

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 3 January

Children's Talk: The Passage of Time

A couple days ago, we celebrated the New Year. Last year was 2020, but now it is 2021. When we start a new year we celebrate a new beginning. New Year's isn't the only time we get excited about. There are lots of ways that we notice special times. Some of you might say rabbit rabbit on the first day of the month. If you've ever gotten a new watch, it's fun to watch as the time shifts from one hour to the next, like from 3:59 to 4:00. We also celebrate special days, like your birthday or Christmas.

But what's actually happening when we begin a new year? How do we know the next time your birthday comes around? When does one day end and the next one begin? You could say with a calendar or a clock, but the people who make those have to somehow know. The answer is that the Lord has given us things in creation that help us keep track of the years and seasons and days:

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day. (Genesis 14-19)

The Lord gave us the sun, the moon, and the stars to help us keep track of times and years and seasons and day.

How does that work? Well the Earth circles around the sun. When it has gone all the way around and come back to where it started, we call that a year. So if you were born when the Earth was here, it takes a whole year for it to circle around again, at which point that is your first birthday. When the Earth spins away from the sun, it gets dark and it's night-time. When the part of the Earth we are on is tilted away from the sun, it's winter, and towards the sun, it's summer. We don't use the moon to measure months anymore, but they used to follow the moons changes to tell when one month changes to another. So all the changes in time are based on things we have no control over.

That means sometimes we don't like the way timing works out. Sometimes, you are full of energy when it gets dark. Sometimes you are so ready to have a birthday when it's 8 months away. But even though you can't control changes in time, as you get older, the Lord can help you control changes on the inside. Even when life is hard and frustrating around you, you can still choose to focus on good things and choose to do good things. It's like having your own personal sun shining with warmth in your heart. Now this is hard to do. It's especially hard the younger you are. But isn't it amazing that no matter what time of day or night, no matter if it's the coldest day of winter or the hottest day of summer, it is possible to have a good day on the inside, where it actually matter.

Keeping to a Spiritual Timeline

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

3 January, 2021

Time is a useful tool. Clocks and calendars help us keep track of a lot of important things. We use time to organize and arrange many things in our lives. This service began at 9:30 on a Sunday. Without knowing that, most of you would not be watching right now. Keeping track of times and dates helps us remember things that have gone before and plan for things in the future: wedding anniversaries, birthdays, and landmark dates, all present opportunities for this kind of reflection. We particularly mark the New Year as a time to leave the past behind and embark on something new. Yet at the same moment, time is artificial. There is nothing about one full revolution of the Earth around the sun that makes life much different. I've seen numerous, tongue-in-cheek reminders that just because the date has changed from 2020 to 2021 does not in any way mean Covid has magically disappeared or that the problems of last year have vanished away. Yes, these times of transition are useful reminders. But we also have to learn to let go of an attachment to Earthly time, and lift our minds to a more spiritual way of measuring progress and change.

In many ways we are controlled, or at least unduly influenced, by time. One example is New Year's resolutions. Now I'm not someone who makes New Year's resolutions, in part because I'm confident I'd break most of them by the end of January. Which, although I don't have actual statistics on this, is probably true for most people who do make resolutions. But in any case, if I *did* make resolutions, and I didn't even make it to February, I think here is how my thinking would go: "well, I've broken my resolution for 2021. Oh well. I guess I can try again next year." As if somehow there is something more magical and effective about starting a commitment on January 1st than there is about starting one on February 18th. Which of course there isn't! Yet I have a tendency to let those kinds of things influence me more than I should.

That's a fairly light-hearted example, but it happens in harsher ways too. In places that don't have as mild a winter as we are blessed with here, the long, cold, dark winters can have a profound effect on people's mental wellbeing. It becomes a lot harder to be your best self, and it takes a lot of work to overcome the dragging inertia of wintertime. Weather and seasons, and yes, time, dictate to us how we behave in ways that we sometimes can't control even when we become aware of them.

The ways that time controls us goes even deeper though. This next example might not at first seem to have much to do with time, but I think it does. And that is the state of the world, either the state of the world at large or the state of the world around us personally. The state of the world can take control over who we are as individuals in unfortunate ways. A prime example would be Covid. So much of what we have gone through this year has been shaped and dictated by this pandemic. But it's not just Covid of course. Hatred, fear, anxiety, poverty, corruption, alcoholism, abuse, loneliness, despair, and all manner of other issues plague our worlds. These things dictate a lot of who we are and the choices we make.

What I think these examples have to do with time is that they dictate our schedule of spiritual growth as it were. Until these situations change, I have to put a pause on x,y, or z. As long as the world, or my world, is like this, little to no progress is possible. We act as if we are beholden to the world's timeline for us. We wait for Covid to end so we can get back to normal, but at a certain point, you have to live

your best life in spite of Covid getting in the way. The same goes for all the other hardships we face.

