

4. In Time for Eternity

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] If you turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 3, the passage that we read, that would be a great help to us. And the title this morning is this, In Time for Eternity.

Now the Christian gospel is always very down to earth and realistic. And that is the preacher of Ecclesiastes' great refrain, isn't it?

We've seen it already. Be real. Face the facts. Don't hide away in fantasy. And of course the Bible's realism is always the answer to us and to our world, to our thinking, to our personalities, to the way that we are.

Somebody said to me after last Sunday morning that they'd find the passage in Ecclesiastes a great challenge to their tendency to too much pessimism. And at the same time it had challenged their wives' tendency to too much optimism.

Well that's right. Because the Bible's realism is always the answer to our tendencies too much in one direction or the other. All our imbalances, all our extremes are met by the plumb line of scripture.

[1 : 13] And that's why we need scripture. That's why we need all of it. But the preacher is talking about realism, not cynicism.

He's not a cynic. He's not just a debunker. No, he has found the answer. He's found the real answer. And it's a supremely positive and liberating answer for life.

And therefore it's a message that all of us need. You need it if you're not yet a Christian. You haven't really got clear about the reality of life. But likewise you also need it if you're a Christian.

Because even Christian people like us, we so often live our lives, practically speaking, as though we haven't got through clearly to the reality of what life's all about. So here again in chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes, the preacher is at his same old business of reorienting and refocusing us on reality.

And his message is plain. Although he's clear, and we must be clear, that this world will never ultimately satisfy us, nevertheless, the wonderful paradox of his message is that if we accept that and if we grasp that in the light of God's eternal plan and purpose for the world, then we can indeed be liberated to know and possess the great and the abundant joy and satisfaction that there is in this brief life that we have on planet Earth.

[2 : 46] But it all hinges on us grasping and coming to terms with a proper view of time and a proper view of eternity.

We need to grasp that we are in time for eternity. We need to grasp what that means and accept it and come to rejoice in it.

And if we do, we will find that that is indeed the path to great blessing, even amid the bafflement of earthly life. It's the key to the way of believing delight that vanishes the burden of bitterness and despair that so often stalks us and creeps into our lives.

So let's look first of all at these first eight verses that we read. Its message is simply this. We are in time. Now this poem is probably one of the best known parts of this book of Ecclesiastes, isn't it?

It's often quoted. Usually it's quoted entirely out of context, of course, isn't it? To try and justify that the Bible gives permission to certain things. I remember as a teenager watching some teenage film, it was all about small town America and it was all in the days of rock and roll and they wanted to have a rock and roll dance in this place and the local preacher was a miserable sort of killjoy who wouldn't want anything like that at all.

[4 : 10] And they picked up the Bible and found in the book of Ecclesiastes that there is a time to dance. And the old killjoy was hoist on his own petard. Well, it's good when killjoys are shown up by Scripture, but of course that's not what this passage is really about at all, is it?

It's not a prescriptive list, is it, to justify these particular actions. No, it's a descriptive poem. It's just telling us about the simple reality of life, about the ebb and flow of time, just as we know it to be.

It's rather like the opening poem in chapter 1, verses 1 to 11, that spoke about the cycles of nature. Do you remember? Well, so it is here in human life and the times that we all live in.

And the Bible speaks that way, of time. There's an interesting phrase in the old authorised version translation that you keep coming across in the book of Kings. All the doings of this particular king and the times that went over him are recorded in the books of the annals of the kings of Israel.

And you see, the preacher is reminding us in this rather evocative poem that we are creatures of time and of our own times.

[5 : 27] Creatures of time, not controllers of time. And we live inside time and we're trapped, in a sense, by time and we're trapped by our own times too.

So you see, there's seven couplets here, each with two contrasting pairs. It's a sense of the perfect number seven.

It gives a sense of totality. It's a sense of all the ebb and the flow of the vicissitudes of life that we know and that we experience.

