

"I went out, Lord. People were coming and going, Walking and running.

Everything was rushing: Cars, trucks, the street, the whole town. People were rushing not to waste time. They were rushing after time, to catch up with time, to gain time.

Good-bye, Sir, excuse me, I haven't time. I'll come back. I can't wait. I haven't time. I must end this letter--I haven't time. I'd love to help you, but I haven't time. I can't accept, having no time. I can't think, I can't read, I'm swamped. I haven't time. I'd like to pray, but I haven't time.

You understand, Lord, they simply haven't the time. The child is playing, he hasn't time right now...Later on... The schoolboy has his homework to do, he hasn't time...Later on... The student has his courses, and so much work...Later on... The young married man has his new house; He has to fix it up...He hasn't time...Later on... The grandparents have their grandchildren. They haven't time...Later on... They are ill, they have their treatments, They haven't time...Later on... They are dying, they have no... Too late!...They have no more time!

And so all people run after time, Lord. They pass through life running-- Hurried, jostled, overburdened, frantic, And they never get there. They haven't time. In spite of all their efforts They're still short of time, Of a great deal of time. Lord, you must have made a mistake in your calculations, There is a big mistake somewhere. The hours are too short. Our lives are too short."

Those are some of Michel Quoist's thoughts on time and they may resonate with you as they do with me.

This morning in our series on stewardship with think about stewardship of time. Even as I start I think I haven't time to do this justice. Friends if you never have enough time then this sermon won't change that. But before you decide that you might as well use the next twenty minutes to catch up on some sleep can I say that what I think it may do is challenge us to think about time and about how we use it. So use these moments as a *kairos* moment to think about how you use the time God gives you.

To help us I'm going to look at this passage from 2 Tim 4, although it is not about time it does involve thoughts about time which I think take us to the mind of God. As such, I'm not going to be dealing with time management. There are plenty of books and courses about that but by and large that can be a very human answer to a very human issue. I want to see what God has to say about our lives lived within time and space.

So as we look at these verses what did Paul say to his young friend Timothy, who was leading the church in Ephesus, and how does it speak of time?

1. The priorities of life

Have a look at the passage and ask yourself what was the main thing Paul said to Timothy. Some of us have done this exercise before as we have looked in courses at how we understand the Bible.

So what was the one thing Paul wanted to say to Timothy? It is there in v2 "Preach the word."

Why did Paul write that? Presumably because that was what he felt it was important for Timothy to do in Ephesus.

Timothy may not have seen it that way. He ought to do a bit of visiting and church council always took time as did Deanery Synod. Then there was his family and he was a massive supporter of Ephesus Town in the Mid-Mediterranean League. Yeah he had lots on his plate.

Paul understood that because Paul had been in Ephesus and Paul knew Timothy, even more God knew Timothy as he spoke to him through Paul. God doesn't deny all those things but he does say clearly preach the word – give time to that which is most important. For Timothy as God saw it at that time the priority was to preach the word and Timothy should make that his priority giving it the time it needed.

So as you look at your life what are your priorities? If we are Christians then can I suggest that our main priority is to "seek first the kingdom of God". That is we are to put God first in all our thinking and not least as we think about how we use our time. That phrase comes in the sermon on the mount and in a section where Jesus was telling the disciples not to worry about their lives what they eat drink or wear. We may not worry about such things but so often we, and this very much includes me, say I'm not sure how I'm going to get everything done in the time!

What God seems to be saying is be it time, money, abilities, possessions put me first in all these things, give me the best of them.

But of course we don't. Often we are too busy to even spend a few moments with God a day. We have too many things on our agenda to be able to get to church to meet with the people of God and worship God. In that we are just the same as everyone else in the world.

But what are the priorities? Well that I can't spell out for you. I would suggest that you sit down with a spouse or a friend and try and think through with God what are the priorities in your life and whether you are actually giving the best of your time to those.

2. Times of rest

But if I can't spell out the priorities for you I can tell you one thing very clearly that God wants you to do with your time.... he wants you to rest in fact he commands you to rest.

Isn't that amazing! I'm sure we could trawl through the Bible and come up with a number of things that God calls us to do with our time but he one commandment is to take a Sabbath, to rest.

This is what we saw in Lifeshapes with the semi-circle. We saw that God rested on the seventh day and that we who are made in his image should do the same. But we saw that we don't rest from our work rather we work from our rest. It is the rest which gives us the impetus to work. But God doesn't just see it as a good idea to have a day of rest no, to have a Sabbath rest is a command of God. It is a command just like all the others and yet I know we so often break it we break this command as if it doesn't really matter. Friends this is a command and so in the view of God surely it follows that being a workaholic is to God as bad as being a murderer.

Rest is an essential part of discipleship. So as we have a few moments this morning have a look at your life. It's rhythms and patterns? Where are the times of rest? I'm not just thinking here about a Sabbath day because, again as we saw in Lifeshapes rest is not confined to one day a week but to time in each day week, month, year.

