

The Summer Soul
Part 1
7-9-17
Ecclesiastes 3:1-11



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“In what ways do you notice that life is seasonal? How might you describe the various seasons of the soul?”

“What time is it? Is it the right time? What might be your ‘timely’ response? Might it be the wrong response in the right time?” (or, vice versa)

“What do you believe to be true about your situation? What do you know about God? How does that effect what you believe to be true of your situation?” Ask God to reveal himself in your situation.

“How would you describe the present season? Where/how are you attempting to interrupt that season? Accelerate the season? What do you sense it’s trying to ‘complete’ in you?”

Teaching Notes...

Most of you here today have a faith that is much deeper than you imagined.

It’s not a faith that has allowed you to successfully eliminate confusing life-circumstances, but a faith that has caused you to conclude that the prospect of refusing to believe in God is almost more troublesome than processing the hurts and disappointments... many of which are directed toward him.

It’s the kind of faith that’s unwilling to sit idly by and ignore the tension for fear of offending God. We expect more out of life; more out of God! (e.g. John the Baptist... *“blessed are those who do not fall away on account of me” Matthew 11:6*) are not offended (scandalized: see in another what displeases us) by me...”

I have discovered that the deeper your faith, ...

- ... the tougher your questions (boldness),
- ... the more complex the answers,
- ... the more hospitable you are to ‘mystery’,
- ... the more resolved you are in trust.

We claim to know way too much.

When it comes to life, none of us gets the luxury of total comprehension, no matter the level of our education or the technological advances available to us. We too quickly make definitive statements from a posture of over-confidence and limited perspective.

We underestimate the love of God.

I would suggest that the point of Ecclesiastes is that, too often, we **underestimate** how valuable we really are. Solomon seems to be saying, in his own sarcastic way, that it's a shame to lose a life to such trivial and fleeting pursuits.

Or, to quote Jesus... "*What kind of deal is it to get everything you want, but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?*" (Matthew 16:26, Message)

Ecclesiastes is part of a grouping of writings known as "*Wisdom literature*" (Protestant Canon, including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job). Primarily, the ancient writings, both biblical and extrabiblical, were concerned with the questions: "*How do I live well? What does it mean to live humanly?*"

Wisdom literature not only helps us attempt to address the tension that we feel in our pursuit of such a life, but helps us come to terms with the opposition we face and the hostility of the environment, at times. Ecclesiastes acknowledges at least (3) of these: 1) time limits (temporal nature of our existence), 2) human frailty and mortality (3:19), 3) fate.

I think that we sometimes feel that we are left with no other options except chaos or fate.

A life which is either 'out-of-control' or so 'controlled' that we have little recourse, either way. The Greeks believed "**fate**" to be this form of 'ultimate reality' to which even the gods were subject. As you might imagine, living with the notion of this irresistible determination would inevitably produce feelings of apathy, futility and despair. Nihilism.

Ecclesiastes seems to be just honest enough to say that life is not always "*proverbial*". Sometimes even our commitment to wisdom does not result in the favorable outcome that we had anticipated.

"The fastest runner and the strongest warrior don't always win. The wise sometimes go hungry... those who are educated don't always lead successful lives" (9:11).

Life is seasonal.

I grew up in a region of the country which offered us (4) distinct seasons: cold and snowy in the winter, wet and stormy in the spring, hot and humid in the summer and cool and colorful in the fall.

Although **certain** and **distinct** they were **unpredictable**. It was hard to know for sure when the transition took place, but there were signs--- indicators of a different season.

Some seem brutally long. Some seem to pass too quickly. Some we anticipate. Some we endure. Some provide signs of their arrival. All are necessary. None of them last forever.

In every season, there are appropriate and unsuitable responses.

There are some activities which prove to be totally unproductive and completely futile, given the season. So, it would seem that the challenge of any given season/occasion/circumstance is to recognize it (understand the signs) and discern the appropriate response.

"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven..." (3:1)

"time" (Heb)- *appointed time; set time; fixed time.*

"season" (Heb)- *experiences, occasions, circumstances*

"everything beautiful in its time" (Heb)- *appropriate; fitting*

So, the beauty of a season seems to have less to do with the quality of the actual circumstances and more to do with the appropriateness of our response.

“...yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end...” (scope) 3:11

“**Scope**”: it’s what allows us to see **what’s happening in spite of what’s happening**. It allows us to choose our response and, therefore, take responsibility for our future.

2 Corinthians 1: *“We don’t want you to be uninformed about the hardships that we suffered... In our hearts, we felt the death-sentence, but this happened so that...”*

I think it’s always easier to “tell time” than to “know what time it is”.

Did you notice these things are diametrically opposed? You literally can’t do them at the same time. There is a time to do one or the other, but not both.

Is it time to start something new or time to let something come to an appropriate end?

Is it a time for determined action or quiet rest?

Is it time to celebrate or a time to mourn?

Is it time to embrace someone or permit them to walk away?

Is it time to say something or is it time to remain silent? (e.g. Do these pants...)

“Be careful how you live, not as fools, but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don’t act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.”

Ephesians 5:15-17

There you have it: **Think before you act, don’t do anything evil and don’t do anything stupid**. Between those boundaries lay any number of decisions or choices with a host of potential consequences, some more favorable than others.

Discernment is knowing God, knowing our situation, and knowing God in our situation.

Because life is not ‘fateful’ and ‘prescribed’, there must be both an avenue by which God is able to provide us with “situational truth”. Truth that’s relevant for our circumstance.

If you thought you were responsible for the rapid growth and joy of Spring, you will inevitably blame yourself for the struggles of Summer.

If we thought we were responsible for the delight of Spring, we become ungrateful. If we thought that we were somehow to blame for the struggles of Summer, we become resentful.

We know that in some seasons, it’s like we are *“licking the blender paddles”*: we feel badly that we are feeling so good. We must be *‘doin’ this whole Christian thing, right’!*

In other seasons, the darkness seems to not only be around you, but getting in you. God seems distant. We must be doing it wrong! I just can’t please him!

Seasons mock our illusion of predictability and control.

You know what I’ve noticed about seasons? You know when you know it’s over? When it’s over. I’m not in control of the season, but of the opportunity.

I have determined that it's ultimately detrimental for a season to end pre-maturely.

It must, as James says, "... *have its perfect (perfecting) work so you won't be lacking anything*" (1:4).