

Jason Upchurch - Ecclesiastes 3:3 - Times of Healing, Breaking Down and Building Up

We return to this amazing poem this morning about the seasons and times in life. As we saw last week, these are appointed times and seasons. These are not arbitrary and random. They are ordained by God - every season that passes. And we are called to do the right thing in these seasons.

We mentioned last time that the poem is a series of contrasts: time to be born/die, seek/lose, love/hate.

And it's also a series of pairs. **Read 4**

So there are seven pairs within this poem. Last time we ended on the first part of **Vs. 3** that there is a time to kill. The time to kill is the time where we are lawfully required to end life. The Bible affirms capital punishment for not only murder, but for other crimes as well. And there is a time to put someone to death.

I had a lot of feedback from that sermon. Let me say that what we covered last time really is the Cliff's Notes version. Under Christian ethics there's a whole host theology about when and how capital punishment should be administered to those who are convicted of crime in a civil court of law.

But there is also a rich theological tradition known as Just War Theory. Just war theory answers basically 3 questions: when is it lawful to go to war? How do we conduct ourselves in war? And how do we conduct ourselves after a war toward our defeated enemies?

And I know what you're thinking - that sounds like a lot. And it is, but it's important to know **Read 8**

We'll talk about Just War Theory a little later. But know that it is very important for Christians to understand these concepts. We need to understand the seasons we're in and at rightly.

That's living wisely in the world.

1 Chronicles 12:32 talks about the ascension of David to the throne of Israel. And the armies are all gathering together to support him in the midst of Saul's persecution. And Issachar doesn't have a lot of troops. They're not the largest force by any means. But here's what Chronicles says: The men of Issachar had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do. They only had 200 chiefs and some family members below that. Much smaller than the other tribes. Zebulun had 50,000 seasoned soldiers, Simeonites had 7,100 men of valor, Asher had 40,000.

Issachar had 200 chiefs. But they knew what needed to be done and when it needed to be done. They had wisdom.

We need to be those same men. We need to know our season and how to conduct ourselves in the proper season. It's good to have troops, it's good to have might but better than both is wisdom and fortitude to act accordingly.

So we saw last time there is a time to kill. Not murder - murder is the unlawful taking of human life. Killing is lawful and intentional end of life.

What's the opposite of that? It's healing. **Read 3**

So healing is the intentional act to preserve life. The Christian faith has had a long history of healing. To illustrate just one way, think of the 3 major hospitals in Spokane and what they are named: Sacred Heart. What kind of heart? Sacred. It's Catholic. There's Deaconess. Female servants of the Lord. And then there's Holy Family. Obviously these are Catholic, so we have crucial differences. But they are founded on Christian principles.

There's Methodist hospitals, Presbyterian hospitals. Why? Because Christianity values human life from fertilization to natural death and we seek to proclaim the gospel through medical care. And not just for other Christians, but for all people.

When you think of foreign missions several things all pop up in the wake of Christian missions. Churches, of course. Schools form because literacy and education is of critical importance to Christians. And hospitals and medical facilities pop up as well. It's almost without fail.

Why? Because Christians seek to heal people. That's a good endeavor.

If you think of the Lord Jesus, a large portion of his ministry was simply healing people. Taking away their infirmities. Blindness, leprosy, hemorrhaging, lame legs, arched backs, blindness, people who were oppressed by evil spirits that manifested through medical conditions.

The apostles did the same and God even gave a gift of healings for a time where people could heal in the same way as Jesus and the apostles. The ability to miraculously heal people was one way to authenticate the truth of the gospel message. We also know one of the most prolific biblical authors in the NT - Luke - was a doctor. And we look forward to the New Earth, eating from the new Tree of Life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. The New Heavens and the New Earth are a healing of everything that has been broken in this world because of sin.

Now, remember there's a time to kill and a time to heal. Which means, by definition, that it's not always time to heal. When are there times not to heal?

Let me give you just a couple of examples. When someone is at the end of life - it's not always the time to heal. Or, more accurately, it's not always the time to try to heal.

In American medicine we've kinda adopted a "keep people alive for as long as absolutely possible" mindset when it comes to the end of life. Keeping people alive is a good instinct, of course. But sometimes it's just time to go. Keeping grandpa alive just to go from surgery to surgery where he may not make it off the operating table isn't always the best scenario.

At some point the heart will fail, the cancer will win, the disease is irreversible and Hail Mary treatments are detrimental. A lot of times the best course of actions is comfort care to ease pain. Prov. 31 talks about giving alcohol to those who dying to ease their pain. That's the idea.

Another type of situation that I think requires wisdom is whether or not to keep trying to treat chronic diseases. This is a hard one. I know many of you have or have had chronic medical conditions.