Just tell us life as it is. And the point is, we are not the controllers of any of it. We can't control when we're born or when we die, although there's a time for both.

We, as human beings, we react to time, but we don't rule over time. So, at the beginning of the poem, he tells us there's times for creation and construction, for planting, for building up, for bringing to birth.

[6 : 33] And we find ourselves engaged in times just like that, don't we? But there are also times, he says, likewise, for deconstruction, for destruction, for breaking down, for plucking up, for facing death, for people and for things.

And we may have to live through that too. And we simply have to accept it. We have to react to it. There will be, he says, times, verse 4, of laughter and dancing, but equally there will be times of weeping and mourning.

Well, that's just life as we know it, isn't it? We can't change that. We're fools to think that we could control that and be controllers of time.

No, we are creatures of our time. And it may be that our times will have more of the one extreme than the other in any particular way. So, if you were born and brought up in the 1920s and 30s, the days of hardship of the Great Depression, well, there wasn't much you could do about it, was there?

There wasn't much laughter and dancing in those days. Then you had to live through the Second World War. You didn't choose to be born then. But if you grew up in the 50s and 60s, in the boomer years, well, there was plenty of dancing then, wasn't there?

[7 : 51] And if you retired just at the right time before our Chancellor wrecked the pensions market, then you probably retired in a very good and comfortable pension. And you've never had it so good. And it won't ever be so good again.

And if you were born when I was born and anybody after me, we have got to accept that. We'll have to work till we're older and older. We won't have that kind of thing. Well, it's just the times we were born in.

I can't control it. Neither can you. We're creatures of our times. That's just the way it is. But, of course, if we feel hard-dunter about that, we could always think we could have been born somewhere far worse, couldn't we?

I could have been born in Bangladesh or Angola or somewhere that's been wracked by famine and civil war. But we can't control our times and we need to come to terms with that and accept it.

Summed up in chapter 7, verse 14, the preacher says, In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider, God has made the one as well as the other. And there are times in verses 5 and 6 when the pressing need is to accumulate wealth.

[9 : 04] I think that's what the seeking of verse 6 refers to. It's used the same way in chapter 5, verses 13 and 14. It's probably also in verse 5 here where the stones that are being gathered or embraced are very probably precious stones.

If you read 1 Kings 10, you'll read about Solomon having an abundance of precious stones. It's used that way also in Exodus 25 of the precious stones that were gathered for the tabernacle.

Gathering wealth. Well, there's a time when you need to do that, isn't there? If you've got a family to support, if you've got responsibilities to fulfill, well, you have to earn a cross, don't you, to keep things going.

But equally, well, if times of plenty come, well, there's a time to stop embracing and seeking to gather in substance, isn't there? There's a time to cast it away before you lose it all, as we saw last week, before you have to leave it to someone who might turn out to just be a fool.

I think of that when I listen to Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, these billionaires that have just given away. What is it? Hundreds of billions of dollars into charitable foundations.

[10 : 14] Well, good on them. There's a time to refrain from embracing your wealth. Likewise, I think verses 7 and 8 probably refer to relationships.

There's a time to break off, tear away, and there's a time to patch up, a time to sow. And that's true as we know it, isn't it? In personal terms, true sometimes in business terms, true in national and international terms.

There's times to court friendship with other countries, and there's times that that just can't be. There is a time for war and a time for peace. That's just the way of life, isn't it?

But you see, the point of this poem isn't in the specific details, it's in the totality. He's telling us again and again in different ways, we are creatures of time.

We're locked in time. We're trapped, in a way, by our own times. We are not controllers of time. And it's sheer vanity to think that we can ever change that.

[11 : 22] There's no place for pipe dreams, for delusions of grandeur. Life is a rich tapestry of all of these different things, and we simply have to face up to that.

We, as human beings, as Christians, have to learn to adjust to life, not imagine that life is going to adjust to us. And that's a fundamental lesson that we need to learn.