Jesus speaks directly to the need to be working on ourselves now, and not waiting for the ideal time to show up. He uses language of His returning, in one sense meaning the Second Coming which He has already made, but in another to His coming to each of us personally to the extent that we repent and live a heavenly life:

Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, "My master is delaying his coming," and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:42-51)

If you wait for the perfect time, you'll not be ready for when you need to have begun. The perfect time is now. If you fall down on a resolution this year, don't wait for next year to try again. The middle of July is just as good as next January. Don't let the state of the world or the state of your personal life hinder your growth, while you wait for things to change. We can't let the world's calendar dictate our ability to grow spiritually.

So far, this call to action might be causing some anxiety. It might sound like I'm saying to forget pacing yourself, just do everything all at once, right away! A complete spiritual overhaul with no regard to how hard it will be. You can't just decide one day to become perfect; you can't will your way out of anxiety and depression in an instant. But if we just put aside any kind of worldly timeline, that's what we would be left with. So instead of just discarding all notion of time altogether, we need to replace a worldly understanding of time with a spiritual one.

If we look to how the angels experience time we can start to glimpse what spiritual time means. In one sense, there is no "time" in heaven. There is no physical rotation of a globe to mark the days, no physical sun to determine the years and seasons. But that does not mean there is chaos and everything happens in random order at random times. There is a kind of time that does exist in heaven, as the Teachings of the New Church explain:

Angels do not know what time is, although with them there is a successive progression of all things, as there is in the world, and this so completely that there is no difference whatever; and the reason is that in heaven instead of years and days there are changes of state; and where there are years and days there are times, but where there are changes of state there are states. In the world there are times because the sun of the world seemingly advances in succession from one degree to another, producing times that are called

seasons of the year; and besides, it revolves about the earth, producing times that are called times of day; both of these by fixed alternations. With the sun of heaven it is different. This does not mark years and days by successive progressions and revolutions, but in its appearance it marks changes of state; and this, as has been shown in the preceding chapter, is not done by fixed alternations. Consequently no idea of time is possible to angels; but in its place they have an idea of state (see above n. 154). (*Heaven and Hell* §163-164)

In other words, although the movement of the Earth and Sun do not determine the progression of time in heaven, the angels still experience cycles of days and years. These are determined by the states of life they happen to be going through. As on Earth, everything still has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

So to give an example of how time is experienced by an angel, when beginning on some process of internal change, around them would be early morning, as the world begins to lighten; or, if it were a longer term, deeper change, it would feel like early spring, with a chill still in the air. As the angel came into the strength of the spiritual change, the day would come into the strength of midday, or, again if the change were longer term or deeper, the season would transition into the full warmth of summer. As the angel completed their inner work and began to move on to other priorities, the day would fade into evening, or the summer to a cool fall. And as the angel again embarked on new growth, the progression would begin again with early morning or the springtime. (See *Heaven and Hell* §166).

So while an angel's experience of time is not dictated by seconds and minutes and hours and months and days and years, there is still a sensation of time passing as they go through growth and change. This is the idea that we can replace our attachment to Earthly time with. Instead of being restricted to hours and years, we can focus on progression of states. A good example that came to me was how we assume that we should have hit certain milestones in life by a certain age: graduate college by 22; move out from home entirely by 25; married with kids by 30; a well-established career path by 30 too. These arbitrary dates put unnecessary pressure on us. Put aside the number of years as irrelevant, and, like the angels, focus on state. One 25-year old might be at a state where it makes sense for them to really exert their independence and move out. Another 25-year old might be at a state where still living with their parents is exactly what they need for stability and support. Some people know from the time they are teens what their purpose and mission and life will be. Other people only find that in their fifties or later, having needed to go through a lot of experiences and growth to figure it out.

Now it is true that some people have ignored opportunities that they should have taken years earlier; sometimes a full grown adult does take a couple of decades to grow up. But even then, it is *not* their age, the numbers of revolutions around the sun that determines that; it is that they were spiritually ready to move on to the next stage of life, and decided not to. Years can give us a rough benchmark; but only an examination of where someone is spiritually can determine where they have been, where they ought to be, and where they can head next with life.

So here we are at the beginning of a new year. And maybe, with the new year, you are ready to work on something new. But maybe, this is actually a time for you to keep working on things you began ages ago. Or perhaps this is a time of closing one chapter of your life and moving on. Or you may not realize what part of your life the Lord wants you to focus on until some random Tuesday in March! But no

matter what season it is, no matter what is going on in the world, we have the power to begin, now, today, on the work the Lord has led us too. And in time, we can transcend the restriction of time and space. We can become more attuned to what is needed in the moment than to what the calendar or the world wants us to focus on. And although cycles and ups and downs will continue to eternity, when we align with the Lord's path we will see fewer and fewer of the downs, as we enter everlasting morning and springtime. I'll end with a quote from Isaiah to this effect:

The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you;
But Jehovah will be to you an everlasting light,
And your God your glory.
Your sun shall no longer go down,
Nor shall your moon withdraw itself;
For Jehovah will be your everlasting light,
And the days of your mourning shall be ended.
(Isaiah 60:19-20)