

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

I know Who Holds My Hand

Sometimes I wish I knew what God knows about all of my life. After all, Scripture says that God knows the end from the beginning.¹ But, perhaps if I did know what God knows about my life and my future I'd be afraid about the things I must face. Therefore God mercifully gives us life, moment by moment and day by day. We can handle that.

I know we have plans for our lives; plans for school, for work, for family, vacations and retirement. Some of us have loose and vague plans. And some of us have detailed flow charts. But none of us really know what tomorrow holds. There is an old hymn that we've sung with these lyrics:

I don't know about tomorrow.
I just live from day to day.
I don't borrow from its sunshine,
For its skies may turn to gray.
I don't worry o'er the future,
For I know what Jesus said.
And today he walks beside me,
For he knows what is ahead.

Many things about tomorrow
I don't seem to understand.
But I know who holds tomorrow.
And I know who holds my hand.²

This is a great old country song. "I don't worry o'er the future, for I know what Jesus said." I thought about that line this week. And I asked myself what did Jesus say? Well, I think it has reference to Matthew 6 where Jesus said not to worry about what we will eat and drink and so on. It is the unbeliever who lives under the sun who worries about material things. But then our Lord said,

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you. Therefore

¹ Isaiah 46:10

² Written by Ira P. Stanphill

do not worry about tomorrow...sufficient for the day
is its own trouble.
(Matthew 6:31, 33, 34)

And so I ask, are we seeking **first** the kingdom of God? And do we know who holds our hand? I ask these questions because we affirm ourselves to be Christian believers, and yet at times we are so shaken by what life brings our way. I know, I know, we are only human after all. I don't know about tomorrow. But Scripture tells us that God knows what will happen on every day of our lives. Speaking of God, Psalm 139:16 says,

Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When *as yet there* were none of them.

God knows the good days that will happen to me and to you. And He knows about the bad days. And He allows both to happen to us. I'll try to explain why in a minute. But now let's read Ecclesiastes.

To everything *there is* a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
² A time to be born,
And a time to die;
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck *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;
A time to embrace,
And a time to refrain from embracing;
⁶ A time to gain,
And a time to lose;
A time to keep,
And a time to throw 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 of war,
And a time of peace.
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

There is a time for everything. One day you will receive a phone call telling you that you got the job or the promotion. One day you will be told that a loved one died. One day you will have a child and cry with joy. One day that same child will make you cry in despair. One day you will build something great. One day you will have to tear down what you once thought was good.

Sometimes there are days of agony where you hurt so bad inside that you could wish you were dead. But sometimes there are moments of joy so deep that you feel like you could explode! Why do these things happen? Solomon asked the same question.

What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?
¹⁰ I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time.
(Ecclesiastes 3: 9-11a)

What profit or benefit do we gain from living through good times and bad times? Solomon, the preacher, declares that all of these times are God-given. God has made everything in life "beautiful" or more accurately, appropriate or fitting for its time. In other words God knows the best time for us to enjoy a beautiful day. And He knows the appropriate time to allow us to go through suffering. I know this doesn't sound like the gospel according to Joel Osteen, but bear with me for a bit. Now comes the last part of verse 11.

Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.
(Ecclesiastes 3:11b)

Here is what this Scripture means. God has placed eternity in our hearts; a longing for a better age and world and life. He does this with everyone: believer and unbeliever. God has placed a longing in our hearts for something more than what we find under the sun. On our own we cannot understand this work of

God. We don't understand the restlessness in our hearts. But God uses the seasons of life to call us closer to Him. He uses both the good and bad to get our attention. In Matthew 5:45 we are told that,

...makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good,
and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

And Acts 14:17 tells us that God did not leave the unbelievers in the world without a witness that He exists,

...in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven
and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and
gladness.

Why is every day not a bad day for unbelievers? Why is every day not full of storms and tempest? The answer is the goodness of God. And yet, in righteous wisdom God will also allow times of trouble into the lives of unbelievers. In 2 Kings 5 we read the story of a Syrian Captain named Naaman who had leprosy. Had Naaman not had leprosy he never would have traveled to see a Jewish prophet and learn about the one true God.

