

In Time for Eternity

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[0 : 00] Ecclesiastes chapter 3, and we're going to read together the whole chapter. Listen then to the words of the preacher who is speaking to us.

For everything, he says, there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted.

A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to break down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.

A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to cast away. A time to tear and a time to sow.

a time to keep silence and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for peace and a time for war. What gain has the worker from his toil?

[1 : 14] I've seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. And 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.

I perceive that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and do good as long as they live, also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. This is God's gift to man.

I perceive that whatever God does endures forever. Nothing can be added to it nor taken away from it.

God has done it so that people fear before him. That which is already has been. That which is to be already has been.

And God seeks what has been driven away. Moreover, I saw unto the Son that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness. And in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.

[2 : 23] I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked. For there is a time for every matter and for every work. I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them, that they might see that they themselves are but beasts.

But what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same. As one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath. And man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity.

All go to one place. All are from the dust and to the dust all return. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beasts goes down into the earth.

So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work. For this is his, well, lot. Better word there would be reward.

That's what it actually means. Nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his reward. Who can bring him to see what will be after him? Amen.

[3 : 35] And may God bless to us this his word. Well, good morning, everyone. Do turn with me, if you would, to the passage that we read there, Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

Now, the Christian gospel is always, always down to earth and realistic.

And that is the great refrain of the preacher, Ecclesiastes. He constantly is telling us throughout this book to be real. To face fact, not to hide in fantasy.

But his message is not just one of cynicism. It's a challenge to undo pessimism just as much as it is to over-optimism.

And, of course, biblical realism is always the answer and the only answer that can liberate us for the real joys that this earthly life can afford us.

[4 : 38] Now, the preacher is very clear. This world can never ultimately satisfy us. But the wonderful paradox is that when we grasp that, when we accept that, in the light of God's eternal plan for the world, well, then we can be liberated to know and to possess great joys, abundant joys, great satisfaction in this brief life that we have on this mortal coil.

But it all hinges on coming to terms with a proper view of time and a proper view of eternity. And we need to grasp that we are in time for eternity.

Understand what that means. Accept it. Rejoice in it. And you will find that it is a path of great blessing, even amid the bafflement of our earthly lives.

You'll find a way of believing delight to banish the bitterness and the despair that is so often what marks life in this world.

Let's see how that message comes to us very clearly once again here in chapter 3. First of all, in verses 1 to 8, this message is very simple. We are in time.

[6 : 00] We are creatures of time. We are not controllers of time. Now, this poem is probably the best-known passage in the book of Ecclesiastes.

It's often quoted, isn't it? Often actually quoted out of context to try and justify some sort of action with the Bible's permission. Those of my generation will probably remember the teenage film from 1984 called Footloose, where the hero, Kevin Bacon, I think it was, he quotes verse 4 here about a time to dance to justify their plan to have a dance in the town hall in small-town America.

And the preacher was the misery guts, miserable killjoy, who was leading a campaign against the dancing. And he's quoted this verse and rather sort of hoist on his own petard.

There is a time to dance. Well, it's good when killjoys are shown up by Scripture, but that's not really what this list is actually about, is it?

It's not a prescriptive list to justify these various actions. No, it's just a descriptive poem. It's just laying out the simple reality of life in terms of the ebb and flow of time.

[7 : 14] Rather like the opening poem in chapter 1, which was about the cycles of nature. And here it's about human life. It's about the times that we live in. And he's reminding us in this evocative poem that we are creatures of time, but never controllers of time.

We live inside time. We're trapped by time. And by our own times too. So look at the poem. There's seven couplets.

Each of them has two contrasting pairs. Seven's the perfect number in the Bible. It gives a sense of perfect totality. All the ebb and the flow of life's experiences as we knew it.

And the point is, we are not in control of any of it. We can't control when we're born, can we?

And we can't control when we die either. But there's a time for both. And we react to time. We are not rulers of time. So there are times of creation and construction.

[8 : 23] There's planting. There's building up. There's bringing to birth. And we ourselves are often engaged in all of these things. And yet also there are times of deconstruction and destruction.

Breaking down. Plucking up. Facing death. Death of people. Death of things. And that we might have to live through that too. And we need to accept that, don't we?

