ, new creation. The old is gone. The new has come. Now, what I'm contending here this morning is that Solomon is making a similar move in Ecclesiastes chapter 3.
That is, this is not just an abstract philosophical, you know, meandering reflection on time. This is a very biblically informed and a very biblical theological reflection on time that we're given here in Ecclesiastes chapter 3.
[12:26] And as we approach it, I just want to say a word about where this passage, Ecclesiastes 3, 1 through 8, sits in the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole. So, I noted last night, if you look at 3, 9, what gain has the worker from his toil?

I think this obviously corresponds to 1, 3. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? So, we kind of have this book-ending inclusio, 1, 3 and 3, 9.
What do you gain? That's one of the big questions of this section of the book. And then, let me just invite you to look at chapter 3, verse 10, where Solomon writes, I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.
And if you look back at 1, 13, he says near the end of that verse, it is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. So, what he's doing here in 3, 9 through 15 is really repeating a lot of stuff from 1, 1 through 14.
Look, for instance, at what he says in verse 15. That which is, this is Ecclesiastes 3, 15, already has been. And that which is to be, already has been.
[13:42] And if you look back at chapter 1, verse 9, what has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there's nothing new under the sun. So, in 3, 9 through 15, you've got a broader bookend with 1, 1 through 14.

Okay? So, he starts with these themes. He ends with these themes. And that suggests, that's first and last, in this first section of the book, I think this suggests that 2nd, 3, 1 through 8, sorry, 2nd to last, 3, 1 through 8, is going to correspond to 2nd, which is 1, 15 through 18.
And if we look at those verses, just briefly here, 1, 15. Now, we didn't walk through 1, 1 through 14. But I would suggest that what Solomon is talking about there is the way that God created the world.

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And it's like he's situating his reflections in the world as it's described as having been created in Genesis 1 and 2. And there's a lot more I could say about that. But in 1, 15 through 18, what he's doing is he's saying, this is a fallen world.
Look at 1, 15, what is crooked cannot be made straight. And what is lacking cannot be counted. It's like he's saying, when God, in the language of Romans 8, 20, subjected the world to futility, he bent the world.
[15:06] If you've read C.S. Lewis's Space Trilogy, you've seen how the characters in that book refer to evil things as things that are bent. I think Lewis got this from Ecclesiastes.

What is bent or crooked cannot be made straight. It needs to be made new. It needs to be, in the language of 1 Corinthians 15, sown, buried like a seed, and then raised, incorruptible.
But it's bent. It's crooked. And what is crooked cannot be made straight. What is lacking? I think what he's getting at here is the way that the rabbis thought that prior to his sin, Adam shone with a radiance that was brighter than the sun.
So as a result of sin, there are things lacking from us that we can't even enumerate. We can't account for. This is the fallen world.
And then look at what he says in verse 18. In much wisdom is much vexation. It's kind of like the more you learn, the more it hurts.
[16:16] The more you see how beautiful things were in the very good creation, the more you understand of the infinite goodness of God, the more painful it is to see how things have been ruined.

In much wisdom is much vexation. And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. Now, that's where he starts, in second position, second to last in 3, 1 through 8.
It's almost like he's become reconciled to time. And it's almost as though he's contemplating what's going to happen in the fallen world. We'll work through this as we go through 3, 1 through 8.
Let me just say a word about chapter 2 and the way that it functions, I think, in terms of the chiastic structure of this section of the book. I think the passage we looked at last night in 2, 1 through 11 is complemented by 2, 24 through 26.
So it's almost like Solomon is saying in 2, 1 through 11, I attempted the Adamic task. I tried to fill the world with God's glory the way that God put Adam in the garden to seek to do that in the very beginning.
[17:31] And then what he learns is that he's not the new Adam. He's not the Christ. He's not the one who can straighten what has been crooked. And so all he can do is enjoy an Edenic quality of life by eating and drinking and seeing good in his toil.

And then in between that first and last part of chapter 2 are those two sections on death and the one who comes after. And that's, I think, really what's driving the conclusion that all is breath and striving after wind.
He's going to die. He's not going to be around to maintain the glory of what he's accomplished. I'll never forget one of my professors at Southern Seminary who had studied with, he had studied at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.
And I forget the name of my professor's teacher, but I remember this story. He said he was in his professor's office one day and there was a famous Jewish scholar named Samuel Sandmel who had taught at Hebrew Union College.
And Samuel Sandmel, he's famous down to this day. He wrote a very important article entitled Parallelomania, talking about the way that Old Testament scholars go crazy with parallels to other ancient Near Eastern literature and trying to caution some of that.
[18:55] And Samuel Sandmel was the president of the Society for Biblical Literature. In fact, that article was his presidential address the year that he was president. And my professor's professor said, when Sandmel was here, meaning before he retired, he said when Sandmel was here, he was God on this campus.

