

Jason Upchurch - Ecclesiastes 3:4 - Right Emotions at the Right Time

Well, we've slowed down our pace through Ecclesiastes as we've been working our way through the poem here. Initially I thought we might need 2 weeks - but as I think through these section I think it's worth slowing down and really considering each one.

This morning we come to an interesting section in our poem because it talks about emotions. And proper seasons for emotions.

It's hard to underestimate the importance of emotions in life. They are connected to almost everything we do. God created us to have the capacity of emotions. Some emotions are weak, some are strong, An emotion is an internal response to situations. Could be happy, sad, anger, disgust, fear, anxiety, depression, mourning. So on.

One particular difficulty with emotions, especially as it relates to sin, is that we often have wrong emotions. That might sound unusual but part of the effect of the fall is that we feel the wrong thing at the wrong time. We are called to check our emotions.

Our society has gone supernova when it comes to bowing down to emotions. If you feel something, then it must be true. In fact, if you feel something then that feeling must be your authentic self. As though somehow we are defined by our emotions and have no ability to change our emotions.

You've heard people say "Well, I'm just an anxious person." Someone who is chronically sad is called depressed. We define ourselves and others just by emotions. People have anger or all sorts of other issues - that eventually become a defining feature of who they are. Not good.

And because emotions become identities then we end up with emotions being all kinds of crazy. Spouses saying "I don't feel married to you." What does that mean? "I don't feel like coming into work today." Welcome to the club. I feel like a boy or I feel like a girl, I feel like a cat. On and on. Even in just normal conversation feelings have become equated to opinions. "I feel like the Seahawks are going to have a good year this year." That's not a feeling, that's a thought, that's an opinion. That's a mental calculation you make, not an emotion that you have.

And I fall into that trap as well: rather than simply saying "I think" a lot of times we begin "I feel" or "I feel like" and then we continue on

I know some of that seems like minute details, but the reality is that our society has become controlled by emotions. Everything bows down to emotions and we frame things in regard to emotions.

I've mentioned this before, but now whenever I go to make a yearly doctor appointment their primary concern isn't whether or not I have heart disease or diabetes or high blood pressure. In order to even make the appointment I have to answer 7 basic questions that all relate to my emotions.

Well, it turns out that the Bible also has a lot to say about emotions. God created us with emotions and he wants us to have the proper emotions at the proper time.

Two more things about emotions that I think are worth noting.

First, emotions in the Bible can be controlled and prescribed. We can change our emotions and are often called to change our emotions to appropriate emotions. That's good and right.

Think about when you were a kid and your parent was rebuking you and you started laughing. How did that go for you? Not well. Wrong emotion.

Second, if you think about a train, emotions are often the caboose of our lives, not the engine and not all the cars in between. Feel good emotions often come after all the other stuff. So if the engine is a conviction, the cars are the acts, emotions are the caboose.

Loving your spouse isn't always fun. But that's a conviction. The acts are the cars and ultimately joy is the emotion.

Same with getting exercise. That's a conviction, jogging/walking are the cars, joy is the end result.

Reading your Bible is the conviction, waking up early in the morning to do it are the reps - the cars - maturity and godliness and joy are the long term result.

You get the idea. This morning we're looking at 2 types of emotions. Sadness and joy. And there's a time for each of these.

1) There's a time to weep and mourn. Read 4

So there is some overlap in these words. Not all weeping - crying and sadness - is because you're mourning the loss of something. And sometimes mourning the loss of something does or does not have weeping.

So when should we weep? When should we mourn?

A. Mourn over our sin. **Turn to James 4:8-10**

This section is a flurry of encouragements from James about our conduct before the Lord. He wants us to not be friends with the world - talking about the sinful world system. He wants us to be humble, wants us to resist the devil and his temptations, wants us to draw near to God. And then we're commanded to mourn. **Read 8-10**

Now, that sounds pretty depressing. It sounds like maybe what James is saying is that we can't have fun in the Christian life, we can't enjoy things. Is that what he's talking about? No, of course not.

The issue here is sin. We should mourn and weep over our sin. Cleanse your hands - that's Bible talk for repent. It's as though our hands get dirty from sin and we want to wash them off. But it's also that our attitude should be sad about our sin.

I don't know what your kids do, but when it's raining outside my kids are happy. They go out and stomp in puddles and they're soaking wet. There's absolutely no remorse at all for being covered head to toe in mud.

That's the exact opposite of what God calls us to. When we sin, it's as though we've gone and played in the mud. We're filthy dirty. And a lot of times, if we're honest we like our sin. We love our sin. We're happy about it.

Or maybe we're talking about someone else's sin, with a little air of fondness or glee or jealousy. Or maybe we're talking about our past sins with a small amount fondness.

