

Living the Easter Life: Time

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

James 4:13-17

*Jesus is Lord over every moment
we've been given.*

A sermon preached by
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Back in the 1960's the U. S. Senate held hearings on the future of technology. One of the findings of the scientists was that in the next twenty years, there would be so many time-saving innovations that by the turn of the century, people would be working shorter hours, enjoying more leisure time, and retiring sooner. The challenge of the future, they said, would be how to use all the time we had saved with technology.

It didn't quite work out that way, did it? Now, in the 21st century, our primary challenge is not what to do with all our excess time.¹

In the old days, success was measured by the leisure of your life. Long vacations, short work hours, early retirement—that was the mark of prosperity. Now, apparently, having no life is the life to have. In February of this year, *Forbes* magazine, the standard of success, published an article entitled, "Having No Life Is The New Aspirational Lifestyle." Psychologists did analyses of social media and advertising, as well as conducted experiments with humans, and they found that the more overworked and busy a person is, the higher status that person achieves.

The researchers concluded that our new "conspicuous consumption" is no longer about scarce things like jewelry or money or cars. Instead, it's about saying, "'I am the scarce resource, and therefore I am valuable'... Displaying one's busyness at work and lack of leisure time operates as a visible signal of status in the eyes of others."²

Time is certainly one of our most valuable resources, and it's a scarce commodity. Often time is more scarce than money. It's much easier to give a donation to a cause than to actually volunteer our time. If you show up and give your time to something—like church!—that must mean you really care about it.

And nothing is more uncertain than our time. We never know what the day will bring. We could start the day well, then the doctor says you have cancer. A car accident, a fire, a tornado can change your life in the blink of an eye.

This reality has not changed through the ages, even with technology. The Letter of James says: *“Pay attention, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such-and-such a town. We will stay there a year, buying and selling, and making a profit.’ You don’t really know about tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for only a short while before it vanishes.”*³ You never know what the day will bring.

Colman Mockler is considered today as the model of an effective CEO. A Harvard Business School graduate with an MBA, he had gone to work for Gillette Corporation and steadily worked his way up the ladder to the top. Under his leadership, Gillette became a dominant force in its market. The stock increased in value 50-fold. Mockler made millions and had just announced that he was going to retire.

As a crowning achievement, Forbes magazine was featuring Colman Mockler on the cover of the February 1991 issue, celebrating his success with Gillette. On January 25, they delivered him an advance copy. The rest of the executives on the top floor applauded Colman as he accepted the magazine and walked confidently back to his office. It was a good day.

With the applause still sounding in the hall, Colman Mockler closed his office door. Then he clutched at his chest, and crumpled to the floor. Within moments he was dead of a massive heart attack. They found him still clutching the Forbes magazine that featured him on the cover.⁴

Time is scarce. Time is short. Time is uncertain. That produces anxiety, worry, even fear. How are we supposed to deal with that reality? We need help. Maybe Jesus can help. Maybe the risen Lord, who is Lord over everything, can be Lord over our time, over every moment we’ve been given. How would that look?

Jesus can help us **PRIORITIZE OUR TIME**. It’s not that we don’t have enough time. We have all the time in the world. Nobody has more time (or less time) than us. We all get 24/7/365. It’s how we use the time we have that is the key to the Easter Life. The wise

writer of Ecclesiastes said, “*There’s a season for everything, and a time for every matter under the heavens.*”⁵ There’s plenty of time for every important thing; the trick is learning how to fit it all in.

I saw Dr. Stephen Covey speak one time and do a remarkable illustration of priorities. You take a container that represents your time. It is half filled with beans (actually Covey used rocks), because half of what we spend our time doing doesn’t amount to a hill of beans. Add to all these little things the medium-sized tasks and goals of our lives, then try to stuff in the big things—the really important things like family, God, church, job, friends—and you find that everything will not fit in the container.⁶ No way you can fit all those things in the allotted time in your life.

But try a different approach. In another container, put the big things in first. Then place the medium-sized items on top of the big things. Then you can take all of the beans and pour them into the container which is already seemingly filled with priority items, and guess what? It all fits!

The point is clear. If you organize your life priorities first, all of the necessary things will get done, and what doesn’t get done was probably not worth beans anyway.

In order to organize your life around your priorities, you have to figure out what your priorities are. In other words, prioritize around your mission. What is your personal mission in life? Have you ever thought about that? What are the two or three things in your life that are of absolute importance? God? Family? Career? Money? A couple of weeks ago, we mentioned a verse that might be a Scriptural mission for our lives: “*Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.*”⁷ Or you could just go with what Jesus said was first: “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is*

greater than these.”⁸ Once you figure out what is really important, what your mission is, you can organize your life around those priorities.

