

Life's Scheduled Programming

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[0 : 00] I have here a remote control. Who has one of these in your house or something similar? A remote control is a very useful device. It allows you to control what you're watching on a screen.

And this one has a number of different controls, volume. But also, pause. You get to pause what you're watching. You get to fast forward.

You get to go forward to maybe a scene you want to see. You get to rewind back to something you want to watch again. Now, if you're old enough to remember when VCRs first came out, right? I'm not going to ask you to raise your hands. But these were cutting edge. It was amazing, this new technology where you're watching a movie and you could pause it.

So you could go to the bathroom or get a snack from the kitchen and not miss anything. It was great. And, of course, DVDs came out also with remotes that you could control what you're watching. And now, of course, we take it for granted.

[1 : 01] With streaming services, it's so easy to pause, to fast forward, to choose what you want to watch out of the hundreds of options, to track forward. You know when you hover your mouse point over YouTube, you can see exactly the frames where you want to go.

It's so much control we have over what we're watching. But it wasn't always that way, right? Back in the day, you'll remember, again, if you're old enough, I'm old enough to remember, there was scheduled programming.

Remember scheduled programming where you didn't get to choose what was on. You had to watch what was on. I know the kids are going, what? That's crazy. But it's how we lived, boys and girls. Scheduled programming where whatever was on was on and you couldn't pause it. You couldn't fast forward. You couldn't rewind. You couldn't choose what you wanted to watch. Maybe there were a couple of channels, but it was scheduled.

You had to wait until the ad break to rush to the toilet or to get your snack. That's how it was. You had no control. You just had to take it as it came.

[2 : 02] Well, I want to ask you a question this morning. Consider this. What would you be willing to give to have a remote control for your life?

Think of it. Think about that. Imagine you get to pause your time. Now, I think we've all been there, haven't we? Where we were actually, we're so overwhelmed with things.

We get a break and we just want to pause, right? Before tomorrow comes. Maybe on a Sunday night. Have you ever had that feeling? That feeling, I just want to pause.

I'm not ready for the week ahead. Imagine you got that opportunity. You just had a remote control. You could pick it up and you could pause your time until you're ready to resume. Or maybe fast forward through times in your life that aren't that great.

Maybe you're going through a difficulty or painful time and you just want to skip past it to the next scene. Fast forward and imagine you had a control that could just do that. Or rewind.

[3 : 01] Imagine you had a rewind option for your life. You could go back to times in your life that were great, that you really enjoyed. Well, I'm afraid to give you some bad news this morning.

There is no such thing as a remote control for your life. In fact, the fact is, the truth is, our lives are actually far more like scheduled programming.

Where you don't have any control of what's up next. And that is the reality of life to which Ecclesiastes now turns. In chapter 3, I invite you to have your Bibles open in front of you.

Chapter 3, if you don't have a physical Bible, you can get an online one on our Connect app. But we're looking at Ecclesiastes 3 and that's really what he's considering this morning.

This scheduled programming of life. The inability we have to control the times we face in our lives.

[4 : 10] And it's a reality of life for everyone. That's why I've entitled this sermon, Life's Scheduled Programming. And he makes the point in the first eight verses here in Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

And he starts by saying, there is a time for everything. And a season for every activity under the heavens. And then he says, there's a time that this is going to happen and a time that that's going to happen.

A time of this and a time of that. Verse 4, time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. These are the scheduled programs of our life.

And many of these things we read, war, mourning, weeping, are times in our life we would rather avoid.

And yet we can't. That's the point he's making here. There is no fast forward button through the times of weeping and mourning. There is no pause button for the times of dancing and laughing, much as we would like there to be.

[5 : 13] And the fact is, even though this is a truth of life that he observes in his wisdom, it's a truth of life that we actually really don't like.

We hate to admit it's true as people who like to be in control of our time, don't we? Especially in today's culture. More than ever before, we live in the age of schedules and calendars and time management apps and blogs on how to have more control over our lives and over our time.

And we don't like this idea that actually we're not nearly as in control of our times of life than we think we are. And this truth observed here in Ecclesiastes 3, that no matter how much we try, we don't really get to decide what's coming up next in our lives.

And it's an uncomfortable thought, isn't it? It's an uncomfortable thought that we don't actually get to decide what's up next. And that's the frustration and the discomfort that he's meditating on.

You know, often this passage is used in a positive way, you know, the beauty of the times of life. But actually, the first eight verses, there's a tone of frustration in it.

[6 : 35] There's a lot of times in life we'd much rather avoid, but we have to go through. And then he proves this fact by, if you noticed, when we were reading it earlier, bordering the list with the very extremes of life on earth.

