

From Here to There: Pursuing the Promise – 3. Audacious Faith

Joshua 10:12-15

August 23, 2020

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Our youngest daughter celebrated her 36th birthday ten days ago. I know – as you look at me you are wondering how I could possibly have a child that is 36. I wonder the same thing. Where did the time go? We know there are twenty-four hours in every day and seven days in every week. It's always been that way – never speeds us and never slows down. The time ticks away one second every second. But that's not how it feels – at least not to me. I'm often thinking there so much I want to do and not nearly enough time to do it. And in my journey from Here to There, just finding time to figure out where there is is difficult. Life seems too short - never enough time.

Time and how we manage our time may be one of the greatest challenges of 21st century life. Last week, I came across this description of how Americans spend their time. If our lifespan only allowed us to live to 75 years, this is how the average American would spend his or her time. 25 of our 75 years would be spent sleeping. 15 years would be spent on the phone, watching TV or browsing the Internet. 5 years would be spent traveling to get to school, work and home. 3 years out of the 75 would be spent going to school (that's elementary through college). Are you doing the math? We're half way and we haven't included our work life or family life. How much time do you suppose would be spent with God? Let's say you went to church every week from the day you were born until age 75 and you never missed. We would spend 5 months. That's 5 months out of 75 years. Now let's say we spend 15 minutes a day reading the Bible, praying, devotions – every day from cradle to grave. That would be nine and a half months. Nine and half months in one on one time with God throughout my entire 75 years. Knowing there were a lot of years I didn't spend any one on one time with God, I'm a long way from 9 and half months. And as I thought about it, I realized that I seem to find the time to do what matters most to me.

Time itself was created by God, and yet God is timeless. In the Greek New Testament, there are two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* – from which we get the word *chronological*. This is the ticking of the clock. It's the way that we measure time. The other word, *Kairos*, refers to fullness of time. This is God's timing. God's purposes are not necessarily bound by our understanding of chronological time. When Jesus came into the world, it was a *Kairos* moment. Paul tells us, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son." (Galatians 4:4)

Let me try to help us understand *Kairos* with a picture. When you first look at the picture all you see is a pattern, an interesting design. But if you stare long enough and hard enough something entirely different emerges. Can you see the dinosaur? All the patterns somehow rearrange themselves in your brain. And if you don't get dizzy trying, what you discover is another image, but it takes time. That's the *Kairos* moment. It's the place where God is found, but we've got to pause (be still) and get in touch with God's purpose to catch a glimpse. And this morning, we have an amazing story of an answered prayer which gives Joshua more time.

Remember Joshua was born into slavery in Egypt and experienced firsthand his people's deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh. As they journeyed to the Promised Land, Joshua rose to a leadership position as Moses' assistant. When they came to the Jordan River, Joshua was among those sent into the Promised Land to see what lay ahead. Only Joshua and his friend, Caleb, clung to faith and said, "let's go." Everyone else wanted to turn back. Everyone else was afraid, and fear prevailed. So the next 40 years were spent wandering in the wilderness, enduring the consequences of acting with fear instead of faith. After 40 years, the people

returned to the river's edge. This time God says, Be strong and courageous. And they leaned into God's promise to be with them every step of the way. They crossed the river, and as long as they let God lead them, they were able to claim the land that God had promised to them. In Joshua 10, we find a prayer and a moment when chronos and kairos intersect. This is the place of answered prayer.

Here's the scene: Five opposing armies were positioned to attack Joshua and his people. So Joshua decided to strike first and led his army on an all-night march into battle. During the march, God spoke to Joshua. **"Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your power. Not one of them can stand up against you."** So at dawn, the Israelites mounted a surprise attack, and it went well. The other armies – the Amorites – fell back and began to retreat. But with the sun sinking toward the horizon, what God promised had not yet been accomplished. Most of us would call it a day. We've done all we could do and now the day has ended. Tomorrow's another day. But Joshua wasn't most people. He actually believed what God promised: **not one of them can stand up against you**. So Joshua saw that time was running out. He grabbed hold of every ounce of faith, and he prayed one of the most audacious prayers in the Bible. **"Sun, stand still at Gibeon! and moon at the Aijalon Valley!"** He had the audacity to ask God to make the sun stop in the sky. I realize this sounds preposterous and scientifically impossible, and I can't give you a detailed explanation for how this could happen. But according to scripture, God answered Joshua's prayer. Really? Did God actually stop the earth on its axis, or create some way for the sun to be reflected in the sky to extend daytime? Really? I don't know, but I choose to believe God can step into a moment in time to answer a prayer according to God's purposes. And I believe God still desires to make the sun stand still over the life of every believer, if we have the audacity to ask. And at the end of this story, we are told it was **a day when the LORD responded to a human voice**. At the height of human need with God's purposes on the line, God listened – and God still does.