We need to be realistic about it. There will be times of laughter. Times of dance. But there will also be times of mourning. And of weeping. And that's just life as we knew it.

And we'd be fools, wouldn't we, to think that we can control that. We can't. We are creatures of our own times. And it may be that our times, our personal times, see much more of the one thing than of the other.

My father was born in the 1920s. He grew up during the 1930s, the Great Depression. And there was nothing he could do about that. He knew great poverty as a youngster. There wasn't much laughter.

[9 : 31] There wasn't much dancing in the 1930s. And then came the Second World War, which he had to live through and fight in. They were very hard times.

But those baby boomers who were born after the war grew up in the 1950s and the swinging 60s. Well, there was plenty of song, plenty of dance then, wasn't there? Very different. And then they retired just in time.

Just before Gordon Brown wrecked the UK's pension industry. So you could retire with a nice final salary pension at the age of 60 or so. And you could live to enjoy all the benefits of modern medicine, have a long life.

And lots of holidays and cruises and all that sort of thing. It's a great time to have been born and to live. Those times are now past, aren't they? And if you're in your 40s now or younger, you'll be working at least into your 70s.

In fact, if you're much younger, you'll probably die working. Because there won't be pensions for your time, I'm afraid. Get real. These are our times. We can't control it. It's the way it is.

[10 : 36] You can argue about who to blame. But you can't change it. We have to accept that. That's the point. As he says later on in chapter 7, verse 14.

In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider God has made the one as well as the other. So there are times, verse 6 and first half of verse 5 there, when the pressing need is to accumulate wealth.

I think that's what the seeking and the keeping refers to in verse 6, as it does in chapter 5, verse 13. And the gathering of stones there probably means precious stones.

Exodus 25, verse 7 speaks similarly. Well, when you've got a family to support, when you've got responsibilities to fulfill, you have to earn a crust, don't you, to keep it all together? But equally, when times of plenty come, there's a time to stop embracing your substance, isn't there?

There's a time to cast it away before you leave it to the fool. Do you remember last week, chapter 2, verse 18? You're no good relatives. Or the prodigal chancellor, even worse.

[11 : 51] Likewise, verses 7 and 8 refer to relationships with people, a different kind of embracing. There's a time to break off, to tear away. Well, that can be very hard, can't it?

But there's a time to patch it up, to sew together. Sometimes that can be equally hard. And that's true in personal terms. It's true in business terms. It's true in national and international terms, too.

There's a time, isn't there, to court friendship, to court peace. But also, sadly, there's a time when war can be unavoidable. That's reality.

That's human history. The point isn't in the specific detail. The point here is in the totality. We are creatures of time. We're locked in time.

And we're often trapped by our own times. We are not controllers of time. And to think we can change that?

[12 : 50] Well, as a preacher, it's just vanity. Chasing the wind. As vain as thinking we can control the earth's temperature. Whatever the green religious zealots will be saying in the next few weeks here at COP26.

Now, there's no place, is there, in the Bible for pipe dreams, for delusions of grandeur. None of that for the Christian. Life is a rich tapestry.

We simply have to face up to that. We have to adapt to real life. Not to try and imagine the reality somehow away. As though somehow we could do that. And as though reality would adjust to us.

It doesn't happen. That's a fundamental lesson that we need to learn. It's very hard, though, to learn for human beings. But the preacher's point is that unless we do learn this, unless we get things to a sense of real detachment about life, so that we can live amid this reality, well, then life will be full of misery.

It'll be full of a sense of burden, a sense of dissatisfaction. As one wag put it, life is full of misery, loneliness, and suffering. And it's all over much too soon.

[14 : 05] Well, there's humor there, isn't there? But there's real truth. The world is full of people constantly dissatisfied with life because they want to be controllers of time, of their time.

They can't accept that they are just creatures of time. But they are. That's the truth. But we find it so hard to accept that, don't we? Why is that?

Why do we seek so much more from life than our time can ever give us? Why do we seek to control time?

Why do we feel so frustrated when we can't? Well, that's because although we are in time, secondly, this passage teaches us that we are for eternity.

