

God's Time - Man's Time : Whose Time?

by Valsan Thampu

The sermon explores the relationship between God's time and man's time, emphasizing the importance of recognizing God as the Creator and Giver of time in order to live in accordance with God's time.

Scripture: Psalm 90:4, Ecclesiastes 3:11, Matthew 6:34, Luke 4:18, Ephesians 5:16, Hebrews 12:1, James 4:14, 2 Peter 3:8

Topics: "Gods Timing", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Dr. Zac Varghese from London delves into the concepts of Chronos and Kairos time, emphasizing the importance of experiencing special moments that transcend ordinary time and lead to extraordinary encounters with God. He reflects on the speed of God's actions compared to human actions, highlighting the significance of living in the present moment and the transformative power of now. Mrs. Mini Krishnan shares insights on the immeasurability of time in Hindu mythology, illustrating how selfless work can reverse the effects of time and rejuvenate the spirit.

Transcript

Somewhere deep in the bowels of Hell, Satan convened his demons.

"How do we capture the souls of these humans?" he asked them for suggestions.

"O Father, of Lies, tell them there is no Heaven", said one. "With no prospect of eternal reward, they'll have no reason to live virtuous lives"

"O Master of Deceit, tell them there is no hell," said another. "Having no fear of final judgment, their human natures will lead them to ruin."

Then a senior demon rose and faced the assembly. "If you really want to capture the souls of humans, " he said, "Just tell them there is no hurry."

Now is the time. Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation.

The relationship between God's time and man's time is of utmost significance. If this were superfluous, God would not have drawn our attention to it Himself. A thousand years of man's time are like an evening of God's time. So, to know one is also to know the other.

We must not, to begin with, mistake the meaning of this paradoxical statement. It is not a statement on the insignificance of time in human zone, though it could seem so. Time matters to God! God is sovereign over time. All of time belongs to Him. Yet, He pays minute attention to every particle of time. In that sense, to begin with, a thousand years are 'like an evening gone'. To understand this, let us couch this idea in parabolic terms. A thousand Rupees to a billionaire is, perhaps, what a Rupee is to you and me. A billionaire may treat a Rupee with indifference. But God is not indifferent to the worth of even a small particle of time. He takes care of the contents of millennia as minutely and carefully as we would cherish the experiences of an evening, if our life were to shrink to its short span. God values time. Of that there is no doubt.

If thousand years are like an evening to God, the converse should also be true: an evening is like a thousand years. Years, whether counted in thousands or millions, imply a succession of evenings! In God's scheme of things all evening belong together and comprise the building blocks of the mansion of time. You cannot value years if you do not value days. This truth has decisive practical application. Whether or not we value our life can be seen clearly from our attitude to time. As a rule, those who devalue their own worth are sure to be lazy and poor at time management. They are unlikely to be punctual. As a result, they recognize opportunities only in retrospect, and are marked by grumbling rather than thanksgiving.

This offers a valuable insight into the Parable of Lost Sheep, which is fundamentally about seeing issues from a godly perspective. The proof of the caring character of the shepherd in the parable is that he attaches supreme significance to every sheep. None of the hundred should be lost. He would have clung to the remaining 99 sheep, abandoning the lost one to its lonely death, if he could not look beyond the given moment. The prospect of rejoicing with the whole flock, after retrieving the lost one, belongs to a zone beyond the given. In the mind of the caring shepherd, the moment of loss and the moment of restoration co-exist in faith. But for this, his conduct is irresponsible and reckless. Yet, his is the only outlook that makes sense, in particular with reference to the plight of the lost sheep. The world, in the wake of the materialistic worldview, measures everything quantitatively. Quantity belongs to today, here and now. As regards tomorrow, flocks of one or 99 are the same; for they are not yet, and are equally unreal! In course of time, one sheep could multiply to a hundred and the 99 could shrink to none, depending how things develop. Materialism makes sense on the scale of man's time. Its treasures, says Jesus, will not endure; they are vulnerable to rust, moth and thief [Matthew 6:19-24]