Everybody wanted to know what Sandmel thought. Everybody wanted to know Sandmel's assessment of their argument. And if you convinced Sandmel, you were right.
And then he said, the day he retired, nobody cared what he thought. And that's the way it goes. All his breath and striving after wind.
And this is what Solomon is wrestling with as he contemplates the way that he's going to die and be unable to ensure that the one who comes after him is going to be wise or a fool. And in 3, 1 through

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8, I think he comes to a kind of reconciled position where what he's doing is he's contemplating his life against the broader biblical story, both what has been prophesied by Moses and what has been anticipated, prophesied regarding destruction and judgment and fulfillment and restoration.
So look at, look with me if you will at Ecclesiastes chapter 3, let's look at verse 1. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.
[20:26] Now the first thing I want to observe is the sort of A-B-B-A structure there. Everything first and then every matter last and then season second and time second to last.

So everything, season, time, season and time are related concepts and then every matter under heaven. So there's a very organized presentation here and I think that what he's doing is setting up the way that he's going to bracket these concepts and associate other concepts with one another. And he's thinking about seasons and times. Now we don't have the same language here, the same Hebrew terms, but you'll remember that in Genesis 1, the Lord God in verses 14 through 16, he made the two great lights and he gave them as signs that they should be for seasons and days and months and years.
And I think that Solomon is thinking in terms of the way that God created the world. And it's as though he's gone from a place where he's frustrated by the fact that he's going to die to he's reconciled to the fact that there's a time for everything.
In a sense, I think in some ways, particularly in chapter 2, as he's striving, as he's trying to accomplish the great work, we can relate to him when we're frustrated that we don't have enough time to finish our to-do list.
[22:06] Or, I mean, I don't know about you, but sometimes I'll feel like I'm just getting into the flow. I'm just getting into a groove in my writing or my study of the Bible and it's time for me to go and teach a class.

Or, it's time for me to go and have a meeting. And I feel like I get interrupted at just the wrong time. And it's frustrating and it's vexing.
But here in this passage, it's as though Solomon has become reconciled to God's providential sovereignty. And he's recognizing there's a time for everything.
And as I've aged and matured, I've recognized there are good times of the day for me to do certain things and then bad times of the day for me to try to do those things.
And then, by the same token, there are like, for instance, email. What a frustration. But there's a good time of the day to do email. And then there's a bad time of the day for me to do email.
[23:05] I don't want to do email first thing in the morning. First thing in the morning, I want to use my fresh, creative, energetic powers to study the Bible or to write things that are going to last.

I don't need to waste that energy on correspondence about logistics or that sort of thing. I can do that in the afternoon when I'm tired and I'm not very fresh.
I'm not very creative. So, we can become reconciled to the sovereignty of God and recognize, Ecclesiastes 3.1, for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.
Now, what he's going to do here is he's going to proceed in an organized manner. Let me invite you to look down at verse 8. And look at the kinds of things he's talking about in verse 8.
He says, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. And again, there's a kind of A, B, B, A structure here.
[24:09] Love and peace clearly go together. Hate and war clearly go together. And in a way, these are all encompassing.

This is like the whole of life. The whole of life can be summed up with love, peace, hate, war. And Solomon is saying there's an appropriate time for all of it.
There's an appropriate season for every matter under heaven. Look back at verse 2. When we get these sort of polar opposites that are intended to encompass everything in between, this is a figure of speech called a merism.
And we have merisms all through here. And it's interesting. In these verses, verses 2 through 8, we're going to have 14 pairs of opposites, each of which uses the word time twice.
So we're going to have 14 pairs and 28 instances of the Hebrew word for time, this term eight. And that's interesting, I think, because 14 is obviously twice seven.
[25:21] And 28 is four times seven. And there may be something intended here along the lines of, you know, a seven-day week and then a 28-day cycle of the moon around the sun.

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The moon is put in the heavens for sign and a season. And it's the orbit of the moon around the earth that establishes our roughly 28-day month.
So verse 2, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. I think this is fascinating.
This is amazing. Here what he's done is not done an A-B-B-A. He's done A-B-A-B. So these are parallel statements. Now, being born, that's obvious.
We know what that is. The mother that has received the seed of her husband. It's almost like the man's seed.
[26:23] And that's the language in the Bible. Leviticus 18, sorry, Leviticus 15 speaks of the man's seed being laid down in his wife when they come together in marriage.

