



A FRESH LOOK AT TIME

“Time and tide waits for no man.” Time is no respecter of persons – it moves inexorably on. So what does it mean when the apostle Paul, in Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5, admonished the believers to “redeem the time”? The word “redeem” is a commercial term, which means “to buy back” or “to rescue from loss”. The Greek word (*kairos*) translated as “time” here is a fixed, definite period or season, which carries the idea of “opportunity”. Thus, the emphasis here is to rescue from loss the time that is available to us. In other words, “seize every opportunity” to make good use of time and not let it go to waste.

Admittedly, we live in a time where people are so caught up with a leisure lifestyle. People love to ask the question: “What is your favourite pastime?” Well, there is nothing wrong to engage in some sort of productive and edifying pastime. But at times it has become a trap and a snare, as what is supposed to be a pastime has become something that takes up most of their time! So instead of having a pastime, many end up having wasted time. Believing that they have all the time in the world, they go about spending it on their vanities. It is not uncommon to see some people hanging around their favourite coffee shop for hours, sipping their coffee and “killing time”. The same applies to those who love to hang around fast food chains and shopping malls.

Indeed, if we look around, we will see much of people’s time being wasted on their vanities and tied down to some unnecessary, unfruitful activities, or worse still, engaged in worldliness and sin. Hence the need to take heed of Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 5:15-17: “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”

This article will challenge us to take “a fresh look at time”. In the New Testament, there are two Greek words used which are translated as “time”. They are “*chronos*” and “*kairos*”. “*Chronos*” denotes time as a succession of moments. It can be time past, present, or future. “*Chronos*” is linear time, i.e. the continuous succession of seconds, minutes and hours. (It is the word from which the English words “chronicle” and “chronology” are derived.) “*Kairos*”, however, refers to a fixed and designated occasion for a specific action. It is the specifically given season for an event. “*Kairos*” denotes time as

a God-given opportunity, i.e. the opportune time within the framework of “*chronos*” time.

MEASUREMENT OF TIME

By Natural Rhythm of the Day

Looking back at the history of mankind, prior to the advent of the mechanical measurement of time (by the clock) and its forerunners like the sundial and the hourglass, life was lived according to the natural rhythm of the day. During the Creation week in Genesis 1, we read the recurring phrase, “And the evening and the morning”, which is followed by the first (v. 5), second (v. 8), third (v. 13), fourth (v. 19), fifth (v. 23), and sixth (v. 31) days respectively. Aside from being the Scriptural evidence for the six literal days of Creation, it also tells us how time is measured by affirming that a day is that span of time equivalent to the passage of an evening and a morning. Daytime and nighttime determine the day!

Interestingly, the Jews practise the dividing and measuring of time by night “watches” and “hours” of day. Nighttime is divided into four watches: first watch – “evening or eventide” (6-9 pm); second watch – “midnight” (9 pm – 12 am); third watch – “cockcrow” (12-3 am); and fourth watch – “morning” (3-6 am). The Lord Jesus, in describing His second coming to the disciples, distinctly referred to these 4 divisions of nighttime in Mark 13:35 – “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning”.

Likewise, daytime is divided into 4 quarters, identified according to its last hour: third hour (6-9 am); sixth hour (9 am - midday); ninth hour (12-3 pm) and twelfth hour (3-6 pm). We see a reference to this time arrangement in the parable of “the labourers in the vineyard” in Matthew 20:1-16, where a householder hired labourers “about the third

hour” (v. 3), “the sixth and ninth hour” (v. 5), and even “the eleventh hour” (v. 6). Then time was measured in generally large “blocks”, with the work ceasing at nightfall, which is affirmed by Jesus Himself: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). The Lord Jesus further gave an insight into these time divisions in John 11:9 when He answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.” Evidently, daytime is made up of 12 hours. And with another 12 hours for the night, it makes up a total of 24 hours in one day!

By Clock Time

With the advent of the clock and watch, time is measured in smaller units – firstly by dividing it into 24 hour-period time units, then into minutes, and then into seconds. With the clock measuring time in precise units, such an efficient measurement of time enables many people to manage their myriad activities and responsibilities according to a schedule. As a result, man has become more conscious of how and on what he spends his time. This has affected man’s attitude towards time, which in turn has brought about different perspectives and views on time.

WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE OF TIME

The following are three commonly observed worldly, self-centred and self-indulgent views of time, which reflect the godless perspective of man.

Firstly, one common attitude towards time is expressed in the cliché, “time is money”. It views time as an economic entity which exists to allow us to earn money. This is often the slogan or motto of the financially-

driven, profit-oriented individuals and business entities. Secondly, many people feel that time belongs to them personally; they do not have to give an account of how they use time. This attitude makes them feel that they are in charge or in control of time and that they have all the right as to how they would spend or misspend time. Time is thus spent according to their whims and fancies. Thirdly, most people view time as in the present only. The past has no bearing, and neither has the future, as long as they are enjoying the present. This attitude is very prevalent in our time, where people live their lives as if there is no tomorrow and without eternity in view. This “care-free” attitude towards time is best portrayed in the “Eat, drink and be merry” philosophy of many people today.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF TIME

In contrast to the secular and worldly perspective of time, the Christian attitude towards time should reflect the understanding that it is a gift from God. God the Almighty Creator is the source and giver of life. As the length of our days is in His hands, realize then that time is a gift from God. Someone has said, “Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That’s why it is called the present!” Since we begin and end each day with no promise of another, each day we are given is a gift. Thus, we ought to thank the Lord for each and every new day!

Time is something that is entrusted to us by God. True, we may work hard to expand the opportunities at hand and extend the impact of our endeavours done in a given time, but ultimately the number of our days is determined by God. Every day is given to us as a grant or trust. As recipients of time, we are therefore stewards of God’s gift.

RIGHTFUL RESPONSE TO GOD-GIVEN TIME

Viewing time as God's gift brings about far-reaching implications in our life. It brings about an acute awareness that we are not in control of our time – we are simply allowed to use it. It instils in us humility before God; being constantly reminded that He is the Creator and we His creation, we realise that without Him we can do nothing. It also drives home the understanding that we ought to spend our time on things that please God.

With this Biblical understanding and view of time, how should our response be? Firstly, we are to treasure time, not because it is gold or money, but because it is God's precious gift. Time is thereby too precious to be wasted on worldly and sinful activities, things that have no eternal value, or anything that does not glorify God.

Secondly, we must make good use of time on things that exalt and glorify His Name. Among other things, we ought to spend regular time in prayer and reading / studying God's Word, participate actively in church activities (like prayer meetings, fellowship gatherings and Bible studies), and serve the

Lord with gladness in whatever capacity God has appointed us.

Last but not least, we are to accept time with a grateful and thankful heart. Every moment of our life is something sent from God – be it distressing or delightful, it is something that God has designed and purposed for us. As Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:14, "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him." On the same note, the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

CONCLUSION

With this God-centred and God-honouring perspective of time, may we learn to value the time that God has given us, by living our lives and spending our time only on things pleasing and glorifying unto God. As Paul puts it, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."



“Place a high value upon your time, be more careful of not losing it than you would of losing your money. Do not let worthless recreations, idle talk, unprofitable company, or sleep rob you of your precious time. Be more careful to escape that person, action or course of life that would rob you of your time than you would be to escape thieves and robbers.”

- Richard Baxter -