

Coach House Church BEACONS

SEEING GOD IN ALL SEASONS

26TH AUGUST 2020

What's your favourite season? Mine has always been summer, for multiple reasons. For example, I love the heat, so a wet summer is absolutely miserable to me. I love the long, light evenings. I love the light mornings which enable me to actually wake up without setting 5 or more alarms. I love the fact that everyone is more relaxed when the weather's nice, and not just hurrying on to the next destination to get out of the cold or the rain. I loved the long summer holidays when there was no work, and endless time spent on beaches or in parks. Conversely, I hate the cold dark mornings of winter, the agitating cold, the drab landscape and the depressing lack of light in the day. Seasons are things that we can't change, and each of them has their own features, arriving approximately at the same time every year. We'd be fools if we tried to force the weather to change because it's a part of our existence on planet earth. We can't wear summer shorts and sunglasses expecting to hold off the winter snow. What we need to do is to equip ourselves appropriately for the seasons in which we find ourselves. It's wise to have a decent, waterproof coat in winter and suncream in the summer. Disliking the season won't change the season.

Christians also talk about 'seasons' in a spiritual sense, and the Bible talks about them most famously in Ecclesiastes 3. I'll read the first 9 verses, and then look at a few key points that show us how we can begin to trust and hope in God through the different seasons of our life.

Here it is:

***“3 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
2 a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
3 a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;***

**4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
5 a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6 a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
7 a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
8 a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace."**

There is a 'season and time' for everything, the passage talks about some of these 'times'. If you look through the list, you will notice a mixture of different experiences. Some we have control over – being quiet and speaking in v7. Some we have little or no choice about – being born and dying (v2). Or crying and laughing (v4) which is often an involuntary response. There is a time for war and peace (v8), which unless we're in positions of great influence or power, we have little control over. Neither is this a list set out in a good/bad format with the good things being said first and the bad ones second in a clear cut structure – some have negative associations (mourning, killing), others have positive associations (loving, embracing).

So what is this passage telling us? First of all, it gives us a small snapshot of the many experiences we have as human beings living on planet earth. Life is happening all around us, it's happening to us, and all along we're trying to figure out the right responses to it all. Secondly, it should be clear that there is so much on this list that we either do not have control over, or that we don't have the right response for. Life is messy and difficult to figure out. Even when the Bible gives us clear moral guidelines, we need wisdom for how to apply them in a certain situations, and we can't see the whole picture.

The rest of chapter 3 gives more detail about how we should respond to the uncertainties of life in a godly manner. There is a repeated phrase throughout Ecclesiastes which shows up later in chapter 3, and it helps us understand how to approach these uncertainties. Here it is in 3:12 -13 "12 I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. 13 That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God." We are not able to control all that occurs in our lives, or understand it, but the correct posture towards the good that we have received from God is to enjoy it

and thank him for it – because it is all a gift. The rest of Ecclesiastes argues that however frustrating or meaningless life can seem to be, God is in control, and we come off best trusting in God and following his ways.

So I'd like to give you three starting points that will help you begin living for God, whatever season you find yourself in. These passages are well known and I'd encourage you to read around them as well, which we don't have enough time for here.

1. Going to the God, the source of wisdom – Knowing how to respond rightly in a situation is a mark of wisdom. Wisdom comes through experience, listening to advice and most of all, it comes from a right understanding of God. Proverbs 1:7 tells us this “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” ‘Fear’ in this verse means a healthy awe and respect for God. If we believe that he has brought the universe into existence and that he's set up the world in a particular way – it makes sense to follow and respect what he says. This gives us a starting point for decision making, and as we get to know God better through the Bible and the Holy Spirit, our responses to different situations, seasons and moments will become wiser because they are conditioned by what we know about God.

2. Going to God, the source of strength – God doesn't just tell us what to do, but he gives us the power and desire to do it. Paul says this when writing to the Colossian Church (1:9): “9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” God is the one who is able to make our love, knowledge insight and righteousness increase because we are connected to him through Jesus. This gradual change of character is by God's power, and we praise him because of it.

3. Going to God, who will never leave or forsake us - Understanding that God's ways are best and the fact God strengthens us to face different situations is not the whole picture either. There are many situations which we do not understand, at least not at the point that they happen, and our passage from Ecclesiastes reveals that there is a lot we don't have control over. This is why it is so important for us to understand God's enduring love for us – we need to be reminded of it when we're going through tough times. Romans 8:35-39 puts it like this:

“35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

It can sometimes be very difficult to believe God loves us, but these verses cut right through those doubts, and equip us to face hard times. In practice, we struggle to take all of this in especially when we're in the thick of life, but my hope is that this gives you a starting point for how to respond to the different seasons of life that we face – whether you're loving life, or finding it very difficult.

In my own life, change is afoot on many different fronts, with a lot of exciting developments and possibilities ahead. I do feel that the seasons are changing at the moment as I pray, talk with close friends and observe things around me as well as attitudes in my own heart. There are certainly seasons that I am hoping for and longing for, as in, periods of time which God has announced for my immediate and obvious happiness. However, I am not God. I can't see 2 months down the line, or even a day. My knowledge is limited while God's is absolute. However, if I fear God, go to him for strength and trust in his unfailing love – I know that I am setting off on the right path, whatever the season ahead.



JONNY KNIGHT



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn