

WHO IS REALLY IN CONTROL?

JANUARY 29, 2006 – ECCLESIASTES 3:1-22

MEMORY VERSE – *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”*

Ecclesiastes 3:11

INTRODUCTION

Having found only fleeting moments of satisfaction and fulfillment in the pursuit of pleasure, work and study, Solomon exhorts people to search for true joy and contentment in the gifts and opportunities that God provides. Although we may face many problems that seem to contradict God’s plan, we can find rest and reassurance in the holiness and constancy of our heavenly Father. The unexplainable and hard to understand events of life should not be barriers to believing in God, but rather opportunities to discover that, without God, life’s issues have no lasting solutions. Solomon’s main point in this passage is that God is the one who is in control. He is working out His perfect plan in each of our lives so that He will be exalted and glorified in the end.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. The first eight verses of chapter three demonstrate the capricious nature of life and how time affects the body and soul. Summarize what you think God is communicating to us in these eight verses concerning time.
2. What positive and negative things does Solomon say in verses 9-15?
3. In verse 14, Solomon says God does all He does so that men will revere Him. What does it mean to revere God and how does this impact our quest to find purpose in life?

4. How does God's sovereign control of time and eternity bring meaning to this life? What consequences of not acknowledging God's authority are taking place in society today?

5. From a strictly worldly thinking perspective, Solomon tells us in verses 16-22 that "man has no advantage over animals and everything is meaningless." In verse 11, what does Solomon say sets man apart from animals? What does God mean by this statement in verse 11 and how should this impact the way we live?

OUR WALK WITH GOD

1. In verses 9-13 and 22, Solomon is communicating to us that our ability to find satisfaction in work depends to a large extent upon our attitude. Why do we often become dissatisfied and frustrated with our work? What changes in our thinking must we make in order to have the attitude and perspective that God desires for us in regards to our work?

2. How does the phrase, "He has made everything appropriate in its time," give you proper perspective during a time of trial or suffering? Share with your group a time when you went through a circumstance or situation that just didn't make sense. Discuss with each other some healthy ways to respond when you encounter the unexplainable and painful trials of life.

3. Consider the activities and people you may encounter in the coming week. What difference would it make if you lived as if every person and circumstance that came your way was a "divine appointment"?

GOING DEEPER

1. Solomon wrote there is nothing better for us than to “be joyful and to do good as long as we live.” Read Isaiah 61:10; Matthew 5:13-16, 25:34-40; 1 Timothy 6:18-19; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 1:3-9, 2:11-12. According to these verses, where will we find true joy? In what ways should we “do good”?

2. Read Psalm 139 and Lamentations 3:22-26, 37-39. What do these passages tell you about God’s sovereignty and control over our lives? How might this encourage you during times of difficulty and struggle?

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“God is not always pleased, but He is never perplexed. Or, as one man said, “God can let man do what he will and leave nothing to chance.”

Tommy Nelson, A Life Well Lived

“Why does God give dogs fleas? To remind them that they are dogs. Why does He allow struggles? To remind us, we’re not God.

Tommy Nelson, A Life Well Lived