

You Better Wise Up | Week 2: “The Need To Know”

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

1. Introduction: Not Knowing

1. Will the Grizzlies finally reach the finals?
 1. OKC is out of the way...the Spurs are vulnerable...the Floppers - I mean Clippers - seem inferior to our team's chemistry...
 2. All is well. We have a good reason to believe that our chances are strong, but...
 3. The Golden State Warriors. Where did they come from? We knew they'd be formidable, but *this good?*
2. We live with this anxiety each day - **The anxiety of not knowing:**
 1. Will I ever experience marital bliss or will I only know a lifetime of loneliness?
 2. Will I live a good, long life or will it be shortened by illness or tragedy?
 3. Will those I love the most remain safe?
 4. Is there life for me after the collapse of my marriage?
 5. I've been laid off. What will I do now? I worked my way up. I thought I was blessed by God, but now I'm starting over, and with only a high school diploma. What will I do?
3. Wouldn't it be better if we just knew? Wouldn't it be better if we had control? Wouldn't we be happier, healthier, and free of our tormenting anxiety if God would just let me know what's coming my way?
4. But God doesn't tell us. And Solomon explains why...

2. Times & Seasons (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

[1] For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

[2] a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

[3] a time to kill, and a time to heal;

*a time to break down, and a time to build up;
[4] a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
[5] a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
[6] a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
[7] a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
[8] a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.*

1. These items aren't random. They're a poetic description of everything that happens in our lives, from birth to death:
 1. Serious events such as life and death, mourning, war and hatred.
 2. Lighter issues such as laughter and dancing.
 3. But also mundane issues such as building, sewing, and gathering stones.
2. Many people assume this is talking about us, but it's actually talking about a God. This is a description of the times and seasons of our lives that happen according to God's sovereign plan.
3. In other words, the times and seasons aren't a description of how we live our lives according to our own will. The times and seasons are a description of how our actions and choices are shaped and superintended by God as he advances history according to his plan.
 1. This is about God's complete and total control over all of human history and the universe. This is what chapters three through the end of five are about.
 2. Jeffrey Meyers: **"We have no leverage, no advantage over these seasons. Wisdom accepts these seasons from God's hand, and then follows**

God's lead by discerning the appropriate 'dance step.'" - Jeffrey Meyers¹

4. Living our lives means recognizing we're not the lead as we dance with God.
5. How does the Preacher deal with this reality?...

3. Everything Is Fitting (3:9-11a)

[9] What gain has the worker from his toil? [In light of this, what leverage do we have?] [10] I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. [11a] He has made everything beautiful in its time...

1. Toil: The totality of all our life's activity.
2. The Preacher refers to the actions listed above - human actions. But clearly states they are assigned to us by God.
3. Then, speaking of these actions, the Preacher says that God *"has made everything beautiful in its time."*
 1. Solomon isn't making an "aesthetic evaluation of God's work."² Rather this is a statement about God's control over all human affairs.
 2. What is he saying? A better word that has been recommended is "fitting"³ instead of beautiful. **Everything fits into God's plan.**
 3. This immediately confronts us with the question of whether we will choose to believe that. Are we going to trust God or attempt to change God?
 4. Mysteriously, everything we do - even though it feels like each behavior of ours is borne of our free will - finds its source in God's wise plan.
 1. At this point, I'm sure some of us are getting a bit nervous. I've found that fewer people complain over error and bad doctrine than they do about the subject of God's sovereignty. We get real squeamish when people mess with our perceived "free will."

¹ Meyers, Jeffrey. *A Table In The Mist*. 76.

² *Ibid.* 80.

³ *Ibid.*

2. Many of us are wanting to raise our hands and ask:
 1. *What about ISIS? Is God controlling their actions?*
 2. *What about Al Qaeda?*
 3. *What about Human traffickers?*
 4. *What about child abusers?*
 5. *What about murderers?*
 6. *What about earthquakes, like the one in Nepal yesterday, that killed - as of this morning - 2200 people?*
3. While there is no way I could explain this in a way that would satisfy our objections (because I have the same objection), I would like to remind everyone that Solomon is writing 2500-hundred-years before the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, the time in which we currently live in which something is rejected as false if it can't be explained scientifically. So we all bring strong notions of doubt to God's word that we must be aware of because of our culture - not because we're more advanced in our thinking.
4. Also, we must remember that Solomon isn't writing to secularized skeptics. He is addressing the people of God. This is not an apologetic aimed at cultivating belief among non-believers. This is a pastoral. He is shepherding his subjects' hearts, helping them find their footing when they are faced with the complexities of life. So don't lean back with arms crossed, waiting for me to chisel through your skepticism. Lean in and open your heart. **God may not be telling us what we want to know, but he is telling us what we need to know.**
5. So far: This section is about God's fitting, appropriate, sovereign, and wise plan contrasted with humanity's powerless toil. What's the point if we have no leverage?
6. But, wait...more troubling news...

4. Eternity In Our Hearts (3:11b)

[11] He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

1. God has intentionally locked our lives in this tension that we despise so much - a deep longing to know the way God knows, yet we live under the sun.
2. We want to be able to anticipate, foresee, control, but, alas, we cannot.
3. What do we do then? What should our response be to this tension? Take over? Wrestle control from God? Give into despair because of our powerlessness?
4. It's all about worship. Wonder. Awe. Over his majesty.

5. Two Certainties

1. In verses 12-15, the Preacher says there are two things he knows.
2. The ESV says, "I perceive," but "I know" is a better reflection of the context.⁴
3. The first thing he knows is what we, as humans, should do in response to God's sovereignty.
4. The second thing he knows is what God does.
 1. 3:12-13: *"I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; [13] also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man."*
 - **Joyfully do good!**
 - **Be thankful for and enjoy the good gifts that God gives to us.** - every good thing that happens to you.
 - **Abandon the madness of attempting to comprehend and control God's plans.** We must abandon our quest to rule our own lives and create our own security.
 - **Pursue contentment.**

⁴ Greidanus, Sidney. Preaching Christ From Ecclesiastes. 71.

1. Contentment is not passing up on opportunities and taking a vow of poverty. Contentment is to be satisfied in what we have and to quit reaching for more and rather reach for Jesus (maturity).
 2. A life of contentment is active, not passive. It is to pursue a life of goodness (kindness; purity; etc.). It is eating and drinking with good friends. It is living well in rich community - a gift that always satisfies.
 3. This is one reason why we push small groups at our church so aggressively.
2. 3:14-15: *"I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. [15] That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away."*
- **We must admit we have no leverage over God's plans.**
 - **We must admit that God is inexhaustibly wise and that we will never fathom his dealings with us.**
 - **We must admit that God has a higher goal for us than the comfort of knowing the future: our maturity.** (Fear = trust)

6. Conclusion: We are most whole when we are living a life of trusting God.

- *We come to God with nothing in our hands.*
- *We can contribute nothing to his plans.*
- *We can do nothing to change his plans for our lives,*
- *We are powerless.*
- *We must depend entirely on him.*
- *We stand in awe of God.*