

Ecclesiastes 3: 1 and 2; "A Time for Every Purpose under Heaven",
A Bible Study prepared for the Evening of September 3rd, 2008,
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Time is something that has been invented by God with relation to the world and all the physical things that He made in the Beginning. God Himself stands outside of time, and yet He always is very intimately involved with it, because He is the One who upholds all things by the word of His power. The reason that God stands outside of time is because He is the only self-existent eternal Being. He actually stands outside of time and outside of His whole created universe. I wanted to say this before I told you that in order to uphold His whole creation He must also be able to interact with it in a very intimate and thorough way. Nothing escapes the notice of God. Nothing created exists or continues apart from His Providential care of all things. We believe that the Bible teaches this. Turn over with me to Job Chapter 34 and verses 13-15. You can very easily see how sovereign our God is and how extensive His control is over every created thing by the way that Elihu describes Him here. "Who gave Him charge over the earth?" "Or who appointed Him over the whole world?" The answer of course is; no one did. His creation of the world and His sustaining of the world are all of His ordering. "If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust." God created all living things and causes them all to be able to live, and breathe, and move; but He could very easily gather all the breath of life back to Himself and all flesh would perish together. This is a frightening thought which ought to cause men to seek Him, to find Him, and to know Him. But God is not only powerful. But He is also infinitely wise and good. Turn to Psalm 147, verse 5. "Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite." "The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground." "Sing to the Lord with Thanksgiving." "Sing praises on the harp to our God, who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains." "He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry." The Lord knows how to do all of these amazing things.

If He knows how to do all of these great things and to do them with wisdom, then does He not also know the right time to do them? Well look over at Psalm 145 and you will see the answer. Verse 14 says, "The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down." "The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season." "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." This is the God whom we worship and serve. And He also, because He is wise, knows the time and the season for everything under heaven as our verses say here in Ecclesiastes. "To everything that man does, there is a season; there is a time for every purpose under heaven. The lesson for us here tonight is that there is a right time in God's mind for everything that is right and

good. And it is for man to learn what God's mind is concerning every subject that is listed in verse 1 - 8; thereby learning to glorify Him. There are some of these things listed which are outside of man's power do anything about them because they are too great for man. And then there are some things which are in man's power to either engage in them or to abstain from them; and man must learn how to distinguish both. What I will attempt to do tonight is to take each of these verses and to briefly distinguish each subject in relation to God's sovereignty and man's responsibility so that you and I will better understand life. If we do not finish all of them tonight, we will take them up in our next study.

1st - There is a time to be born and a time to die.

The time of each person's birth is wholly in God's hands. Your parents may try to plan the day of your birth in terms of your conception, but even that was not in their hands. You did not choose when you were to be born in time, or where in the world you will live when you are born. All this was God's decision. God knows the purpose that He has in mind when He creates you. Turn with me over to Jeremiah Chapter 1. God is calling Jeremiah to the ministry of being a prophet. Jeremiah isn't so sure. God starts it out with him by saying in verse 4, "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.'" "Then said I: 'Ah, Lord God!'" "I cannot speak, for I am a youth." "But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, I am a youth, for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.'" "Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." We can see from these verses that it is the Lord whose purposes will be fulfilled; the purposes which He has planned from long ago. Our responsibility is to learn to seek to understand the purpose for which we have been created. We have been created to glorify God and we must do it within the time that has been allotted to us or we will have failed. Jonathan Edwards said, "God gave you time here in order to prepare for eternity, and your future depends on the improvement of time."

There is another thing that we need to consider in relation to our birth. It is whether we understand that we have only so much time given to us here upon the earth, in which we can come to know God and to glorify Him. Look at Job 14: 1. "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." "He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue." Look at verse 5 now. "Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass." We need to understand that we are going to die sometime or other, and that time is not known to us. God gives us a certain time to live and we must improve upon it, for there is also a certain time to die which is fixed in God's purposes. Therefore, we are given a certain responsibility. And we can find it mentioned in many places in the Bible, but let us look at one. Psalm 90, verses 7-12. The children of Israel had grieved God at many points after they left Egypt. This is a prayer of Moses'. He says, "For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified." "You

have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance." "For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh." "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for is soon cut off, and we fly away." "Who knows the power of Your anger?" "For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath." "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Our responsibility is to pray and ask that God would teach us to think about the days going by; not just to spend them on earthly pursuits and aims, but to include generous portions of time for spiritual things as well. We must learn to pursue God Himself in the things of everyday life. This is learning to be rich toward God.