It's almost like an apple tree that has its seed in its fruit. And the fruit falls. I'm going to use the language of John 12. The fruit falls onto the ground and dies that it might bear more fruit.
That kind of concept, I think, is at work in the way that the Old Testament presents childbirth. The man's seed goes into the womb of the mother and creates new life.
It's almost like, I think it is this way. When a man in Leviticus 15, when he comes together with his wife, the text tells us in Leviticus 15, 18, that as a result of the union and the man's seed leaving his body and going into his wife, both of them shall be unclean.
They shall bathe their bodies in water and be unclean until evening. So it's not communicating that there's something wrong with a man and his woman coming together in marriage.
[27:33] What it's communicating is that they've come into contact with death. It's death that makes you unclean. So I think the way they're thinking about birth is the seed is dead.

And when the seed leaves the man's body, he's come into contact with death. And when it enters the woman's body, she's come into contact with death. And because of their contact with death, they've been rendered unclean.
Now think about what this implies about childbirth. It suggests that there is a picture of death and resurrection in the conception of every human child.
Isn't that a, what a way to think about the conception of children. Death and resurrection is happening because the dead seed is falling into the ground and dying, John 12, 24, that it might bring forth more fruit.
So there's a connection in the Bible, all over the Bible really, between people and seed. So think for instance of Psalm 1.
[28:34] Blessed is the man who doesn't do these things, but his delight is in the Torah of Yahweh. What's he going to be like? He's going to be like a tree planted by streams of water. Think of Psalm 128. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.

His wife will be like a fruitful vine. His children will be like olive shoots. Think of the Lord Jesus. I am the vine.
You are the branches. So people and plants are metaphorically connected in the Bible. And Solomon is saying there's a time to be born, and that time clearly corresponds to a time to plant. And then he says a time to die, and corresponding to that, a time to pluck up what is planted. I think that Solomon is using language here that is significant, and I think later biblical authors pick up on it and understand it.
So that language of plucking up, this is the language that we find in Jeremiah chapter 1 when the Lord says to Jeremiah in verse 10, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.
[29:54] And I think in the context of Jeremiah, the plucking up is ultimately pointing to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people from the land.

And then the planting, it's almost like after exile comes the planting of new life, which is language also similar to Isaiah. Remember Isaiah 6 verse 13, like a terebinth or an oak, when it is felled, the nation of Israel is like a tree that's going to get chopped down, and then the stump is going to be subjected to burning.
And then he says, the holy seed is the stump. So it's like the exile, the tree is chopped down, or in Jeremiah's language, plucked up. And then there's this seed, this death that's going to bring about new life, that's going to mean new exodus and return from exile.
Think of Isaiah chapter 11 verse 1. Think of Isaiah 53.

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He grew up before us like a root out of dry ground. Isaiah is using a lot of the same language in chapter 11 and chapter 53 to tell us the guy in chapter 53 is the future king from David's line in chapter 11.
[31:12] He grew up like a tender plant, like a root out of dry ground. Okay, so I'm going to suggest that a time to be born, this is not merely, this is, it is the birth of an ordinary human being, but it's also something like the birth of the nation of Israel.

In a time to die. In the Old Testament, in the Old Testament, to be in the presence of God is to be in the clean realm of life.
When you're in the Garden of Eden, you're in the clean realm of life. Think of Psalm 16. In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
Forevermore. To be exiled from God's presence. For Adam and Eve to be driven out of the garden, in a sense, is for them to die. Because they're driven out of the unclean realm of life into the unclean realm of the dead.
Similarly, when the Lord puts Israel in the land, it's like they're in a new clean realm of life. And then when they get exiled, it's like the Lord kills them as a nation. And that death of the exile is going to be answered by resurrection from the dead.
[32:26] Think of Ezekiel 37. The Lord takes Israel out, and what does he show him? A valley of dry bones. And the Lord says, this is the whole house of Israel. And then he says, prophesy to the wind, son of man.

Prophesy. And Ezekiel prophesies to the ruach, the wind or the breath of the spirit. And the spirit enters the bones, and they stand up, and the Lord clothes them. They've been resurrected from the dead.
And the Lord says, I'm going to give life to the nation, and I'm going to put them in their own land. Meaning, I'm going to resurrect them from the dead and restore them to the clean realm of life.
A time to be born, and a time to die. A time to plant. Psalm 80, verse 8. The Lord brought a vine out of Egypt, and he planted it in the land.
Isaiah chapter 5. Let me sing a love song concerning my beloved. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. And he cleared it of stones, and he built a hedge around it, and he planted vines in it, and he expected them to yield fruit.
[33:31] A time to plant. A time to pluck up what is planted. I think Solomon is reading his life and mapping his life onto the salvation historical story across the Old Testament.

