

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE
Tragic Hope Series - Part 3
Dan Burrell

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to seek, and a time to lose;
A time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to tear, and a time to sew;
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time for war, and a time for peace.

What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 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. I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil - this is God's gift to man.

I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before Him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for ever work. I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath and man has no advantage over the beasts for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?”

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. I don't think it comes as any surprise to anyone who knows me at all when I confess that I can be a little bit of a control freak. I like structure, order, schedule, and expected outcomes. I am not the kind of guy that lives by the seat of his pants. Unexpected surprises are generally not really received well by me. If I am in the car I want to be driving. I can handle just about anything that life throws at me, or I feel like I can, as long as I know it is coming and I know what I can expect in the end.

However, life is not for control freaks. And Solomon took Chapter 3 of the book of Ecclesiastes to remind us of that truth. In fact life in general can be a control freak's nightmare. If you want certainty, surety, plans always turning out exactly the way you envisioned them to be, then life is not for you, because life rarely goes that way.

I was doing some reminiscing this week, and one of the things about social media is that often it will show you what you were doing this time last year and so on. I have been on social media since 2006 because I was a professor. I don't know if you realize it or not but Facebook originally was only for college kids. And if you didn't have a college email address you could not be on Facebook. So I got one of the very first ones because I was teaching college so I had a college email address. And I was curious about all the buzz going around about this new-fangled social media thing, and I got in on the early days.

Now I can go back to the early 2000s and see what I was doing. And a year ago this last week I was on a dude trip. A dude trip was something I always took with my boys from time to time. We would make big plans to do things that my wife and daughters would not have enjoyed doing. And we guys would just go, usually from two days to two weeks, and do just guy kind of fun. My son had announced to us a few months previously that he was going to be a United State Marine so he would be soon going off to Parris Island. So this dude trip was two weeks before he was preparing to experience all the best the US government could throw at him. And we decided to do one more dude trip.

My son was nervous about it because he was afraid he would get injured and then wouldn't be able to go off to boot camp. And I was hoping he would get injured and wouldn't be able to go. (*Laughter.*) But anyway we headed for the Smoky Mountains and we spent a wonderful week just hanging out. We went hiking, we went biking, and we went roller coaster riding; those were the three things we wanted to accomplish. Nothing will make a guy on the upper end of his middle aged years feel older faster than to get on a roller coaster. (*Laughter.*)

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE
Tragic Hope Series - Part 3
Dan Burrell

Remember the days when you were really little, and you are at the amusement park and it was time to go on the roller coaster? And you were like, *'I don't think I want to do this. I really don't think I want to do this.'* Then there was a period of your life where you lose your mind and you are like, *'I can't wait to do this. I can't wait to do this.'* But then you enter that last phase of your life when you revert back to being five years old again and you are like, *'I don't think I want to do this. I really don't think I want to do this.'* And I am fully ensconced in those years of my life now. *(Laughter.)*

But I swore when my boys were little that I was not going to be the 'old man' dad. You know what the 'old man' dad is, right? *'Yeah, sonny you get on there. That's for young boys.'* And then they go over and sit on the bench and eat funnel cake and caramel corn while the kids are off riding the roller coasters. And I just wasn't going to be that kind of dad. I was going to be the dad that died on the roller coaster with his son, maybe having a massive coronary, but I was going to be there with him at the very end. *(Laughter.)*

So this was what we had determined to do, and this wasn't my trip it was his, so I just decided to grit my teeth and do it. So off to Dollywood we went. Now don't mock me; I like Dollywood. I like everything about it. I like the food, I like the mountains, I like the music, and I like Dolly. Now I know many people just roll their eyes when you tell them you like Dollywood, but I embrace it fully. And they have a pretty decent selection for this part of the world of roller coasters, and they were adding a couple of new ones. They had some wooden ones and they had metal ones. So off we went.

