

“Living in the Middle”
John 20:19-31; Revelation 1:4-8

- 19** On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”
- 20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.
- 21** Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”
- 22** And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.
- 23** If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”
- 24** Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.
- 25** So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”
- 26** A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”
- 27** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”
- 28** Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”
- 29** Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”
- 30** Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.
- 31** But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Introduction (Phil Keaggy CD – “Time”) There’s a song that goes like this:

“Well He hasn't always been around/And He won't always be.
But He's on the move at this moment/Measuring life for you and me.
I fear we all submit to him/Existing anxiously,
And no one is able to turn him off/Except the Lord who holds the key.
When the Lord stops him, that'll be it/Too late for apologies.
Too late to forgive your brother/Too late to get on your knees.
When the Lord stops him, that'll be it/Too late to help the needy
And worst of all it's too late to turn/You must face eternity.

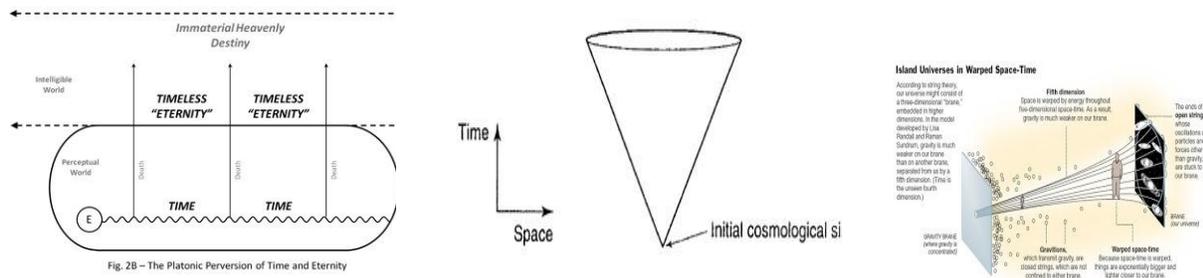
His name is Time and he's coming to an end/His name is Time where will you be my friend?”

I. Alpha ----- Omega (Revelation 1:8, also 21:6 and 22:13)

In Revelation chapter 1 and in chapters 21 and 22, the Risen Lord Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” Jesus was there at the beginning of time and he will (from our perspective) be there at the end of time. We live in the middle of time.

Jesus also said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24). And, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them” (John 3:36).

What is the relationship between time and eternity? I think I know what I think. But I made the mistake of google-ing the subject. Hundreds of charts and articles appeared. The vastly different theories and ideas came from scientists, religionists, and philosophers, theologians, and mathematicians from ancient to modern times.



The Platonic Perversion Initial Cosmological Singularity Warped Space Time

It is a mind boggling, mind bending concept. We human beings will continue to seek a definitive answer to the question. As for me, all I know is that we are here, now. I pretty sure this is true. And we are constrained by what we call time – past, present, and anticipated future. I remember yesterday; I’m experiencing the now; and I anticipate, even sure that in 10 minutes of our Time, I will be here preaching about God’s Word.

The apostle John is writing to seven of his churches (in present day western Turkey) to encourage them in the midst of troubles and persecution. He affirms for them that all of time, all of history, their very lives are in God’s hands. They need not fear that something could happen to them apart from God’s plan. Jesus is “Alpha and Omega, the One who is, and who was, and who is to come.”

While President Obama was in Cuba doing “the wave” at a baseball game, it would be easy to think that this small communist country is now free and open to the gospel of Christ. But while

President Obama was watching baseball, Pastor Mario Barroso was sitting in a police station. A Baptist pastor and blogger, he was thrown to the ground and handcuffed at his home (which serves as the church) and then detained just hours before Air Force One landed in Havana. A few hours after the president left Cuba, Pastor Barroso was set free and returned to his family. He was tired and weak, having fasted throughout his detention, but happy to be home.

This bold pastor is an outspoken advocate for religious freedom in his nation. He is seen as a threat to the government of Fidel and Raul Castro. The Cuban government decided to make sure there would be no “distractions” during President Obama’s visit, so Barroso and dozens of other dissidents were detained by police in the days leading up to the president’s arrival.

Our dear Pakistani members and families were deeply saddened by the terror attack in a Lahore park on Easter Sunday. We are glad to hear that members their families were not harmed. But a group of Christians traveled 800 miles from Karachi to Lahore to celebrate the resurrection with their brothers Peter sisters in Christ. That whole group is gone from time into eternity.

I cannot imagine going through such persecution for my faith in Jesus. But we must remember that we, too, live in the in-between times of the “Already-Not Yet,” between Alpha and Omega.

II. A Kingdom of Priests (Revelation 1:4-6, also 5:10 and 20:6)

So, what does God have in mind for us as we live and wait for the fulfillment of all of his promises?

On this Sunday, a week after Resurrection Day, Jesus stood right in the middle of this group of disciples, the men and the women. We read in John 20. He tells them, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you... If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

His first words? *Shalom (a)lechem!* “Peace be yours.” The Risen Lord’s initial gift is his peace – his love, his forgiveness, his favor, his blessing. His first words are not a command, but a gift; not a reprimand for their failure, no call for repentance, not even for faith but sheer grace.

It is with this peace that Jesus then says, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” In the Revelation, John writes to the churches, “Grace and peace to you... from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, he has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.”

“A kingdom of priests” who offer “forgiveness.” On this passage, John Calvin wrote, “The chief end in preaching the Gospel is that men (and women) may be reconciled to God; and this is done by the free pardon of sins.” We are charged with sharing this grace, this free gift to others in our lives that “God, having acquitted us from all sins, freely adopts us as His own.” And Jesus made us a Kingdom, Priests for his Father, forever.

Conclusion

One of the key biblical teachings of the Protestant Reformation is “the priesthood of all believers.” Over the next few weeks, the Easter season continues until May 15th (six Sundays this year). Will you use your “time” as a priest in the name of Jesus Christ? Praying for people in your family, neighborhood, at work or school? Letting them know that God’s love and forgiveness are available? Accepting any embarrassment, rejection, even persecution? Blessing nonetheless? Helping people in need?

Friends, all of us have our experience of time. With faith we look toward eternity. Living in the middle, the Risen Lord calls us to be people of the resurrection, people of hope, people who urge the world to look to Jesus for life now and life to come.

“Most people think he'll never stop/ He'll go on perpetually,
But old man time is running out/ And he'll cease eventually.
When the Lord stops him, that'll be it/ Too late for apologies.
Too late to forgive your brother/ Too late to get on your knees.
When the Lord stops him, that'll be it/ Too late to help the needy
And worst of all it's too late to turn/ You must face eternity.

His name is Time and he's coming to an end/ His name is Time where will you be my friend?”
Let us pray with and for one another.

Revelation 1:4-8

4 John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,

5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,

6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”