We are yoked to our transience, and yet we are yearning all the time for the transcendent. And that's the preacher's second point here, if you look at verses 9 to 15.

[15 : 11] We can't help always looking for more, for that lasting gain for our toil, verse 9. And we can't find gain, lasting profit.

We can't get control of time. And that is because, as verse 10 says, God has made it that way, do you see? He has given us this business, this burden of lives that are trapped in the ebb and flow of time.

The times that go over us, the times that affect us, the times that rule our existence, but which we as mere creatures cannot control. Because God alone is the creator.

He alone is the controller of time. We are locked in time, but he is the Lord of time. But more than that, you see, he tells us we must live as those who have eternity trapped in us.

You see verse 11. God has made time and ordered time beautifully in all its ebb and its flow. And we live in this world of time, but also, do you see, God has put eternity into man's heart.

[16 : 29] And that's why we long for the permanent. For the solid. For the unchanging. In other words, for ultimate gain, ultimate profit in life.

But you see, that is something outside time. That's something beyond time. Of a wholly different order to time. And so we find ourselves intrinsically frustrated and perplexed.

We have this sort of homing device within us. And that means that we know enough to give us that thirst, that longing for more.

We see the beauty that there is in life. And we sense that that beauty must be somehow lasting. And yet we know that it doesn't last. It's only for a time.

We know enough to look for more than this world can give us. But we don't know enough to be able to make any sense of it. To find what it is that's lacking.

[17 : 33] Verse 11 again. See, man cannot find out what God has done from beginning to end. And that is the root of the basic vexation in our human spirits. We long for permanence.

And yet the world in our time is just passing. We long for transcendence. And yet we are just transient. But it's because God has put eternity into our mortal passing frame.

C.S. Lewis called that the inconsolable longing. He says, Our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we've always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fantasy.

No, it's real. Because God made us for eternity. And that explains the tension that we feel in our lives.

We can't control, we can't capture the eternal, that forever. We can't find that key to life. Look at verse 14.

[18 : 44] It's only God, isn't it? And what he does that transcends time. Whatever God does endures forever. And we can't add or subtract one whit from that ourselves.

And as verse 11 says, We cannot fathom his doings from beginning to end. For us, look at verse 15.

Our past has been planned by God. That which is, already has been. But our future also is under his control, as if it were already past.

That which is to be, already has been. From the perspective of God. But we can't find how to hold on to it all. But he can. He does. God alone seeks what has been driven away.

And the implication is, he finds it. That is, while we are helpless to control our times, God is still in control. Totally gathering up every moment in his hands.

[19 : 48] Our times are in his hands, as the hymn says. And that's why, you see, as long as we're living still asking that question in verse 9.

What gain is there for my toil? Well, the answer can only ever be frustration and dissatisfaction. Because we're trying to be what only God can be.

We're trying to be the controller of time. And as long as we live like that, life will always be a miserable, frustrating business. An unhappy business, as chapter 1, verse 13 puts it.

A burden. A burden. As verse 10 here translates that business in the NIV. A burden of unhappiness. But you see, the preacher is not a pessimist.

He's not urging us to despair and cynicism about life. Not like the BBC and all the other news channels that have doom, gloom, and catastrophe all the time.

[20 : 50] It's quite the opposite. Look at verses 12 and 13. Right in the midst of this, you see, he points us to a very different picture of what life can be. I perceive there's nothing better for them than to be joyful.

To do good as long as they live. Also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in his toil. Because that is God's gift to man.

A way of joy, of pleasure, of satisfaction in the things of this world. Even in the passing of these things.

It's a very stark contrast, isn't it, to the frustration and the vexation of that question in verse 9. There is an answer to it all. There is a way to conquer the tyranny of the times that are fading and of the beauty that is passing.

But paradoxically, that key begins when you recognize that you cannot conquer time. It begins when we come to terms with the fact that we are but creatures.

[21 : 55] That we are transient and locked in time. And that God alone is the creator and is the transcendent Lord of time. It comes not just when we come to terms with that, but when we learn to rejoice in that.

And we live in the light of that reality all the way through our lives. So only when we recognize that the frustration, that the vexation that we feel within us is something that we're meant to feel.