What does James call for? He calls for us to draw near to God and cleanse our hands. Get rid of that past sin. Let your laughter be turned to mourning. We shouldn't laugh over our sin. We shouldn't brag about it, look on it fondly or happily. That's the wrong emotion when it comes to our sins or other peoples' sins. We don't laugh and dance and rejoice. No, we should be wretched and weep and mourn.

It should grieve us that what we're doing is offensive to God. It should make us sad that we take pleasure in things that sent Jesus to the cross.

What's the solution? To humble ourselves before the Lord: Jesus, I'm so sorry that I take pleasure in things that caused you to suffer on the cross. Every sin we commit was the cause for Jesus to suffer in our place. It created the need for the Father to sacrifice his own Son.

James says it again just a few verses later. **Read 5:1-6**

So is James condemning all rich people? No. What's he condemning? He's condemning rich people who are abusing poor people who can't fight back. Laborer in Bible times were paid every day. You work, you get paid that same day.

But a wealthy land owner could promise payment to a worker and then not pay and there was not a lot the laborer could do. They couldn't afford to sue the landowner, if they did they'd lose their job. At the same time they needed to keep working on the promise that there would be more work ahead. But they could very easily be taken advantage of and rich people knew this.

So James points out that this is sin. It's fraud. And they should weep and mourn and howl over the misery that the rich are going to face. Misery an emotion. When are they going to face the misery? On the last day when they stand before Jesus in judgement. Right now the rich people are happy, the poor people are weeping. James says, on last day it's going to be the opposite. They'll be slaughtered on the last day, and the poor will be vindicated.

So what's the solution: they need to change how they think about what they're doing. Mourn and weep and howl now, so that on the last day there won't be disaster.

They need to have the right emotion at the right time, and emotion they are called to have is weeping. You guys, we're called to weep over our sin. To mourn over it.

And just to be clear, as Christians we shouldn't just mourn that we are caught. A lot of people mourn that they got caught in sin.

It's like when you catch your kid doing something wrong red handed and then discipline them, there's often a lot of crying. There's weeping. Do you know why they cry? Because they were caught and now there are consequences. That's a lot of the tears that kids shed - they're just sad they got caught and have to deal with the punishment. Can I tell you something? That's a lot of the reason adults cry about their sin too.

Look at 2 Cor. 7 for a minute. Here Paul makes a distinction between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. This is so important when we're thinking about how we respond to sin because a lot of our response is just worldly sorrow. I've seen a lot of people cry over the years of counseling. Both men and women. And I'll tell you, a lot of times what people are crying over and sad about is that they got caught. And that now there are consequences for their sin.

They're not sad they offended Jesus. Not sad they violated their covenant with their husband. Not sad they are falling into the same sin. They're sad they got caught and need to make it up. Paul talks about this. **Read 5-11**

So a couple things, then we'll move on. First, the repentance of the Corinthians was so huge and so obvious it encouraged Titus to go tell Paul about it. He was so moved by the godly repentance of the Corinthians their repentance comforted him!

They were grieved into repenting. Paul had to say some really hard things to this church because they were so wild. And those hard things weren't fun. But they produced a godly grief that turned into repentance. **Look at Verse 10. Read**

So there is a worldly grief. A shallow superficial grief and sadness and Paul says it produces death. Why? Because it's not true grief. It's fake but looks real. Why is it fake? Because it just laments the consequences. It's sad it got caught and now life is difficult.

True repentance, true godly grief produces repentance. An actual change of not only behavior, but of the heart. It's someone who is sad that they offended God. **Read 10-11a**

There's an earnestness in godly grief. What does that mean? Godly grief wants to make everything right as fast and thoroughly as possible.

Someone breaks something of yours and they're apologetic, they want fix it and make it right for you. They're not irritated they have to fix it for you, they're not slow to get it taken care of. No, there's a fire in them to make it right. That's what the gospel does.

Godly grief has indignation. Anger. Not that they got caught, but at the sin itself.

It has fear. Fear of what? The Lord - the only proper fear there is. Not fear of losing face, or losing respect, a job or whatever. It has a fear of the Lord.

This is true mourning. True grief. And there's time for it.

When else to we grieve and mourn? **Turn to 1 Thes. 4.** Another time we grieve is when people die. It is god and right to grieve when someone dies. There's a sadness that is appropriate.

Here Paul is talking about the future resurrection of believers and there's some implications here for eschatology - end times stuff. I don't want to get too caught up in that. I just want to notice that grief is okay.

Read 13-18

Okay, so Paul says in 13 that he doesn't want us to grieve as those who have no hope. Christians can grieve - and should grieve. Even Jesus wept when Lazarus died even though he knew he would raise him from the dead. So there is grief but we don't grieve in the same way as the world.

The world makes up lies about where the dead go. They become part of nature, they all magically go to heaven for an eternal life of fishing, or they just blink out of existence. Or their grief is inconsolable or weird.

Christians are called to grieve. But we're called to grieve in light of eternity. Especially when a believer dies, we grieve with hope knowing that they are with the Lord and one day they will take part in the resurrection. And we can actually encourage one another with those truths.