Listen to Deuteronomy chapter 32. Man, I would love to just walk through the whole chapter, but we don't have time for that this morning. Deuteronomy 32 is a song that Moses taught Israel to teach them what the Lord had done for them in the past, and to warn them not to rebel against him in the future.
But he basically prophesies that's what they're going to do. They're going to rebel against the Lord. The Lord is going to drive them into exile. And there's a kind of summary statement in Deuteronomy chapter 32, verse 39, where the Lord says, See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God besides me.
I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal. And I think what's being prophesied there is, when the Lord drives the nation into exile, he's going to kill them.
And then, when he does the new exodus and the return from exile, he's going to raise them from the dead, figuratively speaking. And this is begun in the Lord Jesus.
[34:51] I think this is why the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 is calling the Lord Jesus the first fruits of the resurrection from the dead. So, what Solomon is doing, I think, here in Ecclesiastes 3, is reflecting on life and saying, There's a time for everything, but the terms and categories that he's using, they suggest the whole story of the Bible.

And it's like he's saying, Okay, I was born, and I'm going to die. And the nation was born, and the nation is going to die. And God has promised resurrection for the nation, and there's going to be a resurrection for me as well.
A time to be born, and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. Verse 3, a time to kill, and a time to heal. And this, again, uses the language that we just saw in Deuteronomy 32, 39.
I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal. A time to break down, and a time to build up.

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This word for break down, this is where we get the name Perez. And Perez, when he was born, he broke through, and was born before his brother. And so Perez was named Breakthrough, basically. [36:06] And this is the language also that's going to be used when the foreign army comes, and they break through the wall of Jerusalem, and they murder all the men in the city, and they burn down the temple, and they carry the king off in exile in shackles.

There's a time to break down, and a time to build up. So it's fascinating, I think, that Solomon, it seems to me, in the first part of chapter 2, was reflecting on the way he built the temple, and now he's reflecting on the time when the city will be broken through, and things will be destroyed.
But that anticipates a time to build up. Verse 4, a time to weep, and a time to laugh.
A time to mourn, and a time to dance. And we can understand what he's saying at the human level. It is appropriate to weep at a funeral.
It's inappropriate. I mean, there are times when it happens, and it can be cathartic. But when the funeral ceremony is going on, that's not the time to laugh. There's a time to mourn at a funeral. [37:20] You don't want to be mourning at a wedding. You want to be dancing at a wedding, right? There's a time for everything, and for everything, a season. This language, though, weeping and laughing, think about the way this language is used elsewhere in the Old Testament.

I'll just read you one passage. This is Jeremiah chapter 33. I'll start in verse 10. Thus says the Lord, In this place of which you say it is a waste without man or beast, because the Babylonians have destroyed it all, in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who sing as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord.
Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at the first, says the Lord.
And then think of the language of Psalm 126, which is interesting. Psalm 126 immediately precedes the song of Solomon, Psalm 127.
126 says, When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.
[38:49] So this weeping and mourning and laughing and dancing, it maps on to the story.

When the nation is destroyed, they're going to come up, Jeremiah's going to write a book called Lamentations, and they're going to weep over the destruction of Jerusalem. But they're looking forward to a day when there's going to be a restoration, and the Lord is going to fill their mouths with laughter.
And the reflection on God's sovereign, providential purposes in the history of Israel is giving Solomon wisdom for his own life.
It's almost like what he's saying is, God has a broader purpose for the whole nation, which also implies he has a purpose for my life.
And just as I can't, in Solomon's case, and in our case, just as we can't determine the times and the seasons, both in the broader flow of salvation history, we can't determine when God is going to send Christ, but we can recognize this is a time to laugh, or this is a time to weep.
[40:00] And then we can embrace God's sovereign, providential governing of the world. And we can respond appropriately.