And that we always will feel. That that vexed dissatisfaction can actually become for us the road to joy in life. And not the ruin of joy in our life.

That's the paradox, you see. It's only when we come to see that the innate sense of dissatisfaction deep within us can't and won't ever be resolved in this world of time.

Only then will it be resolved. Well, not resolved, but transformed so that we are truly released for a real and a living joy.

[23 : 01] Our frustration, our vexation lies ultimately in the fact that we are for eternity. Eternity is trapped within our hearts. God has set it there.

And that we are trapped in time. That we are creatures of time. But the way of joy, you see, comes when we grasp what that really means.

And that's the third thing. We are in time for eternity. God has frustrated us with earthly dissatisfaction so that we will find eternal satisfaction.

Being creatures of time doesn't mean we're in the wrong place. That's only so if we see this world as the only place.

But it isn't, you see. And the creator of eternity and time is calling out to us in time to shed light on us in time. And only that light can make any sense of our lives lived in time.

[24 : 10] Because only that light can enable us to live in time for more than just time. For eternity. See, the vexations that we feel in life are God calling out to us.

Urging us to respond to our true destiny. He calls out from within. That's the point made there in verse 14. The inner tension. The frustration that we feel.

It's something God has done. So that, look. So that people will fear before him. Pain and perplexity is God's megaphone. It's getting our attention. He's saying, look.

We're asking why all the time. Because God wants us to ask. So that we'll look up. So that we'll find the only place of real satisfaction in the Lord of time and eternity.

In our creator. Listen to C.S. Lewis again. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy.

[25 : 13] The most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. You see, the vexation of the human spirit is for a purpose.

It's to tell us that we are for eternity. God is at work in us. And on us. And all around us. In time.

In this life. For eternity. And time is when eternity beckons to us. With its message of glory.

It calls out from within us. As we've said. But it also calls out from without. Look at verse 16. I saw under the sun. That in the place of justice.

Even there was wickedness. And in the place of righteousness. Even there. Was wickedness. You see, even as fallen human beings. We still have a deep sense.

[26 : 11] Don't we? Of right and wrong. We still have a sense of justice. And of injustice. And so we have a sense of outrage. So much in the world that's so twisted. When we read about corruption in high places.

Where there should be justice. When we read about wickedness. Where there should be righteousness. It angers us. And you read about.

These awful stories of children. In children's homes. Being abused. In the place where they should have been protected. Or the elderly in care homes. Should be being cared for. But have often been abused.

Especially in this last year. When you read about sex trafficking. And terrible things. That are just ignored. By the police. Or by politicians. Or whatever. We cry out. How long Lord? Till there's justice.

And yet. Our impotence. That really changed this world. It's palpable. Isn't it? Even the world's greatest powers.

[27 : 14] Can't straighten out the mess. In this world. Look at the humiliation. Of the United States of America. With their recent withdrawal from Afghanistan. Squandering how many hundreds of billions.

Maybe trillions of dollars. In that ill-fated expedition. We need something more. Don't we? Even than superpowers.

We need something greater. We need something bigger. To make sense of it all. Well exactly. That is eternity calling. God is calling.

And that's what time is for. It's time. For hearing his voice. And to respond to his voice. And we must do. Because not only is eternity calling out to us.

In time. One day. Eternity will confront time. And bring an end. To all time. Look at verse 17. Do you see? There's a time. He says for every matter.

[28 : 08] In time for that.

The former columnist. For the Times. Bernard Levin. Once wrote. Will I have time to discover. Why I was born.

Before I die. Well I don't know if he did. But that is the crucial question. Because if you don't. There is no hope.

For eternal satisfaction. And indeed. In fact. There's no hope for earthly satisfaction. Either. Because of that. God. Because that is the whole purpose. Of human life. The whole meaning of our life.

And our times. All its mysteries. And twists. And perplexities. The whole meaning is that we might be. In time. For eternity. To seek God. To find God. God. You see.

[29 : 20] We're so perverse in our hearts. We're so deaf. And so often we can discover. His good and greatest gifts. And enjoy them in a sense.

In this life. And yet utterly ignore. The God who made them. And gave them to us. And so. God. Imbues. His gifts. As it were.

