

In His Time – CJ's City – Sunday 08 June 2008

“Sometimes it flies, sometimes it crawls, but it always passes inexorably. We mark it, save it, waste it, bide it, race against it. We measure it incessantly, with a passion for precision that borders on the obsessive. Time is so vitally enmeshed with the fabric of our existence, in fact, that it's hard even to conceive of it as an independent entity—and when we try, the result is less than enlightening. Pondering the mystery of what time really is, St. Augustine wrote in his Confessions, “If no one asks me, I know; but if any person should require me to tell him, I cannot.””

So began an Article in Time Magazine by Michael Lemonick on 27 December 1999 looking at Time as the millennium celebrations approached.

Time is something scientists debate and something that may be difficult to explain. The Sci Fi novelist Douglas Adams said “Time is an illusion. Lunchtime doubly so.”

Have you ever noticed how powerful it is – or how much control it has over your life. How occupied we are by it?

Quick survey – how many times this morning have you checked your watch, or the clock or the time on your mobile? When you got up, on your way here, or maybe when the service started or most likely I expect when I started talking!

Should our preoccupation with time not set alarm bells ringing? Is it possible I have the wrong view of time? Do I think its mine? My time. Is it our time?

His Time:

Would you turn with me to Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 verses 1 to 14 which reads:

- 1** There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:
- 2** a time to be born and a time to die, _
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- 3** a time to kill and a time to heal, _
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- 4** a time to weep and a time to laugh, _
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- 5** a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, _
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
- 6** a time to search and a time to give up, _
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- 7** a time to tear and a time to mend, _
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- 8** a time to love and a time to hate, _
a time for war and a time for peace.

9 What does the worker gain from his toil? **10** I have seen the burden God has laid on men. **11** He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. **12** I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. **13** That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God. **14** I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can

be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

Here we clearly see there is a time for everything. Often people say there is so much to do and not enough time to do it. I know some of you have heard me saying that.

Doug Larson is quoted as saying “For disappearing acts, it’s hard to beat what happens to the eight hours supposedly left after eight of sleep and eight of work.”

But Scripture confirms there is a time for everything.

When we talk about time this is something we are constrained by not God.

We are subject to times and changes over which we have no control. Verse 2 – a time to be born and a time to die... etc. But God in contrast is outside of time, bigger than time, beyond time, before time. Colossians 1 v 17: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” God is not bound by the constraints of time He operates in eternity and sovereignty over all things.

Time is His, His timing for everything. He has appointed all things. Time is in His hands – as the psalmist writes “My times are in your hands...” (Psalm 31 verse 15(a)). There is a liberty in that.

It would therefore be sensible wouldn’t it for us to seek His wisdom in our use of time. For surely the purpose of our time is to do His will. Romans 12 v 1 tells us to “..offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...” The writer of Ecclesiastes says in verses 12 and 13 “I know there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone my eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God.”

In Proverbs we read we should “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” (Proverbs 16:3) and to “trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6).

I think we need to re-examine our view of time against God’s view of time. Put our life and plans in His hands.

In verse 11 of Ecclesiastes 3, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

All things beautiful in His time. Again we should receive awesome comfort from that. Although the situation we may find ourselves in may not currently be described as “beautiful” we have the assurance in “all things God works for the good of those who love Him.” (Romans 8:28) in all things. We can learn and grow in all things. Hence God can make all things beautiful in His time.

Also as we are reminded in verse 11 that although we are limited by time as we know it, how we measure time, years, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds – from God’s perspective we were made for eternity. That is something it is hard for us to grasp, “...He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” The truth is that in Him and through Him we shall live forever; what we see now is only a fleeting shadow - His time – is all of eternity.

It also means that we need to keep the right perspective – in His Time – what do I mean by this – well we are not meant to waste this time on earth, we have an inbuilt desire for something deeper – following His heart. We should not be content to just run along in the rat race following a treadmill – checking off the seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years as a prisoner would mark out his sentence. No, as I said earlier we should use the time God has given us – His Time – for Him.

Why – to praise Him and revere Him – which is our purpose. Ecclesiastes 3: 14: “I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.”

So time is His – His time.

Right Time

And secondly we see that with God, it is always the right time.

Turn with me to Romans Chapter 5 verses 1-8:

“**1**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2**through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we^[b] rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. **3**Not only so, but we^[c] also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; **4**perseverance, character; and character, hope. **5**And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

6You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. **7**Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. **8**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

His Time is the Right Time

The amazing truth of the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ is that He came and took our place, took our punishment for the things we have done and died and rose again for each of us. And He didn't wait until we were sorted – **at just the right time** – while we were **still sinners** – and that's the amazing truth wherever we are we can come to Him, as Dan found....

[Dan's testimony]

I asked Dan to share that part of his testimony because that is fantastic to me - that Jesus says we can come to Him wherever we are coming from even with all our messes and when things are all over the place. As Jesus said: (Matthew 9:12) “...it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”

Again there is amazing freedom in this. His time is the right time. If you have never heard the truth of that before – He came and died for you – where you are right now – and that time could be now for you to come to Him with whatever you bring – because He can take it all – and has done and has dealt with it on the Cross.

Its good news for Madonna – who thinks she only has 4 minutes to save the world. The Good News for her is that she doesn't have to – she can't anyway – God can and He has through Jesus once and for all. Which is great news for us all.

Time to Act

We therefore have a responsibility as I have said before in how we use or make use of our time. We have to be prepared to act and do our bit.

