

WHAT TIME WAS IT? WHAT TIME IS IT? (John 12:20-36)

In 1959, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame song-writer and recording artist, Pete Seeger, wrote a song that became known as “Turn, Turn, Turn.” It was originally a folk song and was released by both groups and soloists. In 1965 the song was recorded by the Byrds.

Like the Beatles had done in 1964, the Byrds appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show. They sang their new song, and it became an international hit reaching #1 on the pop chart.

The interesting thing is that while Seeger wrote the music and added 7 words of his own, the rest of the song came straight from the KJV of the Bible. While he rearranged the words a little, Seeger used a text that was written in the 10th Century B.C. This made Seeger’s hit the #1 pop song with the oldest lyrics.

Do you remember this song?

To everything turn, turn, turn
There is a season turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under Heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To everything turn, turn, turn
There is a season turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under Heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones
A time to gather stones together

To everything turn, turn, turn
There is a season turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under Heaven

A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace
A time to refrain from embracing

To everything turn, turn, turn
There is a season turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under Heaven

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rain, a time to sow
A time for love, a time for hate

A time for peace, I swear it's not too late

If you want to read how Solomon really wrote it, you can read it in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

I am convinced that one of the keys to living life well is learning to tell time, i.e., to know what time it is. Even if we do the right thing but do it at the wrong time, things will not go well.

- If a farmer attempts to reap when it is time to plant, he will go bankrupt.
- If we dance and laugh at a funeral, when it is time to mourn, it will not be looked upon kindly.
- The wise know when to speak and when to be silent because there is an appropriate time for both of those.

Before engaging in any action, we need to stop and ask, "Lord, is this the right time?"

Sequencing is important. Ruth Ann has sought impress upon Lance, Sarah, and Gemma the words that from the children's song, "First comes love; then comes marriage; then comes the baby in the baby carriage." All three of those things are good things, but they need to come at the right time and in the right order. I would add another thing to that sequence. It could come first or even second, and it is directly mostly to the men: Get a job. Be able to support yourself and your family.

As we work our way through the Gospel of John, it is worth noting that Jesus paid attention to the time. He was keenly aware of what time it wasn't, and then what time it was. Let's trace that through John's gospel. Look at John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20. Then we come to verses in our text, 12:23, 27. Now, look at 13:1; 16:32; 17:1. That word *hour* is used in our passage. Let's read 12:30-36.

I want to ask and answer two questions this morning. We will look first at, "What time was it?" and then, "What time is it?" More specifically, "What time was it for Jesus in this text that is before us?" and "What time is it for us now?"

Here is the answer to the first question:

It Was Time for Jesus to Die for Us

After repeatedly saying, "It is not My hour. It is not My time," for the very first time, Jesus says, "The hour has come." He does so in v. 23. Upon first reading, it seems that what John tells us in vv. 20-22 has nothing to do with what Jesus says in v. 23.

Let's look at who the Greeks were in our passage and the significance of them wanting to see Jesus. Remember that this is the Passover Feast. It was the most important feast on the Jewish calendar. The population of Jerusalem would swell as pilgrims from all over would converge on the capital city for this most important celebration of how God rescued His people from their slavery in Egypt.

Jews living in Israel weren't the only ones who would come. There would also be Jews from various parts of the world. In addition to Jews, there were also Gentiles who would come. These Gentiles had come to believe there was just one God, and the one true God was the God of the Jews. These were known as God-fearers. They had not submitted to circumcision, and maybe they didn't practice all the customs and dietary laws of the Jewish people, but they worshiped YHWH as the one, true God.

Among these God-fearers were a contingent of Greeks who came to Philip with a question. Why Philip? Well, *Philip* was a Greek name. *Andrew*, by the way, was also a Greek name. Maybe they thought Philip would be receptive. They said, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” In other words, they were asking if they could have a private audience with Jesus. They want to meet Jesus and talk with Him.

The first 11 chapters of John contain 7 signs that Jesus performed. John doesn’t call them *miracles*. He refers to them as *signs*. The purpose of a sign is to convey information, and through these great miracles Jesus signified that He is no mere man. He had been sent from God, and He was God. The greatest sign Jesus performed was raising a man back to life who had been dead for four days. Everyone talked about it.

The Chief Priest and other religious leaders convened a council to decide how to deal with Jesus who they viewed as a clear and present danger. John 11:53 tells us their decision. We are told of a second decision they made later. Look at John 12:9-11.

A great throng joined Jesus as He entered Jerusalem for the week of Passover. John tells us why so many showed up. Look at 12:18. Look at the response of the Pharisees in v. 19. They were exaggerating when they said the whole world had gone after Jesus, but they weren’t too far off. The Greek contingent spoken of in the very next verse was an example of people from around the world who were going after Jesus.