And after I got off the first one I realized what an idiot I was for committing to this dude trip. Getting on each roller coaster I had to brace myself mentally, physically, and emotionally in every way for what was about to happen. One of the ways I did it was to remind myself that hundreds of thousands of people per year ride roller coasters and very few of them die. Now occasionally one will, but I like to think that the odds are at least with me. So I brace myself and talk myself into getting on a roller coaster ride during which time I will be one hundred percent out of control. I will be at the hands of engineers I have never met, construction workers who never finished high school, and a teenage operator who was probably getting high the night before. *(Laughter.)*

My entire life, my family, everything I held dear was in their hands. And so I went and I waited for that first thud as they let us loose. At each turn, at each curve, at each loop-de-loop, between my prayers I would tell myself, *'You will survive. It will be okay. And please God, don't let me vomit in front of my son because there will never be*

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

an end to it. And as intense as it would get, as rocking and rolling as it would be, there came that last adrenaline rush that they always do toward the end where you are spinning and gyrating up and down, the g-forces are all there, and then they bring you up in a whoosh and you stop. And you think, *'I survived.'*

A few years younger than I am now, I noticed that when I would get to the end of the ride, my eyes would be twitching rapidly. Does that happen to anyone of you, or is that just me? I assumed it was because my brain has shrunk over time and it was just rattling around inside my head or something, but I know that is my signal that I have lived thus far. Now I still wonder if I am going to die, because it is the weirdest sensation I have ever felt. But when that ride stops I know officially the ride is over for me. It is an abrupt stop; it is a sudden end, but I have gone through all the twists, the turns and the loop-de-loops and I have survived it.

And the older I get the more I realize that life is just one big giant roller coaster ride. You don't know where the next curve is, about the time you think it is over you do another loop-de-loop, there are times when your eyes are twitching rapidly in your head, and you are wondering if you are going to survive this. But survive it we do until that final end and then we meet God. Peaks and valleys, slow starts and sudden acceleration, sharp turns and long straightaways, smooth paths and rocky curves, loop-de-loops and corkscrew descents all designed to thrill, disorient, shock and entertain to a final wild charge and then a sudden stop.

You can be talking about roller coasters, or you may just be talking about life, because there are births and temper tantrums, first words and first steps, first heartbreaks, friends and enemies, love and marriage, kids in carriages, sickness and health, poverty and wealth, dreams and disappointments, dancing and limping, building and tearing down all leading to a very sudden stop.

And that is the story of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 in a nutshell, because Solomon, the Preacher, is reminding the *Ekklesia*, the assembly, that life is a roller coaster of experiences and seasons, of emotions and cycles, and in the end we all eventually exit the ride when we leave our earthly tent behind, and it returns to dust. So there are some things I think we can learn from this this morning. This morning message is a little bit shorter than usual. I hope I am up to the challenge, and I want to do my best, because in a few minutes we are going to re-install some elders to our elder team and we want to allow time in the service for that.

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

But if you will bear with me and intensely follow along I will try to unpack some of the key elements from Ecclesiastes Chapter 3. The sermon from the Preacher, Solomon, the wisest king who would ever sit on a throne in Israel, that he shares with this gathered assembly. And what he really is saying here is we are involved in the control freak's nightmare. We have no control. But here are some things we can learn from this, and some things I think we can carry away that will help us navigate the ride that is life a little better.

Number one - never forget that God has designed your journey and my journey. Never forget that your journey was designed in advance by a God who loves you and will be glorified in you and through you. When we look at the first eight verses we realize that they are one of the most famous passages in Scripture. In fact if you are old enough to remember there was a song still popular today called, '*Turn! Turn! Turn! To Everything There is a Season.*' If you haven't listened to that, I would hope you will do so. I listened to it this morning as I was shaving and getting ready for church because I wanted to be reminded of it. It was a very nostalgic song for me because that was the cool song when I was a teenager.