All of the time is God's. It is when we think we have expelled God from time that we develop the illusion that we are living in man's time. Whether or not we are willing to subject ourself to God's authority is seen best in terms of our willingness to function in terms of God's time, on which depends our "sent-ness"; for the harvest is the Lord's, not ours. Those who see the harvest as their own will not consent to be sent, but insist on everyone and everything coming to them! This is where religious authorities, including those bearing the label of Christianity, go grossly wrong! In the world, Jesus warned His disciples, men love to Lord over others. "It shall not be so with you." [Mark 10:42-44] Why? Because, they are to function according to God's time. On the scale of man's time, it is inevitable that men play God. And not even God is safe when that happens! This explains why the sphere of religion abounds in cruelty and bloodshed, including cruelty to God. Truth to tell, the Victim in every instance, is God Himself; for there is not a blow struck on this earth by human hands that does not fall first on the face of Jesus [Acts 9:4]

The fact that a thousand years are like an evening gone embodies a profound paradox: human life is incomparably significant; whereas human actions and achievements are, in themselves, woefully

insignificant in the light of eternity. While activities may seem to take place within the zone of man's time, life exists in its integrity and wholeness only in the haven of God's time. Because for God a thousand years are like an evening, the sum total of our life-time's actions and achievements individual and collective count for little on the canvas of eternity. They cannot impress God! Yet we are created in the image and likeness of God. So we matter a great deal.

Our life is God's invention and He attaches immeasurable value to it. It is somewhat like seeing human beings from an aeroplane, flying at an altitude of 5000 meters. People, walking on the ground, seem crawling worm-like, moving in humiliating insignificance. Yet, we are up there because human beings are great enough to invent the marvel of an aeroplane! So, viewed from the perspective of God's time we need to be more and more humble the higher we go; just as humans on the ground appear to grow smaller as the plane ascends. Our actions assume worth to the extent that we are rooted in God. People on the ground may seem worm-like as the plane ascends but the pilot in the cockpit does not, or should not! The he and the passengers do so, on the account of aeroplane, this marvelous invention will become a human scandal: a curse on our species. The spiritual application of this idea is that we cannot, and must not, calculate our worth only in terms of what we do or achieve; but also in terms of who we are, which is more fundamental. Jesus, hence, put the focus on who we are: the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and the leaven in the lump. On the scale of man's time our actions may seem more important than our spiritual identity (who we are); but on the scale of God's time our actions matter only because of who we are.

"A thousand years are like an evening": a few overtones:

God has time for everyone and everything. Thank God, He is not a miser of time, or beset with the epidemic of business! So, He has time for you and me and does not hurry past anyone. [Probably that is why we have no value for God; for we are conditioned to fear and respect only those who rub salt on the wound of our insignificance!] God packs it into an evening what it would take us a thousand years to do. This is not a matter of physical powers but of the power of God's love; for time is a function of love! We have, time for what we love; and time begins to stretch according to the reach of our love. Ask a mother, if you are not convinced.

It is a statement on God's faithfulness that endures over generations. Because a thousand years are like an evening, God does not forget! In the Bible, this enduring memory is an important aspect of the very Being and Identity of God. He is "God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob." The promise He made to Abraham took generations to fulfill! God remembers! We forget because we change. God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Life would have been impossible if God was a victim of amnesia, like we are! Paradoxically, it is because God remembers, and not because He forgets, that He forgives. "Forget and forgive" implies a senseless concept. What is forgotten is not forgiven. God forgives because He remembers His faithful ways with the human species from time immemorial: the promises He made with our forefathers in faith, the chequered history of faith and the fact, as the Psalmist says, "that we are dust". He remembers, above all Himself; whereas we forget, over time, who we are and what we are calling is. This interferes, in a real and substantial way, with our duty and freedom to forgive. The freedom to forgive is the sign of being the 'Children of God' over and above being the children of men.

Human life exists within time and space. God is not limited by either. This is at the root of miracles, which are anything but miracles from God's perspective. They are simply an exercise of His authority over the time-space delimitation presupposed in creation. Several of the miracles happened because God has the authority to foreshorten time. For that very reason, miracles can continue to happen, if God chooses to.

