

Time of your life

INTRODUCTION

“What time do you call this?”

Perhaps these words were said to you in your younger years. You've come home from having the time of your life only to find Mum or Dad is waiting as you come in and presenting you with this question, as you are called to account for your use of time.

We may have shrugged that question off then but as we get older or when faced with a crisis what we do with our time becomes more pressing.

Psalm 90 says teach us so to number our days so we may apply our hearts to wisdom. The time of our life is limited.

Our reading from 1 Peter 4 presents us with some serious questions about what are we doing with the time of our life?

TIME TO DO AWAY WITH SIN (V1-2)

The fact that our reading starts with speaking about suffering points to the seriousness of Peter's appeal. The believers attitude to sin should be same as that of Jesus, patience endurance in suffering for doing good.

That much is clear Peter's next statement is a bit harder to work out. “for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin”

The point seems to be, having suffered for doing good, why would you now sin which makes your suffering pointless? You've passed the test, why fail now? It would be like an athlete going through all the pain necessary to qualify for the Olympic games and then before the event stop training and go back to old ways. The sweat and effort would have been in vain.

Likewise, if you have suffered for Jesus as Lord then you will want to live with him as Lord and not turn back.

Our experience may be different to theirs, we may not be about to face the full force of Roman persecution, but it is when we go through challenges and trial because of our faith that we are strengthened in discipleship, we've come this far so keep going.

This brings to what I see as the heart of this passage, if we are determined to have the same attitude as that of Christ, to be like Jesus then we will seek to live the rest of our life no longer following human desires but the will of God.

The language here is pretty serious. It literally is “the rest of your time in the flesh”, it's a kind of arresting of “til death us part” kind of statement. It's a question of what are you going to do with the remaining time of your life?

Peter will go to say for the rest of your time stop wasting time in verse 3 to 6, and spend your time doing God's will in verse 7-11, giving us a two point sermon

Before we go on we should take some time to ask do we want to live the rest of our lives following the will of God? It is not only Peter who encourages us to do this. Paul at the end of his theological argument in Romans says that as living sacrifices “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God.”

To live out God's will is what God's word calls us to but do we think enough about spending our time doing it? This is the question at the heart of this passage.

What time do you call this?

As followers of Jesus it's time to do God's will.

WASTED TIME (3-6)

Peter tells his readers that as they consider their remaining time, they have wasted enough time already. He goes on to list a pretty impressive carousing lifestyle all derived from following human desires.

It is hard to know if this is how his readers used to live all the time, it sounds a bit exhausting, but that is not Peter's point. Rather this is not how they are to live now, any part of it. There is to be a total break with that way of living.

Many have found during the changes we have seen in our society that some of the ways they use to live were wasted time and have found a better use for their time, investing in family and useful pursuits. The test will be when the restrictions end and with them the pull of the old way of life with its time pressures and practices. "Come on" friends will say let's get back to really living.

That is the kind of situation that Peter is thinking of but not something caused by a virus but a vital change of living, in following Jesus as Lord. Peter says despite the appeals do not follow your old ways, despite the voices saying come on. Let what has happened be truly life changing.

Peter's reasoning is deadly serious. Do not waste your time for a time will come when we will have to give an account to "him who stands ready to judge the living and dead."

This is a phrase that we say week by week in our creed but do we really think about how serious this is? Can we think of anyone to whom these categories of living or dead does not apply? Time may mean we move from one to the other but regardless we will all have to face Jesus and give an account of our time. Judgement time is coming for us all. Christians may face it with hope because Jesus died to bring us to God, but it is still a sobering thought.

This helps us understand the very tricky verse 6. Christians may have been mocked for believing in the resurrection and living the way they did as they died like everyone else. Peter is saying that those heard the gospel when they were alive and responded although having died now live in the Spirit, in God's kingdom. Despite suffering death, the universal judgement on sin, their faithful life following Jesus will be vindicated. It is worth living following God's will.

So, where have you wasted time on things not of God's will?

What will you do with the rest of your earthly time?

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES (7-11)

Peter then gives his answer to "What time do you call this?" This is the end time, the end of all things is near. Back in Chapter 1 Peter said that the raising of Jesus in glory is these last times (1:20). It is appropriate on this Sunday after Ascension to be reminded that with Jesus having taken his place at the right hand of God all that remains in God's purposes is for Jesus to return and bring God's kingdom in. It is another sobering thought in an already serious passage.

It is not a surprise, then, that Peter says that rather than dissipation there is to be discipline, not drunkenness but sobriety, clear minded and self controlled so that we can pray as we ought.

If we are not disciplined we will not pray as we ought, for our time will manage us rather than the other way round.

Understanding what time it is will shape our prayers. Remembering Jesus return is imminent will lead us to pray with confidence for God's kingdom to come and for God's will (that idea again) to be done on earth and in our lives.

We then have a list of what living a life following God's will looks like and the kind of life we should spend time praying for.

Above all love –

Firstly there is to be constant love or deep love between believers. A love that stretches the giver but also some flexibility for the receiver, for love covers a multitude of sins. I have enjoyed hearing great stories of love being shown in these time, practical visits, meals delivered, this is to live following God's will. And when we do this it is not just that sins are covered there is less room for them. A church that is wracked by gossip and anger had no way to cover sin, but when love starts its healing work, so much sin loses its oxygen and dies away. I have seen this happen in a church and it is beautiful thing, and God's will is being done.

But it doesn't just happen, it takes effort and discipline and prayer.

Hospitality

In a similar way we are to practice hospitality. Hospitality was at the heart of the life of the early church with gatherings in family homes. This may be hard to put into practice in these times of social distancing but look to your heart. Is there generosity and a willingness to share what God has given you? Or is there a grumbling, murmuring and frankly selfishness.

God's gifts

This idea of sharing the good we have is also clear as Peter encourages us to serve each other with the gifts that God has first given us.

In school there are often gifted classes, and we may have wanted to be in those classes. But this passage tells that we are all gifted by the God who graciously gives all manner of manifold gifts. But they are not given to build up our pride but to serve those alongside. Whatever our gift is we use it to serve.

Peter goes on to say that if it is a speaking gift it should be as speaking the word of God, a sobering thought for us preachers, and if service in the power of God. Both are important to serve God's people and bring glory to God.

All of us are called to practice love and practice hospitality as we use our time for God's will but using our gifts is something personal and different for each of us.

So, to each of you listening what is your gift? Are you using it to serve others?

It's worth wondering do you pray for yourself and for your community that there will be growth in love, hospitality and using of gifts to serve each other to the glory of God.

What time do you call this? Time to serve.

CONCLUSION

Peter ends this section with a statement of praise. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. It's not clear if this said about God or Jesus, it seems most naturally here to be about Jesus.

So in word and deed, we as his people will bring glory to God through Jesus our Lord. How we spend our time bears witness to the God that we serve, that is God's will.

But just as importantly that is what we were made for. The Westminster Shorter Catechism taught that the chief end for humanity was to glorify God and enjoy him forever. To live out God's will is something truly human. All too often living the Christian life is seen as something that is a bit inhuman, denying who we truly are, wasting our time and our lives. This is a lie.

As we live looking for God's coming kingdom, pray, love, be generous and use our God given gifts to serve others we are truly living, what Jesus would have called life in abundance. It is a wonderful beautiful, precious thing, life changing, life sharing and life giving use of our time..

What time do you call this?

Its time to truly live and as we do so we will see that we are having the time of our lives glorifying God in all things through our Lord Jesus Christ.