Gut problems, heart problems, headaches, allergies, all kinds of ailments. We see those in the Bible as well. The woman with the issue of blood who had spent years and all her money trying to solve the problem, with no relief. Lepers were chronically ill, the people surrounding the pool of Siloam who would wait for the water to stir and somehow try rush into the pool to be healed. If you remember in **1 Tim 5** Paul tells Timothy to drink some wine and not only water - do you remember why? His frequent stomach ailments. Paul had the gift of healing. He healed many people over the years, why didn't he just heal Timothy? We're not given specifics but what we can say is that it wasn't the time to heal.

It's always interesting to me to think about the guy that Peter and John healed in Acts 4 that was an invalid. He couldn't walk. How many times had Jesus passed this guy in and out of the Temple and didn't heal him until these guys did? Why? It wasn't the time to heal.

Chronic illnesses are nothing new, and they are often very frustrating and discouraging. Added to that our medical system often doesn't really do a great job at trying to solve the underlying issues, or they don't care to because insurance doesn't cover it. And so you're left with drugs to cover it over or alternative medical options that are often very expensive and sometimes just as frustrating. I think it needs to be said: as much as the modern medicine can be frustrating, natural medicine can be frustrating too. You can easily spend tens of thousands of dollars and get nowhere. It's not always a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

We've battled a variety of chronic things in our home over the years. Sometimes it's traditional medicine that fixes it, sometimes it's natural. Sometimes it's nothing fixes it and we just endure.

And just pastorally I want to encourage you that sometimes there is no cure. There's no natural solution, there's no prescription solution, there's just enduring the suffering to the glory of God.

Rom. 8:17: We are children of God and heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him.

We don't need to shy away from suffering if it's not the time to heal.

Turn to 2 Cor. 12:10 Paul is talking about a thorn in the flesh that God gave him, a messenger of Satan, to harass him. Remember that? We don't know what it was. Maybe a physical ailment, maybe someone who was persecuting Paul. But God gave it to Paul after also giving Paul an amazing vision of heaven in order to keep Paul humble. **Read 7-10**

Now, I confess, this is going to be a little bit of a sermon in a sermon - which you're never supposed to do. But I think it's really important for us to know these principles, especially as it relates to a time to heal - or not heal.

So first, it might not be a time to heal because God is trying to teach you something. Maybe humility, which is always a rough lesson to learn. My throat has been strained for several weeks now and it's not fun. Someone mentioned maybe God's trying to teach me something. And I responded that maybe he's trying to teach me to shut up.

Second, God is ultimately in control of our lives. It's a messenger of Satan that is harassing Paul. He knows that for sure. Maybe that's what's bothering you - we don't know for sure but maybe. But ultimately who's in control? God is.

Third, it's okay to ask for it to go away. **Read 8-9**

God doesn't rebuke Paul for the request. It's okay that we pray for our own healing, or for other people to be healed or that procedures would be effective or that life would be prolonged. Those are all good instincts. But they don't always happen and it takes wisdom to know when it's just not the Lord's will for us to be healed.

Honestly, sometimes I wish we had the answer Paul had. Just a direct line from God: Hey, you're not getting over this thing, so stop trying. Just be content. But we don't get that so we have to evaluate and use wisdom.

But notice that Paul can be glad when he's weak. Not just content and resigned. But glad. The word really means to be pleased with a situation. You're happy about it.

Why? Because God's formula is often to use weak people to accomplish his purposes so that it's obvious God is the one working.

That's the David and Goliath story. That's the Gideon story. That's Paul's story. That's often our story. That God uses weak people to gladly accomplish his purposes because when we do that it shows his strength.

Last, notice Paul mentions a whole host of problems. **Read 10**

This list is a catchall of bad things. Are you weak because you're sick or tired or old? It's okay. It might not be time for you to be healed. But you can be content and glad that you're weak because in your weakness Jesus is strong.

Let's look back at Ecc. 3. So there's a time to heal. There's a time to do that, to seek that, to strive for that. Just as there's times where we kill.

Let's look at the next part which is coupled here. **Read**

There's a time to break down and a time to build up. So similar to the kill/heal distinction, but more focused on the general concept of when do we tear this thing down or fix it? I'll take these two together.

When we bought our house there was an old decrepit shed in the back yard. It was piled a couple feet high with junk and a few cats had decided that it was their home. It till kind of had a roof but it was in bad shape. But we had no storage, no garage at the time so we had to decide what to do. Eventually we got the thing completely cleaned out and just stared at this thing and realized: it's gotta go. It's so nasty and decrepit and smelly that we can't possibly use it. Time to tear down.

What needs to be broken down? Well, in a literal sense, there's a physical aspect to this. It could be sheds or fences or buildings or all kinds of things. We need to have discernment to know when something is beyond repair - that's really the issue.

A lot of times this refers to institutions. Governments, schools, churches.

You think of some of the most well known Ivy League **schools** in America and they started off as divinity schools - schools to train pastors. Princeton, Harvard, Yale - they all started out as great schools but eventually fell to the trap of liberalism. There was effort for a time at each of these to reform them and turn them back to the truth but usually by the time a reformation effort is underway it's too late.

