

**Followers of the Way**  
**Sermon: 6<sup>th</sup> February 2022**  
**Preacher: Lynda Rose**

**Understanding the times**

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-9**  
**Genesis 11:1-9**

As we've just heard, Ecclesiastes 3 begins with the words, 'To everything there is a time and a season under heaven...' and it goes on to spell out the 'seasons' that govern our lives. Not for nothing perhaps is Ecclesiastes known as Wisdom literature, because we ignore the seasons at our peril. The same holds good, of course, very obviously, in nature, because, as we all know, nothing done *out of season*, or even in the wrong place, will prosper. So if you're a gardener, for instance, you know that the right time to prune roses is late winter or early spring ... or that mid-March to April is the best time to plant potatoes. And azaleas need to be planted in an acidic, well drained soil, or they'll die. In the same way, if we don't take account of the God-ordained 'seasons' in our lives, whatever we do won't work.

Yet sometimes, in our own lives, it's not so easy to discern the seasons. The broader pattern, like childhood, adolescence, adulthood, of course, is fine, but the periods of change or when nothing much seems to be happening can be much more difficult, both to discern and understand. And we can create real problems by inappropriate or premature action. Think Abraham and Hagar. Think Boris Johnson! So to prosper – and I think the writer of Ecclesiastes would agree with me here – we need to recognise the season we're in, the 'season' laid down by God, and then to act appropriately. To put it another way, recognising the circumstances or conditions in which we find ourselves, we need to be obedient to God's leading, because otherwise we run a real risk of disaster.

So that's the first point. We need to recognise the season and, even if things seems difficult, we need to be patient and adapt our behaviour to the circumstances.

But there's another situation, of course, where we deliberately ignore the God-ordained order, and try to impose our own will. Which is actually a way of challenging God. And it's this situation we see described in the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis. In chapter 11 we read that the whole earth had one language, and they were obviously feeling pretty good about themselves. V.4 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.' Now another

way of looking at this is to say that the people are planning a full-frontal invasion of heaven, the dwelling place of God. This is hubris. Only a few chapters before, in chapter 3, we know that Adam and Eve had been expelled from Eden because of the sin they'd committed in listening to the snake, and after God cast them out, He placed a cherubim at the gate to prevent them ever going back. Yet here humanity is, only a few chapters later, saying forget Eden, we're going straight for heaven. We're going to make a name for ourselves and confront the Big Guy!

Now this is interesting, because it's actually exactly what a large part of society is saying today, albeit in a different form. We're a bit more sophisticated these days, we think, so the current form of challenge goes along the lines; we didn't need God anymore because with science – knowledge – we can control it all for ourselves. We can even remake creation the way we want. Build back better! So forget the woolly haired God-character living up in the clouds, and ditch all the boring rules about the way we're supposed to live, and let's do what we want!

Okay, back to Genesis. God's response when he finds out what the people – the mortals – are planning to do is to come down and take a look for Himself. And we read that God is not pleased. V.6 '... this is only the beginning of what they'll do,' He says. And you can feel the outrage, can't you? So He takes very swift action to nip things in the bud, and His response is absolutely masterly. He doesn't smite the tower with lightning, as you might expect. No, instead He confuses the language they all speak, so that they can't understand and work with each other anymore. Brilliant. And then the Lord puts an even bigger stop to their plans; He scatters them over the earth.

There is a lesson here that humanity needs urgently to learn, and that is that, no matter how great or clever we might think we are, we can never challenge God. Because He'll only allow us to go so far before moving, and putting a stop to things. Time and again in the Bible we see God responding to sin, and it's not pretty. We see people being blasted by war, pestilence, plague, by drought and famine, all with the aim of bringing them back into line. But the direct challenge to God is something different again, and when God moves in response to that, the effects are cataclysmic. And permanent.

This is where we are today. I'm not talking about the date for the second coming – Christ's return in glory, though from Scripture that may well be near. But, over the last century, mankind has increasingly fallen prey to the lies spewed out by the devil. There's no God, we say. With our expanding knowledge we just don't need Him anymore. We are the lords of creation. We can do whatever we want, wherever and whenever we want. And we've got new gods now that everyone has to worship: sexual rights, tolerance, diversity, the power of life and death, deciding who gets to be born ...

This is more than rebellion. It's a demonically-driven challenge to God, and the truth is that God is now moving in response.

Luke 1:30 “... the angel said to Mary ... You will conceive and give birth to a son ... He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High... and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

That's the important bit here, 'his kingdom will never end.' Falling away and tribulation are both foretold in Scripture before Christ's return in glory, when He will finally and forever smash Satan's hold, consigning the devil and all his minions to destruction, before ushering in a new earth. But throughout it all, God's promise remains ... the kingdom of the Son of the Most High will never end. We can, and must, stand on that promise now. Though tribulation and even persecution may lie ahead, while we keep faith, we are more than conquerors in Christ

But just as with Babel, God has seen the challenge being mounted by man ... and He is responding. What we are experiencing now are the rumblings, the birth pangs – before judgment truly comes – and unless mankind repents, there is truly infinitely worse ahead. Covid, financial instability, tension between nations ... these are all signs that God has withdrawn His protection and is allowing us to inherit the wind. But God is not just passively standing by. As His armies gather in the heavens, ahead of Christ's return – whenever that may be –so now God is shaking and sifting the nations in preparation, and so that as many as possible may be saved.

At Babel, God confused the language so that people could no longer understand and work with each other. In similar fashion, the peoples of the earth today are rebelling against God. Until Christ returns in glory, the battle between good and evil will continue – but however bad things get, God will not allow evil to prevail and have the last say. If men and women repent, it may be that God will, for a season, deliver us from these current crises, but it is still necessary for the earth to be purified. That is the purpose of this great shaking that is going on, this sifting.

Recognise the seasons! We are in a time when the wolves have got in amongst the flock and are wreaking mayhem, drawing people astray. So this is a season that's pretty uncomfortable, let's be honest, but we are called to stand. More than that, we are here at God's express will, at and for this time, to defend truth and seek after the lost.

More trouble undoubtedly lies ahead, because this is a battle between good and evil and the devil is striving to assert supremacy. He can't ultimately win, of course, but for this time – this season – we are called to play our part, and He that is in us is far greater than he that is against us. So be encouraged, and stand firm ... and, whether in this life or the life to come, we *shall* see the deliverance of God.