Right at the beginning in verse 2 and right at the end of verse 8. A time to be born and a time to die. The extremes of our individual life. And of course, at the end, the extremes of our national life.

A time for war and a time for peace. And it's true, you didn't choose when you were going to get born. Anyone? I mean, unless I'm alone here.

But I think none of us got to choose when we would get born. None of us got to choose our birthday. And you don't get to choose when you're going to die.

Also, you didn't get to choose whether you were born in a country that was at war. Or a country that was in a time of peace. I mean, some people born in a certain age, some of the people in history have known nothing but war all their lives.

[7 : 42] It's a totally different life to a life in relative peace. But you don't get to choose. You don't get to decide. And that's what borders this little section at the top and the bottom.

These extremes of life that we don't get to decide. But then in between, which is interestingly in seven pairs of two. And seven in the Bible is, especially in Hebrew, is this idea of completion.

So it's basically, he's summing up all of the different encounters of life. All of the different occasions of life that we go through. In between birth and death.

In between war and peace. All the other events, the same principle applies. We don't get to choose what happens. And the older we get, the more we realize the truth of that, don't we?

As you go through your years, you realize that life inevitably moves from one season to the next. And you just do not get to control what season you're in today.

[8 : 48] And that's a frustrating thought. No matter how much you do. No matter how much you try to change it. No matter how hard you work. No matter how much control you try to have over your life. No matter how many of those blogs you read or life coaches you listen to.

None of that can affect the times that you will inevitably face. None of that will change the season that you will inevitably face.

The rich will have times of weeping. Just like the poor. The poor will have times of dancing. And so because of that.

Because nothing we do can actually change that fact. Ecclesiastes then ends off in verse 9. By asking the same question that he's asked at the beginning of the book.

What do we gain from all our toil? What's the point of going about all of this activity we go about if it doesn't really change anything?

[9 : 49] That's the question he's asking. It's a good question. What is the point of the effort we go to if it gives us no more control of our lives? What's the point of working overtime?

And what's the point of pursuing your career if actually it doesn't give you any more control over your life than you had before? And that idea that no matter what we do, no matter how much we work, it's still going to continue to go through these inevitable seasons and changes.

It can easily lead to despair. You know, to think, what's the point then? If it's already, you know, I'm already fated to go a particular way.

What's the point of trying to change it if I can't? And it is despairing, like many things in Ecclesiastes, but that's why we've got to continue reading on.

And we've got to remember the key. Remember two weeks ago, if you weren't here two weeks ago, you need to understand the key to reading this book. If you read this book without the key, it's going to be very difficult to understand why it's in the Bible.

[11 : 00] But there's a key to understand Ecclesiastes. And it is the phrase we see multiple times in this book, under the sun or under heaven. We see it again at verse 1 in this chapter.

There's a season for every activity under the heavens or under the sun elsewhere. And so what is happening here is that in these different chapters, considering different parts of life, Ecclesiastes starts by looking at life from a limited perspective, a perspective of under the sun, only what we can see.

Not anything above the sun, not anything divine, not considering that yet. Just under the sun. And he looks at all these things. We looked at last week, possessions and wealth and pleasure. We looked at the week before, the cosmos and the cycles of nature.

And he says, you know, under the sun, it's really quite pointless. All of this stuff. And this week, the seasons of the times we go through. Because if you look at it from that perspective, then all these times that we go through and face in our lives are pretty random.

They're just the collection of pure chance and atoms hitting together. And there's no rhyme or reason behind them. And inevitably, we're going to go through things that are just going to, we're going to be lucky to avoid things and lucky to get things.

[12 : 19] And that's all it is under the sun. We're just subjects of luck and chance. And in that case, if we are subjects of mere luck and chance, then this lack of control over our lives is a terrible thought, isn't it?

If we can't control our lives and what happens tomorrow, and actually it's just up to fate and chance, then who says that terrible things aren't going to happen to you tomorrow?

It's a terrible thought once you start thinking about it. And that's why people don't like to think about it too much. And they just get on with life without having all these deep questions. But Ecclesiastes is here in the Bible to force us to consider these things.

And that thought is actually what depresses countless people who do start to think about it. People in this world who also, like Ecclesiastes here, have limited their view to what's under the sun.

It's a depressing thought when you start to think about life deeply and you limit your view to what's under the sun. But it all changes in verse 10.

[13 : 28] Because it's in verse 10 that Ecclesiastes starts to bring God into the picture. And it's there that we realize, in the second half of this passage we have this morning, that time is not random.