But it's one that's very, very hard to learn, isn't it? But the preacher's point is that unless we can get through to a real sense of detachment about life and learn to adjust to its reality, then life will be one of misery, a source of burden and dissatisfaction.

Woody Allen, he said, life is full of misery, loneliness and suffering, and it's all over much too soon. Well, there's dry humor in that, isn't there? But there's also real truth.

How many people there are who are perpetually dissatisfied with their life because they want to be controllers of their times.

[12 : 36] They can't accept that, no, they are but creatures of their times. but that's what we are. But we find that so hard to accept.

Why is that? Why do we seek so much more from time than time can ever give to us? Why do we seek to control time and feel frustrated when we can't?

Well, it's because, the preacher tells us, although we are in time, we are for eternity. That's his second point here in verses 9 to 15, isn't it?

We can't help always looking for more. We're looking for gain, says verse 9. What gain does the worker have from his toil? We can't find gain and profit.

We can't get control of time. We can't even get control of our own times. But that is because, says verse 10, God has made it this way. He has given us this business, or this burden, as the NIV translates it.

[13 : 44] A burden of lives trapped in the ebb and flow of time. Times that go over us and that affect us and that rule our existence, but which we cannot get control of as mere creatures.

No, because God is the creator. And he alone is the controller of time. We are locked in time, but he is the Lord of time.

But more than that, the preacher tells us, we must live, not only trapped in time, but you see verse 11? With eternity trapped in us.

He says, God has made and ordered time beautifully in all of its ebb and flow, and we live in this world of time, but God has put eternity into man's heart.

And that means that we are always longing for the permanent, for the solid, for the unchanging, for ultimate gain. But you see, that's something outside time, something beyond time, something of a wholly different order to time.

[14 : 52] time. We have this homing device within us that means that we know enough to give us a thirst and a desire for more. We see the beauty that there is in its time and in life, and we sense that such a beauty must speak of something more, it must speak of something lasting, and yet, we know that it's only for a time.

We know enough to look for more than this world can give us, but not enough to find it, not enough to make sense of it all, not enough to find what is lasting.

Verse 11, he cannot find out what God has done from beginning to end. That's why we're frustrated. That's the root of the basic vexation that we experience as human beings.

We long for permanence, and yet the world and our time is passing. We long for transcendence, and yet, we are stuck in a world that is transient, and it's because God has put eternity into our mortal frame.

C.S. Lewis called it the inconsolable longing. He says, there's our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which now always seems to be on the outside.

[16 : 24] It's no mere neurotic fantasy, he says. No, it's real because God made us for eternity. He has said eternity in our hearts. And that explains the tension and the frustration that we feel in our lives.

we can't control and capture the eternal, the forever. We can't find the key to life. You see, verse 14, it's only God and what he does that transcends time.

Whatever God does, he says, endures forever. We can't add or subtract one whit to that. Verse 11 says, we can't fathom his doings from beginning to end.

For us, you see, verse 15 says, our past has been planned by God. That which is already has been. And our future is entirely under his control as if it were something of the past.

You see, that which is to be already has been. From God's perspective, our future is also known. He controls time, past, present and future. future. But we can't find how to hold on to it all.

[17 : 38] But he can. God sees what has been driven away. We can't seek it and find it, but God can. God is in control of time.

That is, while we are helpless to control time, God is in total control. He is gathering up every moment and holding it together.

our times are in his hands. That is what the hymn says. And that is why, you see, as long as we are living, asking that question of verse 9, what gain is there?

What ultimate gain is there from my toil? The answer can only ever be frustration and vexation. Because we are trying to be what only God can be, the controller of time.

And as long as we live like that, it will always be a frustrating and miserable business, an unhappy business, a burden. That's the reality the preacher is telling us.

[18 : 41] But he's not a pessimist. He's not urging us to despair and to cynicism. It's quite the opposite. Look at verses 12 and 13. In the midst of this, he paints a very, very different picture, doesn't he, of life?