With an inbuilt appetite. Stimulant of their own. So that to have them. And to enjoy them. Makes us desire more. More than they can ever deliver themselves.

It's like eating chocolate. Isn't it? Or ice cream. You can't just have one. Soon as you've swallowed it. Immediately. Your appetite is stimulated. Isn't it? You want more. And God wants us.

To seek more. Because he wants us. To find him. That's what the apostle Paul said on Mars Hill. Wasn't it? To the. Intellectuals in Athens.

[30 : 18] In Acts 17 verse 26. God made mankind to live. On the face of the earth. Having determined. Their allotted periods. Determined their times. And the boundaries of their dwelling places.

He did that. So that. They should seek God. God. And yet. He's not far. For every one of us. Says Paul. You see.

We are in time. For. Eternity. Life. Is for. Seeking. And finding God. Finding him now. In time. Before. Eternity. Overtakes time.

At the last. Ultimately. Or. In the twinkling of eye. Of an eye. For any one of us. Individually. Look at verses 18 to 21.

It's chilling isn't it? But it's real. One of the chief lessons that. That God is teaching us. Is that we're all mortal. In terms of our mortal bodies.

[31 : 16] Well. We are just like. Every other beast. Every one of us. All of us will die. Notice five times. The repeated. All there. In verses 19 and 20. All go to one place.

All. Are from dust. And two dusts. Will return. See. From a purely. Earthly. Perspective. There's no difference.

In the end. Between men. And beasts. Just as there's no difference. Between the wise. And the fool. We saw last time. In chapter 2. All die. Just the same way. Verse 21.

Who knows. If there's any difference. After death. And the answer is. You see. You can't know. Unless. You have found. In time. The reality.

About eternity. That what does. Separate. Man from beast. Is the eternal image of God. Planted in us. By God. And which enables us.

[32 : 14] Not only to look for more. But to desire more. Unlike the beasts. And to find it. To find. That eternal life. In time.

In knowing. In loving. And in serving. The God who made us. For himself. And that's what we're in time for. Friends. That's what life's about. To lay hold on the eternal world.

That God has made us for. Before we are confronted by it. And before the time for finding God is over. And the time for judgment comes.

For. Verse 17. And look again. God will judge. Everyone. One day. So let me ask you the question again. Will you.

Have discovered. That you are in time. For eternity. In time for eternity. That's a real question for you.

[33 : 09] If you are not. A Christian believer today. In fact. It's only. The only real question that matters. Do you struggle.

Do you grapple with that frustration. That. Dissatisfaction. That perplexity. Well. Listen to God's megaphone. He's calling out to you.

To find him. To submit to him. Saint Augustine discovered that. After a great struggle. And he admitted. You made. You've made me for yourself.

And my heart is restless. Until it finds its rest in you. But be clear. That's not a search. That you have to. Embark on all by yourself.

It's a search that God. Has ready. Already embarked upon. For you. God doesn't just call out. Into time from eternity. He invaded time.

[34 : 05] Himself. In the fullness of the time. Says Paul. In Galatians chapter 4. Jesus. Came. He sent his son. Born into time. To save us.

For eternity. Jesus came and said. I am the resurrection. And the life. I came. That you might have life. In all its fullness.

That true life. Of God. Eternal life. Which begins. Now. Before it's too late. God has called. Into time.

God has come into time. So you can't ignore him. That's the way to disaster. To futility. To despair. In this world.

And indeed forever. Today. Is the day of salvation. Says Paul. The apostle of Christ. Now. Is the favorable time.

[34 : 59] He says. And that's why you're alive. Now. Is the favorable time. For you to discover. That you're in time. For eternity. For the new creation. And if you're not yet.

A Christian believer. Well now. For you. Is the time. To find life. In Jesus Christ. Before time. Disappears. Into eternity. For you.

But of course. There are big issues. Here also. For every Christian. Because the frustration. That we have in this world. Won't disappear. When you find faith.

Don't be mistaken. Rather. What happens. Is that our yearning. Becomes. Far more intense. Because the more our eyes. Are open to the eternal.

