



Eternity is a Timezone

Message by Pastor Andrew Kulasingham 11th October 2020

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Time gives context and context determines action. Time gives context. You look at the time and it tells you which part of the morning, afternoon or evening it is. Once time has given you context, you decide what appropriate action you should take. It's time to wake up, time to go to work, etc. If its midnight on 31st December people act differently. They might gather in groups and countdown the seconds to usher in the new year. Imagine doing that on a normal day at midnight. That would be an inappropriate action. So, time gives context and knowing the time and context enables you to decide an appropriate action.

Ignorance of time and seasons can have dangerous consequences. The prophet Hosea warned the people of God that they would be "destroyed for lack of knowledge". In that context it was knowledge of the times and seasons they were living in. The Chronicler speaks of the sons of Issachar who had extraordinary ability to know the times and seasons they were in and the appropriate actions to take.

1 Chronicles 12:32 (NKJV) The sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command

Note the connection between understanding the times and knowing what to do. Time gives context and context determines the appropriate action to take. In this situation, Israel was in the midst of transitioning from the House of Saul to the House of David. Of course it was a no brainer as David had won the war and Saul was now dead. So we see in the chapter a whole list of tribes that were shifting their allegiance to David. The passage however highlights the sons of Issachar, as they were not just doing something because it was prudent, but they did it because they discerned it was a God thing to do. They realised that they were in a season of time which was significant in God's time clock and "knew what Israel should do". They recognised the significance of the moment in Israel's history. And it was significant. The act of ordaining David as King would have eternal consequences. Israel was about to enter into its greatest hour as a nation and in the context of God's eternal plan, mankind was one step closer to the coming of the messiah, Jesus the son of David.

I want to take you to Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 to give you an understanding of how Biblical writers viewed time. There were three concepts of time which this passage captures. In verse one we see two of the concepts mentioned.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NKJV) to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven

Here the word translated season is the Hebrew word *zemân* which means a fixed time. The word translated time in the verse one is the word *‘êṭ* which means now time. So the author is saying that everything under heaven has a “fixed time” but there is also a “now time” where purposeful things are actioned. He then goes on from verses two to eight to give a list of things that occur in its “fixed time”.

Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 (NKJV) A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck 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; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw 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 of war, And a time of peace.

After giving a list of examples of *zemân* time, he goes on to say in verse nine and ten how futile this *zemân* fixed time is.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-10 (NKJV) What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.

If that’s all life is about, how does that profit anyone. Just moving from one calendar event to the next. How many have woken up one morning and asked themselves this very question – what’s the point of all this? The sooner we ask ourselves this question the sooner we will get out of the futility of merely existing. Futility however, ceases when one is faced with the truth of verse eleven.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NKJV) He has made everything beautiful in its time (‘êṭ). Also he has put eternity (‘olam) in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

In verse eleven, the preacher in Ecclesiastes introduces us to another concept of time. The Hebrew word *‘olam* which is translated eternity. In the midst of the ever constant happenings of “fixed time”, we come to “now times” where things become beautiful. But the author wants us to know that beyond the “*zemân* fixed time” and the “*‘êṭ* now time” there exists another time concept. He called it *‘olam* or eternity. He links *‘olam* time with the work that God does “from the beginning to end”. The NASB suggests another possible reading in its footnote.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NASB alternate reading) He has also set eternity in their heart, without which man will not find out the work which god has done from the beginning even to the end.

The passage suggests that God has put another time clock in our hearts – eternity, “without which” we will continue to live in human concepts of time and not discern or be aware of God’s purposeful acts within times and seasons.

Let us take a closer look at the three concepts of time found in this chapter of Ecclesiastes.

Three Biblical concepts of time

zemân - a fixed time

The Hebrew word *zemân* corresponds to the Greek word *chronos* which most of us are more familiar with. It is where we derive our English word chronology from. *Chronos* is linear and sequential. We monitor *chronos* with calendars and clocks. You can’t control *chronos*, it ticks on by. Ignorance of times and seasons makes you a casualty of *chronos*.

'êṭ - a now time

The Hebrew word *êṭ* corresponds to the Greek word *kairos*, which suggests a time where one acts intentionally on *chronos* time with a purpose. *Kairos* is the moment in time which is especially favourable to act on something for an undertaking. *Kairos* moments come to those who are able to discern opportune moments and seize on them. For a believer, *Kairos* is more than opportunistic moments or favourable moments. *Kairos* times are “a now moment in time” where human action aligns with Divine intervention to produce the miraculous.

