

Can everything in the world be considered beautiful?

Dear listeners,

Today we have come to the last Sunday in 2018! I don't know how you feel about that but for me the end of a year always leaves me a tinge sad. At the same time I am thankful that more is yet to come. For some of you this past year may have been filled with positive and pleasant experiences whereas for others the negatives just kept piling up like filthy bags of garbage. When we reflect on all that has gone on in 2018 can we agree with the conclusion made by the preacher in Ecclesiastes 3:11? There we read, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." Has the Lord made everything beautiful in its time? Don't we all know of the darkness of depression, disease, devastation, disaster and death?

The words of Ecclesiastes 3:11 touch on several intriguing but deep theological concepts. What does the preacher mean when he says God has made everything beautiful in its time? We know the creation was made beautiful. We love to see the beauty of colours, mountains, streams, flowers, snowflakes and sunsets. But what's so beautiful about war, conflict, hatred, sickness and death? And what does the author mean when he says God put eternity into the heart of people? Are we not touching upon concepts that may be too difficult to handle in a message designed to encourage us as we end one year and begin another?

One thing is certain: If we isolate the text and lift it out of its context we will end up in deep trouble. So what we need to do is follow the preacher and work through what he presents to us. Ecclesiastes 3 begins with the much quoted words, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven..." Following that opening line the preacher names no less than fourteen contrasts in life, all of them familiar scenes. There is a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot. There are times of weeping and times for laughing, and so forth.

But how are these things beautiful in their time? We would certainly agree that the Lord created everything beautiful at the beginning of time! God made the sun, moon and stars. He made birds and fish, plants and animals, oceans and streams. Whatever hasn't been polluted by humanity is beautiful. However, the preacher doesn't say God at one time created the world beautiful but "He has made everything beautiful in its time."

The key to unravelling the meaning of this sentence is the word "beautiful." The Hebrew uses the same word in Genesis 1, where it is translated as "good". After each day of creation you find the refrain, "and God saw it was good." The LORD saw what he had made was suited to its purpose. God made everything excellent in its time. When the time was right it happened; it came into being. Nothing came into being by chance. According to his divine purpose the dry ground and plants were made on the third day and not on the sixth. Likewise, Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day and not on the first.

Also today everything is maintained and sustained according to God's pattern. Everything is made to work excellently and perfectly in its time. The birth of a child, a death in the family, laughing, grieving, healing, love, hatred, war, and peace are all subject to God's almighty government. The Lord completes his plan, purpose and program in our life, pulling a line through from the high water points to the low ebbs. Through it all He will get us where he wants us to be.

Note well, the preacher is not saying "all things are beautiful and good." There is nothing beautiful about war, famine, death or hard times. But whatever evil comes on our path is overruled for good and serves God's purpose and goal. What the preacher says has a deeper dimension in Christ. God has made everything beautiful in its time through Jesus Christ our Lord. As the apostle Paul writes to the Romans, "And we know

that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). The Lord makes everything good in its time, including your loss, your failures, your fragmented dreams, your heartache, your illness and your loneliness. The Lord wouldn't say “everything” if he didn't mean “everything.”

The Preacher goes on and says, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” By this he is saying, “God has lodged in man's mind the capacity to look beyond the present and into the future.” The Lord has given human beings a sense of history, distinguishing humanity from all others. The Lord has put it into human hearts to probe and search; to be intrigued by the past; to want to know what the future holds. It explains why a young child will follow you around the house with those “why Mom?” and “how come, Dad?” questions. The Lord has put it into our hearts and minds to ask about tomorrow and the day after. He made us with the ability to step back and assess what life is all about. He gave us a mind to think, to examine whether or not we are following a correct course and to make decisions in the present in view of what has taken place in the past and what will happen in the future.

Since God has put eternity in our hearts we have to focus on planning ahead in our work, in the education of our children and in all our activities. Yet God has put a limitation on what we can know. Not everything about God's plan and purpose has been uncovered. As verse 11 concludes, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” Our knowledge of God's ways and works is limited. We cannot find out or fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end. Those limitations must bring us to God's revelation. From our side we have so many questions about the goal and purpose of life. We do not comprehend why things happen the way they do and we will never fully understand it. But let us acknowledge our need for greater dependence on him.

The Lord has put a sense of history into the mind and hearts of human beings but he gives those who believe in him more. He gives us answers in his Word. Knowledge of God, gained through the Bible, not only gives us a curious mind but also offers the answer as to where we have come from and where we are going.

At the present time we do not see the exact purpose behind everything that happens, but we believe it. All the zigzags of our life are pulling a straight line to our eternal glory. And all of that is possible because at one point in history God made the cross of Christ beautiful in its time. His work allows you and me to live with perspective – and to enter a new year with the certainty that God will make all things beautiful in their time.

Knowing that God has made everything beautiful in its time, I wish you all a happy and blessed New Year.