Time is not the product of pure chance. Because time is actually in God's hands. Look at verse 11. Now he's changed his perspective. He's starting to consider things above the sun.

Look what he says at the beginning of verse 11. God, he, has made everything beautiful in its time. Or another word for the Hebrew, which is translated beautiful, is appropriate.

God knows what he's doing with time. He's made everything beautiful in its time. You see the difference. You see how, what happens when this perspective changes.

From just this random, well this is going to happen, this is going to happen, this is going to happen, this is going to happen, we have no control. Versus actually, God is doing things. And they are beautiful.

[14 : 35] Even if we can't see how. When you bring God into the picture, it changes your perspective on life and on time. Because when you bring God into the picture, you no longer see

time as this enemy that we constantly have to live our lives trying to push against and get control over.

That's typically how people living under the sun see time. That I need to agonize to frantically get control over my time and try to control tomorrow.

And time is the enemy. Time is the thing. I wonder if you feel that way. Even Christians, even people who believe the Bible, we still have this war with time, I think.

Where we constantly feel time is against us. Especially in today's modern world. We constantly feel we have to force our will over time. Otherwise it's going to overwhelm us.

I wonder if you feel that way. But here, you bring God into the picture. You no longer see time as the enemy. You start to realize and concede that we are not meant to control our time.

[15:44] But rather we are meant to be carried along in the seasons that God has already determined for us to go through. It's a very different way of looking at our lives.

It's a very different way of looking at time itself. Under the sun we see it as this enemy we need to get control over. But when we bring God into the picture, we see that actually, not only is there no point getting control over it, but it's much better to live lives where we let God's seasons carry us. So I grew up in Fisher, for those of you who know. And so that means that I grew up around the sea and spent a lot of time swimming in the sea.

And have been doing it ever since. Spending as much time as I can in the sea. But early on, when you spend a lot of time in the sea, you get taught about rip currents.

Now rip currents are a phenomenon that often happens on beaches in the surf zone, where there's this flow of water away from the beach.

[16:54] And you can get caught in it. And it's quite a distressing thing. A few times I've felt a rip current. And you get caught in this rip current and you get taken out to sea. And it's very distressing. But you know what they always say is if you get caught in a rip current, don't fight it.

Don't try to swim against it. Don't try to swim back to the shore. It goes against what we would think we need to do. But the thing about rip currents is that once they get behind the surf zone, it carries you to a place of calmer water.

And then you're okay. And then you can get back. And that's how we need to consider time if it's in God's hand.

See, I'm convinced that so many people in this world are stressed out and burned out because they're constantly trying to swim against the time that God has allocated for them to be in.

And they spend all their energy focusing on trying to change the situation that they're in that they don't like, that they never actually take any time to learn how to live appropriately in the seasons that God has given them.

[18:02] You know, knowing that if you're in a bad season in life, there's a reason for it and it's not going to last forever.

That's what this wisdom in Ecclesiastes actually gives us. That don't try to push against it. Because if you let it carry you, you will eventually reach calmer waters.

And that is why Ecclesiastes continues from verse 12 and he says this, I know that there is nothing better. In light of what he's just considered, the inevitability of time, but also, or the inevitability of times changing, the fact that we can't control it, but also that God is in the picture now.

He says, There is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. Verse 13, That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction. In all their toil, this is the gift of God. You see, what he's saying is whatever situation you're in, wherever your life is in, that's a gift of God right now. You know, and trying to always change it to get the thing that you want is like receiving a gift at Christmas time and it's not the gift you wanted and just throwing it away and asking the person, What else do you have for me?

[19:25] That's very rude. But we do that with God every time we don't actually accept what he's given in front of us and learn to make the most of it and find the good in whatever situation God has put us in rather than trying to change it.

That's the wisdom that we're learning here. And learn to enjoy whatever we can in the present moment. And of course, some moments there'll be more to enjoy and some less. But if we learn to go with the flow, and I'm talking to Capetonian, so it should be a little easier for you to do this because it is a very Capetonian principle, but we still don't get it right.

But just actually learn to live in the present. Learn to live in the moment. You know, when you're driving home from work and you're thinking about all the things you need to do, but there's a beautiful sunset over Table Mountain.

You know what? Stop. Forget tomorrow and enjoy this gift that God has given you right now. Do we do that? You know how many beautiful scenes we pass in our life that we don't stop and appreciate what God has given us now?

Because we're all frantically trying to control our time. We're all frantically trying to get a hold of, get control of tomorrow. That we don't enjoy today. And yet that's what the teacher here is encouraging us to do.