'olam - a series of times

The third concept of time in Biblical understanding is the word '*olam*. Because it is translated as eternity it is not commonly thought of as time. The Greek equivalent in the New Testament is *iaon* which is translated ages in the English versions of the Bible. '*olam* or eternity is not the cessation of time. It means endless time - an ongoing of time which is invisible and incomprehensible to man. It's the linking of an unlimited series of divine *kairos* moments that are working towards the unfolding of God's eternal salvation plan.

Ecclesiastes tells us that without being aware of the existence of this eternal time clock, we will be oblivious of God's plans and His workings. No one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. No wonder the *chronos* life is meaningless and futile. Our lives are shallow and insignificant until we realise that we can live purposeful lives if we have eternity in our hearts.

Example of these three time zones

The story of the healing of the lame man in John chapter five shows us the three time zones in display through the actions of the people in the story. Keep in mind what I said at the start - time gives context and context determines action. Read John 5:1-7 to get the background of this story. In Bethesda there was a pool famous for an annual event. John describes it this way.

John 5:3-4 (NKJV) in these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

Notice the phrase “at a certain time”. That's a fixed time. The sick were at the mercy of *chronos* time. Only one of them each year would be healed if they were lucky enough to be the first to enter the pool when the stirring occurred. In the midst of *chronos* time, while this great multitude of sick people were waiting for the winning lottery ticket, Divine *kairos* was about to happen.

John 5:6 (NKJV) when Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, he said to him, “do you want to be made well?”

Jesus knew he had stepped into a *kairos* moment - a moment in time for Divine intervention. We might think that the question Jesus asked the man was an odd one. Who in their right mind wouldn't want to be healed? The reality is that this man had been in this condition for 38 years. We are not told for how long he was lying near the pool but we know it has been a long time. Day in day out he hoped his time would come. But when days turn to months and months to years, you see the futility of your actions. *Chronos* can beat hope out of you. We see that in this man's reply.

John 5:7 (NKJV) The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.”

The man had stopped entertaining any hope of being healed. What was the point. Waiting for a once a year occurrence and when it did come his condition never ever would allow him to be the first to step into the pool. Time, *chronos* time, had beaten out every ounce of hope left in the man. So Jesus asks him this question to stimulate hope again. You have a choice. You are now faced with a moment in your life which will change your very destiny. How will you respond?

John 5:8 (NKJV) Jesus said to him, "rise, take up your bed and walk."

This was now the man's *kairos* moment. His moment in time where his action would determine his destiny. If he chose to ignore the moment, he would be lame for the rest of his life. He recognised his moment and responds in faith.

John 5:9 (NKJV) And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

One would expect the entire crowd would be ecstatic at the sight of a phenomenal healing like that. Instead the Jewish leaders were infuriated.

John 5:16-17 (NKJV) for this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill him, because he had done these things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "my Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

The problem with the Jews was that they had disconnected the sabbath day which was in "*chronos* time" from "eternity time". They saw the Sabbath as a day of the week that work must cease. Jesus answer would not have made sense to them for this very reason. God was working on the Sabbath? How can God who ceased from work and instituted the Sabbath be working. What they could not comprehend was that the work that must cease is the temporal work done in *chronos* time. The work God was continuing to do was the ongoing work from beginning to end, to redeem and restore mankind. That work never ceases. That work is in the eternity timezone and continues until "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ".

Eternity is a Divine timezone

This is the shift that needs to occur in all of us if we want to see transformation occur in and around us. Jesus had this mindset that God was always working. In other words, God was operating in another timezone. He was on an eternal time clock. Jesus had eternity in his heart. He never subjected himself to the futility of *zemân/chronos* time. Everyday he carried eternity in his heart. God was always working. Everyday, every minute – so he looked for divine *kairos* moments to engage with people to see God encounters take place in their lives.

These divine encounters kept on happening everywhere Jesus went. His ability to remain in the eternity timezone ensured that the unlimited series of divine *kairos* moments picked up moment which resulted in transformation of multitudes in villages and cities.

John 6:2 (NKJV) then a great multitude followed him, because they saw his signs which he performed on those who were diseased.

Every divine encounter during *kairos* moments had a domino effect when seen with eternity in mind. Eternity is a divine time zone. It is a series of divine *kairos* moments that trigger continuous events that bring about transformation. Eternity creates momentum for supernatural transformation. Understanding this is crucial in our daily Christian lives. When we live our lives everyday looking out for divine *kairos* moments, knowing that every little action in partnership with the Holy Spirit creates momentum towards eternal transformation.

Your concept of time will give you the context you are living in. Your context will determine your choices and action. If you function in temporal (chronos) time, your actions will have temporal effect. If you function with eternity in mind, your divine kairos moments will trigger a series of continuous events that will lead to transformation of your family, friends, town, city, nations and have generational consequences. God is always working. The time to work is now!