

So Father God, what joy, what peace, what laughter, what fellowship, what communion we share together inside the walls of this sanctuary. And Lord, what joy and what peace and what fellowship we share, what communion we share with all of our brothers and sisters around the world in the church universal. Lord, we pray that your bride would shine brightly this morning here in church town and around the world. We pray, dear Jesus, that you would assume your rightful place as the pastor and the teacher of this church and lead us in all things. Lord, lead us in prayer. Lord, lead us in your word. Lord, lead us in song. Lord, lead us in Christian fellowship, one with the other as generation teaches generation and the power of your Holy Spirit binds us together. It's in the sweet and precious name of Jesus, the Christ of God, we pray. Amen. Amen. I know that the music school had no idea that we're preaching Ecclesiastes, so that's kind of it. But you know actually through our teaching of Ecclesiastes already that that is the power behind the message of Ecclesiastes, that your life is powered by the power of God's Holy Spirit, made possible through the life and death of Jesus Christ. So we keep that in mind as we ask and ponder these very deep questions. This is chapter 2 verses 12 through 17. I just want to open up with this. So this is the teacher, "I decided to compare wisdom with foolishness and madness for who can do this better than I, the king? I thought wisdom is better than foolishness just as light is better than darkness. For the wise can see where they are going, the fools walk in the dark. Yet I saw that the wise and the foolish share the same faith, both will die. So I said to myself, since I will end up the same as the fool, what's the value of all my wisdom? This is also meaningless. For the wise and the foolish both die. The wise will not be remembered any longer than the fool. In the days become both will be forgotten." This is important. We're going to touch upon this in the next piece. "So I came to hate life because everything done here under the sun is so troubling. Everything is meaningless like chasing the wind." Ecclesiastes. Boy, I tell you, when you get into scripture, you know how when I tell you when you when we're in the epistles and Paul is really bringing out the realities of spiritual warfare, when we're in the gospels and Jesus is confronting evil and calling out evil and talking about repent, the shame of God is at hand. And I said, man, it seems as though those things begin to manifest, if you will, not in the new age way, but you begin to experience things like that in your life. So Satan can remind you, "Yeah, it is spiritual warfare." Or perhaps Jesus would like to remind you, "Yes, it is spiritual warfare. This is not all fun and games." When you get into Ecclesiastes now, the past couple of weeks, I'm going to tell you, there has been a lot around here that has been pebble, where it looks like it should be important. Something should be important. Something is distracting me or counsel from doing what we're called to do. Air conditioners dumping water in the basement, vandalism down at the pavilion where they tore off the spigot and tossed it aside, all kinds of things. And I get wrapped up, just talking with my friend Angel here about how I have actually gotten so much better, but I would get wrapped up in those things and allow the enemy to completely distract me. But you know what is meaningless? Those things, not meaning less, meaningless compared to eternity, compared to the individuals who come here on Sunday to hear of repentance and turning to the Lord for salvation. Those things don't matter. We can turn off the air conditioners and somehow, some way we'll survive. We cannot have water at the carrying buckets from this spigot down to there. And somehow, some way we will survive. But somehow, some way, I'm laying in bed at night, can't sleep, trying to figure out what's wrong with all these people in these companies that won't come and see what's wrong with the people in town. I just heard from our dear friend Cheryl, people are going through cars in town. If you leave your car on log, you're at the mercy of whomever is roaming the town of Little Church Town being vandals. So be it. We see a world full of that this week was no different. Whether it is something small, like carrying on the spigot, or something large, like a global global display of the mockery of Jesus Christ, there it is. This is the world that is spoken of in the scripture. And part of what Ecclesiastes challenges us with is what is important and what is not important. Now, I said, Proverbs, right, when we look at wisdom literature, we're not, I'm never going to preach anything in a vacuum. I'm never going to preach anything where I say, this is a passage of scripture. This is what I think about. We're talking about a piece of wisdom literature taken as a