And this is a passage that many of us have read, we have heard it read at funerals, we have heard it read at weddings. It begins: "***A time to be born, and a time to die: A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.***" It is fourteen couplets all together here and it walks us through the twists and turns, the ups and downs, the ins and outs of life in a very systematic way. And these are the days of our journey. These are the turns of our ride and these are the cycles of life.

Verse 2 is about birth and death, and you see that as you age. You remember the first time you held your little baby in your arms and you remember the first time you went to a funeral. If you were young and you went to a funeral it was a life altering thing to see a body in a box for the very first time. And yet as we age then we start seeing the people that were dearest to us and who we loved most; our parents, our siblings and our closest friends, one by one going into eternity. And we realize there is a season. A season to hold your child for the first time and a season to have a grandchild, but there is also that season that comes where all of us reach the end of the ride.

And then in verse 2 it talks about planting and harvesting. This I can relate too, particularly this time of the year. Fall is one of my favorite times of the year as I remember growing up on the farm because that was harvest time. My wife and I took a ride through a country this week and you could see some of the harvesting that was taking place. We went over to apple country and their harvest was almost completed.

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

We saw corn coming out of the fields, and there were still pumpkins laying out in the fields. It is a beautiful time of the year, because after all the sowing that took place several months ago, now it is the time for harvest.

This week was such a beautiful week to enjoy the fall weather. I was out in my yard yesterday looking at the remnants in my garden. There were a couple of dried up peppers, and a little okra, and that was it. The harvest is over, the season has ended, and before long it is going to be cold with rain, snow and ice. All of this is part of God's design to have seasons.

In verse 3 we see there is a time for killing and a time for healing. There is a time to breakdown and a time to build up. In verse 4 we see there is a time to weep and a time to laugh. In other words there is a time for joy and there is a time for sorrow. And until you have laughed and cried with someone you haven't really knitted with them. I mean the more you know someone, the more you journey with them, the more you realize that there are these seasons when you weep together and there are seasons when you laugh together. And sometimes you might do both in the same day. Sometimes you may even do both of them in the same conversation.

In verse 5 there is a really intriguing verse: "***A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together.***" That is a little hard for us understand, why in all the different seasons of life we are talking about rocks. It seems kind of bizarre, but it is interesting to remember that this was written in Palestine and Israel and Canaan. And if you have ever been to Israel you know there are rocks everywhere, I mean just everywhere. I once heard a tour guide say, '*You know when God was creating the earth He gave the angel all the rocks in a big wheelbarrow, and God told him to distribute them evenly all over the world. And the angel started pushing the wheelbarrow, but then he tripped, and the wheelbarrow overturned and all the rocks landed in Palestine.*' It is kind of a joke over there that you aren't going to do anything until you have cleared the rocks first.

It is interesting that in many parts of the world where there are rocky fields what they do first is take the rocks and move them into rows. And they build those rows up until the rows with rocks on them become fences. So what they were doing is clearing to make parts of the land more tillable, and the fences could be used for protective devices as well as to keep the animals where they were supposed to be and the warriors out. So the rocks were used to build up fences, and maybe that is some of the imagery that Solomon is talking about here.

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

Then he goes on and says there is a time for greetings and a time for goodbyes. He talks about embracing and then refraining from embracing. In Jewish times they didn't just embrace, they would kiss on the cheek. Sometimes it would be a kiss on each cheek, and in other parts of the world it was customary to kiss three times on the cheek. I am from South Florida and there if you don't do the kiss on the cheek you are considered to be rude. I lived down there for so many years it became automatic to walk up to someone and do that. But then I went up to Boston where I had a teaching assignment, and when someone introduced me to their wife I went in to kiss her cheek and she jumped back like I had the plague. So not all parts of the world greet each other the same way, but in those days in this part of the world it was customary to embrace each other. There were no pandemics and social distancing going on there.

Then it says there is a time for gaining and a time for losing in verse 6. In verse 7 it says there is a time for creating and a time for destroying. It also says there is a time to speak and a time to keep silent. There is a time for waiting and a time for acting. In verse 8 it says there is a time to love and a time to hate, and a time for war and a time for peace. So there is loving and hating, and conflict and peace.

