

## The Meaning of Time

1. Warm-up: As we get older, we see things differently. For example, when you were 15, what age did you consider young and what age made someone old? From where you are right now, what age do you consider young and what age makes someone old?
  
2. Sunday's sermon spotlighted one of the most famous verses in the Bible, a verse that talks about the past, present, and future. There Jesus says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . , [the one] who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Revelation 1:8. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; omega is the last letter. So the verse is telling us that Jesus was here before time ever began and will still be here after time ceases. II Peter 3:8 puts it this way, "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." In other words, God exists above, beyond, and outside of time. Our earthly reality is so dominated by time, it's hard to comprehend there can be such a thing as timelessness. Yet that's consistent with what science teaches. Read Revelation 1:1-8, as printed on p. 3, as well as the quote from Harvard physics professor Jacob Barandes, also found on p. 3.
  - a. What do you draw from Professor Barandes' quote? What do you make of his suggestion that the passage of time is an earthly illusion that's inconsistent with the greater reality that surrounds us?
  - b. Jeff also quoted an article from *Scientific American* which concludes that, in black holes "time stops and space ceases to make sense." What is a black hole, as best you understand? And what's the spiritual significance of the fact that there are places in our cosmos where time and space don't exist?
  - c. Scientists also tell us that 95% of all the mass energy content of the observable universe around us is invisible to us. Although the effects of it can be felt, we cannot directly detect or observe it. What's the spiritual significance of that?
  - d. Jeff speculated that heaven may be located in (or through) a black hole somewhere in the cosmos or, alternatively, may be everywhere around us but hidden in the invisible mass energy of our cosmos. Where do you think heaven might be located?
  
4. After grappling with what the Bible and science say about time and timelessness, we then began to unpack what it means to say that Jesus is the one "who was, is, and is to come." In other words, what does it mean to say that Jesus is the God of our past, present, and future? We began with **God of our Past**.
  - a. Share one of the most precious memories of your past?
  - b. We all have memories of things so precious to us that we're sometimes tempted to wish we could go back to that time. What has been the best era of your life so far? If you could go back to that era, would you be tempted to do so?

- c. Jeff said, “In heaven, in the ‘eternalism’ of the age to come, it appears that what happened in the distant past will be eternally present to us again in the singularity of heaven, so that whenever we want to, in a kind of time-travel experience, we will be able to go back and relive precious memories as if just happening, so that beautiful moments of the past will never be lost to us. Jesus, who transcends time, will gather them up and give them back to us in heaven to savor for all eternity.” Critique that statement. Do you buy it? Why or why not?
  - d. Of course, not all memories are good. There are also deep wounds we’d just as soon forget. Instead, Jeff suggested Jesus will simply heal and redeem those wounds in a type of Golden Repair, so that even our horrible memories will be transformed into experiences that make us more beautiful in eternity. Tell us about one of your most painful memories. Do you think you’ll be able to remember that experience when you’re in heaven? Can you imagine Jesus transforming that experience through a process of Golden Repair?
3. Next we explored what it means to say that Jesus is **God of our Present**. Jeff reminded us of the story told in “Dead Poets Society” as Professor Keating challenged his students to get off the fence, stop living to please others, and dare to boldly seize the day. Keating reminded his students that each of us gets to write a verse in the powerful play of life.
- a. What do you want your verse in the play to be, do, or accomplish? In other words, what do you want your legacy to be? And what are you doing right now – in the fierce urgency of now – to further that legacy?
  - b. The Latin phrase *carpe diem* refers to the notion that life is brief, we have no day but the present day, and we should always make the most of each day. Do you feel that you’re living in the bold spirit of *carpe diem* or with too much caution and passivity? Where’s an area of your life right now where you sense God calling you to be more bold and proactive?
4. Lastly we explored what it means to say that Jesus is the **God of our Future** – both our future here on earth and in the life to come.
- a. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” What is the positive vision of what you hope for in the next ten years of your life?
  - b. Describe for us how you envision your heavenly reunion with someone precious to you – describe the scene and what is said. How does that hope affect your life here and now?
  - c. In his sermon, Jeff kept repeating this refrain, “Nothing will be lost. Nothing will ever be lost.” What do you think he meant? Do you believe that?

## Revelation 1:1-8

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup>who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup>Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

<sup>4</sup> John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup>and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup> Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

<sup>8</sup> 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

## Prof. Jacob Barandes, Harvard physicist, discussing lessons from the Hubble Telescope

"What we've learned relatively recently calls into question the very idea that 'now' is different from 'then.' This is called the breakdown of simultaneity. Simultaneity is another word for the present. [The present] is now a relative concept that depends on your state of motion. . . . If I can make something a few seconds in its own past part of my present by walking in the other direction, it becomes very enticing to say that the past and the future of that object are physical facts just as real as what you'd call your present. This is known as block determinism, or some people call it eternalism, the idea that all of space and all of time simply is. ***Our experience of the passage of time is merely psychological.***"