The more we want from the eternal. Again. It's C.S. Lewis. Who expresses this so well. In one of his. Letters. He says. That he longs for heaven most. Not in the times.

[35 : 56] In this world. When he's most miserable. But in the times. Of greatest. Earthly joy. He says. Those times. Are like. The bright frontispiece. Which whets one.

To read the story. Itself. All joy. Emphasizes. Our pilgrim status. It always reminds. Beckons. Awakens. Desires. Our best havings.

Our wantings. He says. Because our appetite. Is whetted for more. And that's why. You see. There's danger there. That's why.

Christian believers. Also need the preacher's warning here. And he gives the Christian. Two very clear warnings. First. Don't expect. Eternity's glorious. Satisfaction.

Here in time. We're in time. For eternity. The best. Is yet to be. Don't expect. More. More. Satisfaction.

[36 : 51] From this life. Than it is possible to have. In this passing world. Now Christians have to accept life. As it is. In reality. Don't try and live. As if it were not. As it really is.

There's so many things. That we're always going to still see. As through a glass. Darkly. Looking at life. In time. Is like looking at the underside.

Of a tapestry. There's lots of loose threads. You can see the picture. But it's distorted. It's blurred. Isn't it? There will always be vexation.

And pain. And perplexity. In life. Even for Christian believers. Our cry is always going to be. How long. Oh Lord. Until we see. Justice at last. Christ. And Christians.

Have to learn. Believing detachment. From all of these mysteries. And enigmas in life. And in them. Simply to trust. God. That God does know.

[37 : 50] And that he does see. And that he does control it all. For a purpose. Of his ultimate glory. Although we may never. Fathom. And understand that purpose.

This side of eternity. Verse 11 again. We cannot find out. What God has done. From beginning to end. But we do know. As Christians.

Verse 14 is true. That what he does. Endures forever. And we have to be content with that. And trust God.

That's what faith is. And we're to walk by faith. Aren't we? Not by sight. That's so important. For us to keep clear. Some Christians.

Are always seeking. More from life. Than life can ever provide. More in their relationships. More from their careers. From their family. Even in their Christian service. And God may give.

- [38 : 44] All of these things. Good. In their time. And used for the right purposes. Of course. They will yield great blessings. To our lives. But misuse them.
- As vehicles. To give us meaning. As things to give us purpose in life. Well. They will just turn to dust. In our hands. It's the same for the. The quest that many Christians have.
- For better and deeper experiences. Of the Christian life. To get beyond these. These struggles. And these battles. To be released. Into the great blessings. And the victory.
- Of the spirit. Because there must be more. Must be more. Than this. Daily battle. Well. There isn't more. Not yet.
- Heaven's full experience. Cannot be. Until. Eternity. Envelopes time. Until mortality. Is swallowed up. In immortality. That's why the New Testament.
- [39 : 44] Is so full of realism. About these things. Contentment. Is the great blessing. Of our time. I've learned. Says Paul. The secret of contentment.
- In every earthly situation. He writes. The Philippians. Whether I've got plenty. Or whether I'm hungry. Whether I'm in need. Or whether I'm in abundance. Godliness.
- With contentment. He says to Timothy. That's the great gain. The greatest gain. There's nothing greater. And that's the message. Of the preacher here. This life is as good.
- As it gets. In this life. Don't expect. Eternity. Satisfaction. In time. In time. But when we accept. That you see.
- We begin to see. Just how good. Our time really is. And all the gifts. That God has given to us. And that's the second warning. Don't miss out. On this wonderful. Earthly satisfaction.
- [40 : 41] Of time. For our time. When we are living in time. Don't miss it. It's the same paradox. Again you see. When we grasp. That the best. Is yet to be.
- And therefore. When we live. In this world. With a right sense. Of believing detachment. So that as the hymn says. We sang it last week. Earth's joys. May be our guide. And not our chain.
- Not looking to this world. And this time. For ultimate satisfaction. That's when. We are. Liberated. For joy. In our life.
- And for the fullest. Earthly satisfaction. That is possible. This side of eternity. That's when we're transformed. As someone has put it. From being unhappy. And discontented.
- Even in our happiness. To being happy. And content. Even in our unhappiness. That's what the Bible means. By joy. You see. Real joy.
- [41 : 37] It's an attitude. It's a perspective. On life. All of life. That sees through. Always to the glory. Of eternity. And lives in the warming light.
- Of eternity. Even now. I made all the perplexities. And the pain. Of life. With all its experiences. Whatever our times. May bring to us. It's an attitude.
- That takes you. Always. Beyond the clouds. To the sun. That is always there. That you can't see. By getting in a plane. Isn't it? In Glasgow airport. And taking off.
- Through the clouds. And you realize. Oh there's a sun. After all. And forgotten. And you see. That sunlight. Of what we see. In the Christian gospel.
- Bathes. Our whole perspective. On life. And that is the light. Of real joy. Look at verses 12. And 13 again. I perceive.
- [42 : 33] That there's nothing better. Than to be. Joyful. To do good. And find pleasure. In toil. That is. God's gift.
- To man. You see. That's believing. Detachment. That's godly contentment. And joy. Yes. Living in the light. Of judgment. To come. Doing good.