Even when we lose an unbeliever, we entrust their soul to the judgment and justice of God. And we are reminded all the more to finish the race all the way to the end and call others to repent and turn to Jesus as well.

And let me just say one other thing about mourning the loss of someone. Different people take different amounts of time to mourn. Sometimes it's longer, sometimes it's shorter. But it shouldn't be forever. As Christians we should be working toward closure and reminding ourselves of truth. There are some people who lose someone and then that becomes their identity forever. We don't do that. We take the time we need to mourn, and then keep going.

What are other times we mourn and weep? We can mourn over the judgment of our country. There's a whole book called Lamentations - which means mourning - where Jeremiah laments and wails over the destruction of Jerusalem and the utter devastation of his country. Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet for a reason.

You guys, when we see aspects of our country that are completely sinful or being handed over to judgment that shouldn't cause us happiness or even resignation. It should cause us to mourn. To be sad that we've lost a great thing.

So all of that to say there is mourning and weeping. It's good and right to weep.

We can weep at injustice in our society. We can weep at misfortune. We saw all the fires devastate people this last summer. The Bible says we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who what? Weep.

We can kind of mirror - to some extent - what other people are going through.

You remember Job's friends? They actually did good the first week they were with him. It's when they accused him wrongly that they fell into sin.

2) When do we laugh and dance? That's the second half of the verse back in Ecclesiastes.

First let me say that both of these words indicate merriment. The word translated laugh is often translated joke, amuse, play, dance, and the word dance is just what it sounds like - dancing.

And so I think it's worth mentioning that Christians should actually be some of the most joyous, happy people. Not just rejoice always even when life is miserable. There are plenty of seasons where life is miserable. But Christians should also have times of pleasantness and merriment.

When do we do that? First and foremost where should be joy and dancing when we're thinking of salvation.

Psalm 118:15: The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous, the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.

When God saves us, there should be rejoicing. True joy, true happiness. Dancing and excitement.

Psalm 30 says basically the same thing. **Turn to Luke 15** for a minute. In Luke 15 Jesus gives 3 parables - back to back to back The parable of the lost sheep, lost coin and the lost son - or we know it as the prodigal son.

The 3 parables are given in rapid succession and are meant as a rebuke to the Pharisees and scribes. **Read 1-3a**

So here are all these wretches - tax collectors and sinners - and they're coming to Jesus and they're getting saved. And what's the response of the religious leaders? Grumbling. They can't imagine rejoicing and dancing at salvation. So Jesus lays into them with 3 parables that illustrate not only what God and angels do when sinners repent, but what we should do as well. **Read 3-7**

So parables usually have just one main point. It's easy to get a little lost in the weeds with parables sometimes, but usually there's one main point they are pressing. Here the main point is at the end. The Pharisees and scribes are grumbling. What's happening in heaven when a sinner repents from their sin? Joy. In fact there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 "righteous people" who don't think they need to repent.

God and heaven are happy, glad, filled with joy when a sinner repents just like a shepherd is filled with joy when he finds his lost sheep.

Same point is made in the next parable. **Read 8-10**

Again, same point. And, not only does the woman rejoice, but she calls other people to rejoice with her. That's good and right and proper. So all of heaven is rejoicing - and even angels are rejoicing. That's amazing. Angels are excited that humans repent and believe the gospel. And if even angels are excited, should we be as well?

Last parable teaches the same thing. Remember the son takes his inheritance, goes off and wastes it all. Eventually he comes back with a repentant heart, willing work like a slave for his father. And this is the Father's response to his repentance. **Read 23-32**

What's the response to salvation? We should party. That should be the default setting of Christians when someone comes to faith.

We should be glad in corporate worship. **Psalm 122:1:** I was glad when they said to me "Let us go to the house of the Lord."

There's something about being together with other Christians on a weekly basis that should cause our hearts joy. There's something about gathering weekly together, to worship and fellowship that's indispensable. There's

usually people here even after church until 12:30 or 1pm just talking with each other. I love that. There's a connection and joy to be with each other.

We dance and celebrate victories - even military victories. Remember David when he had brought the Ark of the Covenant home? It had been captured by Philistines and bounced back and forth. Then Uzzah died trying to keep it safe on a cart while they transported it home. So they just kind of left it at a guy's house for years. Well, they realized you have to have priests carry the ark - they forgot. And what did David do once it was back home? He danced.

Prov. 11:10: When the righteous thrive, the city rejoice, when the wicked perish there are shouts of joy.

Thank God that wicked person is dead.

Babies should also cause joy. Remember when Sarah overheard God talking to Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child in old age? What did Sarah do? She laughed. She laughed in disbelief, but God said she would actually laugh with joy. And Isaac was named Isaac because he was the cause of her laughter - her joy.

There's a season weeping, but there are also seasons for joy and dancing. And we need to know which is which. So that even our emotions bring glory to God.

Pray