Just look at them. There's nothing better than to be joyful and to 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. You see, there's a way of joy and pleasure and satisfaction in the things of this world, even in our passing times. That's a stark contrast to the vexation of verse 9 and the question, where's the gain?

There is an answer to it all, he says. There is a way to conquer the tyranny of time's passing beauty. But paradoxically, it begins only when you recognize that you can't conquer it.

It begins only when we come to terms with the fact that we are but creatures and transient and locked in time and that God alone is the creator and the transcendent one and the Lord of time.

[19 : 54] It's only when we come to terms with that and can actually rejoice in it and live in the light of that reality all through our lives that we find resolution.

It's only when we recognize that the frustration and the vexation that we feel within us is something that we're meant to feel and that we must always feel that our vexed dissatisfaction can actually become the road to joy in life and not the ruin of our joy in life.

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

Well not resolved but transformed. See the vexation lies in this fact that we are for eternity.

That eternity is trapped in us. That God has said eternity in our hearts. And that we are trapped in time and that we are creatures of time.

[21 : 08] But the way of joy exists in finding what that really means. I seem to be trapped here in electronics. Can anybody hear what I'm saying?

I've got two things on here. Is that working? How many more do I need? Can you hear? Yes you can. Okay. We are in time but we are in time for eternity.

And being creatures of time doesn't mean that we are in the wrong place. That's only so if we see this world as the only place. But if we see that this world is not the only place then we are in the right place.

And the creator of eternity and time is calling out to us, every one of us, in time, to shed his light on us in time.

And it's only that light that can make us have any understanding at all of what our life in time is all about. God. Because that light from eternity tells us that we're in time for more than time.

[22 : 22] We're in time for eternity. So you see the very vexation that we feel is eternity calling out to us and urging us to respond to its call.

God, the eternal God, is calling out to us from within. That's the whole point of verse 14. You see, there's the inner tension and the frustration that we feel. It's something that God has planted in us on purpose.

He's done it, says verse 14, so that people will fear him. The pain and the perplexity that we experience in life is God's megaphone to get our attention.

We ask why about so many things in life because God wants us to ask why. He wants us to ask why so that we will look up to the only place where we can find satisfaction in the Lord of time and the Lord of eternity.

C.S. Lewis again, if I find in myself, he says, a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

[23 : 30] See, that's the explanation for so much human vexation. It's on purpose. It's to tell us that we're for eternity. eternity. And that explains so much of the inexplicable in our lives.

God is at work in us and on us and around us in time, in this life, for eternity. This time is the time when God beckons us for eternity.

That's what time is for. And it beckons us from within in that frustration that we feel. And verse 16, it beckons us from without as well.

You see, even as fallen human beings, we still have a sense of right and wrong, don't we? Of justice and righteousness. And we sense a rightful outrage when we see twistedness in the world, when we see even in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.

When we read about corruption in high places where there should be justice, when we read about wickedness where there should be righteousness and trust, and we read about terrible things like abuse of children in a children's home, or abuse of old people, or trafficking of human beings, we feel outraged.

[24 : 45] We say, how long until there's justice? And yet our impotence has shown up, isn't it, so starkly in these situations. Look at Iraq, the world's greatest powers, and they just can't make the twisted straight.

See, we're looking for more, we need more, and we need eternity to make sense of it. And God says, yes, exactly.

That's the preacher's message. Eternity is calling, God is calling. That's what time is for. Time is for hearing the voice of eternity and responding to it.

And we must do, because not only is eternity calling to us in time, one day eternity will also confront time and bring an end to time. Look at verse 17.

There is a time for everything, for every work, including the work of God's eternal judgment. God will judge the righteous and the wicked. That time, that time to end all time is coming.

[25 : 51] And so the question, friends, for all of us is this, will we realize what we are in time for in time? when we realize that we are in time for eternity, in time for eternity.