When are your down times in the day, the month, year?

But of course the Sabbath was not just about rest it was about being with God. We put that in Christian terms and we talk about abiding in Christ. For me this sermon is apposite for as I revisited my notes on the semi-circle I recalled that I'd said for me part of the pruning process was that when I went on holiday to cut a few of the novels and put in a Christian book that would feed me, so that as I rested on holiday I was abiding in Christ, was important. As we think of priorities in terms of use of time rest is a priority and as we rest we also abide in Jesus and so we come full circle to the fact that God should be at the centre of our time.

3. The seasons of life

Let's go back to what God was saying to Timothy in 2 Tim 4:2&3, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come..."

We have a number of time words there as Paul speaks about seasons and times and each word has its roots in the word *kairos*.

Paul here was saying to Timothy that he was to preach whether it was opportune, timely, convenient, or not. In other words his priority overruled convenience. However it leaves us with the thought that in life there are seasons and times when things change and how we use the time we are given may vary.

When we are single time is different from when we are married and that from when we have young children. When we are fighting to establish our careers time is different from when we are established and when we are retired. Some times will occur only once but some will reoccur. In church life we work in terms and often the end of the summer term July and August I find are times when I can put aside the regular pattern of meetings and find time for reading reflection and rest. Indeed I know of some churches where following the Lifeshapes pattern they have times of rest where there are no meetings other than Sunday.

The problem is we don't always recognise the time and for many of us we want to squash the wrong things into the wrong seasons. Perhaps when you are struggling with young children and are working long hours is not the time to be undertaking huge new responsibilities that will take up a lot of time. An overall and a seasonal picture is what we see from the Bible.

Can you recognise such seasons in your life? Are you aware of the season you are in at the moment and if so are you going with the season or trying to fight against it?

Again these are very general questions and can't answer specific points in your life for which you again would need to sit down with spouse or friend and talk through.

4. The eternal dimension

What I find interesting and perhaps in a sense surprising as Paul wrote to Timothy is the reasoning. Have a look again at the passage, v1 "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word". Can you see what he was saying – in the light of Jesus the judge and his return preach the word. Then at the end of the passage v8, "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

The two act as bookends, setting the whole context of what Paul was saying. Timothy should make preaching his priority because Jesus will return as judge and through the preaching people will come to faith and be on the right side of that judgement, so that they like Paul could be confident of the crown at the end.

But the point is that Paul has this big picture which he offered to Timothy and offers to us. It is not a matter of living under the sun as we were seeing from Ecclesiastes but of living in the light of eternity. We should think of the way we use the time given to us in the light of eternity. In this way we will use our time to lay up treasure in heaven. In setting out our priorities in the way we use time we should be asking what is the eternal benefit of this? [need an example]

As I said at the start this sermon is not going to solve the problems you have with time. But I hope it may have given us some things to reflect upon so that again we see this as a *kairos* moment.

We observe our busyness and recognise that something needs to change

We reflect that actually that is not what God would have for us. The rush, the stress, the not having time for things.

We discuss with our spouse friend about our use of time, our priorities, our times of rest, the seasons we are in.

We plan to live life in the light of eternity, with God at the centre, giving him the best of our time and under his hand to live according to our natural rhythms making time to rest and abide as well as work.

We are accountable as we talk with other and plan so we allow them to hold us accountable so that in this as in the use of money or talents or possessions we are seeking to follow Jesus in every way.

We act. Having recognised that something needs to change and gone through the process we do something in response to the word of God.

As we close in prayer we will use the Lord's prayer in the way we did it in Lifeshapes

The Father's character – Our Father in heaven

Heavenly Father we know that you are our God and that you have made us in your image. You are the eternal God and so as we pray lift our eyes and hearts to your throne that you may give us your mind and fill us with your desires

The Father's kingdom – hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Father as we think about time help us to remember that we are your children. As you put your heart and will in ours may we find that we use our time to your glory and to the building of your kingdom.

The Father's provision – give us today our daily bread

Heavenly Father thank you that our times are in your hands and that you gives us all we need. We thank you for today and simply ask that we may use the time we have today wisely. Help us not to feel we have to fill it but give us time to rest and to reflect upon you.

The Father's forgiveness – forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

Forgive us father that we are so often so rush. Forgive us the frantic way we try and cram things into each day and week. Forgive us that we complain so easily that we don't have enough time.

The Father's guidance – and lead us not into temptation

Father help us as we look at our lives and think about time to know what should be our priorities. Help us to sense the seasons of our lives and to know when we need to rest. Father use family and friends to help us in our thinking that guided by you we may live our lives to the best.

The Father's protection – but deliver us from evil

Save us Father from wasting time, from making time an idol, from focussing just upon the here and now. Keep in our minds that eternal

dimension so that we build up treasure in heaven.

For yours is the kingdom the power and the glory for ever and ever Amen