Then you can learn to **MANAGE YOUR TIME WELL**. This takes some learning, some principles, maybe even some study. But it’s not rocket science. It’s mainly common sense applied with consistency and discipline over a long period of time. Eventually good time management can become second nature.

Unfortunately, most of the time we live under “the tyranny of the urgent.”⁹ We spend our time dealing with the urgent demands of our lives, reacting to external events, stomping out fires, if you will, and we never get to the priority stuff. Again, I will refer back to Stephen Covey, who invites us to look at the activities of life falling into four quadrants along the scale of urgent and important. Some activities are urgent and important: crises, pressing problems, deadline-driven projects. These important and urgent things necessarily require attention.

However, we can understand that many of the urgent intrusions on our time are not really all that important. That’s quadrant three in Covey’s scheme: urgent but not important. These are things like interruptions, some phone calls, email, some meetings, and some things that you like to do, but they’re really not all that important. The key to managing time well is to reduce the time you spend in quadrant three, because it takes your energy and doesn’t really produce anything worthwhile.

Some things are neither important nor urgent—lots of email, social media, paperwork. I’m not going to spend time talking about them because you shouldn’t waste time fooling with them.

The most productive quadrant of time in your life is quadrant two—those things that are important, but not urgent. Most of the things that are really important do not need to be done today. They can wait until tomorrow, or so we think. But if we let them wait too long, we find that we are weary, fatigued, depressed, and ineffective in our daily

tasks. These are things like prayer and devotional time, taking care of our health, building relationships with people, planning ahead, and enjoying true recreational activity. These are the kinds of activities that build our life up. The more time we can spend in quadrant two, the healthier we will be physically, emotionally, and spiritually.¹⁰

Prioritizing our time and managing it well can put Jesus in the driver's seat. But the most important thing we can do to let Jesus be Lord over our time is to **KEEP AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE**. Our time on earth is short and uncertain. Our time with God is forever and sure. Whatever we do with our time here on earth is preparation for an eternal life yet to come. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.*"¹¹ Whatever afflictions or tragedies come our way here on earth, they are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in heaven.

However crazy busy or hectic our time can be, we need to maintain that eternal perspective. Jesus *is* the Lord over time. He is the One whom God exalted through the resurrection, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of the Father. Jesus wants the very best for us, and putting every aspect of our lives under his dominion will bring us life in all its abundance for all eternity.

In a sense, Jesus was fortunate to know exactly when, where and how he was going to die. He knew his time was short, and there was no uncertainty about it. So on the night before he died, he gathered his closest disciples together for a last Passover meal. He told them that whenever they gathered together to eat a meal to remember him. When we gather around the Lord's Table today or any time, we remember the Jesus who is Lord over time.

We remember the **past**, as we commemorate his Last Supper and recall what he did for us on the cross and in his resurrection. This is the meal of our salvation.

We celebrate the **present**, because Jesus is here in this sacrament. When we eat this bread and drink this juice, we believe that Christ is present in the elements in a spiritual way, communicating to us his unconditional love. This is the meal of grace.

When we gather around the Table, we anticipate the **future**, because this meal is a “foretaste of glory divine,” a preliminary for the main event, the opening act for the big show, which is the Messiah’s banquet in heaven, where every redeemed sinner will feast around the Table of Jesus. So this is the meal of joy.

Come to this Table today. Remember the past; celebrate the present; anticipate the future. Time is scarce and short and uncertain. God is not; God is abundant and sure and steadfast. Jesus can be Lord of our time, to help us prioritize and manage the days we have on earth, to help us keep an eternal perspective in view. This is real success. This is living the Easter life.

¹ John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 82.

² Michael Blanding, "Having No Life Is the New Aspirational Lifestyle," *Forbes* (2-20-17)

³ James 4:13-14.

⁴ Mike Fleischmann, "Your Most Precious Resource," Mike Fleischmann blog (10-3-16) <http://www.mikefleischmann.net/?p=2594>.

⁵ Ecclesiastes 3:1.

⁶ In the worship service, I used dried pinto beans for the small items, assorted wooden blocks for the medium sized items, and mini-basketballs to represent the big priorities.

⁷ Romans 12:2.

⁸ Mark 12:30-31.

⁹ Charles E. Hummel, “The Tyranny of the Urgent,” (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1967).

¹⁰ Stephen Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 151ff.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 4:17.