

Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Theme: Harvest Time.

It is our harvest celebration. Harvest was a time of year which our forefathers placed the right emphasis on. They wrote many of the hymns we have sung and they would have meant more to them than it does to us - *“all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin”*. Often, we are far removed from the direct production of our food and we need to think about harvest and our sources of food. As of now, we can have many foods, salad stuff, tomatoes, exotic fruit from all over the world at just about any time of the year.

We seldom think of the production process - except when there's a shortage and things shoot up in price. If a grain harvest fails, bread and flour prices will show a marked increase, despite any food mountains that may be stored in UK or in EU. We are still dependent on harvests around the world to maintain our way and quality-of-life. We are still dependent on harvests for our basic food resources and if these fail there will be knock-on effects.

News items concerning harvests in our land may cause people to question what is going on and why. Climate change is a big issue at this time. Many listen to the news and are scared as we are going through uncertain times [x3] financially, economically, and politically and these things can threaten the food supplies readily available to us at the moment. Sadly, some are cynical and even in hard times they live or say they live life with an *“eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die”* attitude. They do not care about the future, but live for today and all it holds and will do the same again tomorrow if they are around!

Imagine you had the money, time and wisdom needed to conduct experiments in life - to see what life was really about and what really satisfied. You would be able to find out so much and then let people into the secret. If you did it in our modern times, the things you learned would be marketed at a price, distributed by DVD or Blu-ray, perhaps an online blog so people would subscribe to and certainly push it in a bestselling book and so you would be able to add fame and more money to your money, time and wisdom.

King Solomon had the time, money and wisdom and he conducted such experiments and wrote about it in Ecclesiastes 1:13 *“I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven.”* The book of

Ecclesiastes is mostly about the experiments he tried and the conclusions that he came to on them all was “*Vanity of vanities*” or “*Meaningless, meaningless*”. In other words, “*So you do, build, try and so what?*”

In many of his experiments he deliberately left God out of the picture. Only occasionally does he refocus on God to try and make sense of the experiment and its result and in his final conclusion he says that all is meaningless without God. We can have experiences of much in life, but if we leave God out of the big picture then we too may feel that our lives are meaningless.

Here in chapter 3 he seems to include God. He has viewed many things going on and it makes no sense until here in chapter 3 he brings God into the picture and then he can see purpose, reasons, rationale behind patterns of life. It is not just random, not just chance happenings but has a purpose. Here in this chapter he sees there are times for things and events in our lives and in the bigger picture all will have a place and make sense. This passage in chapter 3 is well-known and gives us a glimpse of the bigger picture and one piece of the recurring jigsaw is harvest time (3:2) - a time to uproot that which we have sown i.e. harvest the results of things we have put into our lives. I want us to look at 4 things and I use the word TIME to take my headings off and relate them to the idea of harvest time:

1. Temporary.

If you have been growing things in your garden or on an allotment, how have gone this year? In our little garden our cherry tree produced cherries and we enjoyed both of them! Our Bramley apple tree at last has apples on it, they are on the small side and we are looking forward to both of those! Our raspberries have produced well, as has one of our 3 blueberry bushes and we have been eating well from that and also our runner beans and the French beans. Now things are beginning to slow down and we will soon be clearing the ground ready for overwintering as a lot of vegetable plants are only temporary and we need begin to prepare for next year's harvest.

No matter what we produce in our land, in our garden or allotment, our supplies will soon be or are gone and we need more. No matter how good a harvest we have, we will need to sow and plant again ready for another harvest. Harvest time is just part of the cycle that has a purpose – a time to plant and a time to uproot. It says that times come and go and many things are ever so temporary.

Our time here on earth is also temporary. We have a limited time. We are told in v2 there is a time for us to be born [x2] and after that many of the times in v2-8 will be experienced in our lives, but we are also told of our end in v2, for there is a time to die for each one of us. Our lives are temporary. We are not guaranteed a set time or promised 80 or 90 years, not even 20. Our time is limited and temporary - whether old age and natural causes takes us, or a terrorist incident, or a war or a pandemic. We, like the rest of our generation are doomed to die. Bertrand Russell, the atheistic philosopher, said “*Death is the ultimate statistic, one out of one die!*” We often say we haven’t much time, but live as if we had an unlimited store of it, but none of us knows when our time runs out. Harvest time reminds us things in this life are only temporary, including our own time. Harvest time is also:

2. Instructive.

There’s a time to plant and a time to pluck up - to harvest the fruit of the seeds we sowed. Hopefully we would have sown the right seeds, in the right way and got the crop we expected e.g. carrots from carrot seeds; onions from onion sets or seeds; leeks from leek seeds, tomatoes etc. we do not plant onion sets and expect pumpkins or worse thistles! Harvest time is instructive in that it teaches us the principle of sowing and reaping - we reap what we sow.

That goes for life. People used to say that you’d get nowhere wasting your time on sports such as snooker, football, rugby and suchlike. Yet now you can become professionals in many sports and not only earn mega money, but earn much from sponsorship and advertising if you are good enough. You can invest time in so much to master it and it pay dividends - whether in sport, education, music items or even a hobby.

Sadly, people can neglect many areas of their diet - overeating or under eating, not having a balanced diet and it can have repercussions later on in life. Others may have been unwise regarding their health as a child or youngster and the health consequences are stored for later on in their lives. Some abuse their bodies by the things that they actively take into their body by inhaling, injecting or popping pills into their mouth to experience a high that makes them feel so good, such affects their health. Over the years there have been saving schemes, yet the companies have made bad investments in the return on the money has been very poor or non-existent as the companies have failed.

We can sow little in our lives and yet unfairly expect huge returns e.g. little work ready for exams; we do nothing and expect a beautiful garden, or not work at a relationship and wonder why it fails. The same goes in our lives - what we feed into our minds and hearts can often bear a harvest later in life - for good or evil. So, we need to be careful what we allow into our minds as there can be things that pollute and stimulate wrong thoughts, actions and desires and can produce a disastrous harvest of consequences. We need to feed our minds and lives with good things to produce good in our lives.

This is especially so on the spiritual level and we need to feed good into our lives spiritually and not reap a harvest of thistles and thorns. The Bible is keen for us to know, learn things, to train up children in the right ways of God so that as they go into adulthood it will influence their behaviour in the right ways of God, will help them to know the difference between right and wrong, to maintain moral standards and things are a preservative effect in their lives.

3. Maximising.

We are to make the most of what we have. We may have a small garden or a large garden, but if we use the space wisely, we can produce many good things for ourselves and our families as we plan and prepare to do so. In our lives we need to make the most of what opportunity and blessings we have in our lives - educationally, physically, sports, relationships, developing skills and abilities. We may have to work harder at than others who seem naturally gifted, but doing so reaps benefits. We do not know when such opportunities will end and so we are to snap up like bargains the opportunities and times we have. My mother loved a bargain, even if she didn't know what an item was, but she bought it because it was a bargain! We are to snap up bargains of opportunity and time as if they were in a sale and we see them as something most desirable to use and develop in our lives so as not to miss out!

We are specially to use the opportunities we have to hear the gospel and to respond to the gospel. So often we can have the opportunity, but be too busy in our thoughts, lives or even be too lazy and indifferent to hear and to respond to what we are told in the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

We are to use our time wisely in all areas of life, to maximise the benefit we get from it. Sometimes it does not matter - as we can have 2nd chances to study, to learn an instrument, to get a training session in, to meet a person

again. Sometimes we don't get the 2nd chances as they never return (*my school motto was Ni ddychwel doe = yesterday never returns*). We are told in the Bible about the gospel, not to delay in our considering of it, of our responding to the gospel and believing on the Lord Jesus. The Bible always stresses that today, now is the time of salvation and we are to trust the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour now. We are not to wait until... Or once we have done... We are not to delay making Jesus our Saviour.

4. Eternity.

There have been government campaigns as well as many adverts on TV encouraging us to be planning for our retirement and our pension. For some it seems decades off, to others retirement will be too soon or they are already a pensionable age and they wish they had been able to get bigger pensions by investing more throughout the years.

We all need to have the future in mind even though we know we are not guaranteed we will see tomorrow. Some fear there could be a war triggered by some hothead with a finger on the button somewhere, or terrorist attacks could spark a major incident or climate change unexpectedly affect the planet or a flu pandemic could sweep through our land. People feel the future is insecure. Yet there is one thing certain about the future for us all and that is eternity.

We are to realise this life is not the be all and end all of our existence. The Bible speaks of us having eternal souls, which are the real us, the priceless diamond in the marvellous jewel casket of the body. What will happen to us after death, after our time has come and we leave this world scene and our little lives end. Solomon writing in 3:11 says "*He has also set eternity in the hearts of men*". Within us there is the feeling of something more after life...

One of the pictures the Lord Jesus uses of the end of time is that of harvest [x2]. When the angels will gather all people from all of time and sort them into 2, and only 2 groups. One for the eternal joys of heaven and the others for the eternal suffering in hell. I know that's not a pleasant thought, but we are to realise the sorting will be not be done on nationality, wealth, popularity, niceness, education, morality or even churchgoing or religious rites done; but on whether or not people have trusted the Lord Jesus as their own Saviour - in other words on their personal response to the gospel that tells of how

people can be right with God, know His peace, love and care and have all their sins forgiven through Jesus and all He is and has done for us.

This is why it is so important to maximise and make the most of our opportunities to hear of, think about and respond to God's offer of eternal life in the gospel - by trusting the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. God gave heaven's best, His only and dearly loved Son as He made a way for people like us to be right with God and have a guaranteed home in heaven and acceptance by God there. We can know where we come from, why are we here and where we're going and our futures can be far more wonderful than anything we know on earth.

Time moves on so quickly for us all - we've come into this world and we will soon be gone. Yet where will we spend eternity after our time here has ended? This harvest time please take time to think seriously about these things.