

Time

By John R. Gibson

In a recent lesson and in last week's bulletin article we sought to encourage the habit of regular Bible reading and consider some ways to make it more effective, with one of those tips being to make some notes as you read. There are a number of benefits to taking notes, but one of them is that points of emphasis or themes become more evident when notes are taken on that day's reading. Sometimes these will appear in one day's passages, but other times you will begin to see a theme emerge when you look back over the notes from the past few days. As I sat down to prepare this bulletin I looked back over the past three days of notes and the concept of time and its place in God's plan began to emerge. While I hope today's article will serve to make you think about the specific points discussed, I also hope it will help everyone appreciate the value of allowing thought-provoking themes to spring from our reading and notetaking.

It Takes Time

One of my readings was from Luke 8 and the Parable of the Sower. There the good soil was said to represent those who did more than hear the word and offer an initial response, but these kept the word and bore fruit with patience or endurance, as the margin gives it. It is good to be reminded that the commitment to follow Jesus is not for today or tomorrow, but for whatever time I have remaining on this earth. As seen with the stony and thorny ground, we will face temptations and distractions, but Jesus expects us to keep serving Him as the days add up to weeks and the weeks turn to months and the months to years. Elsewhere we read that we are not to grow weary, but realize that "in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9). Let's commit ourselves to being in this for the long haul, knowing both the consequences of stopping too soon and the blessings of perseverance.

Time Will Run Out

2 Peter contains the writing of an aged apostle who knew his time had about run out (2 Peter 1:13-14). We must not ever begin to think we can cheat death, for the sands of time eventually run out for everyone (Hebrews 9:27). And this is not just for the elderly, but this is a lesson for all of us, for as James would warn in 4:13-17, we have no promise of tomorrow and must do what we know to be right today. If you are not prepared for your time to expire, you are making a great mistake and need to change that right now. Be prepared for the day you will stand before God in judgment—it's coming. Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10

But can we also think about Peter and his mindset as death approached? He knew his time was about up, but there was no bitterness or resentment expressed; instead, he wrote to encourage the saints to remain faithful and continue to stand in the truth after he was gone. The first man to openly proclaim the saving gospel (Acts 2; Romans 1:16) would soon be gone, but he knew the truth would remain and the work would continue. As we get older let's not allow the infirmities and difficulties of life to discourage, but instead focus on the "exceedingly great and precious promises" given us (2 Peter 1:4), remain faithful,

and do as Peter did in exhorting others to keep on keeping on.

We Don't Know the Time

Another chapter I had in those three days was 1 Thessalonians 5 and the reminder that “day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (5:2). The latter half of the fourth chapter contains the beautiful message of the comfort that can be found in Christ’s return, but the fifth chapter reminds us that there is a flipside to this comfort. For those who have not served God with the patience we considered first or who have never obeyed the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8) will find the return of Jesus to be “sudden destruction” (5:3). How do we see this passage? Sure, we know God wants us to have a spirit of endurance and we know our time will run out some day and we know the end of time could come, but could it be that we still manage to delude ourselves into thinking we have plenty of time? We may live well beyond the threescore and ten and the Lord not return in our lifetime, but we don’t know that either will happen! We must understand that time is not in our control, but we can control what happens when our time is no more. After speaking of the sudden destruction to come upon some, Paul added that we are sons of light and sons of the day with the ability to live for Him so that in the end we live together with Jesus (5:4-11).

Time Hasn't Changed God's Word

The last point is taken from Jeremiah 35 and the prophet’s dealings with the Rechabites. The Lord told Jeremiah to bring the Rechabites into one of the chambers of the temple and serve them wine. When this was done, the Rechabites refused and said their father had forbidden them to drink any wine and they always did as he had instructed (35:1-11). While Jeremiah used their obedience to their father as a contrast with Judah’s rejection of the Lord and His prophets, I want us to think about the time factor involved in this story. Jonadab, the son of Rechab, had lived in the days of Jehu (2 Kings 10), at least 200 years before this invitation to drink wine in the temple. We don’t necessarily have to do things the way our ancestors did them 200 years ago, but do we have the same commitment to our heavenly Father as they did to their earthly one? Peter writes of God’s word as incorruptible and living and abiding forever (1 Peter 1:22-25), so will we change with the times or be like the Rechabites who continued to live by their father’s standards no matter how much the times changed? While we live in an everchanging world, nothing can change God’s word and if we allow the passing of time to change our approach to the Eternal God and His word, we will find ourselves unprepared when our time is up.

Unless noted, all quotations are from the New King James Version.