

## 010123 Sermon "God's Gift" Ecclesiastes 3:11-13

Today is the first day of the new year 2023. At the start of the year, as I meditated on what I would like to share with you, I remembered the book of Ecclesiastes. The word Ecclesiastes comes from the Greek word ecclesia which means "church or congregation." This Greek title is actually a translation of the title in the Hebrew Scripture, which is cohellet, which means preacher or teacher.

The book of Ecclesiastes, as you know, is a book of wisdom that Solomon imparted as he was ruminating on his own experiences. As we read the book of Ecclesiastes, the elements that make up the so-called successful life that apply to us today are listed: wisdom, pleasure, wealth, work, friends, popularity, religion, marriage, children, social status... He tried all of these things but was declaring that all was in vain. Not because it was useless and wrong in itself, but because they cannot bring the ultimate satisfaction as the purpose of his life. Solomon concluded the book: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all humankind" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Do you fear God and obey God's Word? If so, you are already wisely putting into practice what Solomon realized in his last years of life.

In Ecclesiastes today, verse 11 says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

This is a real story from a book by Jack Canfield and Victor Hansen called "Chicken Soup for the Christian Family Soul."

Cheryl Stewart's maternal grandfather was a carpenter who lived in Chicago during the Great Depression of the 1930s. One day his church sent to an orphanage in China a box of clothes donated from church members. When he got home, he found the glasses in his jacket pocket were missing. After a few days of searching the house and the church, he realized what happened. His glasses had fallen out of his pocket and into the donation box! The Great Depression was at its height, and Grandpa had six children. He had spent twenty dollars for those glasses that very morning. "It's not fair," he told God as he drove home in frustration. "I've been very faithful in giving of my time and money to your work, and now this."

Several months later, a missionary who ran the orphanage in China visited the church for a sermon. The missionary began by saying thank you for the box of clothes they sent a few months ago. "What impressed me most among the things you sent me..." The missionary paused as if to feel the emotion again. "It was the glasses. You see, the Communists had just swept through the orphanage, destroying everything, including my glasses. I was desperate. "Even if I had the money, there was simply no way of replacing those glasses. Along with not being able to see well, I suffered from a severe headache. I prayed about this with my colleagues every day. At that time, the box of clothes you sent us arrived, and surprisingly, what was on top? How on earth did you know that I needed glasses across the ocean and my exact prescription?"

The congregation all thought that the missionary was confusing with relief supplies from elsewhere. There were no glasses on their list of items to be sent overseas. But sitting quietly in the back, with tears streaming down his face, an ordinary carpenter realized the Master Carpenter had used him in an extraordinary way. Sometimes God takes the things that are painful for us and uses them in the lives of others.

2 Corinthians 4:18 says, "So we're boldly declaring that what we pay attention to is not only visible but also invisible." With a clear purpose, God accomplishes His work with incredible power in mysterious ways.

As the seasons go by, people realize that their time is finite. According to the Bible today, God has set eternity in the hearts of people. If life is eternal, human beings will not long for eternity. When you experience the finiteness of life, you yearn for eternity. If you get sick, you realize the importance of health. Ordinary things like sitting, walking, eating, and drinking in our daily lives can be very difficult for somebody, and even very easy and trivial things might be impossible for someone. When I was healthy, I didn't know how valuable that was. According to the Bible today, God created everything, but made it beautiful in its time. As hard as it is to believe this in many cases, I want you to stand on this word.

We learn God's timing through the Bible. As we read in verse 11, "yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Even though we

long for eternity through our weakness and finiteness, we cannot see the beginning and the end of God's work. So, we must pray to control our nervous hearts. If you pray, you must wait. Because God certainly works for us and eventually makes things beautiful. I don't know about you, but I really believe this. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Nevertheless, we are always impatient and say, "Does the Lord know my urgent situation? Does God love me?" But even at that moment, the Lord is at work! He doesn't neglect us. God has promised not to leave us orphans. Sometimes the answer of prayer is delayed, but He is listening. You are just looking at God's timing. Therefore, we must endure with faith, not despair. Galatians 6:9, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

I read an interesting article about bamboo. After planting the trees, they give water and manure, but for 4 years only small bamboo shoots come up and seem to grow very little. Then in the fifth year, it surprisingly grows over 60 to 90 feet long within five weeks. Did this bamboo grow for five weeks? Or did it grow for 5 years? It grew in five years. How pitiful would it be if you wait 3 or 4 years and pull it out? You have to endure.

In spring, summer, autumn and winter, a variety of flowers bloom. Cherry blossoms, roses, sunflowers, cosmos, camellia, etc. Each one blooms in a timely manner and is beautiful in its own way. So don't be discouraged if the subjects you pray for don't get answered when you want them to. Whether the prayer is for children, for study, or for business. If people who believe in the Lord Jesus pray, God will surely bring flowers to bloom.

In verse 12 Solomon talks about the two most important things in life! The first is to live with joy while you live. The second is to do good. When Solomon looked back at his life, he found no better two things, living every day with joy, while doing good. Verse 13 is related. "Everyone eats and drinks." In other words, trivial things, everyday things. And "It's a pleasure to labor." Whether you're studying, working or doing housework, it's God's gift to be happy about your sweat and labor!

Again, Ecclesiastes 3:22 emphasizes, "Therefore I saw that there is nothing better than a man to enjoy in his work..." You don't have to rejoice only when your life is going well; you don't have to be distressed and miserable when it is not going well. God works not only through success, but also through what we see as failure. The question is: am I walking with God now? Is the Word of God lighting my way?

Even if things are resolved according to your will, there are times when you are far from the Lord. On the contrary, even if your life is not going well, you can walk with the Lord at that time. Christians should be able to enjoy the happiness of walking with the Lord, not because of the results of success and failure. In other words, the true satisfaction and happiness of your life is "walking with God," not in possession or success.

So don't be distressed, discouraged, fearful, and indifferent to God just because you don't get something you want. Even if you don't, pray that the will of the Lord will be done in your life! Then stand on the promise of God!

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, we have lived every single day in 2022 whether you liked it or not and we are welcoming the very first day of 2023. I hope and pray you walk with God every day, every hour in 2023, in joy or pain. May God's rich promises fulfill in you. In his time, he makes all things beautiful in his time. May God's love for you be reminded again. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.