whole in the wisdom literature of scripture. And I said last week, Proverbs read Proverbs. They're not promises from God. They're not God's law. They're not prophecy. But boy, they sure are a lot nicer to read about. If you do this, then you will be in God's good graces. And if you do this, you'll live a long life. Well, those are really good suggestions. And those are really good godly behaviors that we should be demonstrating in our lives. But Ecclesiastes really gets to those quiet moments when it's just you and Jesus and everything seems to be falling apart. Now what matters? Now, the air conditioner's not functioning. That's not everything falling apart in my life. But that's a decent example of the distractions that are trying to be brought on. That stuff is heaven. It has form, but no substance. If I'm preaching, you know, if there's anybody in this sanctuary who can repair those air conditioners, you go to heaven. That's crazy. That doesn't matter. What matters is when Jesus Christ says, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." That matters. And so Ecclesiastes brings forth all of the things of life from broken air conditioners to the broken world and says, "Okay, folks, what is meaningful and what is meaningless?" And he spends chapter after chapter after chapter after chapter talking about all of the things that are meaningless. Now we examined that word meaningless. Some interpretations choose the English word vanity. It's all vanity. Vanity of vanities. It's all me thinking that it's important. And the Hebrew word hevol, we described that last week, if you've ever been in a plane looking down, it really looks as though those clouds are solid. It really looks as though you could walk on top of those clouds, but you can't. It's an illusion. They're not solid. They're not meaningful. They can't support you. They look it. And so these things, and I'll keep using the same metaphor or the same description that I started with, these things like those things in the back, boy, they can hit you in the face and they can really look like those clouds. They can look like it's important. They can seem like nobody in the sanctuary is ever going to be comfortable again. It's not. It's simply not. What happens now? What happens when we're in the word is what is important. So we read in chapter two, not go. So we read in chapter two that the teacher now even delves into wisdom and is wisdom important. Compared to foolishness, wisdom is important. Is it better to act in a wise manner or a foolish manner? It's better to act in a wise manner. But when we look big picture, the teacher says, what's the depth? This wise individual and this foolish individual, we have the same fate. So why should I seek to live a life acting wisely? And again, you can't preach Ecclesiastes without you knowing the answer to that. We sang the answer to that this morning. We preach the answer to that every weekend. When we put it in that context, though, my hope is that when you do get into those Ecclesiastes moments in your lives and we all have them, when it is you, it is Jesus, and it is your broken life, you can remember the answer to Ecclesiastes. Why? Because wisdom, as we did read in Proverbs, is of the Lord. Behaving in a wise manner, seeking the wisdom of the Lord is a godly behavior. It's a holy behavior. That's the difference. Yes, we share the same fate. And yes, you may look at individuals that you know, that person is an absolute fool, a criminal, whatever. This person seemed to have led a godly life seeking and they both died. Or this one lived to be 98 and this one died of cancer at 48. What? This world is unfair. And the answer from Ecclesiastes is yes, it is. Yes, it is. It is unfair because it's broken, it's busted. And we have a difficult time, and I think we should probably have a difficult time with that because we're carried in the human race. But knowing the big picture, which is what wisdom literature tries to teach us and Ecclesiastes in this way tries to teach us, helps us move through that. So let's look now at perhaps one of the most famous passages of scripture, certainly perhaps the most famous passage of Ecclesiastes. "For everything there is a season," this is the beginning of chapter three, "for everything there is a season, a time for every activity under the sun." Now we've read this word and I told you to hang on to these words from the end of chapter two "under the sun." Under the sun. What does that mean? Every activity under the sun? It means here on earth in your current state. You not in your glorified bodies in the age to come, not in some sort of super holy, super spiritual type of Pharisee thing that you're doing right now. It's under the sun right now as you are living right now at the age you are right now doing what you're doing for a living right now. You're living under the sun in this physical world as a spiritual being connected to your creator by the power of God's holy spirit. So let me let me connect these two passages. I should have done