Verse 5, Solomon says, a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together. I think that probably what's in view here is the kind of thing that we read about over in 2 Kings 3, verse 25, which uses a lot of this same language.
And I first want to, I'm going to read 2 Kings 3, verse 19, and then I'll skip down to verse 25. 2 Kings 3, 19 says this, You shall attack every fortified city and every choice city and shall fell every good tree and stop up all springs of water and ruin every good piece of land with stones.
And then down in verse 25, they overthrew the cities, and on every good piece of land, every man threw a stone until it was covered. They stopped up every spring of water and felled all the good trees till only its stones were left in Kir Haresheth.
And the slingers surrounded and attacked it. So I think this language of a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones, it refers to the way that when foreign armies conquered a land, what they would do to try to ruin the land for its inhabitants, to try to keep them from thriving and keep their economy from recovering, is they would take rocks and they would throw rocks into the

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vineyards and into the fields that were cultivated for the growth of food and it would make it so that before they could plow that land again, they would have to go and clear out all those rocks.
[41:56] So the defeat of the people and the ruination of the land, I think, is what's in view. And Solomon is saying there's a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.

Probably that gathering stones together refers to the recollection of bricks and stones that are used for the making of walls and the building of structures, again, that have been torn down and destroyed.
And then the middle of verse 5 says, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. I think this probably alludes to things like, in Israel, Deuteronomy 24, when a man gets married, he's not to be sent out to war for a year because it's the time for him to embrace his wife.
And then when it's time for him to be sent out to war, it's the time for him to refrain from embracing. We think of the way that David, when he comes to the priest at Nob and the priest says, well, I can give you the showbread if the men are in a clean state.
And he says, well, we always refrain from embracing our wives, essentially, for three days before we go into battle. What he's saying is, we go into battle in a clean and holy state devoted to the Lord, and we refrain from embracing so as not to make ourselves unclean by means of the seed that passes.
[43:21] There's a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. Verse 6, a time to seek and a time to lose.

A time to keep and a time to cast away. This is interesting, I think. Again, clearly, the seeking and keeping are in parallel with one another, and the losing and casting away are in parallel with one another.
The word for lose here, you could translate this word destroy. But when they translate it into Greek, when they translate Ecclesiastes into Greek, they use the same term that the Lord Jesus is going to use in Luke 15 when he tells these three stories about something lost.
There's a lost coin, and then it culminates in the lost son. And we wouldn't say that the coin was destroyed because it's found. We wouldn't say that the son was destroyed because eventually he's found.
Similarly here, I think that there's a time to seek. Well, the Lord sought Israel when he made them a nation, and then there was a time, a time came when they were lost from him, and he drove them into exile.
[44:41] And then also, a time to keep, this is the language used when Adam was to work and keep the garden.

there's a time to protect the walls. And think of what Solomon writes in Psalm 127, unless the Lord builds the house. If the Lord doesn't build the temple, those who labor on it, they labor in vain.
I think we could also say, if the Lord doesn't build the house of David, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord keeps watch over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.
It's almost like he's saying, we need the Lord to be our protector. We need the Lord to build the house, both the temple and the house of David, and then we need the Lord to be the one who works and keeps the garden.
And here he's saying, there's a time to keep and a time to cast away. Here's what I think Solomon is saying. It's like he's saying, look, I've read Leviticus 26.
[45:44] I've read Deuteronomy 4. I've read Deuteronomy 28 through 32. And I know that we are going to be exiled from the land. That's what's going to happen. And when we're exiled from the land, this fabulous temple that I've built, all these things that I've accomplished, they're going to lie in rubble.

It's going to be a smoking ruin. But God is sovereign over these things. And there's a time for God to keep the city and there's a time for God to cast the people into exile.
And that applies broadly to this huge scope of history and it also applies to our individual lives. You know, life is a mystery.
And I suspect that like me, you've had times of your life when you've thought something like this. I wish it could stay like this forever. But you know this season is about to come to an end.
When I was 18 years old, the Lord blessed me. The Lord smiled on me. The summer after my senior year of high school, I had been hoping to be somebody that was highly touted, heavily recruited athletically.

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[46:51] I wanted to play either basketball or baseball in college. Nobody recruited me. I get to the end of my senior year and I feel dejected about athletics in general. And the Lord brought me through a kind of spiritual crisis that really involved me devoting myself to Him and committing myself to His purposes and His causes and accepting His program for my life.

And it was like the Lord said, that's where I wanted you to be. Now I'm going to bless you. And my batting average went from being about 230 to being like 560.
And it was amazing what happened on the baseball field that summer. I hit for the cycle. At one point, I got 11 straight base hits. In that string, when I got 11 straight base hits, I was on, I reached base safely 17 times in a row.
And it wasn't from the other team making errors. So I either got walked or got a base hit. And I was thinking to myself, this is incredible. Everything is going right for me.
I want it always to be like this. But then at the same time, I could see, we only have so many games scheduled. This season is going to end. And I thought to myself, I don't want this season ever to end.
[48:08] And really, it was kind of like striving after wind. It was vapor and striving after wind because I knew the sun's going to rise tomorrow and we're going to be one day closer to the end of this season.