Jesus didn’t just come for the sake of the Jews only. He came to save people, as it says in Revelation, from **every tribe, language, people, and nation**. The fact that Greeks were seeking to meet with Him told Jesus that His time had come to die for the world. We are not told whether Jesus met with the Greeks. I have a suspicion that He did because Jesus never turned away people who wanted to see Him.

It is worth noting, however, that from this time on in John’s gospel, Jesus avoids the great crowds, and He invests His time instead with the disciples. He is preparing them for His departure.

Jesus uses two metaphors to describe His death. He first speaks of **a grain of wheat or a seed falling into the earth**. A seed does no good if it stays in the packet.

I walked into the shed in our backyard the other day. In the process of looking for something, I found something I wasn’t looking for. I found several seed packets. The seeds were still in the packet. They might have been in there all winter. They might have been in there several winters. I don’t know. The point is, they hadn’t yet spouted because they hadn’t yet been buried. Life comes from the seed’s burial.

I came across an interesting story. Back in the 1960’s, an archaeological dig was made at Masada. Masada was where King Herod kept a winter home in the Judean desert just west of the Dead Sea. It was really a fortress. The dig uncovered a cache of seeds that were kept in an ancient jar. They had been kept in a dry, cool space. Testing showed they were 2,000-year-old date palm seeds. Those seeds were stored at a university in Tel-Aviv for 40 years.

Finally, a researcher asked for some, and she was given several seeds. One of those seeds germinated. It grew into a date palm tree and was named Methuselah after the oldest man in the Bible. In time, other seeds germinated. Unlike Methuselah, which was a male tree, these were female trees. Methuselah successfully pollinated the female date palms. Now, these trees are growing fruit. There are plans to have an entire grove of date palms that came from 2,000-year-old seeds. As long as those seeds were kept in a jar,

whether at Masada or a Jewish university, they were doing the world no good, but after they were buried, a harvest came.

It was time for Jesus to die. Only after He was buried in the earth would a great harvest ensue.

About 4 years ago, as we were traveling through the Gospel of Matthew, we came to Matthew 13. I preached a sermon entitled, “The Certainty of the Kingdom Harvest.” I answered three questions—why, when, and where.

Why is the Kingdom harvest certain? The Kingdom harvest is certain because the seed is powerful. The seed is the word of God. While the seed is the word of God in Matthew 13, the seed is the Son of God in John 12.

When will this great harvest take place? I said the harvest is certain when the sower is faithful. Jesus began His parable in Matthew 13 with these words, “A sower went out to sow.” That sower was flinging seed wherever he went. You and I are to be seed-flingers. We are to sow the word of God in the hearts of people wherever we go.

Finally, where will there be a certain harvest? The Kingdom harvest is certain where the soil is fertile. In God’s Kingdom, whenever there is a problem with the harvest, the problem is never with the seed; it always lies with the soil.

Before Jesus comes back, I am looking for a great influx of souls into God’s Kingdom. Looking back over the long haul, that has already happened. On the day of Pentecost in AD 30, 120 believers were gathered in the Upper Room. It is estimated that at the end of the first century, .02% of the Roman Empire was Christian. By the end of the second century, 3.5% were Christian. At the end of the third century, 6% was Christian. Midway through the 4th century more than half of the Roman Empire was Christian. One scholar estimated that 33 million out of the 60 million people that made up the Roman Empire were followers of Jesus.

Today, there are 2.5 billion Christians in the world, and the majority of those believers live in what is called the Global South. The Global South is comprised of South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania which is made up of Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific islands. In 1900, 82% of Christians lived in the Global North (North America and Europe). In 2020, only 33% of believers lived in the Global North and 67% of Christians live in the Global South. Christianity has exploded in places like Africa and China. For instance, in 1900 the Democratic Republic of Congo was 1% Christian. Today, it is 95% Christian.

The first metaphor Jesus used to describe His death was a grain of wheat falling into ground and bringing forth a great harvest. That has happened and is happening.

Jesus used a second metaphor in v. 32. It is explained in v. 33. John consistently used **the words “lifted up”** to describe Jesus’ crucifixion. Look at John 3:14. The phrase came from an OT story involving Moses and the children of Israel while they were in the desert. The people were constantly complaining against God and against Moses. God brought discipline to His people by bringing poisonous snakes into the camp. People were being bitten. Many were getting sick. Some were dying. God ordered Moses to craft a snake from bronze, put in on a pole, and whoever looked upon the snake would be made well.

You and I have been bitten by sin, but if we will look upon Jesus, the One who has been lifted up, we will be made well.

Jesus used those words in John 8:28 and then here in John 12:32. What does Jesus mean by all people. Is He saying that all people will be saved? He is not saying all people without exception. He is saying all people without distinction. He will save Jews and gentiles. He will save slave and free, rich and poor, male and female. Jesus does away with all separations and walls that we build. He brings people into His Kingdom regardless of creed and color and class.