That's true with smaller schools as well. Once error and corruption has sank it's teeth in, it's like gangrene and the diagnosis is basically fatal. There's no coming back.

This is also true with **governments**. Governments by their nature - because the men who lead them are sinful - usually tend toward sinfulness and corruption, even with the best intentions. And over the course of history people have had to decide whether or not to try to reform them or create something new entirely.

The Declaration of Independence is a fascinating case for this. We usually just read the first part of the declaration, but if you read the whole thing it's a list of grievances against the king because of his dereliction of duty. The colonists tried legal means to reform their situation over and over with no meaningful change. They tried to build up, but it was time to break down.

Sometimes **churches** need to be broken down. If you look through the NT especially, you'll see that the apostles repeatedly warn against false teachers and those who lead people astray. Elders are to rebuke these people and discipline them out of the church. Paul says that the church, which is the house of the living God, is the pillar and buttress of truth. So everyone inside the church is to be constantly vigilant to guard the truth.

But there is a time for breaking it down. Jesus warns in the early chapters of Revelation that if the churches didn't repent he would remove their lamp stand - their light. He would close them down. Why? Because there comes a time when there is no more reforming a thing. It's beyond recovery.

We talk about the Reformers - heroes of the faith like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Theodore Beza. Why are they called ***reformers***? Well, for Luther especially, he was trying to reform the Roman Catholic church. He thought he could take a tainted institution and fix it up. But the corruption was so bad top to bottom there was no way to fix it.

It was like Israel in the time of Jesus. God had tried to reform it over and over and over through the centuries. He sent in prophets to warn and nations to judge. He even exiled Israel to Babylon for 70 years and brought them back. What'd they do? The same thing they always did. So that by the time of Jesus it's so corrupt that Jesus says your house will be left to you desolate and given to a people bearing fruit for God.

Sometimes God breaks down faithless churches. And I have to tell you this is a warning to all of us. We can't be indifferent to doctrine or morality or our love for one another. Those are all at the top of the list where we are to stay vigilant.

It's always interesting to me that people paint Jesus with sort of unending sympathy and tolerance for wickedness. And God is patient. Just look at the Corinthians who argued over their favorite pastors, applauded guys who were in sexual immorality, ate at the temples of idols, bragged about their spiritual gifts, had abandoned teachings about the resurrection, got drunk at the Lord's Supper, on and on. And Jesus didn't end the church there. He was gracious.

Does that church still exist today? No. Eventually it was removed. The Lord is patient and gracious, but that's not a license to be sloppy or indifferent to truth and love.

Side: we see this all the time with **denominations**. There's a massive rise in non-denominational churches over the last 30-40 years. We're non-denominational. Why is that? Denominations are really great in theory but always slouch toward error.

There really is no such thing as a denomination who has stayed faithful to its mission beyond a generation or two. Methodists have gone woke and liberal. Episcopalians have done the same. The Presbyterians will form a denomination, it'll go liberal, so they'll start another one. It'll go liberal. Start another one, so on. Their view of church government requires a denomination so they can't not have one, but they all end up corrupt.

One example is the PCA. The Presbyterian Church in America was supposed to be the conservative answer to the PCUSA which began ordaining women and homosexuals. And the PCA was proud of their hold out resistance to theological drift. Except last year it was revealed that a large percentage of churches in the PCA were doing the exact same thing: ordaining women as pastors, and churches that weren't were giving cover for those who were. It was already corrupt.

So then you have to ask yourself, do we keep this thing going? Do we try to build it back up? Sometimes you can. The Southern Baptists had the conservative resurgence in the 1990s. Went from being on the brink of liberal collapse to a voice for biblical Christianity again. You know what? They're back in the trenches trying to fight against the same liberalism again.

It's true with businesses. Is a business beyond repair? Is the reputation so bad or the systems so poor that there's no refining or remaking it? I remember working for some places that initially I thought would be really good. But after a while you realize there's really no changing the culture or process. I remember talking to my boss about a management book I had read and wanted to implement some of the concepts and he seemed totally uninterested in changing things. He didn't care. He made good money and didn't see how changing anything would help him out at all. I lasted another year at the job and jumped ship.

Listen, it takes discernment to know when something is beyond repair. It's not always easy to understand. And no matter what you do, it's hard work to both restore a thing to its former glory or to start something new. It's always work.

I read a book a few years back called Church Planting is for Wimps. And the gist was that it's actually easier to simply plant a new church and start from scratch than reform a church from the inside out that's become corrupted. Church revitalization is very difficult because once something is entrenched in a congregation - good or bad - it's very hard to change it. It takes a lot of time.

Something need to be broken down. They're done. They need to be thrown on the ash heap to the glory of God. Others we are called to reform and heal and build up.

May God give us the wisdom to know which we should do.

Pray