Bernard Levin, the one time journalist and columnist for the Times, once wrote this, 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 critical question, isn't it, in life?

Because if we don't, there is no hope for eternal satisfaction. And there is no hope either for earthly satisfaction. Because that's the whole purpose of life.

The whole meaning of life and time, with all its mysteries, with all its twists, with all its perplexities, is that we are to be in time for eternity, in order to seek God, and in order to find God.

You see, we are so perverse, we are so deaf, that so often we can devour God's greatest gifts, and yet utterly ignore Him. And so, God, as it were, imbues His gifts with an inbuilt appetite, stimulant of their own.

[27 : 09] To have them and to enjoy them makes us want for more. It's like chocolate, when you've had one bit, you just have to have some more. And you see, God wants us to want more. He wants us to seek Him because He wants us to find Him.

Isn't that what Paul said to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts chapter 17? He made mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods, times, and the boundaries of their dwelling place, so that they might seek God.

Yet He's not far from every one of us. You see, we're in time for eternity. Life is for seeking God, and finding God, not just seeking Him, and finding Him in time, before eternity invades time, and brings an end to time, for the day of judgment.

That happens at last, when Jesus Christ comes, but of course it may happen for any one of us, mightn't it, in a twinkling of an eye, look at verses 18 to 21, there's chilling realism there, isn't it?

One of the great lessons of life, says the preacher, is that God is teaching us all that we are mortal, we are not gods, we are not in control of our life and times. All of us, you see that repetition, all will die.

[28 : 46] In terms of our mortal bodies, we're just like all the rest of creation, all the beasts, verse 20, all go to the same place, all are from the dust to dust, all return. Friends, I can confidently say that that will be true of every one of us in this building here today, unless Jesus Christ comes first.

His point, you see, is that, looked at from a purely earthly perspective, there is no difference between man and beast, just as in chapter 2, there's no difference between the wise man and the fool, all go the same way to the grave.

Verse 21, who knows if man and beast are any different after death, if one goes upward and one goes downward. The answer is, you can't know that, unless you have found in time the reality of eternity, that the thing that does separate man from beast is the eternal image of God planted in us by God.

That which enables us not only to look for more and ask questions, but to desire more and to find more, to find eternity in time by knowing and loving and serving the God who made us, our creator.

And that's what we're in time for, that's what your life's for, to lay hold on the eternal world that God has made us for ultimately, before we're confronted with that eternal world.

[30 : 17] And the time, the time for finding God is over. And the time for judgment has come, because there is a time, says the preacher, for every work. And God will judge the righteous and the unrighteous.

So here is the question, will we discover that we're in time for eternity? In time for eternity. That's a question for you if you're not a Christian believer.

It's a big question. It's the only question that really matters. Do you have frustration and perplexity in your life? Dissatisfaction? Well, friends, you must listen to God's megaphone.

He's calling you to capitulate. He's calling you to submit to him. The great Christian believer, Augustine, way back in the fourth century, found this. He said, God, you made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

But it's not a search that you need to embark on yourself as though God was far away. No, it's a search that God has already embarked on for you. God doesn't just call from eternity to time.

[31 : 31] No, God invaded time. The gospel tells us, Galatians chapter 4, in the fullness of time, God sent his son born into time to save us for eternity.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. I have come that you might have life in all its abundance. You might have it beginning now in time.

God has called into time but God has come into time. You can't ignore him. That's the only road to disaster in life, ignoring the call of the eternal God.

It's the only road to futility and despair in this life and forever. That's why Paul says in the New Testament, today is the day of salvation. Now is the favorable time.

You're living in a time where your job is to answer to God. That's why you're alive now in the favorable time. That's why God has given you time.

[32 : 37] time to discover that you are for eternity. You're created for the new creation. And if you're not a Christian believer, this is the time for you to find your life in Jesus Christ before time disappears into eternity.

