

## **Time, Sovereignty, and the Joy of Life**

### **Ecclesiastes 3:1-15**

#### Introduction

1. This entire section (3:1-15 ) is a building onto the conclusion of 2:24-26.
  - a. In this section Solomon (Qoheleth) switches his focus from death to life.
  - b. He's now going to analyze life, and not merely from an "under the sun" perspective, but with particular reference to God.
2. Summary statement of 3:1-15:
  - a. This passage gives us a proper perspective of life as creatures, whose existence and reality, is governed and controlled by a Creator.
  - b. We're going to see that this world is under the absolute control of a Sovereign God.

#### Text

1. V.1— The interpretive lens for the poem (vss. 2-8).
  - a. Language of "appointed" and "everything" as a reference to providence and sovereignty.
  - b. Must keep the poem married to v.1 and interpret it through the lens of God's sovereign providence.
2. Excurses on sovereignty and providence.
  - a. Isaiah 46:5-11
    - i. God is separating himself from everything.
    - ii. Language of "declare" as sovereign rule.
  - b. Psalm 139:13
  - c. Psalm 16:33
  - d. Proverbs 21:31
  - e. Amos 3:6

- f. Matt. 10:29
  - g. Acts 17:24-28
3. Vss. 2-8—The poem is a series of merisms (28 items, 14 pairs, multiples of 7). It's more important to know what Solomon is doing with the poem as a whole, rather than focusing on what each couplet might mean.
- a. v. 2— Control over life and death.
  - b. v. 3— Control over conquering cities, or establishment of kings.
  - c. v. 4— Control over emotions.
  - d. v. 5— Control over relationships.
  - e. v. 6— Control over possessions, but also things like dreams, desires, and ambitions.
  - f. v. 7— Control over the broad category of everything people do and say.
  - g. v. 8— Control over every disposition humans have toward each other.
4. Excurses against fatalism.
- a. The Bible must be read as a whole.
  - b. The Bible as a “both-and” document.
5. Vss. 9-10— Solomon re-asks the same question from 1:3 about the meaning of life. He answers it, not by trying to find an answer “under the sun,” but by answering it with reference to God.
6. V. 11— Solomon’s answer to the meaning of life.
- a. God is making everything beautiful in its time.
    - i. He’s taking both the sweet and bitter things and weaving them into something beautiful.
    - ii. What’s he teaching you?
  - b. God has placed eternity on every man’s heart.
    - i. We have an eternal capacity.

- ii. Purpose: that we might not know what God is doing.
7. Vss. 12-13— First thing Solomon knows.
    - a. The secret to joy is to stay in the present.
    - b. Life is still a gift and something in which we should rejoice.
  8. V. 14— Second thing Solomon knows.
    - a. God’s work remains forever.
    - b. Purpose: That men might fear him.
  9. V. 15— Repeats idea from 1:9.
    - a. More optimistic.
    - b. Never forget we still live “under the sun” and are therefore still subjected to futility.