this to begin. The very end of two, and you don't necessarily have to put that up. I'm going to read the very end of two into three because you remember what we have taught this a thousand times. The bible didn't come with chapters and verses. So sometimes when we read it's not like Ecclesiastes one is a bible study, Ecclesiastes two bible study break. No, they flow and they're meant to flow and you should read it like that from one chapter into the other. And so let's do that now so that we can get a better picture of Ecclesiastes three, the opening at least. Let me go back to verse 24 of Ecclesiastes two. So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God for who can eat or enjoy anything apart from Him. God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please Him. But if a sinner becomes wealthy, God takes the wealth away and gives it to those who please Him. This too is meaningless like chasing the wind. So He's giving us the picture, foolishness, wisdom, riches, poorness, good health, bad health. What do we do with it all in this life? Well, we sort of take it as it comes and we recognize, as the author says, that it is all of God. And so what we have to enjoy, we enjoy and we praise God for the ability to enjoy that, all things, including our work and wisdom. What we must endure, we endure by the power of God. And dare I say, we praise Him through it because we know that He's not just there in the wisdom and the joy and the job and the pleasing and the wealth. He's there in all circumstances. And so to drive this point home, the author then says there is a season, a time for every activity under the sun. That's one of the words I've looked up, every, every, every activity. Did Scripture really mean to say every activity? Yes, Scripture does. Every activity. Your human life as it is now as you are guided by the power of God's Holy Spirit, there is a time for every activity in this life under the sun. Things will change in the age to come. But right now there is a time for every human activity under the sun. There is a time to be born, as we know, and a time to die. We talked about that. We've already just finished talking about that. What is that time? I don't know. You don't know. God does know. And when we begin to try to seek those answers vainly, when we try to begin to compare our lives or even our health to somebody else, vainly, or when we look at individuals and we judge that individual to be wicked and they're living a long life and this individual to be godly and they are living a short tortured life, we vainly, we project onto that forgetting that for every human being, the days that you are appointed are appointed to you by God. There is a time to be born and there is a time to die. Open-ended. So you see the challenge in this. How many people really love open-ended questions that you get to think about for the rest of your life? Right? I mean, it's not bad. It's not like it's horrible. But no. There's a time to plant and a time to harvest. It's rather concrete. A time to plant and a time to harvest. Literally. And as we move through the old into the new testament, metaphorically, how many planting, how many farming, how many harvesting parables and references does Jesus use? There's a time to plant and a time to harvest. Sometimes when we full of God's Holy Spirit and we want to really share the gospel, we think that we are in charge of both. It's the time to plant and the time to harvest. And I'm going to save that soul. Wrong. You're not going to save a single soul in all of your life. But you are called to share the good news with all. You are called to share what Jesus taught. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. You are called to be strong in your Christian faith. So there's my vote. All of these can probably be taken literally and then projected metaphorically and even theologically as a reflection of who God is for us. A time to kill and a time to heal. Well, we don't like to hear that in our Bibles, but do we not, first of all, simply kill meat and eat it? Yes, we do. There is a time to kill and we know that there is a time to kill and there is a time to heal. As we know, wounded individuals physically, spiritually, emotionally, part of our gathering as a church is to promote healing from the inside out. It's to promote growth from the inside out. But I can also tell you people that I love very much. If somebody comes in here and threatens your lives, I'm going to do everything I possibly can to eliminate that threat. There is a time for that healing, which is now, and there is a time for that killing that is seeking to physically destroy good, physically destroy the image bearers of God. So we can take it from the killing of animals for the purposes of eating to the protecting and defense of image bearers of God, professing children of God. This is one thing that I think we have lost our way on and I don't want to take it. I haven't actually had taken a rabbit trail today. I talked about