That is to say, at His word what would normally take several months or years can happen upon the instant. This is, besides, the proof that there is an eternity. Time is both the enabler and constrictor of human existence. But time is, because Eternity is. Else, time will accommodate only blind chance and absurdity. That which changes has to be rooted in that which does not. We cannot be wholly free as long as we live in within the elbowroom of time. We are the children of eternity and only in that eschatological homeland can we be truly free. God is creatively free within time, because He is eternal and beyond time. What is within time is subject to change, which also makes growth possible! God neither changes nor grows, though He is the reason why there is growth at all in any sphere or particle of life.

Yet another derivative from the concept under consideration is the fact that God's mercies never end. God is eternally patient, because He is not subject to the tyranny of time. He knows our tomorrows, even though we don't our own. Patience is, among other things, a function of time. (Historians of cultures point out that impatience and intolerance are basic to "time-oriented cultures". In contrast, "space-oriented cultures" are more tolerant, but tend to lack in dynamism, as in the case, say, with the Indian culture.) Often it happens that events blind us to the promise of tomorrow. As the Psalmist says, weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning! We cannot pierce the veil of the night and behold the morning that fires the east. When we are impatient an evening seems a thousand years!! A significant application of this idea is that God's time is the unit of life; where as man's time is the unit of death. As each year goes by, we move closer to our death; where as when we live according to God's time, we take step closer to eternal life. (Hence the irony of birthday celebrations! The celebrants are blissfully unaware of the contradiction within it. Seen only in the light of man's time, birth anniversaries must seem alarming; for they warn us that we are inching closer to death. But, when under the light of God's time, birth anniversaries call for celebration; for we are progressing towards eternity. The correlation between life and eternity implies the absolute value of life! it is a logical imperative, hence, that when hope of eternal life evaporates, life loses its meaning and worth.) This truth can serve as a bulwark against SUICIDE. No one in touch with God's time can take his own life. Likewise, ABUNDANT LIFE is impossible, so long as we live under the logic of man's time. The liberation that Jesus promises [Luke 4:18 Setting the captive free...] has this implication to God's time. How can we, as children of God, live unmindful of God's time? This could afford a useful insight into what it means to be BORN AGAIN.

So the question arises in the end; which is the right or authentic unit of time? Or, which unit of time shall we adopt? God's or man's? Also, why do we sing, In your time...In your time...You make all things beautiful in your time..." The beauty, meaning and purpose of everything created is unveiled in God's time.

What happens when we switch over to man's time to God's time?

We become part of a larger flow of life and are liberated from our small and narrow worlds. A dreading myth that those who live exclusively in man's time carry is the notion that a person's life begins and ends with him or her. Man's time is marked by discontinuity. The denizens in this idea of time attach no value to passing anything down from one generation to another. Each age why, each life- is assumed to be an accidental and discontinuous beginning. In contrast, from a spiritual perspective, life becomes themselves out through the centuries. Seen in that light, the vision of the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews makes eminent sense that we are surrounded by a 'great cloud of witnesses' [Hebrew 12:1-2] On the plane of man's time, this is, at best, quaint poetry!

Faith is germane to God's time. The desperation that many feel in respect of faith whether or not we are wasting our life, chasing an impossible ideal- is induced by man's time. We cannot stretch our imagination

beyond the brink of grave, as long as we live on this plane alone. Faith in anything beyond the present is possible only when we switch over to God's time.

We regain a sense of proportion. Within the framework of man's time, the gravity of every man-centered and man-driven event looks exaggerated. It is in this light that we can understand best Jesus' exhortation that we should not fear human beings. We are sure to remain shackled by this fear till we switch over to God's time, wherein man's authority can be seen in perspective, as Jesus did in respect of the authority of Pontius Pilate. We magnify our woes, problems and difficulties as well as the important of others. [We become, then, a party to devaluing meekness. Those who strut around on the stage of history seem comic characters on the scale of God's time, not to say anything of those who inflate themselves in the institutional contexts. The Resurrection of Jesus is, in one sense, the meeting point of two modes of authority: those that pertain to God's time and man's time.) And we become, in the process, blind to the redemptive nuances of our suffering and struggles. It is impossible to have faith in God, if we do not also subject ourselves to God's time. Faith enables us to see the present in its true reposition.