And when this season comes to an end, who knows what's going to happen when it cranks back up in the fall. And then maybe, you know, I mean, I think back to like the days of being a newlywed. What a glorious time of life. And I can remember thinking like I did that summer when I was 18. Can it just be this way forever? And then when my kids were all under 12 and I can kind of see looming on the horizon, things are about to get really busy.
You know, with high school sports and we're out of the house every night. But before that, before life went crazy like that, man, when they're small, when they're young, everybody's home every night.
It's family night. We don't have anything. We don't have any practices or games that are taking us. It's just a glorious time. And we think, you know, my wife and I both, we're like, can it just stay this way forever?
[49:17] Can we keep these kids? You can't keep the kids small, right? They're going to grow up. And you have to become reconciled to the reality that there's a time for everything.

There's a time for every matter under heaven. And the secret of life is learning to be content with where the Lord has put you and with the circumstances that you are in.
And I think this is what Solomon is reflecting on as he thinks about his life and as he maps it onto the whole scope of salvation history. And really, this theological reality is what enables this. because we can't live like what I live for is now. What I live for is this life. We have to recognize the Lord has appointed things for me in this life and then I'm going to die and then I'm going to be raised from the dead and I'm going to face the judgment and then there's going to be the new creation.
And I think that Solomon here in Ecclesiastes is presupposing the resurrection and the new creation. And that reality is what informs a statement like what you see down at verse 14.
[50:35] If you look down at verse 14, he says, I perceive that whatever God does endures forever. That nothing can be added to it nor anything taken away from it.

God has done it so that people fear before him. Now look at what he says also in verse 7 of chapter 5.
Ecclesiastes 5, 7. When dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity. There's breath, vapor. But God is the one you must fear. Look at chapter 8, verse 12.
Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God because they fear before him.
But it will not be well with the wicked. Neither will he prolong his days like a shadow because he does not fear God. And I skipped 7, 18.
[51:33] If you look at 7, 18, it is good that you should take hold of this and from that withhold not your hand. For the one who fears God shall come out from both of them. And then you also have chapter 12, verse 13.

The end of the matter all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments. Now, all through this book what I'm saying is Solomon is talking about the fear of God. The fear of God I think is

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really easy to understand and really easy for scholars who don't believe in the holiness of God and they don't believe in the wrath of God and they don't believe in the final judgment and as a result they're really confused about the fear of God.
To understand the fear of God all you have to do is think about the final judgment and recognize that at the judgment verdicts are going to be handed down and the verdict is going to be experienced in the resurrection and the verdict is either going to be life and reward or death and eternal destruction.
That's what informs the fear of God. The fear of God arises from the fact that he's perfectly holy and I'm going to stand before him and then fear is hand in hand with trust because you have to believe yes he's there yes he's holy and yes the instructions that he's given are such that if I believe and if I do as he says I won't be eternally destroyed.
So the fear of God what I'm saying is it only works with faith and it presupposes resurrection and either reward or punishment that will be experienced by those in a resurrection body.
[53:22] So I'm trying to get at the logic of the way that Solomon is using this big story of the Bible this master story this meta-narrative and that meta-narrative is shaping his identity it's shaping the way that he thinks about the time that he has and what he's doing is recognizing these correspondences between his own individual life and this broader history of Israel that's going to be fulfilled in the new covenant when God sends Christ.

So continuing here in Ecclesiastes 3 verse 7 a time to tear and a time to sow a time to keep silence and a time to speak.
Once again we've got parallel statements tearing and silence go together. Think of Ezra chapter 9 when Ezra gets the news that all these Israelites who are supposed to be devoted to the Lord have intermarried with a bunch of pagan idolaters a bunch of people that don't know Yahweh and they worship false gods.
You remember what Ezra does? He tears his clothes and he sits on the ground and he puts ash on his head and he's silent until evening. There's also a statement along these lines in the book of Lamentations.
Lamentations chapter 2 verse 10 the elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence. They have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth.
[54:56] So they've ripped their normal garments and clothed themselves with sackcloth and then they sit in silence. There's a time to tear and a time to keep silence.

