

## You Are Here, pt.4 – Ecclesiastes 3

1. Today, we come to the most famous section in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Perhaps that is because of the song “Turn, Turn, Turn” written by Pete Seeger and recorded way back in 1959. Except for the title and the final two lines, every word in the song comes from the first 8 verses of chapter 3. (Eccl. 3:1-8)
2. In late 1965, the Byrds adapted the song with an iconic 12 string riff and it has been a classic ever since, holding the #1 spot on Billboard during the Christmas season of 1965. It holds the record of the oldest lyrics of any #1 song! (other hits that consist entirely or almost entirely of scripture are the Melodians “River of Babylon”, Sister Janet Mead’s “The Lord’s Prayer,” U2’s “40”, Sinead O’Connor’s “Psalm 33”, and Cliff Richards’ “Millennium Prayer.”)
3. That said, let’s make sure we understand something about this passage: it is NOT a Calvinist proof-text. Calvinism teaches predestination, meaning that God has predetermined all things, including who will be saved and who will be lost AND that He controls all things everywhere and wrote the script for the universe before He created it. Calvinism can give someone comfort in trying times by saying to themselves or others, “God must have a reason for this” etc. but it isn’t helpful when you realize it accuses God of planning, arranging, and staffing every evil event in history.
4. God has not determined your birthdate and death date and all the other times in this passage (with some exceptions – when He wants something to enter history or leave it). So...what do these verses mean?
5. These verses are a marvelous description of real life – and a sign that God understands how life feels to us. I did a series 20yrs ago where each line was a sermon. I won’t do that this time but it would be wise to have a look at this section very closely.
6. In verse 1, we are called to expect our lives to consist of contradictions, swings, and change. In verse 2, we are reminded that the sound of a starter’s pistol is heard at the birth of a child. Regardless of when we die, we die, and that makes life precious.

Even though this book questions our purpose, our meaning, and even questions why we do what we do, it reminds us that life is not to be wasted. It is a marvelous and terrible adventure from day one to day last.

7. So...what can we expect? We can expect the need to plant, to provide for the future whether or not we are in it. We can expect a time to pull up what was planted before us (planting walnut trees, enjoying our church building).
8. The next line upsets some people. Is there a time to kill? Here we confront a reality behind the universe that makes us uncomfortable. We like things either this or that. We like hard lines that help us understand our position and the rightness of our beliefs. God doesn't give us that kind of universe. Jesus' teachings will upset Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, and Independents. He refuses to live in any box we construct.
9. I am not a pacifist, but I am almost always anti-war. That puzzles people. I understand: people would rather you were one or the other. But God and the universe don't care what people would rather happen: this is life. It is messy. It isn't easily defined. And you are not going to find your meaning by what happens to you. Rather, **your meaning will be revealed by what you do with what happens to you.**
10. So, sometimes, we have to tear down. Other times, we need to build. There are times in our lives where we will weep but don't be defined by that – reserve times for laughter. It is right and proper to mourn but remember to allow other times into your life where you will dance. Don't get stuck in either side of any of these! (development therapists)
11. There is a time to scatter stones – to forget, to let the past be the past and no longer allow it to set up markers in your life. And there are times to gather the stones together and remember something that must be a marker in your life.
12. There is a time when hugs and acceptance are the right things to do...and there are times when it would be best to pull back and

refrain. There are times to search...but there are also times to stop searching and accept what you know and have in the moment (young men in Texarkana who just enjoyed asking questions but were going for engagement and conversation and play, not answers).

13. There comes a time to inventory your life to see what needs to be there and what needs to be thrown away. There comes a time to render something useless, to dismantle it, but there will also be times to fix what you have and keep it.
14. There are times to be silent (please!) and there are times when you need to speak. There are times when you are to love and, yes, there are times to hate. And there ARE times of war but also time for peace. And, as Jesus tells us, the blessed are those who are devoted to making peace (and that is not the same as being peaceful).
15. How are we supposed to behave in a universe that looks like 3:1-8? One – avoid always running to extremes (Matt Dabbs and what happened when he praised the church of Christ). Give room to the middle because that's where most stuff is.
16. And trust God. 3:9-14.