motorcycles at the beginning, but not during the service or sermon. And so I'm doing really, really well, staying very focused. But we have been as a Christian church universal, so conditioned by culture that we are not allowed to stand up and be proud of who we are. If I take any pride, I take any pride in the foolishness that it seems to be following Christ. We're told that all things can be said about us, done to us, all things, and we should turn the other cheek. And we should show Christian love and compassion to those who are simply either from mocking God to persecuting and killing his children as I speak here this morning, show your love to them. How else will they come to repentance? What would Jesus do for those individuals who mocked the Lord's Supper? I'll tell you what Jesus would do. He would probably speak a parable against their sin, calling out their sin, and then he would turn to them and look them in the eye and tell them, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." Somewhere along the lines, Christians lost backbone, lost an idea that we are strong in our faith. Does that make us ungracious? Absolutely not. Does it make us uncaring? Absolutely not. Does it make us ungraceful? No, absolutely not. We love our neighbors as we love ourselves, but how unloving is it to watch somebody being destroyed by the lies of the enemy and not having any backbone to say, "That's wrong." That is ungracious. That is unloving. It's terribly unlovable. Jesus Christ doesn't run around and we don't see that in scripture that is so popular in theology today. "Well, he's just chasing after you, man. He's chasing you down. He wants you. He's desperate for you." No, he stands who he is, presenting who he is in that book and who he is in the form of Jesus Christ, and he looks at his creation that is broken and he looks up and he says, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. You are broken. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. Salvation is only in the name of Jesus Christ." These are the things that he says. Not, "Well, maybe, well, maybe you're right." Or, "Maybe, well, we should be more gracious than that to these lost souls." We're absolutely gracious to the lost souls. I'm not seeking to go out and hurt anybody because they're using words against me. I really desperately want to demonstrate the truth with my life and I really truly want to share the truth with them because I know it is true and I know what it is like to be regenerated and reborn. Okay, there's my rabbit trail coming back, but it's irritating. It's irritating, right, because I had pastor brothers and sisters say, "Oh, Brian, you can't say that. Maybe they didn't really mean it. Maybe, and what would Jesus do?" Well, Jesus would share a parable calling out their sin and then look them in the eyes and repent and sin no more. That's what he would do. You know who's intolerant? Yahweh is intolerant. Jesus is intolerant. He hates sin, loves those people so much he would like to redeem every broken part of their being and regenerate them into the people that he sees. [silence] The time to tear down and the time to build up, you get the point. They're both literal, metaphorical, theological of all of these, so I won't dwell on each one of them, but there is a time to tear down and there is a time to build up. And that can even go so far as to what we might call Christian discipline, as we watch an individual coming to church who's backsliding and doing all. Maybe we sit that individual down, we tear them down a little bit. "Brother, you cannot be doing this. You should not be doing this. Scripture says this, you're doing that." And then we love them, build them up using the Word and the power of God. Physically, spiritually, tearing down and building up. I hope a little bit of every single sermon that you hear from me tears a little bit down and I hope the encouragement that you hear from the Word of God then builds back up. I hope everybody goes home every time and says, "I never thought of it that way," or "Man, I felt convicted today. I need to look in the mirror." It's one of our favorite sayings around here, "I need to look in the mirror. What's going on in my life?" I hope that happens. I hope you're uncomfortable. I hope all of those things. I said, "If you, I won't say for the sake of counsel, hasn't fired me yet, but if you don't want to hear those things, don't come. Nobody hears those things, don't come back." I got my brother sitting here, a friend from 1989, we figured out. It's my running back at Boylan Spring Science School in 1989. What an honor it always is. What an honor it always is. So there's your message from Pastor Bryant, formerly Coach Bryant. You don't like what you hear, don't you? He knows. You all know. You all know. Because how unloving is it to be loved? It's a time to cry and a time to laugh. Take that on every level, physically, emotionally, spiritually. A time to grieve and a time to dance. We all know that. And as a Christian, we have the absolute unique ability to dance as