There's a time to sew. You recognize God brought judgment upon us but now God has renewed us. He's given us new life and new hope so we're going to sew those garments back together and we're going to begin to speak again.
Verse 8 a time a time a time a time a time for war and a time for shalom.
I think that many of us might struggle with this time to hate but we need to be reconciled to this. We need to embrace this. Think of think of Psalm 139 this beautiful Psalm about David's going on about how he's always with the Lord when I wake you are there with the wings of them there's all these beautiful statements at the beginning of the Psalm and then you get to the end of the Psalm and he says do I not hate those who hate you oh Lord I hate them with complete hatred that's appropriate it's good and right to be affectionately devoted to the Lord such that you have no sympathies with the wicked you you feel no kinship no connection with Satan and the seed of the serpent and and when they come tempting you this is this is what we need we need to recognize that when Satan tempts me with perversions of things that God means for good I need to respond it's a time for hate it's a time for war a time to love and a time to hate a time for war and a time for peace the Lord himself embodies this in the history of Israel he sets his love on Israel but then when they break the covenant and when they when they face his wrath he turns his face away from them and drives them into exile and then he's going to renew peace for them he's going to bring them back from exile so here's what Solomon has done I think in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 he has modeled for us understanding and embracing the perspective of Moses and of the other biblical authors who wrote before his time which includes his own father
[57:41] David what Solomon has done I think is study the Torah and as many psalms his father David had put together and any other material maybe he has Joshua maybe he has judges I'm not sure exactly what scripture he has access to but he has studied that and that has shaped and formed the way that he thinks about himself and his life and now when he talks about time in this passage he's thinking in terms I think of the whole history of redemption what God has done in the

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past for Israel what's going to happen the exile from the land and then what's going to happen with the future new exodus return from exile new covenant new creation and then he's speaking of his individual life in terms that resonate with that in other words the Bible has built his brain the Bible has formed his concept of himself which means he didn't get his self-esteem merely from the way that other people looked at him he didn't base his identity his understanding of himself on what the party people thought about him what the renegades and scallywags thought about him he's basing his identity on the scriptures he's understanding who he is in

God's program and he's thinking about time in these terms he's recognizing I can give my life to this great project of building the temple and trying to manifest God's glory in the nation but God has a broader program that this is part of you know I want Southern Seminary I teach at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and I want that school to thrive and flourish and I want it to be a place that's devoted to the training of pastors and I want guys to be able to come there and learn Greek and Hebrew and be equipped to exposit the word and be taught sound doctrine and then go out and faithfully serve the Lord but here's the reality about every human institution it is not going to last it is breath it is a striving after wind it's it's wonderful the way the faculty is right now believing everybody's an inerrantist faithful believing sound it's not going to last it's not going to last I can't place my hope in

Southern Seminary I dare not we have to place our hope in the Lord I can't control what's going to happen when Dr. Mohler retires I suspect that we're in for some upheaval you know he's on the cusp of retirement he's almost 70 years old when he retires we're probably going to go through some hard times I don't I'm not you know I'm not a prophet but I suspect the next president I don't know who it's going to be he's probably not going to last very long you know he's following somebody that's been there over 30 years he's got huge shoes to fill he's not going to be able to fill them we're probably in for some lean days in in coming years I don't know who knows maybe maybe the Lord will just continue to lavish blessings on us and we won't have any hard times but that doesn't tend to be the way that things go we've got to think about these things in biblical terms we've got to think in terms of what I'm really looking for is the coming of the Lord Jesus that's where my hopes are set and and what I'm serving is not let me enrich myself or let me pad my reputation or any of that vanity and folly what I'm serving is the Lord what I'm trying to do is be faithful to him and even if the project is a failure and by you know there are many people that are going to look at what we're trying to do and they're going to say your methods are too slow it takes too long it's not fast enough in terms of the fruit that it bears in the attempt to fulfill the great commission commission you're a failure is basically what they're saying and what we have to do is say well I understand you might count me a failure by your worldly standards of measure but I'm trying to be faithful to the

Lord and I'm trying to think about my life in terms of the Bible's big storyline and I'm trying to make sure that I'm thinking about time and and what I'm doing in light of the broader narrative that forms and shapes my identity so how you think about time is intrinsically connected to your self-conception and the story that you understand yourself to be living in and what Solomon is modeling for us is an understanding of his times in terms of the broader biblical storyline let me just take you to the end of the book to look at what he says about the end of life over in chapter actually I will start in it chapter 11 verse 9 I love this verse rejoice this is Ecclesiastes 11 9 rejoice oh young man in your youth you you young guys in the room your bodies recover so fast you're you're you bounce when you fall you you know less there's a group of people from from our church that plays ultimate frisbee on Sunday afternoons and last Sunday afternoon I had two of my sons went out there to play ultimate frisbee so I went with them and you know I'm watching these young guys and they're laying out for the disc you know their their their bodies are fully parallel with the ground and then they smash onto the ground and they just bounce right back up and I'm thinking to myself I would not recover from that you know if I hit the ground like that I don't think

