

# The Times of the World. 3:1-22

by W.J. Erdman

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*W.J. Erdman's sermon reflects on the transient nature of life, the inscrutability of God's purpose, and the importance of finding joy in our present works amidst the vanity of existence.*

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 3:11-12, Ecclesiastes 3:17, Ecclesiastes 3:22, Ecclesiastes 8:17, Ecclesiastes 9:5, Ecclesiastes 12:13

**Topics:** "Gods Sovereignty", "Eternal Purpose"

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## Description

In this sermon by W.J. Erdman, the Preacher reflects on the fleeting nature of human life and the inscrutable ways of God's eternal purpose. He contemplates the limited understanding of man in relation to the divine plan, emphasizing the importance of fearing God and acknowledging His ultimate judgment. Despite the mysteries and vanities of life, the Preacher advises surrendering to God's sovereignty and finding joy in the present moment.

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## Transcript

A melancholy silent questioning follows: "The good, the good, where is it?" Anon, abruptly, he turns from his self-centered life to the great world around him; he turns from experience to observation; and his silence is broken by the utterance of the most unique and briefest possible statement of the "times" of human life, both of the individual and of the race. The "times" enumerated are just twenty-eight; the world number, four, multiplied by the number of completeness, seven. Surveying the whole extent, the Preacher is again confounded, not only by the profitless labor of man, but also by his ignorance of the relation of the piecemeal "times," into which human life and history are broken, to the one eternal purpose of God, moving, moulding, controlling and uniting all. God has set the world in man's heart; man has "thoughts that wander through eternity," but, their all-uniting divine Thought, who can find?

The "times" of man are seen coming and going in orderly, seasonable sequence, but not only is there no permanent outcome or profit from them all, but no one knows what God is at in regard to them; no wisdom under the sun can tell; all is inscrutable; all one can say is, that the mystery of the world and the expectation of a judgment, when He will summon all the past into His presence again, should make men fear before Him. Man under the sun knows not how to fit, or how his work fits, into the great plan of God.

And so the Preacher concludes the best thing he can do is to let God see to it all, and thankfully resign himself to eating and drinking and the enjoyment of the good of all his labor under the sun. And truly, in view of the many scientific theories of the "problem of existence," that come and go like other vanities,

mere misty, baseless things, it must be said that man under the sun, left to his own knowledge and surmisings concerning nature and history and God, lives in an ellipse of "the unknowable;" the "unknown God" above it, the oblivion of the grave beneath it, and what was before, and what shall be after, hidden in impenetrable darkness. And man himself, to such theorists, seems

"Like the bubble on the midnight sea, which reflects for a moment the starry heavens above, and then disappears forever."

But this wise man is reminded, by the judgment-day of God, of the unjust judges on earth, and declares their judgments will be rejudged, and that God's Day will be long, " a time there for every purpose and work." He also says that the non-righting now, of human wrongs, is intended to test men whether they really believe, as men often say, there is no difference between man and the beast, and so no future life or judgment. Because one event of death and dust is to both, and seemingly to sense and sight the end of all, it is true, men, in that respect, are like beasts; but the fact of future judgment proves that man has pre-eminence above the beast; he should know his "spirit" does go upward, and is not the same " spirit " as that of the beast, and men at last will be shown to themselves how like beasts they were in living as they did. However, all is "vanity," so far as the unprofitlessness of life and labor under the sun is concerned. Man has no more substantial surplus of life and labor left, at death, than the beast; at least no one shall bring him back to see what shall be after him; he would like to live on, or at least to know what is going on in the world after he has left it; but, as he cannot, he concludes again, "where fore I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion." The enjoyment of this present life and its goods is, at least, some thing.

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