



## Redeeming the time

Our family recently purchased the popular game “Settlers of Catan”. I find playing “Settlers” a particularly humbling experience because I am routinely beaten by my younger sons. I console myself with the fact that I am ‘merely inexperienced’. I tended in the past to avoid playing card or board games, believing that I could be doing something more productive with the time. However, I’ve come to see the value of relational time with the family around a game and the joy I bring them when they whip me (again)!

As many who have played “Settlers” will know, the object of this board game is to build roads, dwellings and cities on the imaginary island of Catan using five commodities: brick, wood, wheat, sheep and stone. At early stages of play, brick and wood are particularly important for road building, later stone becomes more sought-after for erecting cities. Trading these products reflects the basic economics of supply and demand; the rarer the commodity, the higher the value.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the value of time. Anyone of us can potentially make innumerable bricks, plant forests for timber supply, grow wheat in huge paddocks, graze sheep on a thousand hills or quarry stone deep into the mountain sides. However time is a ‘commodity’ which, for absolutely all of us in this life, is strictly finite and in limited supply. You and I will not live on this earth one more or one less day, hour, or second than God has determined<sup>1</sup>.

Understanding the nature of time, the foolishness of wasting this valuable gift and the importance of making the best use of time will help to “teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom”<sup>2</sup>.

### The Nature of Time

Time is a created element, woven into the fabric of the universe. ‘Before’ the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth there was no space and no time, only God Himself. He is eternal in His essence, *‘from everlasting to everlasting’*,<sup>3</sup> without beginning or end. He alone is the Creator of time and sovereign Lord over all events, past, present and future. The Bible is God’s progressive revelation of Himself in the context of advancing time. It is not surprising therefore to find that references to timeframes and dates abound in the Scriptures. The Hebrew term for ‘day’ (*yom*) is the 5<sup>th</sup> most frequently used word in the Old Testament, the majority of which covers the unfolding history of God’s faithful dealings with his covenant people, Israel, through repeated cycles of their rebellion and restoration.

The historical events of the Bible all lead to a special moment. *“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman”*.<sup>4</sup> Then God Himself, in the person of His Son, took on human flesh. In his humanity Jesus Christ became subject to time<sup>5</sup>; growing progressively from a baby to a man.<sup>6</sup> His daily desire was to use the limited time he had on this earth to do his Father’s will.<sup>7</sup>

Fellow Christian, Jesus Christ never wasted a moment to secure your salvation. As children of God we are all called to express our thankfulness to God by imitating His wise use of time by being good stewards of this precious gift.<sup>8</sup> We are not to dishonor our Lord by wasting the time which He has graciously given to us.

## **Wasting time**

Time only moves in one direction. When the clock strikes at midnight tonight, you will have spent exactly 86,000 seconds today. Tomorrow, by God's grace, if your allotted time is not yet up, then you will have yet another 86,000 valuable seconds. If the Lord keeps you in your body for all of 2015 you will have used up 31,536,000 seconds this year. That's a similar number to the population of buffalo before settlers armed with guns started hunting these majestic animals of the plains, not of Catan, but of North America.

In 45 years (from 1840 to 1885) the huge buffalo herds had been destroyed with the numbers declining from millions to barely nothing. Why was such a staggering loss not prevented? At least in part because the hunters just thought that there was an endless supply of buffalo. We could say the same of whales in the expansive oceans or mighty trees in the vast Amazon basin. Sometimes it is only when a resource is much depleted that its value is realized.

For those of us who are over the halfway mark in life's years, we tend to see more vividly that time is reducing. In our 40s-50s we may be shocked by the death of contemporaries, perhaps to cancer or heart attack. In our 60-70s and beyond our circle of similar-aged friends begins to diminish. We often value time more than we had in the past. We may regret time wasted on trivial pursuits (excuse the inadvertent reference to another board game!).

Younger readers, you may well think that you have lots of time. Having the precious resource of time replenished at the rate of 86,000 seconds per day may fool you into thinking you have access to an endless supply; like a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century buffalo hunter. But be careful lest valuable time slip through your fingers like sand in an hour glass. Take the counsel of wise Solomon and *'Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them."*'<sup>9</sup>

Time is the most valuable commodity you are given, the most precious resource you possess. That is why God's people are called in His Word, in the light of the gospel, to *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."*<sup>10</sup>

The late John Lennon encouraged the world to believe that the best is yet to come on this earth if only we *"imagine no heaven, no hell below us, imagine all the people, living for today, no religion, all the people living life in peace"*. This is not wisdom, but dangerous folly. The days are evil and there is a heaven and a hell. This world is the seat of conflict between two mighty, but unequal, spiritual powers. The cosmos is under the influence of forces which are hostile to God and in opposition to the kingdom of Christ.<sup>11</sup> Peace will not come until the return of the King.