And what we see is God saying this: *'In my design it is not flat, it is not level. There are cycles, there are rhythms, there are seasons, and there are times when you cry and there are times when you laugh. There are times when it is easy and times when it is hard. There are times when you are building and there are times when you are tearing down. There are times when you are making peace and there are times when you are making war. There are these tensions that exist and all of them are part of my design.'*

And when we realize when we see design that there is a designer it gives us a sense of purpose. It gives us a sense of direction, but more importantly, it gives us a sense of security, because if you know the designer, you know and trust His design. And in the midst of life when it can be hard, rough, unexpected, and the control measures that you thought you had put in place are completely eradicated, in this you can have security.

I have to tell you that this means something to me at this phase in my life. I love the passage of Scripture that reminds us of the beauty of the childlike faith. I cling to that, because I will tell you that I came to know the Lord as a child, and for many years my childlike faith was my bedrock. It was my foundation. But like the song that Jason sang about, as you get older and your perspective changes when life happens, you lose control, there are other voices, you see consequences, you trip along the way, and things don't always pan out the way you hoped. And I will tell you that my faith gets challenged deeper and deeper, and as a result sometimes my faith grew more complicated

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

as well, because I am of the nature that I am not satisfied with the childlike all the time. I want to know the whys, and I want to know the where are we going. And as a child matures and grows up those are the questions they begin asking their parents. *'Son, I want you to do this.'* And the child says, *'Why?'*

And many times the response that a parent will give is, *'Because I said so.'* (Laughter.) Good parenting advice there, right? What the parent is trying to say is, *'You can trust me. If you will do this your life is going to be easier. If you do this you will understand it someday.'* But I am not that guy that says, *'Okay, dad, I'm good with that.'* And off I go. No, I have to go in for another row of why's; sometimes ten or twelve rows of why's. *'Well, what next? After this what are we going to do?'* I keep asking more and more complicated questions, and in the end I am still going to need to do what I was told to do, right?

All my questions aren't going to change the fact that an assignment has been given, a plot has been laid out, but because I am a control freak I would really appreciate knowing more details. But sometimes God has to say to us, *'You are going to have to trust me with the details. I just need you to obey. I just need you to buckle your seatbelt. I just need to make sure that your bar is lowered and that it is locked in the safe position, because you are getting ready to go on a humdinger of a ride. I have designed it, and in the end after the twitching stops, I am still going to be there for you.'*

Now I have to tell you I don't like it. I have to tell you that there are times I have some questions that I really want answered, and I want them answered now, but in the end I can have confidence that the designer has thought through every detail, and in the end it will have met His purpose. So I take the ride. There are times I want to get off the ride, there are times when I probably think thoughts that are unworthy of the designer, there are times when in the midst of the ride I feel disoriented, lost and confused. But the weird thing is at the end of every roller coaster ride I have ever taken, I look over at my son and he looks at me, and we high five and say, *'Wow, that was awesome!'* (Laughter.) And more often than not, we turn around and get on it again because we are crazy that way.

The longer we live and go through the twists and turns, the more you are going to know that you can trust the designer. And there is going to come a day when that final abrupt stop happens and we are going to meet the designer, then all the questions that we have had will suddenly come into view and we will understand. Now I don't know if you are like me or not, but I tend to overthink, I am overly complicated, and I have a list of questions an arm's length long that I plan on asking God. And I wrote some of those

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

questions during times of my life where I wasn't being super respectful. There are some hard questions.

But I do know this, that whether I have childlike faith, or complicated faith, the designer is still in charge. And the ride I take I can have confidence in because I have confidence in the designer. Now there are times that I regret, there are times when I am sick, there are times when I am hurting, there are times when I am thrilled, there are times when I am enjoying it, but all in all my future is in the hands of the designer, and God has designed my journey.