That is. Fearing God. Obeying him. As the Lord of life. But that is. Living for joy. Rejoicing. In all God's good gifts.

Because. We trust. That God is in control. Working his eternal purpose. For us. Apostle Paul says. To the Philippians. We can work out.

Our daily salvation. Because we know. That God. Is at work. Behind it all. And in it all. Look at verse 22. There's nothing better.

[43 : 29] Than to rejoice. In what we do. For that. Is our reward. It's a much better. Translation. It's the same word. As in chapter 2. Verse 10. That's our reward.

You see. When we see our daily work. Whatever it is. What it's for. For what it's for. It's for a present satisfaction. It's for joy in the doing. When we see that.

When we. When we don't try and get what it's. Get out of it. Something it can never give. When we don't try and. Pump it for ultimate satisfaction. And meaning. Well that's what releases us.

To live with joy. Here on earth. To find the pleasure. That God has given us. Here on earth. Some Christians can be terribly miserable. And ever happy.

Even in their happiness. Always whinging about something. Their job. Their home. Their spouse. Their friends. Often their church.

[44 : 28] Glum faces. Chips on their shoulder. No matter what's happening. That God says. Be joyful. Verse 12. Be joyful. Do good.

As long as you live. Refusing. You see. To rejoice. In God's good gifts. For our time. The food he provides. The wine he ferments. The livelihoods.

He furnishes us with. Living joyless lives. In the midst of that. It doesn't just make us miserable. He says here. It's a sin. It's failing.

To see what we're in time for. To live gladly. To receive gratefully. Every good gift from the hand of God. To not live like that.

Is to be led not by God. But by demons. Read 1st Timothy chapter 4. Don't reject God's joy. Israel was sent into exile.

[45 : 26] Because they did not serve the Lord. With joy. And gladness of heart. Because of the abundance. Of all the good things. That God had given them. Deuteronomy 28.

Verse 47. And some Christians. Put themselves. Far away from God. For that same. Reason.

Whereas others. Who often live through times. Of great sadness in life. Great disappointments. Great burdens. Some can live through that.

With radiant joy. Shining from their faces. So let me ask you. Are you. Someone who is unhappy. Even in your happiness. Well if so.

Perhaps you are looking for more. From this world. Than this world can ever. Possibly give. You haven't really grasped. That the best. Is yet to be.

[46 : 25] And paradoxically. That might be the very thing. That's closing your eyes. To the bright. And beautiful. Technicolor. Of all the gifts. And the satisfactions. That God does have for you.

Even in this passing world. While you wait. For that glory. That is still to come. We are in time.

For. Eternity. So may God grant us all eyes. To see in time. So that we'll live lives.

Of fruitful rejoicing. Before him. Not of futility. And regret. Without him. Amen.

Let's pray. O almighty God. Who alone. Canst order. The unruly wills.

[47 : 22] And affections. Of sinful men. Grant unto thy people. That they may love. The thing.
Which thou commandest. And desire.

That which thou. Does promise. That so. Among the sundry. And manifold. Changes of
the world. Our hearts. May surely. There be fixed.

Where true. Joys. Are to be found. Through Jesus Christ. Our Lord. Amen.