But you know, there's an awful lot here too for the Christian believer, isn't there? Because the sense of dissatisfaction with the things of this world, that doesn't disappear when we find Jesus Christ.

No, in fact, it's the opposite. Our longing for more just intensifies because we've experienced more. And because the more our eyes are opened up to the eternal, the more we have a desire and a taste for it.

Let me quote C.S. Lewis yet again. He expresses it just so well. He says that his heart longs for heaven, not the most when this world is most miserable, but actually in the times of greatest joy.

He says these sort of times are, quote, the bright frontispiece which whets one to read the whole story itself. All joy emphasizes our pilgrim status.

[33 : 51] Always reminds, beckons, awakens, desires. All our best havings are wantings. And you see, that's why there's danger there for Christian believers like you and me.

That's why as believers we need the preacher's message. We need his warnings and he gives us two clear warnings, doesn't he? First, don't ever expect eternity's glories and satisfactions in time.

We're in time for eternity. The best is yet to be. Don't expect more satisfaction from this life than is possible in a passing world. Accept life as it is, it's reality.

Don't try and live as though things were different. You see, we still see so many things through a glass darkly. We live, as it were, looking at the underside of God's beautiful tapestry.

And although we know there is a marvellous picture to be seen, our view of it still has a whole lot of loose threads, things that just don't seem to be clear. We can't see the perfect picture yet. And to some extent, there always will be in our lives, even as Christians, vexation, perplexity, and pain.

[35 : 12] There will always be the cry, how long, oh Lord, in the Christian believer's heart. And as Christians, therefore, we must live with a believing detachment from all these mysteries and enigmas in life.

And in them we must simply trust God, that he does know and he does see and he does control it all, from beginning to end, and he's doing it for a purpose, even though we may never yet fathom that purpose, this side of eternity in our own lives.

Verse 11, we cannot find what God has done from beginning to end, but we know, says verse 14, that what he does endures forever. And we must be content with that, friends, in our lives when we don't understand what God is doing with our lives.

We can trust God, he's doing something that will endure forever. That's what faith means. We walk by faith, not by sight.

And that's so, so important for us to learn. Some Christians are always, always seeking more than this life can ever provide, from their dreams, from their relationships, or their careers, or their family, or even their Christian service.

[36 : 34] God may give all these things, and they're good in their time, and if we use them for the right purpose, they can be a great blessing, of course. But misuse these gifts, misuse these passing things, seek your meaning, your peace, your identity in these things, and friends, it will disappear to dust in your hands.

Some Christians are always on the quest for better and deeper, more meaningful experiences in this Christian life. Well, that's natural.

We find ourselves saying, why this terrible struggle I'm always in? There must be something more. And they go chasing after this blessing, or that blessing, or the latest thing that whizzes through the church and promises an answer and a refreshment of everything.

But the preacher tells us there isn't more. There never can be more than this earth can give. Heaven's experience cannot be experienced fully until we're in heaven, until we're in eternity.

That's why the New Testament is so full of these kind of things, isn't it? Contentment is the great blessing in time.

[37 : 52] It's the secret to real satisfaction in life. Paul talks about it again and again, Philippians chapter 4. I've learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether I have plenty or I'm in need, whether I'm hungry or whether I have an abundance.

He writes to Timothy, godliness with contentment is great gain. In fact, there's no greater gain to live us Christians in this world.

And that's the preacher's message. We're in time but for eternity. This is as good as it gets. Don't expect eternity's satisfactions in time.

But you see, when we see that and when we accept that, actually the paradox is that that's what opens our eyes to see just how good it really is.

And that's the preacher's second warning, isn't it? Don't reject and miss out on the wonderful earthly satisfactions that there are in time and for time while we are in time.

[39 : 00] It's the same paradox again, you see, when we grasp that the best is yet to be. And when we see that we're in time for eternity and therefore we live our lives in this world with a right believing detachment, not expecting heaven now.