Number two - God gives us life to be enjoyed and lived. After we get by the poetry in Ecclesiastes Chapter 3, we see Solomon starts talking about the worker and the soil, about all the business that God has given us to do, about the busyness of life, the times of beauty, and all these different things. Eventually he says that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in his toil.

Now this is not the law of the Epicureans. The Epicureans that we saw in the New Testament, which we talked about last spring, believed in eating, drinking and being merry because this world is all there is. They just liked wild women, wine and song. So this is not the philosophy of the Epicureans that Solomon is talking about. This is the philosophy of a man who knew the designer, and he was saying this: *'God gave you life to be enjoyed. He didn't create a boring life; He created an exciting life. He created a life with twists and turns, and He created this life not for you, but for Him. But you are invited along, and you get to be part of it. So enjoy it.'*

And that we can do. This is where the hope begins emerging in what has been a rather dark book. Whereas the message has kind of been like, *'What's the use, it is all smoke and mirrors. It is all emptiness and vanity. It just disappears like vapor.'* Now Solomon is starting to process, because he is a complicated thinker, and in this I can relate to Solomon. Others will say, *'Well, God is on His throne. God is good all the time.'* All these little clichés we give. And I have to tell you there is a part of me you probably don't want to see in your pastor, but when I hear those little clichés it is like someone running their fingernails down a chalkboard. I know God is good, but this isn't, and I am not enjoying it right now.

And God knew that when He designed us as well. He is worthy of our trust, but He is understanding of our design. I am not talking about being disrespectful, and I am not talking about being blasphemous, but I want you to understand because some of you young people will get into this. You are going to have some tough questions and you are

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

going to ask things like, *'God, why is it if you are good, why is there evil? You are all powerful, so why are people dying of cancer?'* You are going to have all these questions, and I want you to understand something - that is okay. Solomon was asking those questions. *'I have had all this money, all these women, all these things, and look at me. I am just unhappy and miserable and I wonder if life is worth living at all?'* That is okay. It is part of your journey to the right conclusion, to the abrupt stop where you say, *'In the end I know the designer, and in the designer I can be confident.'*

So God gives us life to be lived and enjoyed. And here is the thing, for those of us to know the designer, our journey is not to be endured; it is to be enjoyed. Let me say that again. When you know the designer our journey is not to just be endured; it is to be enjoyed. And here is the tragic thing, if you don't know the designer you can't know when your roller coaster car is going to go off the track, or if you are going to fly out of your seat, and your questions can make life seem completely worthless and empty. But when you know the designer you know that in the end you are going to have the blessings of the designer in full display for you. And there is a privilege and a joy in that.

Number three - God warns us that there is coming an end. So when you look at the end of Chapter 3 Solomon says, *'You know I have noticed this that even in justice there is wickedness, and even in places you call righteousness there is wickedness, but I know this in my heart that God is going to judge the righteous and the wicked, the just and the unjust, and all of that is in His hand.'* And here is something that always gets me, and that is when the unjust flourish. It always gets me when I have these idealistic viewpoints, and I have a lot of them. And when they don't turn out the way I thought they would, or someone that I don't think should succeed does succeed, or someone that I see that I think is a person that God ought to be blessing, because they are faithful and diligent, and they have tragedy like a death in their family, or something goes wrong in their life, I can't see any justice in that.

But then I realize that I am not at the end of the ride yet. The designer isn't finished yet. And I am not the designer. There is coming an end, and in the end God's plan will be revealed, and in the end God will be glorified, and in the end His loving nature that redeemed me when I was beyond redemption by any other entity in the universe, I will remember that He redeemed me. And in that there will be joy and peace and fulfilment and understanding in all that I lacked during my journey.

So here are some principles to remember and then we will be finished. Number one - in the chaos of life, and in the continuum of life, remember that God is at work and in charge. And then I would add these two words - 'not me' or 'not us.' In both the

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

chaos of life, and the continuum of life, because what we see here is both chaos and continuum. We see the continuum, born-die, cry-laugh, continuum, cycles, seasons happening over and over like chapters in a book. But then there are these twists and turns, pain and release, the ups and downs, whether it is chaotic or dull, whether it is routine or unexpected, understand this - the designer is at work and in charge and not us.

