

**8 | Uncontrollable Seasons
and the Unsearchable Ways of God
(Biblical Ecclesiastes – Ecc 3:1-14 as base text)**

[Turn to Ecc 3:1-14, as base text]

Introduction:

Illustration: People – “If you would have told me 5 years ago that I’d be ____.”

Point: We experience this phenomena in which, although we try to plan our lives, it doesn’t seem like we are in much control. We find ourselves in seasons and situations in which we never thought we’d be in.

Illustration: Like a plastic trash bag in the wind – it goes where it is blown.

Youth? This phenomena may seem foreign to you as a teenager. But it becomes more and more real as we get older. And so we want to hear from the elderly wisdom and perspective of our preacher here.

Investigation question: What can we learn from the “course of life” – how our lives seem to head different directions and move into different “seasons”? How should we respond to this?

(1) The uncontrollable seasons of life –

3:1-8 – For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

- ² a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- ³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- ⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- ⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- ⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
- ⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- ⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Misinterpretation: “A time for this, a time for that” = knowing how to discern what is appropriate. Or: there are just different seasons in life.

Transition: But it’s more than that →

Proper understanding: It’s about the sway and uncontrollable nature of seasons. We are like a pawn moved to and fro, from this “time” (or season of life) to that “time” (season).

Evidence: This is evidenced by how little of a say or influence we have in determining these “times” ... e.g., -

- We don’t chose when we will be born and when we’ll die.
- We have little to say regarding the events that move us to mourn or laugh.
- ...When people die or our healed of illnesses.
- ...When nations choose war over peace.
- Etc.

Point: We like to think we our in control of our own destinies, of the twists and turns of our own lives. But when you step back and look at it all, we are subject to these seasons of life.

Kidner: As one commentator describes this section, it’s “the tyranny of time.”

“We dance to a tune, many times, not of our own making. ... Perhaps our choices are no freer than our responses to winter and summer, childhood and old age, dictated by the march of time and of unbidden change. // Looked at in this way, the repetition of ‘a time ...’, and a time ...’ begins to be oppressive. Nothing that we do, it seems, is free from this relativity and this pressure—almost dictation—from the outside.”

Elaboration/examples:

- A lost job.
- A gained job → moving to a totally new area.
- A sport’s injury and you’re out for your senior year (e.g., think of those Div-I scholarship athlete who have career ending injuries right before going to college).
- When we, friends, or family members get sick (like with cancer), or someone close dies.
- Loosing contact with a good friend (you move away, or you lose contact for some other reason; “life happens” we say) – It wasn’t intended; and it’s not in your control. But these things just seem to happen to you like an outside force.

Point: We are not in control of our lives. Sure, we should plan. But to try to control every twist and turn in our life is vanity/futility – we can’t achieve it, gain it, grasp it (pointless effort).

Transition: This is seen in the comments our preacher makes in →

Ecc 3:14-15 – I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. ¹⁵That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Explanation: God who is in control.

[W]hatever God does endures forever, i.e., his sovereign purposes and plans are sure. [N]othing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it.

(2) The unsearchable ways of God –

Transition: These uncontrollable seasons (at least, on controllable by us) are related to the unsearchable ways of God (who *does* control them).

They are a product of, a result of, God's unsearchable purposes—his hidden, or unknown (to us) purposes.

This hiddenness further stresses our lack of control – We can't control them... We can't even *know* them!

Ecc 7:13-14 – ¹³Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?

¹⁴In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

Two points:

- God is in control. No one can alter his purposes – v.13.
- v.14 – And God purposes all things (even in some mysterious way, unpleasant things) such that we can't search out his purposes – in other words, we aren't able to say, "Oh, God will surely do [this]. He'll surely have [such and such] in his plans for me." No, we just don't know.

Ecc 8:6-8 – For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. ⁷For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? ⁸No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.

Two points here:

- Again, we are subject to life's seasons – v.6 – "there is a time and a way for everything."
- We don't know future things – v.7
- We can't control future things – v.8.

Ecc 9:11-12 – Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. ¹² For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

Two points here:

- **v.11** – The seeming “chance” that determines life’s courses. Things don’t go the way we might expect it (e.g., “**to the swift**”).
- **v.12** – Humans simply do not know.
- These sudden turns in life are illustrated by being caught in a trap.

Ecc 10:14 – A fool multiplies words,
though no man knows what is to be,
and who can tell him what will be after him?

We don’t know what is to come. To act like we do is to fool ourselves.

Ecc 11:15 – As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

[Elaborate]

Transition: However, although we do not know God’s purposes, and the course of this life, we nonetheless has a sense of an eternal purpose →

Ecc 3:9-10 – What gain has the worker from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

Explanation: We have a sense of this broader purpose of God worked out through these various seasons of life (i.e., eternity in our hearts). But due to our limitedness, we can’t discern it. We can’t get a hold of it. We are desperately near sighted.

→ **Vanity:**

- And, thus, a vanity occurs when we try to bite off more than we can chew; when we start drawing conclusions about God’s hidden purposes when frankly we don’t know them.
- Or when we try to find out these hidden purposes and are tormented by the fact that we cannot do so.

Transition: But the book of Ecclesiastes shows us a better way.

We come to the “end of the matter” to learn what that way is. →

The “end of the matter” (3:12-13; 12:13-14) –

[Revisit] **investigation question:** So what can we learn? What do we take away from this?

Ecc 12:13-14 – ¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

(1) Submit to God –

We are not in control of our lives. Sure, we should plan. But to try to control every twist and turn in our life is vanity/futility – we can’t achieve it, gain it, grasp it (it’s pointless effort).

And so, we should recognize that we are not in control. And because we understand God to be in control, and to know much more than we do about each situation and the course of our life, we submit to him by trusting him and serving him.

As this verse says, we “fear God” and follow him by “keeping his commandments.”

Note: To the unbeliever, the fact that we are not in control is an incredibly unsettling thought (vanity!). But to the believer, who knows that God is in control, it’s a great comfort.

This vanity and frustration of changing, uncontrollable seasons of life is turned into comfort and security when we fear/trust God and recognize his loving control and care.

(2) Serve God –

Alternatively, we should embrace our stage of life as a gift from God—whatever it is—and as a means of serving him. We recognize every stage of life we are in as our appointment, a time designed by God in which we are to serve him (v.14 - how we respond will be “brought to account”).

This (i.e., embracing seasons as a gift from God) is also seen in... →

Ecc 3:12-13 – ¹² I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.

Evangelistic –

“There is a time for this, a time for that.”

And now we see that there is also a time for judgment.

Ecc 12:14 – God will bring every deed into judgment ...

How will we fair in this judgment?

... with every secret thing whether good *or evil*.

[GOSPEL of justification – verdict of not guilty in this end-time judgment even now in the present through Christ - ELABORATE]