



This Sunday we were in Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

We saw first, that **we live in the best of times and the worst of times (v1-8)**. The teacher's poem beautifully reflects the highs and lows, the ebbs and flows of life in a fallen world. So many of our 'times' are formed by our relationships, and so many of them seem to happen *to us*. Though we may be tempted to think that we can work our way to better times, studiously avoid tough times, or that we will never escape trying times, the teacher assures us that these times come to all of us ...because we're human. He prepares us for what is to come.

Next, we saw that we are to **live in light of the one who holds time in his hands (v9-15)**. The ebb and flow were sliced by the repeating question of v9 (1v3 and 2v22). We were reminded (1v13) that God has *given* this kind of life to us. We saw that our human time is "beautiful in its time" (v11). We also saw that God has "set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done" (v11). God has enabled us to see that there is something more, yet we are not able to grasp it. For *we are not the ultimate doers* in our world or in our lives; that role belongs to God. We are dearly loved creatures, not equals with God.

The teacher gives two things that we can do in light of this:

- accept these lives and lots God has given us, and not try to take charge (v12-13)
- fear and revere the one who is in charge (v14)

It is humbling to realise how small we are, but it is also refreshing. We don't have to pretend that we're God. We don't have to try to do his job for him. We can simply focus on the small things he has given us to do today.

Finally, we saw that he will do things **all in God's time (v16-17)**. The teacher comes up against a problem as he plans to lead a quiet life minding his own business: the problem of evil (v16). But it turns out that it is not just humans who have their times; God, too, has a time, "a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed" (v17). God patterns the whole of existence, not just our human times. And he will one day hold all of creation to account. This is a great reassurance for those who live in a world filled with evil. We can trust it to him.

We finished by considering that "**at just the right time**" (Rom 5v6, Gal 4v4), God stepped into history and came to live in human time. Jesus knew what it was to dance, mourn, speak, and say silent. When we struggle with the times we're in, we can come to the one who has been there before us, knowing that he sympathises (Hebrews 4v15-16, Psalm 23, Matthew 11v28-30). And the Son's incarnation also dignifies our experience of human living. Christ not only became a human but still is one! Does that now show us something of the majesty, glory and wonder of being human? We finished with the words of Psalm 8.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group or for personal reflection...

1. What "time" do you feel like you are currently in? How can knowing the times that are laid out for humans help us?
2. The teacher says that God made "everything beautiful in its time" (v11). What do you think that means? How does that help/challenge you?
3. Why do we (at least those of us who are educated westerners) find it so hard to accept the lives and lots that God has given us? How can we help ourselves and each other?
4. How does it change our perspective to know that God, not us, is the ultimate doer? Why is fear the right response to this realisation?
5. How do we see God's timings at work in Ecclesiastes 3 and throughout the Bible and the life of Christ?
6. How does it dignify our human experience that the Son became (and still is!) a human being?