

'SMOKE AND MIRRORS'
(Seeing Through the Facades of 'Life Under the Sun')
Studies in Ecclesiastes

'Very Good'

It wasn't *very good* in the beginning. In fact, the earth was actually *pretty bad* until the LORD God took over the *formless and void* scene and made *everything beautiful* creation week. Each day He created something new that reflected His redemptive heart:

- Day #1 (Sunday)** Divine light pierced the darkness (enlightenment);
- Day #2 (Monday)** Rising out of the waters came *firmament* (a solid ground foundation);
- Day #3 (Tuesday)** Emerging from the dry ground grew all kinds of vegetation (fruitfulness);
- Day #4 (Wednesday)** In the heavens above appeared celestial lights (sun, moon and stars for navigation on earth);
- Day #5 (Thursday)** Abundant life burst forth up in the sky and in the ocean depths (diverse, amazing creativity);
- Day #6 (Friday)** Land animals and human life erupted from the earth (man and his God-given work to do) – then "...God saw everything He had made and indeed it was 'very good' (*Genesis 1:31*).

Each day God, by His Word, replaced *formless vanity* with more and more divine beauty and order. What was *pretty bad* went to *good*, then *better* and finally *very good*! For a season, God's purposes for life under heaven and life under the sun were in perfect harmony. Until Adam and Eve became discontent with God's work He had given them (they sought to *be like God* not just work for Him), disobeyed His Word to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) and distanced themselves from fellowship with God, all was *very good*. Ever since then, everyone is born into a spiritually *void and formless life under the sun* that can only be in harmony with *life under heaven* when Christ comes into your life and heart to gradually (*like creation week*) recreate our life to be 'very good' in His sight. Or as King Solomon wrote: "...***make everything beautiful...***" **Ecclesiastes 3:11**.

True Christians are God's new creation (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). As He gradually made the unlovely world into a beautiful place, so He does in the person who hears and obeys His word – he or she sees the Light of trusting Christ as Savior and Lord; then comes baptism as a picture of our new life coming up out of what we used to be; then spiritual fruitfulness through growth in grace; next, we learn to navigate through life by light given by God, teachers and godly brethren; as we grow in grace all kinds of amazing spiritual gifts and ministries flow from our life; and in time God gives us work on earth to do as we are transformed into His image.

This is the 'abundant Christian life' that is '**beautiful**' to God (**Ecclesiastes 3:11**). When we live like this we experience an uncomplicated life content with God's provision, we enjoy and are fulfilled doing something we are good at, and we have plenty of time for developing a personal relationship with God. If we don't, we become over-committed to things God never purposed, discontent with a simple life crowding God out to the periphery of our lives or out of our thoughts altogether. Life under the sun clouds out life under heaven and all we do becomes *grasping wind* and *vanity*.

Ecclesiastes 3 is about not letting the smoke and mirrors deceptions of the enemy *throw off our timing* from enjoying the *very good (beautiful) life* from God He has for us during our *life under the sun*. Understanding and accepting His perfect timing and highest purposes *under heaven* will keep us from panicking when life's decisions and challenges confront us. We can remain 'steadfast and immovable' because we know "***to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven ... (God) has made everything beautiful in its time***" (**Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11**).

‘Perfect Timing’

(*In sync with God’s pace and peace*)

Ecclesiastes 3

Synopsis: In a fallen world (this life ‘*under the sun*’) everything is *vanity* (*no lasting value*) and ‘*grasping for wind*’ (*craving passing things you can’t keep*). But this life has enormous value when also lived with God in charge of our life (‘*life under heaven*’). Without God, life’s endless cycles become pointless monotony, but with Him in charge, it is a world of dependable, predictability in which to thrive and serve Him Who made it. The really good life is one that:

- 1) **Is content with a simple lifestyle** from God;
- 2) **Works at a few things you are good at and enjoy**; and
- 3) **Has plenty of time for a healthy, growing, intimate relationship with God** (*Ecclesiastes 2:24-26a*). However, to live in constant discontent just pursuing more stuff, laboring in a vocation you’re not very good at and do not enjoy, is a **sinner’s existence** (*living without God*) of nothing more than *gathering and collecting* (*hoarders*). This is a life of *vanity* and *grasping for the wind* ‘*under the sun*’ (*Ecclesiastes 2:26b*). This kind of life isn’t really living – it is merely existing – not much better than an animal existence.

Life Under Heaven

(*What to expect in a normal lifetime*)

3:1-8

- What’s the difference between ‘a season’ and ‘a time’?
- Discuss how knowing God has *seasons* and *purposes* for everything on the list, helps us figure out how to respond appropriately.
 - Why is it important to not only respond to things appropriately, but also do it at the *right time*?
 - What happens if *timing* is off? (list examples: what is laughing in a mournful situation, or speaking when it’s more appropriate to be silent, etc.?)
- How can wrong responses or wrong timing throw off ‘God’s purposes’ for your life or somebody else’s? (Any personal examples of this done by you or to you?)

Life Under God

(*What life is to us - ‘the gift of God’*)

3:9-15

- From this passage, what kind of things will you be thinking when life isn’t in vain and God is blessing you? (*about what you’re doing, how you feel about life, accountability before God someday, God’s sovereignty, etc.*)
 - Do you feel like this most of the time?
- What’s wrong when you don’t think like this?
 - How can you get back to this frame of mind when you begin to lose it?

Life Under the Sun

(*What to remember when mesmerized by smoke & mirrors*)

3:16-22

- When you are right with the Lord and seeing it as He does (*like Solomon in vs 16-18*), how should you see the world ‘*under the sun*’ (*no concern about being ‘under heaven’*)?
- Does seeing those still in wickedness and iniquity headed for judgment day concern you?
- Does seeing their life as really nothing much more than ‘animal existence’ grieve you?
- Does it make you thankful for your salvation and the eternal value Christ gives you?