Ruth's husband died and she and her mother-in-law were left in deep poverty. In desperation she gleans the fields after the harvest. But if this had never happened she wouldn't have met Boaz. Do you think a Roman centurion would have given Jesus the time of day had his servant not been deathly ill?³

C.S. Lewis wrote that "God whispers to us in our pleasures, but shouts in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."⁴ Some people won't look to God until they are flat on their backs.

So why do Christian believers go through tough times? This is a difficult question for many Christians. They have been taught to see God only in pastel colors. God always wants them to have one good day after another. But this is not biblical. God always has our best interest at heart. But this doesn't mean that we will never face difficulties or pain. In Acts 14:22 we are told "We must through many tribulations [or troubles] enter the kingdom of God.

God will use difficult days to teach us patience and fortitude. Romans 5:3, 4 teaches us "that tribulation produces patience, and patience, character, and character, hope." Let's take a look at the words of the apostle Paul.

³ Luke 7: 1-10

⁴ From Lewis's book The Problem of Pain.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who
comforts us in all our tribulation...
(2 Corinthians 1:3, 4a)

God comforts us in all our tribulations, He doesn't necessarily keep us from
life's troubles. Why?

that we may be able to comfort those who are in any
trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are
comforted by God.
(2 Corinthians 1:4b)

Sometimes we suffer so that we learn compassion and sympathy so that
we are better able to comfort others. It is always a blessing to know someone
who has gone through the same troubles you are going through. In the same
chapter, Paul writes about a time that he and Timothy were in such deep
trouble that they thought they would lose their lives.

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren,
of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we
were burdened beyond measure, above strength,
so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Yes, we had the
sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not
trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead...
(2 Corinthians 1:8, 9)

Why would God allow Paul and Timothy, good and righteous men to face
the jaws of death? Paul tells us it was so they would learn to not trust in
themselves, but in God who raises the dead. God is near to us on good days
and on bad days. But He will never place us in a situation that we cannot
handle, if we look to Him and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is
common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow
you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with
the temptation will also make the way of escape, that
you may be able to bear *it*. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved,
flee from idolatry.
(1 Corinthians 10:13, 14)

⁵ Hebrews 4:14-16

Let life, its good and its bad draw you closer to God and not push you away. Let's return to Ecclesiastes 3.

I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice,
and to do good in their lives, ¹³ and also that every man
should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—
it *is* the gift of God.
(Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13)

God allows unbelievers, those who live under the sun, to enjoy good that they might find Him and trust in Him through Jesus Christ before it is too late. And for us believers, every good day should stir our hearts to think about the age to come when God will show us the exceeding riches of His kindness to us through Christ Jesus.⁶ Therefore, redeem the time and the days you have, especially knowing that some days are evil.⁷ Work diligently and enjoy it. Do good, be kind. Go get some ice-cream and take someone with you. Be thankful.

I know that whatever God does,
It shall be forever.
Nothing can be added to it,
And nothing taken from it.
God does *it*, that men should fear before Him.
(Ecclesiastes 3:14)

On our own we cannot do anything about the seasons of life. God has set them up. In His wisdom there will be days of joy and days of sorrow that we might understand His goodness and our own sin and look for redemption. The fact that we cannot fully comprehend life now should cause us to have a reverent fear of God. History shows that under the sun there are repetitious cycles of birth and death, and war and peace, and laughter and weeping, so that each generation may come to God to find mercy and grace.

That which is has already been,
And what is to be has already been;
And God requires an account of what is past.
(Ecclesiastes 3:15)

Even though the seasons of life repeat and there seems to be no rhyme or reason, we can be sure that God is working out His good purpose for us if we trust Him. Let me end with two passages of Scripture, one from the Old testament and one from the New testament.

⁶ Ephesians 2:7

⁷ Ephesians 5:15

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
⁆ In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.
(Proverbs 3:5, 6)

And,

And we know that all things work together for good
to those who love God, to those who are called
according to *His* purpose.
(Romans 8:28)

As I mentioned earlier, "I don't know about tomorrow...but I know who
holds my hand.