Last week, I remembered an interview I had seen with Scott Hamilton. For four years in the 1980s, he was the world's best male figure skater. He won four US championships, four world championships, and the gold medal in the 1984 Olympics. When he was a child, he suffered from a disease that stopped him from growing. As a result, he turned to figure skating and found he was good at it. His smaller size was actually a benefit. In 1997, at the height of his professional career, he was forced to stop skating to undergo chemotherapy for testicular cancer. In the midst of this battle, a friend, who would later become his wife, brought him to church and he began reading the Bible to discover what God had done through history. He eventually overcame the cancer, was married, and against all odds, a son was born. But a year later, they discovered he had a brain tumor. Scott and his wife, Tracy, began praying for God's will to be done, whatever that might be. A biopsy found that the tumor was one that he had since birth which inhibited his growth. That was the mysterious undiagnosed illness that got him into skating. He realized the brain tumor was a great gift that made everything else possible. But then six years after the brain tumor was removed, the tumor returned – and this time he didn't think he would survive. Take a listen. **[video]** And he says, "I now understand that it is through a strong relationship with Jesus, you can endure anything." God is present to guide us through the tough spots. God was there. God was there every single time.

In 1 John 5:14-15, we find these words: **This is the confidence that we have in our relationship with God. If we ask for anything in agreement with his will, he listens to us. If we know that he listens to whatever we ask, we know that we have received what we asked from him.** Faith makes it possible for us to pray with a bold confidence. Those who believe stand at a place where heaven and earth meet and draw down the blessings of heaven into life in this moment in time. It is the kairos moment. And we know our requests have already

been granted even though they may be granted in ways we do not expect. Last fall, a pastor friend asked me to pray with him for a miracle. His kidneys had stopped function and because he had received a heart transplant twenty years ago, his heart was not strong enough to endure dialysis. So we prayed. He had experienced miracles in the past and this time he was confident his prayer would be answered and when it wasn't, he was devastated for a time – until he realized the God who had been with him to that point would not abandon him now. And when I spoke with him the day before he died, he knew that was the greatest answer to his prayer.

There are five important words in what John was saying that are so easy to overlook. I had to read the verses half a dozen times before I noticed the five words. **This is the confidence that we have in our relationship with God. If we ask for anything in agreement with his will, he listens to us.** In other words, God wants our agenda to align with God's agenda. Otherwise, why not pray the biggest prayer that would benefit your life. Just ask God to let you live the rest of your life free from physical and emotional pain. Just ask God for billions of dollars to enter your bank account. Or ask that this coronavirus disappear. "Hallelujah! Sun stand still! God we will even give you credit."

Let's say your birthday is approaching and your parents ask what sort of gift you would like for your birthday. And you begin to list a few things, some much more expensive than others – and beyond your parent's willingness to provide. So they ask you to prioritize because they really want to give you something that you want. But you don't have time to do that. On your birthday, you call your parents because you are in the checkout line with a gift that you have chosen. "How do you want me to pay for this?" you ask. Whoa... slow down. Stand still. You missed a step. Your parents invited you to ask for something and no request was too large, but you never took the time to determine your parents' true purposes.

Do you see what John was saying and what Joshua discovered – in agreement with God's will. How would you discover the heart and will of your heavenly Father? It's not so different than an earthly father? But it takes time. Be still. Be present. It's up to me to work on the relationship. I've learned it's not always easy or even convenient for me. But for faith to do what faith can do: in the words found in Psalm 46:10 – Be still and know that I am God.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 23, 2020

Weekly Prayer: I come before you, O God, seeking what you can provide. I confess that there are places in my life and in this world longing for life, waiting for your healing touch. Open our hearts and minds that you may be at work in us and through us, in Christ's name. Amen.

Monday, August 24

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Observation: What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? "Pray without ceasing," or as it says in the New Living Translation, "Keep on praying." The apostle Paul is not telling me I must talk to God all the time; he is telling me to think, speak and live in the presence of God all day.

Application: Learning to thank God for whatever he gives is sometimes difficult. Regardless of how I might feel about prayer on any given day, the fact remains: prayer is the pivotal

connecting point in my ongoing relationship with God. If I'm not praying, I'm not really connecting. How are you making yourself present to God today?

Prayer: Eternal God, loving Spirit, thank you that you are faithful and present and always attending to my deepest needs. Help me to let go of any obstacle that is keeping me from you. I want to be available and ready to see and hear and experience you today. Amen.