With earth's joys, as the hymn says, as our guide, not as our chain, not looking to this world for our ultimate satisfaction. That is the very time that we're liberated for joy.

We're liberated for the fullest experience of joy, of all good gifts, God's good gifts, of all the things he does promise us and the things that are possible this side of eternity.

I can put it this way, as my father once put it to me. We're transformed from being unhappy and dissatisfied even in our happiness, to being happy and content even in our unhappinesses.

And that's what the Bible means by joy, by real joy. It's an attitude. attitude. It's a perspective on life that gets through to the glory of eternity and lives in the warming light of the glory of eternity, even in the midst of the perplexities, the pains, the struggles of life.

[40 : 26] And all its experiences, and all that time and our times will bring us. It's an attitude that takes you beyond the cloud and out into the sunshine. It's like taking off a plane from Glasgow Airport and you get up and you see there is a sun.

And suddenly you see the sunlight that you see and you know is there bathes the whole picture of your life that had been full of clouds. Look at verse 12 again.

There is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live. Also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in his toil. That is God's gift to man.

That's God's gift to us in time for now. It's a picture, isn't it, of wonderful godly contentment, of believing detachment. Living, yes, in the light of judgment, doing good, he says, all our days.

Obedying God, fearing God. Yes, but that is living for joy. Rejoicing in all good's gifts because we trust God.

[41 : 33] God. And we know that God is in control and we know that God is working his eternal purpose for us, who are for eternity, not just for time. And our place is not to second guess God's work.

It's to trust him. That's what enables us to go on living, believing in joyful lives before him. As Paul put it, we can work out our salvation because we know that God is at work in us and through us and around us and for a purpose.

Look at verse 22 again. There's nothing better, says the preacher, than to rejoice in our work, in what we do. That is our reward. You see, when we see our daily work for what it is, for present satisfaction and joy, not for what it isn't and can never be, for ultimate satisfaction, well that's what releases us to be people of joy.

You know, friends, some Christians are so miserable. They are never happy, even in their happiness. They're always unhappy or whinging about something.

It's our job, it's our marriage, it's our home, it's our friends, it's our church. We go about living our lives with glum faces, with chips on our shoulders.

[42 : 55] But God says, be joyful. Rejoice in God as long as you live. Refusing, refusing to rejoice in God's bountiful gifts that he gives us in time, the food that he provides, the wine that he ferments, the livelihoods that he gives us.

Living joyless lives doesn't just make us miserable, it's sin. It's failing to see what God has made us for, what we're in time for, to live godly lives, rejoicing in God.

That's why God says Israel were ultimately sent into exile. Did you know that? Deuteronomy 28, verse 37. Because you did not serve the Lord with joy and gladness of heart.

Being miserable, refusing the joy of the Lord, is rebellion against God. God. Because that's what we were created for. Don't reject God's joy.

There are other Christians, you know, who have huge causes for unhappiness in their life. All sorts of crosses to bear, all kinds of sadness, huge disappointments.

[44 : 14] Their lives have been blighted in so many ways and yet, their lives are bright with the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Happy even in their unhappinesses.

Are you unhappy even in the midst of your happinesses? Well, if so, perhaps you are just looking for more from this world than this world can ever give.

Maybe you just haven't grasped fully that the best is yet to be. And friends, paradoxically, that may be the very thing that's closing your eyes to the beauty and the joy and the technicolor of the gifts and the satisfaction that God does have for you in this life, in this world, in this time, while you wait for the glory to come.

We are in time for eternity. May God grant us eyes to see that in time, so that we can indeed live lives of fruitfulness and rejoicing before him, not lives of futility and regret without him.

There is nothing better than that they should be joyful and do good as long as they live, and also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in his toil.

[45 : 51] This is God's gift to man. That's the way you live when you understand that we're in time for eternity.

Well, let's pray together.