Jesus was born to die, and during Passover of A.D. 30, His time came. It was time for Jesus to die for us.

Also, as Jesus spoke, He revealed what time it is for us.

It Is Time for Us to Live for Jesus

Look at vv. 25-26. To live for Jesus means we give up claim on our own lives and selfish dreams. Jesus died for sin. We have died to self so we can live for God. We are to serve Him not self.

Honestly, what Jesus said is quite the opposite of how we generally live. For the most part, we cater to our wants, whims, and wishes. We go where we want to go, do what we want to do, and with whatever is left over after meeting our obligations, we spend our money the way we want to spend it.

That is not how God has called us to live. We are to lose our life for His sake.

Look at how Paul addressed this in Romans 12:1-2. Paul calls us to sacrificial living. The motivation for giving ourselves unreservedly to God is His mercy. We are deserving of God's judgment, but God mercifully withheld that just judgment and gave us instead forgiveness and Christ's righteousness. I have heard it said that by God's grace He gives us that we don't deserve. By His mercy He does not give us what we do deserve.

It is His mercy that encourages us to give ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. That means God can use us however He wishes. Our goal is no longer to make a name for ourselves, rather, to bring honor and glory to His name.

According to Romans 12:2, for this goal to become reality, there is one thing that must not happen and one thing that must take place. We must not become like the world around us. We must not adopt their values. The current of our culture wants to take us in the direction it is headed, but we must swim upstream. That is not easily done.

One test case to see whether we have bought into the world's values is what we want for our kids. What do you want for your children or grandchildren? If we were honest, many of us would say, "I want my children to do well in school so they can get a good job, make enough money so they can live well and be happy." How is that different from what the world wants?

Maybe we should say something along the lines of, "I want my children to do well in school so they will be a well-rounded individual and become a sharper knife for God to use. I want them to find and live out God's calling for their life. I want them to go wherever God calls them and do whatever God calls them to do."

What would you say if your child or grandchild said, "God is calling me to become a missionary in a Muslim nation. I will have to go in undercover as an English teacher or something else"? Would you discourage them from pursuing that objective or would you rejoice that they wanted to do whatever God wanted them to do?

In addition to not becoming like the world around us, we would need to be changed from the inside out as God changes how we think. God doesn't think like we think; so, we need to get rid of our stinking thinking and let God renew our minds with godly thinking. Godly thinking will change us from the inside out. We will be transformed to be more like Christ rather conformed to be more like the world.

Let's consider one more think Jesus said in John 12 that will help us to live for Him. Look at vv. 35-36. The word "light" is used five times in these two verses. What is the light in this passage? I believe the light is Jesus. Elsewhere, He said that He is the light of the world.

What are we to do with the light? Jesus mentions two things. We are to walk in the light, and we are to believe in the light. We are to walk in Jesus, and we are to believe in Jesus. We won't do the first if we don't do the second. Since we believe in Jesus we are to walk as He walked. We are to live as He lived. We to walk where He leads.

Jesus' life was characterized by love and servanthood. We are to love and serve whomever He puts around us. That means we will be God-centered and other-centered and not self-centered. It is time for us to live for Jesus.

Some people are living for the weekend, or living for retirement, or living for the football season to begin again. We need to be different. We need to live for Jesus. It is time.

My alma mater, Oklahoma Baptist University, has been in the news recently. On April 19th, the campus at OBU took a direct hit from a tornado. Every building on campus was affected in some way; many were badly damaged.

I feel for the President at OBU, Dr. Heath Thomas. He was installed as President in January of 2020. He had been the president for less than two months when our nation was hit with a pandemic. Can you imagine trying to run a university during a pandemic and the challenges you would face? He got through it, and the school is growing again. Then, for the first time in the school's 113-year history, it was hit by a tornado. By God's grace, no one was killed or even hurt on campus, but the campus was a mess. Everything was upended—schedules, classes, living spaces. Miraculously, in-class learning began again this past Monday—May 1st. In a video message to the students, Dr. Thomas said, "We are in hallelujah territory right now."

I have heard Dr. Thomas speak on several occasion. Each time he says that the goal of the university is to prepare students to live all of life all for Jesus.

Not only is that the goal of a Christian university for its students, that is God's goal for you, that you live all your life, all for Jesus. And the Holy Spirit lives within you to prepare you to do that very thing.

Brothers and sisters, it is time.

- It is time that we no longer live our lives only for ourselves.
- It is time that we no longer live our lives for what the world has to offer.
- It is time that we live our life for Jesus.

To live your life for Jesus, you must have Jesus in your life. To live your life for Jesus, you must want to do so. To live your life for Jesus, you need His help. You can't do it on your own. Let's ask Him for the help He wants to give us.