The story of Esther is an amazing one. She ended up in the Royal Palace having amazed everyone with her beauty but there came a time when she had a chance to save her people – but only if she decided to take it. As you may know one of the King's officials, Haman, had plotted the destruction of the Jewish people and Mordecai – Esther's cousin - knew she was in a position where she could make a difference. But it was not without personal risk on her part.

In Esther Chapter 4 verses 9-14 we see "... **9** Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. **10** Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, **11** "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, **13** he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. **14** For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Esther had a choice. It was time to act or stay silent. Wherever we are and wherever we find ourselves we can be used by and for God.

God is in control – and who knows but we find ourselves facing a particular set of circumstances – for such a time as this.

Even when things seem bad or hopeless from a human standpoint – such as being sold into slavery in Egypt by our brothers – God works. As Joseph recognized even through that seemingly bleak turn of events (of being sold as a slave) Joseph was able to recognize God's hand at work in his life, in Genesis 45 v 5 he is able to comfort his brothers "...do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."

So we need to ask ourselves are we alert to our circumstances and are we ready to act and use our time wisely? How do we use our time – complaining or acting? Bussing or listening? What do I do with time – what do you do with time? How do we fill it? On who or what do we use our time – who do we give it to? Time is our most valuable possession but we often squander it too easily. As the saying goes, time waits for no man. We can also waste it by not doing and putting off the things we should be doing – you've heard the expression no doubt – procrastination is the thief of time.

Remember it's His time. God is sovereign. If we don't act and allow ourselves to be used that privilege may well pass to someone else who is prepared to serve God in that way, see verse 14 the warning to Esther, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish."

Something amazing happens when we give our time to God and are faithful in that. He is able to give us back the time. In our daily lives if we give our time and energies to Him we will see reward and blessing in our lives, and in our relationships etc. Time spent on God is always time well spent.

God is able to enhance our time – not in the way I used to see in a programme I watched as a youngster called "Out of this World". The main character was a school girl who's mum was a human and father was an alien. Evie (that was her name) had all sorts of powers and the one I always wanted was the ability to stop time. She would put her fingers together like this [action] and time would freeze. She could then do whatever she wanted and restart time by putting her hands together when she was ready. I always thought that would be handy when I had exams or deadlines for things. But God is not in the business of making up for our laziness. I can't not revise for exams and then expect God to increase my learning time the night before I take them. But I have seen His blessings when spending time with God and working for Him. I have seen tasks move more quickly than I thought or things work out easier than I expected. Or even when I was revising – I used to want to spend all the time doing that because I was so scared of failing but I think nearly always I still went to

Church and didn't skip that. My mum often quoted to me and still does, 1 Samuel 2 verse 30 "...those who honour me I will honour..."

What about you? What do you do when the pressure is on? How do you use your time? What do we let slip? What do we prioritise?

Time Challenge

So we've seen time – is His Time, His Time is the Right Time and there is a Time to Act but there is also a Time Challenge.

There is a challenge to us as a Church and as I think as individuals.

In 2 Peter 3 verses 8-15 and verse 18 we read:

8But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **9**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.^[a]

11Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives **12**as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.^[b] That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. **13**But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

14So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. **15**Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation...

18But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

We see here God's perspective on time is different to ours. We measure time in seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years – but is that how we should measure it?

Verse 8 and 9 : **8**... With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **9**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Again, verse 15 "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation..."

So the question and the challenge for us is what are we doing in this time God has given us to win men and women, boys and girls for Him. Would that not be a better measure of time – souls won for God? Speeding His return by fulfilling His purposes for our lives?

Measure = Result = people saved. Expanding His Kingdom.

Not only that but we do not know God's timing so there is a challenge for us as to how we live our lives. Verse 10 - the Lord will come like a thief – so His coming will be unexpected, sudden so, verse 11 asks what kind of people ought we to be – people who live holy and godly lives. Making every effort (verse 14) to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him.

Our tithe, our giving, is not just of our financial resources although this is essential - but we can and should give of our time to God and to His work and to other people – the gift of time. We need to be diligent stewards in this as well as with our wealth.

Measure = Result = living right – our choice how we spend our days – rushing about no matter what or living pure. Holy, godly lives that are honouring to Him.

May we not also measure time by our growth? Time does not stop it moves forward and we too should be moving forward in our relationship with God. Peter exhorts the believers to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus to be wise and prepared. This means that we need to take time to stop and spend time with God – to be still in His presence and wait on Him. We should see a growing process of His sanctification in our lives if we take time to grow in Him.

I would say that in our business and hectic lives that we cram so much into (and I am speaking to myself more than anyone else at this point) we need to jealously guard our time with God. To make time for Him, prioritise time with Him. It should be possible. There is a time for everything after all. Is it not true that there is always enough time for the things we want to do?

Measure = Result = growth in our relationship with God.

Reflection – met mum last night and discussing my talk today. She mentioned to me an old hymn which contained the line something like this: ‘we have all eternity to celebrate our victories; but we only have this time now to win those victories.’

Conclusion

So, as we close we need to ask ourselves what are we doing with the time we have been given? How do we view time and how should we be making the most of it?

My time is His Time – not mine;

His Time is the Right Time – so I need to trust Him now with what I have, where I’m at; and

It’s Time for us to Act!

Time Challenge – how we measure time :

- (1) telling friends, family, neighbours, colleagues the Good News about Jesus
- (2) choosing to live right and live for Him each day
- (3) spending time with Him and growing in our relationship with Him.

Let’s pray:

Lord I pray that I would lay down my plans for your plans. Your time is the right time. May I be prepared to act in Your timing at Your direction and may I rise to the challenge to use the time You have given me for Your purposes. Not my time but Yours Lord.

Amen.