Is there a meeting point?

Is there a meeting point between God's time and man's time? Or are they like rivers that flow parallel to each other? For an answer to this very significant question let us consider the following. If ever you have been in an ecstatic experience or extreme depression you'd agree that we experience time in two contrary ways. There are times when hours fly past without our being aware of it and there are times when time hangs heavy on us. Then it does happen, albeit subjectively, that a few hours are like a moment or, alternatively, a few moments are like eternity, so to speak. Depression, like darkness, is an absence, not a presence; though its victims, like those who are paralyzed in darkness, could readily conclude that boredom is the primary fact of life and happiness a rare relief. This is a commentary on the kind of life they lead, and not a reflection on life itself, or life as God designed it. It is natural that the Creator imparts something of his own nature to what He creates. The two cannot be water-tight compartments. Joy, or ecstasy, is basic to the nature of God. That is why St. Paul recognizes joy as a fruit of the Spirit and not as the worldly achievement of human beings. Joy, being integral to the nature of God, is basic to human life as well. And that explains why joylessness drives its victims to desperate remedies. Joy, unlike pleasure, denotes the presence of the godly. Ecstasy and depression are the foretastes of heaven and hell. Depression is to our spiritual life what breathlessness is to our physical life. Ironically, suicide is a 'proof by indication' that we are the children of God who cannot live by bread alone. Material poverty kills far fewer people than spiritual Poverty does. Why do we get depressed or ecstatic, where as no other part of the created world experiences either? Ecstasy and depression are the indications that human beings are the points of contact between God's time and man's time. Formed out of the mud of the earth, we have the breath of God indwelling in us. That being the case, we cannot live by man's time alone. Attempting to do so is like trying to stand on one leg over a lifetime. The result is burdened and weary life.

All of human experiences whether of joy or of sadness- exist within time. But whose time is it? Is it our time? But we never created any! Then how can we claim it as our time? If we do, don't we become like the servants in the Parable of the Vineyard who developed the dangerous delusion that, by killing the heir to the vineyard, they could be its owners? It is over time that delusions develop; and the most fundamental of all delusions is that there is something called man's time, as distinct from God's time. Time and space are the media that God created for life and no man has authority over it. We can be their stewards, but not owners. (Ownership is the most formidable stumbling block in the path of spirituality.) Thus, to live is to acknowledge God. Even atheists and agnostics have no choice in this respect. What they verbally assert

is contradicted by their very assertion. They exist in God's time and space.

Then how do we develop the impression that what is essentially God's time is indeed our time? Well, the answer is not far to seek. Creation, on God's part, is an exercise in humanity. God denies himself through creation. "Let there be... and there was". The words "let there be...." denote the creation of space. It is by denying oneself that one creates space for others. But for this, all of creation, especially human beings, would have been mere automations and there would have been no room for making free and responsible choices.

The distinction between God's time and man's time, therefore, does not exist in mind of God. It exists, however, in the plan of man. And the statement, "a thousand years are like an evening" is God's commentary on this distinction, which implies a certain degree of alienation between God and human beings. It is a warning against mistaking man's time to be the ultimate scale of assessment. The 'man's millennium' and "God's evening" are not autonomous or polarized, but complimentary, categories. God's evening is the umbrella under which man's millennium must move and have its being. We perceive time and space because both categories are basic to the life of God has created. It is when we do not recognize God as the Creator of time that we succumb to the illusion that we live only in man's time. But to be able to recognize God as the Creator and Giver of time one has to intuit and experience an order of possibilities beyond time. It is impossible for those who live cooped up in time exclusively to concede the possibility that there is something called God's time. It is like a villager who refuses to cross the boundaries of his own village into the next asserting that Niagara waterfalls are a figment of human fantasy.

So the meeting point between God's time and man's time cannot be man. It can be God. That is why the insight that "a thousand years are like an evening" for God comes as the revelation from God. But revelation is a flow from God to man. Such a flow pertains to what is of utmost significance to both parties. So the insight under consideration originates in God and illuminates human awareness. "An evening and a thousand years," incidentally, is not an inappropriate description of the dynamics of revelation. A thousand years of unaided human effort are inadequate to arrive at the insight that God proves in an insight.

