

Ecclesiastes 3: 4; "A time to Weep, and a time to Laugh",
A Bible Study delivered on the evening of October 1st, 2008,
at the Rendall home.

These verses 1-8 that we are studying show us that there is a time and a place for every purpose, for everything that God created man to do and experience under heaven. The object of our study is to see that there is a time in God's mind which is right and appropriate for us to engage in the things which are listed here; and then there is a time when it is not appropriate. Indeed, there may be times when it may be downright sinful to do so. And so I am hoping that we, having learned from the Scriptures, when the appropriate time is, that we will also, then, learn to apply this truth of what is the right time to our lives. We will learn the right time to weep and to laugh if we look at other portions of Scripture which comment upon the verse under consideration. Verse 4 says that there is, "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. I said to you, in our last study, that the words of the second couplet are a comment upon, or an amplification of, the first couplet. In other words, the words weeping and mourning should go together in our consideration. And the words laughing and dancing should go together. They build off each other and help make the meaning clear. Let's first take the subject of the time for weeping and mourning.

When is the right time, in God's holy mind, for weeping and mourning?

I believe that the Scriptures tell us that the right time for weeping and mourning is when we know and understand that we have lost someone or something, or when we are afraid that we might lose someone or something. Weeping and mourning is usually engaged in when we have suffered loss or the bereavement of a loved one. We should understand that this is the appropriate time for tears. This is one of the real reasons that God created the tear ducts in man's eyes. I would like you to turn over with me to Deuteronomy 34: 5. Here, Moses, the servant of the Lord dies at the time of God's appointment. "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord." "And He (that is the Lord) buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day." "Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died." "His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished." "And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty day." "So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended." You can see the appropriateness of this in every way. It was the Lord who raised Moses up to be the great leader and deliverer of God's people. He was the leader of a nation. It was right that he be mourned for a month. This is what is usually, now, done by this nation when one of her President's dies. The flag is flown at half-mast for a month, and there is a general mourning among the people if he has indeed been a great and good leader. But with Moses, here were several millions of people who had been through so

much with him; who had been taught so much by him and there tears for those 30 days were very real tears.

What do we do when we see the tears of people who are grieving the loss of a loved one? Well, I believe that we are to sympathize with them and if we really are identifying with their loss and feel it as our loss as well, we also ought to be able to cry. Turn over with me to John chapter 11. Here we have the incidence of Lazarus' death. Jesus deliberately waited for several days to come to Bethany until Lazarus died because it was his intention to raise Lazarus from the dead and not simply to come right away and heal him. We will take up our reading at verse 17. "So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days." "Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away." "And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother." This was most definitely the right thing for them to do. And it is the right thing for us to do as well. It is right for us to come to sympathize and to comfort the close relatives of the one who has died. Skipping down to verse 31. "Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, 'She is going to the tomb to weep there.'" "Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.'" "Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." "And He said, 'Where have you laid him?'" "They said to Him, 'Lord come and see.'" "Jesus wept." "Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him!'" "And some of them said, 'Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept his man from dying?'"

We can learn from this passage a number of things about appropriate weeping. Mary was weeping and she was weeping for 2 reasons. She was weeping because Lazarus had died. And then she was weeping because she knew that Jesus could have healed him and had not. Sometimes we will weep when matters are too great for us to change, as well as weeping because of our losing someone or something. There is nothing wrong with this if it coupled with faith in God. Martha, Mary's sister, had also made mention of her belief that if Jesus would have been there, that her brother would not have died. But she says in verse 22, "But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." This is the right use of faith in connection with our sorrow, our grief, and our weeping. Yes this terrible thing has happened and our loved one has died. But, even now Lord, you are able to do all things. Now you notice in verse 33 that Jesus took notice of Mary's weeping and the weeping of the Jews who came with her as well. And it says there that as he did so, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." You don't often find that Jesus was troubled about too many things. He was troubled as He was praying in the Garden about undergoing the sufferings of the cross and bearing the sins of the World. And you find Him troubled here. There may be other places, but I cannot think of one. Why was He troubled? Why did He groan? And then

furthermore, when He comes to the tomb, it says that He wept. Why did Jesus weep?