I would that would be it for the day rejoice oh young man in your youth and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment enjoy your strength enjoy the pleasures that you see with your eyes enjoy the pleasures of your body but do it in a way that you're not going to regret when you stand before God at the final judgment what he's saying is pursue holy pleasures pursue holy joys use your strength for holy delights and then look at look at chapter 12 remember also your creator in the days of your youth before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you

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will say I have no pleasure in them he's recognizing that that life is kind of like a single day and he's and he's he's talking about youth and the dawn of life you know it's like the morning is fresh and new but then there's going to be this sunset in this time when when things grow dark and the pleasures are over and he's saying we need to remember the creator throughout all this time and we need to be prepared for the hours of the day verse 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars all those things God created in Genesis 1 14 through 16 are darkened and the clouds return after the rain I don't know about you but I've known people that get really old like you know late 90s even even into their early 100s and and you'll talk with them and they'll say I don't know why I'm still here and they're essentially saying I have no pleasure in life and sometimes these people are they're they're confined to their to their homes or to their their the place where they live and what Solomon is saying here is remember also your creator verse 1 in the days of your youth before that time comes and I think the implication is if you walk with God now you'll be able to walk with God then he continues to describe this verse 3 in the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent and the grinders cease because they are few and those who look through the windows are dimmed and the doors on the street are shut the imagery it can communicate both a great house with all this activity but it can also communicate a human body and those who look through the windows are dimmed it's almost like you start losing your eyesight verse 4 the doors on the street are shut when the sound of the grinding is low and one rises up at the sound of a bird and all the daughters of song are brought low they are afraid also of what is high as I've gotten older I've become less and less confident about my own balance about my own footing and I'm more and more cautious in high places you know my kids we a couple of years ago we went to the we went to that big forest out in Wyoming in Montana that the name is escaping me and we saw the the the Grand Canyon of the
[66:43] Rockies I think it's called or the Grand Canyon of what's that forest called not not Yosemite Yellowstone the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone and my kids are right up there on the ledge and it's driving me nuts and I'm like as far away from that ledge as I can get they are afraid also of what is high and terrors are in the way the almond tree blossoms the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails because man is going to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets and then I think this verse is talking about death verse 6 before the silver cord is snapped or the golden bowl is broken or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain or the wheel broken at the cistern and the dust returns to the earth as it was Genesis 320 you are dust and to dust you will return and the spirit returns to God who gave it God breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life and when our bodies die and and we're seated into the ground the spirit returns to God who gave it verse 8 breath of breaths says the preacher all is breath all is vapor we want to think about life honestly we want to recognize we are going to die I love this story that my my mentor Tom Schreiner it involves him several years ago his his wife was in a horrible bike accident she was she normally wore her helmet this day she wasn't wearing her helmet and she smashed her head on the pavement and it initially it wasn't clear whether she was going to live she kind of got through that that dark period and it was clear she was going to live but it wasn't clear what it was going to be like whether she was going to be able to speak whether she was going to be able to walk all these all these questions were on the table and I said to Tom I said how are you doing with all this and he said he said Jim if she never talks or walks again it will be okay he said we don't live for this life we live for the resurrection he said my body's declining I'm getting worse and he said I hope she recovers but if she doesn't recover we live for the resurrection and we'll be faithful now in anticipation of the day that will rise let's pray together father I pray that you would make it so that our hearts are full of your word I pray that you would make it so that your word is written on our hearts and Lord I pray that you would give us insight into the the sweep of the whole story and into the particular statements that are made and Lord I pray that you would use this to shape our conception of who we are of of what the time is that we have and of how we should use it Lord I pray that you would give us wisdom wisdom that makes us

Christ like make us good stewards we pray of the times that you've given to us and we ask Lord that you'd be honored by the way that we seek to know you by the way that we seek to walk with you and live out your glory and make known your character we pray Lord that you would use us to fill the dry lands with your glory as the waters cover the sea to make it so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting your name will be praised Lord make us ambitious and creative and enable us to be reconciled to your sovereign providence teach us that there's a time for everything

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and give us the wisdom to know what time we should do which thing Lord we commit ourselves to you we pray that you would help and bless us we ask all this in Christ's name amen amen

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