[20 : 46] And it's the key to a much less stressful life. If you're stressed out at the moment, you know this is the key. To change your relationship with time. And learn to enjoy what God has put in front of you now.

Don't worry about tomorrow too much. Jesus himself taught that, didn't he? In the Sermon on the Mount. How can worrying about tomorrow add a single hour to your life? He said. Tomorrow has enough trouble of its own.

Today has enough trouble of its own. He said, don't worry about tomorrow. Just focus on today. And Jesus himself taught that wisdom in his teachings. But all the more we need to learn to do that. Especially if we realize that there's a bigger picture at play. That we can't see. And that's what we're reminded of in verse 11.

Let me read it again. I'm going to continue to the end of it. Have a look in your Bibles. Verse 11. He, God, has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart.

[21 : 48] Yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. No one can fathom. No one knows the big plan, actually. With what God is doing with our time.

And we know there is something bigger at play. God has set eternity in human hearts. Deep down we all know that there's something beyond what we can see. Something beyond the sun. Something above the sun. There's eternal plans at work. Above the cycles of life on earth. And yet, we do not know what they are.

Now, he was writing in the Old Testament. God has revealed far more since then. But even now, as New Testament Christians, the truth is we don't fully know what God is doing.

We don't know the big picture. Romans 11. Verse 33. The Apostle Paul says, Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments.

[22 : 46] And his paths are beyond tracing out. Trying to work out. Why God is doing this. Why I'm in this situation. Why I'm in this season of life.

His paths are beyond tracing out. Don't ask those questions. Because we can't know the answer. But we do know that there's something at play.

Beyond what we can see. Beyond what we can understand. And that should humble us. And so the moral of the story is don't try to control your time too much.

That's really the moral of the story of Ecclesiastes 3. You'll just be swimming against the rip current. Don't try to live a life where you think you can avoid the bad times.

Or you can engineer only good times in your life. Don't think that. Because it's not going to happen. You're going to fail. And you're going to spend all your life's work and your energy and your efforts trying to build a life for yourself that you actually don't have any control over.

[23 : 51] And it's a waste of energy. You'll end up drowning. If you swim against the tides of life that God has already set. Don't try to control your time too much. And you know what?

You know what's really encouraging? Is not even Jesus did. Not even Jesus tried to control the circumstances of his life too much. For Jesus too.

There was a time to weep and a time to laugh. He didn't avoid a time of weeping when his friend Lazarus died. Jesus wept. He went through the bad times of life along with the rest of us.

He went through the weeping. He went through the mourning. Jesus wasn't immune to the bad seasons of life. And there was a time to be born and a time to die.

A time to die for Jesus. Much as he wanted to avoid it. Did you know that? Jesus wanted to avoid his death. Of course. He was human. In the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died.

[24 : 52] He pleaded to God. If there's any way for this cup. Talking about his fate. His death. The next day. If there's any way for this cup to pass from me.

May it be. He wanted to avoid the bad. But he still submitted to the time his father had placed him in.

But not my will but yours be done. And you know that reminds us. Something about Jesus.

Something that Hebrews 2.17 tells us. That he became like us in every way.

To represent us. To be our captain. To die on our behalf. He had to become like us in every way.

Including giving up knowing and controlling his own time. You know there were things Jesus didn't know. You know his disciples asked him.

[25 : 48] The plan ahead. You know. When's the day of the Lord coming? He said not even the son knows that. There were things that when Jesus became a human. When the son of God. Was given flesh.

There were things Jesus was not privy to. Things Jesus the son did not know. Because he had to become like us in every way. Including giving up control.

And knowledge of his own time. And so he too had to trust his father's control of his time. He had to trust. That his father loved him and knew what he was doing.

Do you believe that? About God. In your life. That. He loves you and knows what he's doing with your time.

Do you really believe that? Because. Let me tell you something. That's the only way you'll happily give up your need to control your time.

[26 : 49] If you believe that about God. Anything less. If you believe anything less about God. You will always want. And frantically live to try control your time again.

Because you don't actually trust God with it. Do you trust God with the seasons of your life? Do you trust God with your time? Like Jesus did.

Enough to. Give up control of it. And let the seasons that he's set carry you. To where he wants you to be. Do you believe that about God?

That he loves you and he knows what he's doing with your time? Well let me tell you. You can only believe that if you're a Christian. You can only believe that if you come to Christ.

There's no other way. That you can have that assurance that God is doing good things with your time. Because Jesus came to this earth.

[27 : 52] For the express purpose. To bring you into the same relationship with his father that he has. By dying for sins.

So that all who trust him. Well let me read to you how John puts it actually. The apostle John in John chapter 1 says. He came to that which was his own.