Dr. Zac Varghese from London writes:

As I understood, Greeks and two concepts of time: Chronos or chronological time, the time that can be measured on the clock. It is the kind of time based on earth's rotation around the sun. From such understanding we calculate that a year is 365 days, 5 hours, 49 minutes and 12 seconds. It has a precision about it. Some people think that in God's calendar one day is equal to one year on earth. There are other calculations in the prophetic writings of the Bible.

The Greeks had a second concept of time, which they called Kairos. This time is measured in certain type of special experiences. This is the kind of time spent on giving birth to a child; it is the time spent on reading good books, painting, creating music, writing poetry and other creative writing, meditating, and having an intimate conversation with God, walking, climbing mountain, playing with innocent children, and so forth. In these and other similar human experiences we create the miracle of turning the ordinary time into extraordinary time. This is a miracle. In these experiences we do not think of chronological time at all, there no time for it. An evening in the company of a good friend has no definite limit. We do not measure such an evening in hours and minutes. The romantic moment we met our spouses might have changed our lives forever, we do not count them in seconds, minutes or hours. Such small moments could be

eternity itself. We are slaves of chronological time, but striving for the ultimate liberation in finding kairos in every encounter.

Doesn't this also mean that human actions are very slow as compared to God's actions? What we do in a 1000 years He does in a single evening or a second? How long is one evening for God? Who has 1000 years on earth? Man's lifespan is restricted to seventy or eighty years. But we have a pragmatic way of looking at time. We are told to be the Light of the world. One of the qualities of Light is the speed with which it travels. An evening is equivalent to 1000 years probably also indicates the speed with which things happens in God's time.

Certain important biochemical reactions inside a living cell only take milli- or nano- second or even less. We have no way of capturing the speed of these reactions, but they are there so that we can breathe and react to danger signals. Margins of danger and safety are thin; it only takes a split second to avoid a tragedy. Therefore, it is important to make 'now' the primary focus of our life. It is in the 'now' we love and live. It is important to realize that the present moment is all you ever have. One look or one word is more than enough to destroy a friendship.

We say 'God is patient', but God is only patient in man's time. He has no time to be patient. He does not wait; He has no time to be patient. He does things according to His nature. But in our terms and in our time scales He may appear to be patient. He deals with our past and future on the level of the present. Our ordinary life may take millions of steps needing millions of minutes, but our spiritual journey may need only one or two steps to take, the step we are taking now to have a real union and relationship with God. I cannot love anyone yesterday or tomorrow, I need to love you at this moment, if I were to wait, waiting could turn my love to hate. When God intervenes in our lives we begin to understand the importance of now and every second of it could become important and action-packed. In that time frame our life becomes meaningful because we begin to realize that someone needs us and makes us feel very special and so on.

Mrs. Mini Krishnan of the OUP has this to say:

There is a lovely joke about Time in Hindu myth. Here it is. Brahma's time is different from ours. A million years of ours is a minute of his. So someone went to Brahma and with the intent to trick him, said, "Please give me a minute of your time, I want to ask something."

To which the Brahma smiled and said, "I'm a bit busy now, can you wait for minute?" And that was that.

The Hindu symbol of a snake with its tail in its mouth is about the immeasurability of Time and how it dissolves into itself. One of my favorite images is to think of the planet rotating furiously on its axis and revolving around its fiery parent the Sun. And we think of "fixed" points on Earth. "This is my property. This is my garden; I won't let your tree drop leaves on my lawn." These are all part of the great illusions we live under. The Tibetan idea of Time is that when you are completely focused on selfless work, your health improves and you begin to look youthful because you are reversing the power of time. The more negative energy we draw to ourselves in selfish behavior, the more we are damaging the psyche and the wearier we feel and the more we complain. Interesting thought isn't it? He went on to say that the western concept of the importance of self-identity is exactly the opposite of the Eastern where identity tends to belong to a community. He was, of course, referring to middle class and lower class and lower middle class people. Not those who have opportunities to explore other cultures and countries.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/valsan-thampu/gods-time-mans-time-whose-time/>

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