The moment I step off the platform, get into the car, buckle my seatbelt, and lower my bar, I am out of control. I am just along for the ride. The moment the doctor spanks you on the behind, or actually even before that, when the bright lights of the delivery room are in your eyes, remember this - before that, and then for the rest of your life, God is at work. He is in charge and not us.

Maybe you would wonder why that is important to know. It is because otherwise you have no foundation by which you can anchor hope. If life is meaningless, if it is less than nothingness, if we live in some kind of fatalistic, nihilistic, type of belief system that says we are born and then we die like a dog, we just go to sleep and then we are done, then why would we want to even endure? Many nihilists end up taking their own lives because there is no hope, there is no meaning, there is no intentionality, and there is no design. But for the believer we know there is, and so in that we can endure the difficult days, enjoy the wonderful days, and be confident of the outcome.

Number two - life is lived easier and more meaningfully when we live with the end in mind. I will tell you that I literally do this when I get on a roller coaster ride, I will ask, *'How long is this ride?'* And it is amazing because they usually say something like, *'A minute and forty five second.'* That's not very long, so I have a pep talk going on between my ears because I am at that age, right? *'I should be able to endure anything for a minute and forty five seconds. I should be able to get through this for a minute and forty five seconds.'* Halfway through the ride I am like, *'Am I at a minute, or am I at forty five seconds?'* I would like to know which side of the halfway point I am at.

But I know this, it will eventually come to a stop, except like the stuff in Stephen King's nightmares where you are on the roller coaster for the rest of your life. No, I am going to get off the roller coaster at some point. And we know that after this life there is even better, there is more, and the best is yet to come. So when we live our lives it will be easier and more meaningful to us if we live with the idea that the best is yet to come, that there is a day of accounting, and one day we will stand before God. At some point there will be understanding, there will be meaning, there will be clarity, and there will be comprehension.

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

Number three - part of wisdom means that we factor in the reality that we do not know the entire story as we navigate our journey. Part of growing wise comes to the point where we trust the designer, that we can't be in control, and we don't know the entire story. Someone once asked me if I would like to know the day I was going to die. No, I don't want to know. Now part of me does, so I may argue about that in my head back and forth because I am a control freak. If I knew that then I could have everything planned out. I could have a night where I showed my wife where all the bank accounts were, when the bills were due, and have everything all planned out. But no, I really don't want to know that because that would become then the focal point of everything I do, and the rest of my life would be about such and such a date, like 2026 or whatever the date was.

Now if I die in 2026 you all will think, *'Oh he was a prophet.'* But if I did know the date I was going to die that would become everything that I would think about. I would obsess about it, I would count the days down on the calendar, I would just make myself crazy about it. But no, the Bible tells us that no man knows the day or the hour. We do know that in the end we are not in control; He is. But I can navigate my journey with confidence. I don't know the entire story, but I know that if I continue to live there are going to be days that I cry and days that I laugh. There are going to be days when I am absolutely excited about things and other days when I want to crawl under a rock. And that is the nature of the ride, that is the nature of the journey.

Number four - contentment or satisfaction is a gift from God and it is not a product of our efforts. You cannot work yourself to contentment. You cannot purchase your way to satisfaction. When you get to the point where you say you are content it is because God allows you to rest fully in Him. Remember what Paul said: ***"Godliness with contentment is great gain."*** Paul also said: ***"I have learned in whatever state I am, I am content."*** And we remember that Paul was often in a prison cell. So much of our mindless, meaningless pursuit in life is so that we gain some satisfaction, so that we sense some contentment. But the bottom line is this, the contentment that matters and which is real can only come from God when we rest with confidence in Him.