But his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him. To those who believed in his name. He gave the right to become children of God.

It's a right. You don't get by yourself. You don't have that right. You don't have a right to be a child of God. In this way. But Jesus came to give those who believe in his name.

The right to become children of God. Not everyone. Can know that about God. That he is our father who loves us. And will engineer our time for the best.

[28 : 47] So we can trust him. Only those who come to Christ can know that. If you embrace Christ. You become a child of God. And then. You can have the same confidence.

As Jesus. That God. God. The father is working in your times. For ultimate good. You know.

The gospel. Therefore. Is an amazing thing. I'm looking forward to this course. We're going to.

We're going to look at gospel in life. Because the gospel. The more we uncover it. The more we realize how.

Powerful and transformative it is. Because here we've realized this morning. The gospel does not only transform. Your relationship with God. But it transforms our relationship with time itself.

What is your relationship with time? A love-hate relationship. Is it your enemy you're trying to push against? Well the gospel. If you believe it. And you follow Christ.

[29 : 46] It transforms how you look at time itself. Because it assures. Those who believe. That while. While seasons in your life.

Still will inevitably change. And will swing. From bad to good. And good to bad. And you won't have any control over that. The gospel. Tells us. For God's children.

Those seasons are not random. Romans 8. 28. In all things. God works for the good. Of those who love him. And are called according to his purpose.

And. You know what else the gospel tells us? Not only does it give assurance. To those who follow Christ. That the seasons in your life. Are no longer random. But it tells you. That the final swing. Even though you will go from good to bad. To good to bad. That Jesus came to tell us. The final swing. Of seasons in your life. Will be ultimately. Good. That's what he's saying.

[30 : 42] In Matthew 5. In the Beatitudes. He's talking about. Situations. Seasons. That people are in. And he assures. The people. His disciples. Who follow him.

That if you're in a bad time now. It's going to swing. And it's going to ultimately. Swing for your good. Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom.

Of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn. For they will be comforted. You know the riptide. That you're stuck in now. And trying to swim against. You're blessed.

If you're in God's riptide. Because it's going to take you places. That you could never go yourself. Blessed are the meek. For they will inherit the earth. To end.

I want to take us to. First Peter. And read. How he. Closes. Because it's here. Peter is telling. A group of Christians. Who are going through. Really tough times.

[31 : 39] And he's trying to. Give them this wisdom. In the close of his letter. And he writes these words. 1 Peter 5. Verse 6. This is wisdom.

For Christians. 1 Peter 5. Verse 6. He says. Humble yourselves. Humble yourselves. Therefore. Under God's mighty hand.

That he may lift you up. In due time. Humble yourself. Human being. You have no control over your time.

Don't think you are God. Don't think you are in control of time. Humble yourself. Realize the truth about yourself. That you don't get to control your times. God does. And you can't see the whole picture.

But that's okay. Because if you are in Christ. You are known. And loved. By the one who does. See the whole picture. Who will lift you up.

[32 : 39] At the proper time. And so. Verse 7. Cast all your anxiety on him. Because he cares for you. The one who controls time.

Cares for you. If you are in Christ. And that should. Transform your relationship with time. Verse 10. And the God of all grace. Who called you to his eternal glory. In Christ. After you have suffered. A little while. Will himself restore you. And make you strong.

Firm. And steadfast. To him. Be the power. Forever and ever. Amen. Now let's pray. O Lord.

We thank you that. When we dig into your word. You have great. Profound truth for us to hear. And take on board.

[33 : 35] That we could never. Find anywhere else. In this life. We thank you for the Bible. We thank you for these books. Even like Ecclesiastes. That sober us to the realities of life.

And Lord. We pray that you would help us. Not to listen to the world. And how the world tells us to. Spend our lives. And to see time. Lord.

We hear so much from the world. Every week. And we. We confess that we. We listen so little to you. Just 30 minutes on a Sunday.

A little bit during the week. Help us to listen better. Help us to hear you. And your wisdom. More than we hear. The world. Help us to spend more time.

In your word. And with your people. Than we spend online. With people who don't. Care about us. Because Lord. You care. And we thank you. That the one who is in control of our time.

[34 : 34] Cares for us. Lord. I also pray for anybody here. Who is not yet in that relationship with you. That Jesus came to this earth. To bring them. Lord. I pray that you would. Cause them to. Explore the life of Jesus.

To read. The gospels. And that you would open their eyes. To see the relationship. That you made them. And saved. That you sent Jesus. To save them to be in Lord.

And so we pray. That you would fortify us. With this truth. As we go on in life. In the coming week. In Jesus name. Amen.