Tuesday, August 25

Scripture: Ephesians 6:18

Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers.

Observation: What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? The point of prayer is that it accomplishes things you cannot do by your own effort, organization or skill. At one level, prayer is mysterious. Nobody knows exactly how it works, which may be part of the point. Paul insists that you need to stay awake and keep alert if you are to engage properly in prayer.

Application: Prayer is hard work. It can't be reduced to a few moments of sleepy meditation at the end of the day, or a few quick moments at the beginning. (Although that would be better than nothing!) It helps to have a plan. When do you take time for prayer? You may find it helpful to keep a list of things and people to pray for in order to be faithful to prayer.

Prayer: Lord, I come to you this day. Hear my concerns for others and myself. I pray specifically for _____, trusting that you are already working to bring hope and wholeness. I am grateful for what you accomplish and give you thanks for the greatness of your ways. Amen.

Wednesday, August 26

Scripture: Psalm 119:164; Daniel 6:10

I praise you seven times a day for your righteous rules.

When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house. Now his upper room had open windows that faced Jerusalem. Daniel knelt down, prayed, and praised his God three times that day, just like he always did.

Observation: What word or phrase speaks to you from these verses? The author of Psalm 119 reveals that he prayed "seven times a day," in other words, throughout the day. Not even the threat of death could keep Daniel from honoring his customary times of prayer to God.

Application: Praying at regular, fixed times is a discipline that was in place in biblical times. It would be impossible to grow a relationship, much less maintain it, without constant communication. As you consider today or tomorrow, at what times could you stop to pray? If you prayed when you first woke up, before each meal, and again before going to sleep, that would be five times in one day – five times when the veil could be lifted to catch a glimpse of God's presence.

Prayer: Hear me, O Lord, as I come to you, grateful for all that you have done. I am blessed. Help me to be open to your direction. Let this day be my way of blessing you. Amen.

Thursday, August 27

Scripture: Colossians 3:15-17

The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.

Observation: What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? Paul sees clearly that for the Christian faith to survive in Colossae, the church must adopt very different values from the rest of the culture. Their behavior must be what is revealed in Jesus. The “peace of Christ” must rule in all your human relationships.

Application: Have you ever tried to let Christ’s peace be the reality around which you order your life? If you have, you know it’s not easy. It takes serious prayer. Whatever you do or say must be able to stand having these words written above it: “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Once that is settled, everything else may fall into place.

Prayer: Dear Christ, once again, I offer my life to you. Before seeking what you want to accomplish through me, help me to be still and to listen for the kind of peace that only you can provide. May everything I say and do today, be in your name and for your sake. Amen.

Friday, August 28

Scripture: 1 John 5:14-15

This is the confidence that we have in our relationship with God: If we ask for anything in agreement with his will, he listens to us. If we know that he listens to whatever we ask, we know that we have received what we asked from him.

Observation: What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? John was saying that those who believe in Jesus, who abide in God, can pray with a new, bold confidence. They stand at the “thin place” where heaven and earth meet, and are encouraged to draw down the blessings of heaven into the life on earth, and to know as they make their requests that they have already been granted.

Application: Notice that it doesn’t say “if we ask anything we desire” but “if we ask anything according to his will.” God wants our agenda to align with his agenda. How well are you doing with syncing your purposes with God’s purposes? Some things are only accomplished through prayer.

Prayer: Keep me patient and attentive to your will, O God. Let me never forget that you are always near and always want what is best for me. Amen.

Saturday, August 29

Scripture: Matthew 14:25-29

Very early in the morning he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, “It’s a ghost!” They were so frightened they screamed. Just then Jesus spoke to them, “Be encouraged! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.” Peter

replied, "Lord, if it's you, order me to come to you on the water." And Jesus said, "Come." Then Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus.

Observation: What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? Three things happen in this story. First, Peter hears the words of Jesus. He recognizes Jesus' voice. Second, Peter speaks. He shouts back to Jesus, expressing his faith. And third, Peter gets out of the boat. It is not until his foot hits the water that his faith is demonstrated.

Application: Your faith is not going to increase simply because you want to do things for God or because you'd like to be able to sleep better at night. Your faith matures only as you regularly, methodically develop it by hearing, speaking and doing the Word found in Jesus Christ. How are you devoting time to this?

Prayer: Lord, I want to follow you and to experience the full power of your presence in my life. Help me to be faithful to the time that I commit to being attentive to your voice. Draw me closer to you so that others may see in me your presence and power and seek the same, in Jesus' name. Amen.