

## **Does anybody really know what time it is?**

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

January 1, 2017

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### [Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?](#)

Bring back any memories? The recording comes from a live performance by Chicago in Tanglewood in July 1970. I had just finished my junior year in high school. Sometime along about then, a friend played a Chicago song for me. The song she played for me was “Beginnings” and I became a fan.

*Does anybody really know what time it is?*

*Does anybody really care?*

*I can't imagine why.*

*We all have time enough to cry.*

It's a melancholy song about the futility of chasing time. Or do you think if you are fast enough, you can catch up to it? You can't. Time is not a commodity that can be bought or sold, won or lost. We can neither get ahead of time nor fall behind it, but only live within its flow.

We all have time, the same time, and we all have time enough -- time enough to cry, time enough to die. In other words, don't push it. Be happy for what you have because the crying and the dying are coming, soon enough to all of us. It's a melancholy song, but not sad, I think, not bitter or depressing.

*For everything 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*

*a time to weep, and a time to laugh*

*a time to mourn, and a time to dance*

*a time to seek, and a time to lose*

What about this song? Is it depressing? Fatalistic? If so, why do we love this poetry so much? No, these words from the ancient Hebrew wisdom tradition are comforting. They impart a sense of rhythm to life, to the whole of a life: “a time to be born, and a time to die.” The poetry embodies the flow of a life in all its movements and moments as time unfolds, as it will.

Or I should say, as God wills, because this is not a hymn to fate, to blind fate or chance -- “que sera sera,” what will be will be. No, everything has its season, its time, its purpose. Everything has its place. It makes sense.

It makes sense even if not to us!

*God has put a sense of past and future into our minds, yet we cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*

It makes sense, but we cannot find it out. We perceive the flow of time, but struggle to understand where it has come from or where it is going.

Today we mark the beginning of a new year, a time when we are very conscious of time, of the passing of seasons, of that fleeting moment suspended between past and future that we call now. Today we look back, maybe with regret or maybe with gladness, maybe with grief or maybe with thanksgiving or both, but mostly, I imagine, with a kind of bittersweetness, because the past, good or bad, is now lost to us. The past makes us what we are, but we are always letting go if it, which means we are always letting go of some of ourselves.

And today we look ahead. Hoping? Dreading? Eager for change? Fearful of change? We dream and we plan and we hope, trying to see what will be, trying to see what we will be, but we can't. We can't see what will be, we can only wait for it and make our way toward it, as best we can.

And that's a good thing! It's a good thing we cannot add to time or take away from it, because we would surely make a mess of it like we do everything else! It is good we are not the lords of time, because we couldn't handle it.

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.*

This is not resignation, but trust, trust in God who is the Lord of time. What God does endures. Whatever God does endures, forever. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. And so we stand in awe before God, in awe before the God who was there at the beginning and will be there at the end, not just watching time, but making it, giving time as a gift to all that is and to each of us, one moment at a time. One moment at a time.

We don't know much about where we have come from or where we are going, but we do know where we are! This is what we have, this one moment. And so, this is wisdom: to be happy -- to be happy! -- and to enjoy ourselves as long as we live. How long is that? Who knows? But let us, each of us, simply be happy as long as we live, as long as we live. It is God's gift. It may be easy, it may be hard. We may weep, we may laugh. We may mourn, we may dance, but it is God's gift. This is God's gift.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. In other words, everything is under God's watch. It doesn't mean that everything is good: not that war and peace are good alike, or healing and killing good alike. No, it doesn't mean that everything is good, but that everything is under God's watch and that everything moves toward the end God chooses, or, I should say, toward the new beginning God chooses. God has made everything suitable for its time, which does not mean that all is predetermined, but that all is suitable, all is malleable, all is being bent by God toward God's purpose.

Past and future belong to God, which is to say “now” belongs to God, every “now” belongs to God. So “now” is a gift. “Now” is a blessing. We can have confidence, we can have joy, we can be happy, because “now” is in God’s hands. There is nothing that can happen that can derail God’s intent, nothing that can take God “by surprise.” Because, for God, that which is, already has been, and that which is to be, already is.

Do you hear that? This is what we do know about the future! That which is to be, already is. We don’t have to be afraid of the future, afraid of any unexpected horrors to come, because what will be already is. In God’s mind, in God’s heart, it is already.

And what already is? Jesus already is! We don’t wait for what we don’t know. We wait for what we do know. We wait for the One we already know, who is already among us, already with us.

So as we begin a new season today, a new year, may we do so gladly, eager to receive whatever moments we have as God’s gift, entrusting the future to God, and walking day by day, moment by moment, with Jesus.

*O Child of ecstasy and sorrows,  
O Child of peace and pain,  
Brighten today’s world by tomorrow’s,  
renew our lives again;  
Christ Jesus, come and reign!*