we grieve. For a saint who has passed. That's one of the weirdest things. It's one of the most powerful things that I've preached. Preaching a wedding this weekend. There's a Libyan title. We're preaching a wedding this weekend and they'll hear the gospel there. But there is no more powerful message than at a Christian funeral. And one of the strangest things at a Christian funeral is the joy that Christians feel for another Christian when they are in the arms of Jesus now and not suffering at the hands of the world under the sun. That's one of the most powerful testimonies. You guys are weird. Why are you celebrating this passing? You're not celebrating this person's death. You're not celebrating this person's death. We love that person. We wish that person were with us. We wish that person were in great health, etc. But we know that that person is in the hands of Jesus, in the arms of Jesus. To be absent from the body is to be present with Jesus. A time to scatter stones. A time to gather stones. There's a whole test and a reference there about memorials. If you know about memorial stones and if you follow the trail of the Hebrews out of Egypt and they would stop and they would build a temple and they would leave a mound of stones as a memorial, there's a time to gather them and memorialize and remember and put your feet down and lay a claim. And there's a time to dust your feet off and keep on going. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. Don't cast your pearls before a slime. If you want to go Old Testament, New Testament, then that's one of the many meanings here. But it is true. There's a time to embrace and a time to turn away. God does not say, "Hey, absorb all the toxicity of that abusive individual." I don't read that anywhere. There is a time to embrace and a time to turn away. And don't be ashamed of that. A time to search and a time to quit searching. Again, take that from the literal to the emotional to the spiritual. A time to keep and a time to throw away. Kelly? Not to throw away, Kelly. Oh yeah. Please would you throw something away sometime and every time I throw something, look every man is looking at his woman right now. Everyone knows. Opposite here. Inevitably I'll be like, "We don't need this. This has been sitting around for five years." I take it and it's gone. This is the first thing she notices when she comes home from work. After five years of not looking at it or touching it was the first thing that she notices. Where's that thing that was sitting right here? I know. I know. I know brothers and sisters that have this. I know it. But that's just the literal. Think of it in spiritual terms. What do you have to keep spiritually? What do you have to throw away spiritually? What do you have to keep emotionally that is healthy for you? What do you have to throw away emotionally that is unhealthy for you? What spirits are invading you of the world, telling you lies that you need to get rid of and of course you replaced by the Holy Spirit of God. So there's more to it than just that. A time to tear and a time to mend. The Lord cannot heal an individual if that individual is not willing to open their heart of stone and allow it to become a heart of flesh. You have to tear that down and the Lord mended. There's a time to be quiet and a time to speak, which many of you are probably praying over me right now. There's a chicken in the oven. Can you get this going? That's another rule. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. And again, we can go back to pearls before swine. We can go back to the idea. And I always referenced this before, Henry Nalant, and his idea of the economy of words. Words are like dollar bills, like in an economy. The more you have out there in circulation, the less valuable they are. And you turn on any one of a number of 24/7 media outlets and you have 175 cable stations and 489 audio stations and you have words and you have talk and you have meaningless stuff. 99% meaningless. What do words even mean today? It's really something to think about. And it is something for me and my vocation to think about. Rambling and battling and telling you what I think about things and going on and on or expositing the word of God once or twice a week with words that actually mean something. It's really important for me to think about things that way. And maybe you will now as well. A time to love. Oh, we don't like this one. We have time to hate. Why? Why don't we love this one? God hates sin. God hates sin. To do what is opposed to the will of God, to do what is opposed to the law of God is sin. And God hates sin. He doesn't hate his image bearer. He hates the rebellion in which his image bearer is living. Because he loves that image bearer so much, he gave his only begotten son. So that if that image bearer would repent and turn and believe they become an adopted son or daughter of the Most High God. Hate is also a feeling. We need to remember that. It's not necessarily an action verb. It can lead to action

