

Our Times Are In God's Hands

'It actually takes a lot of energy to live. If we are not careful, we will use it all up living.' The average human in 2024 will live approximately 79 years. He will spend 26 years of it asleep, and 7 years trying to get to sleep! He will work 13 years. He'll spend 8 years and 4 months watching TV, and another 3 years looking at social media feeds on his phone. He will spend 4½ years eating and drinking. And just over 3 years on vacation. He'll spend 3 years and 4 months on schooling, relationships and exercise. About half a year laughing. Another half a year getting dressed. Four years are spent in illness. And 8 months waiting in lines. 'Come to think of it, no wonder we are tired'.

Seems to me that the average person spends way too much time in front of the TV. Eight years and four months! Doesn't it seem like at least some of that time could be spent in more useful pursuits? Reading, for instance. Wouldn't at least some of that time be far more beneficial being spent in the Holy Bible? Well, we spent a little time this morning reading from it. In our ongoing readings from Ecclesiastes, we read chapter three. Famous, famous passage that is. It's said the the author, King Solomon, was the finest poet Israel ever produced. From the looks of just that passage, he certainly had a way with words, to say nothing of his

vaunted wisdom! We'll see more of his eloquence in another of his books later this year.

In today's chapter, verse 15, the king declares, "What is happening now has happened before, and what will happen in the future has happened before, because God makes the same things happen over and over again". On a micro level, this seems obvious. The sun comes up. The sun goes down. There's a new waxing moon, a full moon, and then a waning moon. Every 28-29 days the cycle repeats. Spring, summer, fall, winter. Over and over. Babies are born, grow up, grow old, and die. Everything repeats. But it seems that Solomon was looking at things on a macro level as well. Though, in any one person's lifetime, one can not personally experience the repetition of events, if one becomes a serious student of history, then repeating patterns of events begin to come into view.

I remember back in school days being taught that the western understanding of time is linear, and always moving, in one direction, from what is past to what is future. But some eastern philosophies conceived of time akin to Solomon's thinking that God makes things happen over and over again. These eastern philosophies gave rise to the concept of reincarnation, in which all living things live forever, continuously repeating their lives in one form of being, then another, then another, ideally graduating from lower life forms to ever higher ones until they join the cosmic consciousness in which existence continues in an ever repeating flow

of time, without beginning and without end. Well, in a sense, this describes God, the Creator of All Things, including time itself. But in the written instructions He left us, we know that time for us does move forward in a seemingly linear fashion. If so, then why does Solomon, being guided by Holy Spirit's unction, proclaim "What is happening now has happened before, and what will happen in the future has happened before, because God makes the same things happen over and over again"?

Solomon's words speak of time having a cyclical nature. But the rest of the Bible's grand narrative definitely begins with a beginning, progressing, not to an end, but a final, continuous culmination. The story of salvation reveals a catastrophe when Adam sinned. And following that is multiplied thousands of years of a master plan that moves forward to effect the cancellation of Adam's catastrophic sin, to enable the total restoration of all things. Truly, it's a grand-scale plan encompassing vast lengths of time that we can scarcely wrap our minds around. But when we start examining periods of history, repeating patterns become evident. Which seem to validate Solomon's "over and over again" assertion. When looking at the annual holidays and festivals that the Lord God commanded the people to observe, year after year, without fail, the repeating pattern is undeniable. But for what purpose? God told us, in case we ever forget. He brings these anniversaries, these annual observances, back over and over again so that we won't forget! For humans have an awful tendency to

forget important things, and conversely dwell on today's trivia!

The first of the three high holy days for the Israelites was Passover. Everything in the celebration, most especially the Seder meal itself, served to remind everyone of God's plan of salvation, which had already been set in motion the moment God confronted Adam of his sin. But ever more clearly, it recalls the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, salvation through the parting of the Red Sea.

Following Passover comes Shavuot, or in Greek, Pentecost. This reminds the people of God's giving them His very words, His Ten Commandments, of His sustenance of them, through manna and the words of His mouth. And finally, in the Fall, Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, or Shelters or Tents. Among other things, this third festival caused the people to briefly re-experience the wanderings in the wilderness, and how the Lord supernaturally sustained them with daily manna, with supernatural power that kept their clothes and shoes from wearing out. Everything stayed like new for 40 years! And then they entered the Promised Land, with exceedingly great joy. This is truly a foreshadowing of God's people entering into eternal life in Heaven, saved through the shed blood of Christ Jesus the Messiah. As a foreshadowing, it's another example of Solomon's "over and over again".

So, there is a repetition. But at the same time, history, time is moving forward, and nothing that is repeated is exactly the same as it was before. Which leads us to a conception of the

grand sweep of time as something like an ascending spiral. With each circle, patterns are repeated, but with different people in different seasons and circumstances. Yet they're still clearly visible if we just look for them. For God left them there, as part of His grand plan, for us to find them, and learn from them, while we're, as it were, climbing the great, ascending spiral of time. But it doesn't continue spiraling forever. For God clearly said that there is an eternal state that commences shortly after the Millennial Reign of Christ Jesus the Lord. This is the moment in time when Lord Jesus will permanently dispatch all evil to the lake of fire, specifically created by God just for this very purpose. All things evil will be left in it for all time. No more spiraling. The Lord brings about the culmination of all things. All will be restored to the perfection that God created it.

Drilling back down into our own all-too-brief earthly lives, we all too easily allow ourselves, listening to the influences from the world and the devil, to get hung up on one triviality after another. We live focused only on each day. Abraham Lincoln said, "The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time". John Wayne, too, ruminated about life, saying, "Tomorrow is the most important thing in life. It comes to us at midnight very clean. It's perfect when it arrives and it puts itself in our hands. It hopes we've learned something from yesterday". And that is exactly why Father God has made things, time especially, just this way. We're given new chances every day. Things repeat so that we can

make them better, so that we can make better and more Godly choices, each and every day.

Our Lord taught us in Luke 12 not to worry. Let's recap His words. Verse 22: "Never let anxiety enter your hearts. Never worry about any of your needs, such as food or clothing". Verses 25-26: "Does worry add anything to your life? Can it add one more year, or even one day? So if worrying adds nothing, but actually subtracts from your life, why would you worry about God's care of you?" Verses 29-32: "I repeat: Don't let worry enter your life. Live above the anxious cares about your personal needs. People everywhere seem to worry about making a living, but your heavenly Father knows your every need and will take care of you. As you passionately seek His kingdom, above all else, He will supply your needs. So don't ever be afraid, dearest friends! Your loving Father joyously gives you His kingdom with all its promises!" Contrast that with this worldly man: "I've got so many troubles that if anything bad happens today it will be two weeks before I can worry about it". Sounds like he needs to focus on what's really important. As the Lord answered in verse 34: "Where you deposit your treasure, that is where you fix your thoughts—and your heart will long to be there also". Seems it would be in our best interests to make all our deposits in the Bank of Heaven. Things will happen. Times will come and times will go. This, too, will pass. But we can rest, rest assured, that our times, all of them, are securely in God's hands!!