This world is therefore not, for the Christian, an 'amusement park' in which to waste time. It is not a place to idle away the hours in front of a T.V. screen, to expend large amounts of precious time each day on Facebook, Trade me, You tube, Snapchat, trivial texting or a myriad of games loaded onto your phone, tablet or laptop. This world is not a place for those who are children of the King to fritter away precious days, hours, minutes, and seconds.

However a wise balance of labour and rest is to be maintained. There is a time to work and a time to enjoy not working, a time even to play board games! In his act of creation, God gave mankind a model for weekly activity and resting.<sup>12</sup> Work without rest is idolatry, more commonly called "workaholism", where precious rest-time is wasted. Rest without work is laziness where precious labour-time is squandered.<sup>13</sup> Time is also dissipated through worldly pursuits where the emphasis is on laying up treasures on earth rather than in heaven. The rich farmer/barn-builder in Luke 12,<sup>14</sup> though a busy industrious man, was a time waster.

We all find time for the things and for the people who are most important to us. Your priorities will determine the use of your time. Jesus expressed this principle when he said *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*<sup>15</sup> The world, at this stage in history, is a place in which we are called by Christ to "make the best use of the time." Literally to 'buy back' or 'redeem' the time.

## **Making the best use of time**

Jonathan Edwards, 18<sup>th</sup> century American preacher of the memorable sermon “sinners in the hands of an angry God”, was a busy man, being the husband of but one wife, and the father of 11 children. The results of his diligent labours under God’s grace are evident in his many published sermons and his extensive writings. These include a list of resolutions, two of which express his prayer that God would “*stamp eternity on my eyeballs.*”

Edwards resolved “*never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can*”. He desired to invest the precious time granted to him for the kingdom of God. He resolved “*never to do anything that I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.*” Constantly focusing his thoughts upon the last hour of his life brought clarity as to what was most important to him each day.

If you only had one hour to live. How would you spend that last hour? Think about that for a moment. Would you squander it? Surely not, you would want to use that precious commodity wisely during those final 60 minutes. You would want to redeem the time by not allowing the urgent to constantly take precedence over the important. By considering how he would manage his time during his last hour on this earth, Edwards was able, every day, to better redeem the time gifted to him as he was busy about the Lord’s work during his life.

Jonathan Edwards died suddenly and unexpectedly at age 54. He had complications from a smallpox inoculation. You and I will also run out of time one day; it may come as a sudden surprise. The hourglass will be empty for each one of us at that moment.

When you come to the end of your life, will you be able to say “I have sought to maximize my time for the glory of God”? “I was given many gifts, by my heavenly Father. I had stewardship over a variety of commodities (not in imaginary Catan, but on real earth). Yet more valuable than building materials or food, more precious than gold or silver, was the time allotted to me. I have been careful how I lived, not as unwise, but as wise. I have made the most of every opportunity, because I knew that the days were evil”.

My prayer for you, dear reader, is that you will live your life in the wisdom of Christ, redeeming the time, and that you will enter into glory hearing the gracious words of our Saviour ‘*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*’<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Job 14:15; Psalm 139:16

<sup>2</sup> Ps 90:12

<sup>3</sup> 1 Chron 16:36, 29:10; Neh 9:5; Ps 41:13, 90:2, 103:17, 106:48

<sup>4</sup> Gal 4:4

<sup>5</sup> Phil 2:7

<sup>6</sup> Luke 2:52

<sup>7</sup> John 4:34

<sup>8</sup> Eph 5:1; 15-17

<sup>9</sup> Eccl 12:1

<sup>10</sup> Eph 5:15-16

<sup>11</sup> Eph 6:12

<sup>12</sup> Ex 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15

<sup>13</sup> Prov 19:15; 18:9

<sup>14</sup> Luke 12:16-21

<sup>15</sup> Mat 6:21

<sup>16</sup> Mat 25:21