The only way to find these good and eternal things is if we are born again by the Spirit of God. Unless we are born again we cannot see, we cannot enter the kingdom of God. And we must enter while we are still alive and in this life. There is a time to be born. We cannot ultimately control that time of God's work of regenerating our heart. But we do know that it is by faith in Jesus Christ that we do enter the kingdom. It is also by faith that we go to a Bible believing church and listen to the preaching of the good word of God. This will bring about our growth in knowledge and grace. It will also bring our children to consider God and His salvation in Jesus Christ. The knowledge of God does not come by direct revelation in our days. It comes by faith in the word of God. Turn with me to Psalm 87. The importance of regularly attending a Bible-believing church where the Word of God is preached cannot be estimated. Listen to Psalm 87. "His foundation is in the holy mountains." "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!" "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to those who know Me." "Behold, O Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia: 'This one was born there.'" "And of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself will establish her.'" "The Lord will record, when He registers the peoples; 'This one was born there.'" "Both the singer and the players of instruments say, 'All my springs are in you.'" What is God saying here? He is showing us, in our days, the importance of the New Testament Biblical church. This is where people come to be born again. This is where their springs of spiritual delight are. The people who have learned this blessed truth know this, and they prize it. They know that God Himself is more delighted with the church of His Son, the gathering of His people together for worship and to hear His word, more than if they stayed home and stayed apart for such worship, by themselves in their own home. This is a truth which you may have not sufficiently considered. If you have not, I hope that you will. God prizes His Church. And so should we.

Secondly -There is a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted. (verse 2b)

This idea is found in the Bible in terms of God establishing nations or kingdom or "plucking them up". You can see this if you will turn over to Jeremiah

18. Jeremiah was told by God to go down to the potter's house and there he would see a great illustration. He went down and there the potter was making something on the wheel. "And the vessel", it says in verse 4, "was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make." "Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying, 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?'" "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel." "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it." "And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it." In other words, there is a time for God to plant, and there is a time for Him to pluck up.

There is also a time to plant and a time to pluck up in our own lives in a spiritual sense. In an earthly sense the farmer must plant to be able to raise a crop. And it must be done at the right general time. It cannot be done too early in the spring. And it should not be done too late. The principle can easily be transferred over to the spiritual realm as well. There is a time for these things to happen. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a spiritual sower. The Father is the one who plants us in Christ. "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not been planted, shall be rooted up." But if we have been planted in the likeness of Christ's death, we shall never be rooted up. (Romans 6: 5 says, "For if we have been united (or planted) in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." We will be part of that great harvest which will be gathered into God's barn at the end of the age. All this is done by them in the time which they ordain is best.

Even though God is so sovereign in regard to the success of all spiritual planting and plucking up, still you and I who are true Christians have a responsibility to join in, in the work of sowing the word of God and reaping the wages of eternal life. Turn over to Ecclesiastes 11: 6. "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good." And also John 4: 35, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months, and then comes the harvest?'" "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" "and he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together." We must always remember that only God can plant a sinner in good soil and change his heart. Only God can pluck up and judge unrepentant sinners at the last day. But we do have the important task of sowing seed. And so we should do it. Preaching and gathering people into churches is called planting by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3: 5. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?" "I planted, Apollos watered,

but God gave the increase." "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase."

And then finally we should remember that in our personal lives it is so important that we see that there is a time for plucking out the habits of sin in our lives. Matthew 5: 29 - "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." And obeying the commandments of the Lord does yield fruit. 2 Timothy 2: 6 and 7 say, "The hardworking farmer must be the first to partake of the crops. The farmer labors in ploughing, sowing, fertilizing, weeding, and finally reaping the harvest that he has sown. So shall we also do in the way that we live. Let us all think about how we can sow to the Spirit and uproot the desires of the flesh more and more.