The last thing is this - we are wise to enjoy the journey without forgetting the conclusion. There was once a very, very wealthy man who was an oil magnate. His name was Getty. J. Paul Getty, at a time in his life, was the wealthiest man on the planet. He was the Bezos or the Gates of his day. A reporter heard Getty had only a few weeks to live and he asked if he could interview him. Getty agreed, and the reporter went to him and began the interview. At one point the reporter asked Getty: *'Sir, you are the wealthiest man in the world, the most powerful man in the world, you have wealth beyond*

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

anyone's imagination, more than anyone has ever had at this point in history. If you could do it all over again, what would you do?' And the words that J. Paul Getty said were absolutely incredible. He said: "I would get a little bit more, just a little bit more."

This man was at the top of the heap from many people's perspective, but he still did not know contentment. He was not living with the conclusion in mind. And J. Paul Getty died just like the poorest man on the planet, just like Solomon died, and just like you and I will die. Someone else spent J. Paul Getty's money and someone else moved into his house. He lived his entire life gaining stuff, but never focusing on the conclusion.

There are going to come times in our lives when we feel out of control. But the fact that we feel out of control does not mean that we are actually out of control. We are simply out of our control, but we are never out of His control. The designer knows what He is doing. And we are wisest when we remember that this is not our story that we are living, this is His story that we are a part of. When I put God where He belongs I am the tiny bit player in a magnificent story that glorifies Him. When I put me where I don't belong then the whole world, every experience, every joy and every sorrow, every moment of every day is all about me. And in the end my perspective is wrong and my disillusionment will be deep. I exist, you exist, everything exists for His glory and at His command, because it is His creation, and it is under His control.

The wisest man in the world wrote these words to remind us of this truth, and it is the nightmare of control freaks. But it is the hope of every one of us that God indeed loves us, has a plan for us, offers redemption to us, and that will always be good for us. Our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed and my question to you this morning is, *'Are you living in this moment without looking at the moment to come? Are you worried about control instead of surrender? Is life about your story rather than His story?'*

Perhaps today the message from Ecclesiastes for you is this - you can trust the designer on this wild journey called life. If you don't know Christ as your Savior may I urge you today before you leave to trust Him. Maybe you don't know how to do that. We are going to have a song and over to your left there is a table where someone will be standing who would love to pray with you. Just tell them you would like to know for sure you have a relationship with Christ, and they will have someone take you to a private room and show you from the Bible what it means to be a Christian. You don't have to become a member of this church, you don't have to write a check, you don't have to do anything except just listen to what God's Word has already said for you.

THE CONTROL FREAK'S NIGHTMARE

Tragic Hope Series - Part 3

Dan Burrell

Maybe you would say you don't want to do it today but you would like to talk to me. Give me a call this week, and we will sit down over a cup of coffee and talk about the tough questions by going to the Bible and letting God give you direction. Maybe you would say that you have so many things happening in your life that you do feel out of control, and you feel disoriented, you feel sick, you feel angry, and you feel frightened. Today may I suggest to you that you go back to that childlike faith that says you know the designer. I know His thoughts for us are good and not evil. I know He has an expected end for us, and we can trust in that.

And if you will do that you will regain a sense of stability that will help you navigate the twists and turns, the ups and downs, the fast acceleration, and the sudden stops of life. I don't know how people live life, or want to live life, apart from knowing that there is a designer, and that this isn't some kind of fluke we are engaged in, some kind of chemical explosion that happened by random, but rather we are here because God has a plan. If He has a plan for His universe He has a plan for you. And our challenge is to live in that plan. So embrace His journey, accept His will, and follow His lead. Let's stand as we pray.

Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you, Father, for these wisdom chapters from Solomon. Help us to use them in a way that will make us more stable and give us more perspective. Father, help us to obey you in the little things and in the big things, to trust you in the crazy times and in the dull times. And Father, that when we get to that end of life that Solomon said comes to every one of us, may we be prepared to look you in the face and thank you for the privilege of being redeemed by the designer. So help us live with confidence. For it is in Christ's name I pray. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.