Well, to begin with, I think that Jesus wept out of sympathy for Mary and Martha and all those with them. It is a good thing to be able to do as it says in Romans 12: 15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." Ask yourself tonight if you are a person who is able to sympathize with others who are mourning or sad, or filled with grief? Are you a person who can go to a person in the time of their need, when they are grieving, and just sit with them and cry? Perhaps you will not say many words. Sometimes words are not enough to comfort the grieving. But weeping with them usually is. Sometimes this is just the right thing to do. But there was, I believe, another reason why Jesus wept. It wasn't because this business of raising Lazarus from the dead was too great for him. It was because as he looked at the Jews weeping who were with Mary, He saw something which made him groan in His spirit. It was their unbelieving hearts. Jesus groaned because even though they had come to sympathize with Mary, that some of them had also come to look critically at him in this whole event. When Jesus wept, they said, "See how He loved him!" This was the right reaction on the part of some. But some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" Instead of reasoning from the lesser to the greater and saying, "If this man opened the eyes of the blind, surely He can also raise the dead," they want to take issue with him over not coming in time to keep Lazarus from dying. This should show us something about sinful human nature. Sinful human nature will always doubt and criticize when it cannot get what it wants in its way or in its time. But God's way is usually not found in either. And it is a lesson and a warning to us all. These Jews knew how to weep and sympathize but thought that they also knew how to judge Christ, the very Son of God. They thought that He was simply a man who had been given certain powers. "Could not this Man...kept this man from dying? But as the Son of God He didn't want to keep Lazarus from dying so that He could raise him from the dead and show His power over it! This is a greater miracle yet. And it shows us that in our grieving, in our weeping, and in our mourning over our loss of our loved ones we must always remember the power of Christ to raise them from the dead if they have believed in Him for salvation. And, if they have not believed in Him, we should always remember to believe that God is holy and wise in everything that He does, and that we should justify Him and vindicate His justice in the damnation of sinners, even if in losing an unbelieving loved one, that we are sad. A Christian may certainly sorrow and weep and mourn, but he should not do so as one who has no hope.

There is another time for weeping and mourning that is appropriate to all men. It is the weeping and mourning over our sinfulness. "Blessed are they that mourn"; that is, mourning over their sin; "for they shall be comforted." They shall be comforted with the forgiveness of their sins if they come to Jesus Christ looking for that forgiveness. And they shall be comforted by the Holy Spirit who is the

Comforter who convicts them of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. And they shall be comforted with having their conscience cleansed and the prospect of being able to serve God acceptably in all that they do. But mourning over your sin and your sins is an integral part of what it means for you to repent of them. You can see this in James 4: 8. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." "Lament and mourn and weep!" "Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." He is speaking to Christians who have wanted to have friendship with the World and a friendship with God at the same time. He says that "he who wants to make himself a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." It is time to weep and mourn when you see this in yourself. I could spend much more time on this subject of weeping and mourning, but I do not want you to go away sad from the study tonight.

Let us now ask the question, "When is the appropriate time in God's holy mind for the Christian to laugh and to dance?"

We have already seen in a previous study that Solomon found out that laughing just for the sake of laughing is "madness". "I said of laughter, 'it is madness', and of mirth, 'What does it accomplish?'" It doesn't accomplish anything; it is vanity itself. But there is a time to laugh, and there is a time to dance. I am not speaking now of social dancing. I cannot think of a place in the Bible that commends social dancing between the sexes. Perhaps is appropriate between a husband and wife on the day of their wedding or between a husband and his wife at social events where other husbands and wives are dancing. Perhaps others who are single can dance in line dances for joy at their joy. Perhaps a father with his daughter or a mother with her son at a wedding. But I cannot think that much social dancing could fall under the category of the holy dancing which is found in the Bible. It is not good for men to dance with other men's wives or for married men to dance with single women, or married women to dance with single men. This kind of dancing could easily have sensual overtones to it. You can see the evidence of this in Job chapter 21, verses 11-15. "Speaking of the wicked, Job says, "They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance." "They sing to the tambourine and harp, and rejoice to the sound of the flute." "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave." "Yet they say to God, 'Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways.'" "Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him?" It is evident that there is an unholy dancing. Let's look briefly now at the holy dancing and then we will look briefly at holy laughter.

It appears that the holy dancing of the saints of old, and whatever dancing that would be acceptable to the Lord now, is connected with the victories of the people of God over their enemies. We see this in Exodus 15: 20 in the aftermath of Pharaoh's army being drown by God in the waters of the Red Sea. "Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the

women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." "And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously!" "The horse and rider He has thrown into the sea!" This was just the women, and not men with women. There is a very interesting verse about dancing in Psalm 30, verse 11 if you want to turn over there with me. "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent." This was a song at the dedication of the house of David. David is extolling the Lord for having brought up his soul from the grave and keeping him alive from going down to the pit, as it says in verse 3. He was forgiven of all of his sins in trusting in his own strength in saying, "Now in my prosperity I shall never be moved." (Verse 6) He had been mourning over that sin, but now the Lord had restored him. The Lord had had mercy upon him and had become his helper. This is reason for dancing.

And then finally; holy laughter. Turn with me to Psalm 126. Holy laughter is related often to the great things that the Lord has done for us. "When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream." "Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." "Then they said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad." Every good thing that the Lord has made and every good thing that the Lord has done for us ought to cause us to laugh in joy and delight. Especially our deliverance from every captivity that sin has brought us into. And this is exactly the deliverance that we have through Jesus Christ our Lord. And one more verse. Jeremiah 31: 13, speaking of the joy of all believers, each and every one of them who are espoused to Christ as a chaste virgin, married to Him, united to Him, and having had all their sins forgiven; who will be presented to Christ on the last day without spot or wrinkle, it says, "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and old, together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow." And verse 12b says, "Their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all. What a time that shall be for all of Christ's dear people.