verbs. But the way that I hate the sin, the way that I hate individuals who are mocking God, the way that I hate is one thing. But my loving kindness in demonstrating a life worthy of my calling is completely another. So yeah, there's a time for everything under the sun. Raise your hand if you've never felt hate in your life. Right, exactly. So is the Bible lying? No, the Bible is not lying. A time for war and a time for peace. And that's what's talked about there. My brothers and sisters in Christ, I will defend with my life and my other people in this sanctuary who will defend their brothers and sisters in Christ with their lives. There's a time for war and a time for peace. I want to end with this. I don't know if you've ever, I mean that's a beautiful poem. I don't know if you've ever heard that preached. I hope that you have. I hope that I've given you something, some challenges when you go back and look at it again. And remember, it's not saying I want you to hate. I allow you to hate. I allow you to turn away. He's saying there's a time in your life under the sun for it because you do not live in the age to come. There's a difference. It's like the Psalms. We talk about the Psalms and how people will cry out loud and forsake me. I feel sorry for myself. You're going to kill all of my enemies. Oh my goodness, I can't go on. Okay, you're in those feelings, man. We get it. You're in those feelings. Don't stay there. And all the Psalms come, they come back out. But God, you are my God and you are my rock and my refuge. All of my trust and faith is in you. Got it. He was in those feelings and came out of those feelings triumphantly by the power of God. This is very much what this is like. And we're going to end where we sort of began. Remember, he said those things are of God. We should enjoy our work. We should enjoy the things because they are a gift of God. So let's do that again. What do people really get for all their hard work? I have seen the burden God has placed on us all. Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. Everything. Listen to this. There is a time for everything under the sun. And God has made everything beautiful in his own eyes. It is of God. And if you are of God, then you get this teaching when the rest of the world doesn't get it. And if you are of God, when you are feeling all of this, you know that the power of God resides in you and you don't have to live here. You want to talk about a he gets you campaign. Ecclesiastes, he gets you. There's more. He has located because here it is. Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. Everything. And we relate that back to the beginning for everything. There's a time under the sun. He has planted eternity in the human heart. Even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. Are you okay not knowing? Are you okay having faith that as a child of God, he has planted eternity in your heart? But even so, as a child of God, following God, seeking first the kingdom of God, seeking his will, you will not know the scope or the plan of things. And this is where Christians, I need to know. So I'm going to create a legalistic church and we're going to do numerology and we're going to do prophecy according to Brian or whatever the case may be, because we just have this desire to know. We've got to know these things. Or are you okay in your faith? You don't know. You know, your faith says eternity is planted in my heart. I am saved. I am redeemed by the power of God. I am transformed by the power of God. Okay then, when's the end time? I don't know. Okay then, what's going to happen in your life around the corner? No idea. You're okay with that? What kind of God is that? Eternity is planted in your heart. I am redeemed. I am saved. She is redeemed. She is saved. He is redeemed. He is saved. All these good friends and brothers and sisters in Christ I have. And then there's disease. Then there's death. Then there's accidents. Why? What kind of God is that? Eternity. Aren't you? Can't you? Don't you want to know? How do you just have faith? Well, without faith there is no love. And without love there is no God. So I think I'll probably stop there. You got a good bit there. And I hope that you get both the large picture of Ecclesiastes and the smaller pictures that are in there as we went through a time for everything under the sun. I hope that you realize as a Christian, as I was just told this morning, you're also a person. God knows that. He knows that this is not heaven and we're all walking around with purified spirits and glorified bodies. He knows that there is a time for all human activity under the sun, which is where we are right now. Remember Revelation, that beautiful picture of Revelation? There's no sun. It's the light of life. It is the light of the Lord that illuminates. That's not life under the sun anymore. That's life under the sun. The sun? Not you specifically, but you're a son. I was using you as a methodist. It's okay. You can smile. Father, we do pray that your words will penetrate hearts and minds today. We do

pray that whomever may hear them here in the sanctuary or wherever this word may be heard, that there is a new and a fresh and challenging understanding of who you are, who we are. There's a new and a fresh and a challenging understanding of what this all means as we walk together in this life under the sun. Reveal to us any gaps in the preaching today. Reveal to us any questions that may come up from exploring your word today. And Lord, force us in front of our own mirrors.