

## God's Time Is Now!

Last week we looked at signs of the endtimes that Jesus described in the *Gospel of Matthew*. The signs included wars, famines, earthquakes, the persecution of Christians, the increase of wickedness, people falling away from their faith, love growing cold and the rise of false prophets. These calamities, Jesus said, would signify that the endtimes were at hand when the Son of Man would return and take all those who had placed their faith in him to heaven, while the rest of mankind would face the consequences of unforgiven sin: death and eternal separation from God. Jesus made it clear to his disciples that he was not letting them know about these signs so that they could have the "inside scoop" as to when to expect the end. When they asked him when the endtimes would come, he said, "no one knows about that day or hour--not even the angels in heaven nor the son, but only the Father. Now it's a pretty good bet that if Jesus didn't know when the end was coming, you and I aren't going to figure it out.

The next thing Jesus pointed out was that all the signs he had described had either already been given or were being given even as he spoke. "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." Therefore he warned them to make themselves ready because he could return at any time. "Learn from the fig tree," he said. "As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out--you know that summer is near--right around the corner." "...keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come...the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." The signs have been given and the time is near, so keep yourself on "condition red alert" because the endtimes are now and Jesus is at the door. I think this helps us understand why so much of the Bible is written in the present tense. The Old Testament prophets used the present or even the past tense to describe future events as if they had already taken place. Describing the birth of the Messiah, which lay over seven-hundred years in the future, Isaiah wrote, "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned." "For unto us a child is born, a Son is given." Describing Jesus' crucifixion, he wrote, "he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities." These things wouldn't take place for seven and a half centuries yet Isaiah describes them as if they had already happened, because for Isaiah the future was a done deal, an accomplished reality. God has said it will be so and so it will be for God knows all things and God cannot lie. And since we cannot change the past and God will take care of the future, what we need to focus on is the present. God's time is now! After all, that's the meaning of his name: "Yahweh" means "I am. Not "I will be," but, "I am." By calling himself "I am," God not only affirms his existence but defines his relationship with us in terms of the present moment.

These things are difficult for us to understand, because we exist in time and space, while God is outside them both. He created the universe but He is not *contained* by the universe. He created matter and energy but He is not subject to the laws of thermodynamics as we are. He created time, but He is not governed by days and seasons and years as we are. When we say that God is omnipotent it means that He rules over all visible powers and when we say that He is eternal we mean that He rules over time and eternity. But the same omnipotent God has chosen to deal with us in time and space, and not in the future, but in the here and now. There is a wonderful word in the Greek language that appears several times in the *New Testament* and describes how God deals with us in the here and now. The word is ΚΑΙΡΟΣ (Kairos). ΚΑΙΡΟΣ MEANS “an opportune time,” “a season of the Lord’s favor.” ΚΑΙΡΟΣ living is living in a blessed ongoing season of the Lord’s favor. I think of it as “now living” and now living can bring great blessings to our lives.

First of all, “now” living helps us see that the kingdom of God is not only a future kingdom that we enter when we leave this world; it’s a kingdom we already entered when we were baptized. We live in the kingdom of God right now. Later by sight, but now by faith. And that is why the time we live in is ΚΑΙΡΟΣ-- the *present* fruitful season of the Lord. Listen to how Paul describes the coming of the kingdom of God in the *Book of Romans*: “creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. For all creation suffers and groans in pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” God has called us to be midwives to oversee the birthing of a new creation! As John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed: “the kingdom of God is at hand! “By faith we live in the kingdom of God right now!

The second thing now living helps us to do is to get rid of anxiety-- that nagging worry about how things are going to turn out. In grammatical terms, anxiety draws its power over us from what is called the “future conditional: the “what ifs” that can come to dominate our thoughts and emotions. What if I should lose my job? What if I get the virus? What if the economy crashes? What if? What if? What if? “What ifs” can turn our lives into waiting for the other shoe to drop. It is one of the devil’s favorite ways to chip away at our faith because it tempts us to doubt God’s providential love for us. “I know you’ve always taken care of me in the past, God, but what about this present situation?” When you start thinking this way, I suggest that you try to remember the problems that you were dealing with ten years ago. Chances are you can’t even come up with one of them. God handled them then and if you put yourself in His hands He will handle the ones you have now. A sign my wife keeps on her desk says: “I don’t know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future.” After all is said and done, the future is nothing other than a succession of nows and God is God of all the nows. Jesus said: “...do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.

The pagans run after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” Paul wrote to the Philippians, “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” God doesn’t always give us what we pray for: He gives us what we need. If our problem is anxiety--and that’s a pretty good word for it--what we need is peace, and God promises peace to all those who place their faith in His Son.

Third, now living helps reduce pain and suffering. C. S. Lewis once said that it is amazing how much suffering we can bear if we keep our minds focused on the present and resist the temptation to worry about the future. And having been an infantry soldier who fought in the trenches during the First World War, Lewis knew something about pain and suffering. One of Satan’s favorite tricks, he said, is to convince us that we can alleviate our present suffering by wondering how long it’s going to continue, when the very opposite is true. The pain of the present moment is usually bearable; it’s the prospect of its continuing that is unbearable. Martyrs who have been imprisoned and tortured for their faith say that as painful as the torturing was, the expectation of it continuing was far worse.

Fourth, now living keeps us spiritually “on our toes” and prepared for the Lord’s return. When we live in **ΚΑΙΡΟΣ**, God’s grace for today, we are always prepared and eager for Christ’s return. The authors of the New Testament were filled with eager anticipation. You can sense it powerfully in Paul’s and Peter’s and John’s letters: they literally expected the Lord to return at any moment, and they lived that way. It enabled them--as it can enable us--to pray with all our hearts the last and best prayer in the whole Bible; “come, Lord Jesus.”

Finally, now living empowers us for witness. As we shed the terrible weight of the future conditional, of “what if?” Living, our anxiety dissipates and we learn to rejoice in the present assurance of God’s grace which comes to us *now* and will come to us now when “now” is later. Perhaps no other dimension of “now” living is so important as this, for as we learn to trust God to give us the words and actions to witness to his great love for us, our faith is strengthened and new faith is created in the hearts and minds of those to whom we witness. By telling others about the joys of living in God’s present grace, we answer His call to be salt and light in this world. When you boil it all down, “now” living is really just a matter of living in faith. It is living with the solid knowledge that just as surely as the sun comes up and the sun goes down, God is with us all the day long. And when it comes to our faith life, now is all that matters.

Amen.