



Acts and The Early Church (Week 4/8) Reckoned Time Strangely

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *What do you need to surrender to live more like this household of faith?*

Warm-Up

1. What is the most common advice that you've heard about how we are to use our time?
2. How do you set up your annual calendar? How did the Romans create a sense of order of time?

Read Acts 3:11-16

3. What has happened prior to this in Acts 3? *How did people respond when they witnessed the miracle?*
4. Who do the people think is the cause of the miracle? Who does Peter redirect the focus to?
5. Has there been a time in your life in which understanding your past gave meaning to your present?
6. In order to understand what has happened, to what history does Peter point the people to?
7. According to Peter, how did Jesus fulfil the prophets? In what way does he fulfil God's covenant?
8. If Jesus is the 'author of life', *how far back does his history reach? Why is it significant that Jesus is eternal?*
9. As Christians, in what ways is our confidence for the future (and in the present) built on a foundation of God's faithfulness through history? *What is the ultimate past event that gives us confidence?*
10. Do you think contemporary Christians value God's faithfulness through history? Why or why not?
11. What role does the reading of the Old Testament shape our gratitude for God's faithfulness over time?
12. What role does the reading of the New Testament shape our gratitude for God's faithfulness, too?
13. What are the annual rhythms of the Christian calendar? *How does it help to grow our confidence in God?*
14. In what way are we caught up in God's salvation plans throughout history as we turn to Jesus?

Read Acts 3:17-26

15. What does Peter say *is yet to happen?* (cf. Verse 21).
16. What will the arrival of this future be like? What will the fulfillment of this future be like?
17. Ultimately, who is our eternal future dependent on? Why can we be confident of this?
18. How practically does having a certain future hope transform your roles on various frontlines?
19. How does having a certain future hope help you to feel secure daily? *Can you think of an example?*
20. As we think about the present, what is our primary and first response to God?
21. How was the early church transformed by the constant presence of the Holy Spirit?
22. What does it mean to you to know that Jesus is present with you in every moment?

Apply *As you use your time for God, which of these should be your focus: (a) Rejoicing more in God's presence; (b) Responding more regularly to God's purposes; or (c) Resting with confidence that God is in control?*

Pray *Almighty Lord, thank you that you are the author and redeemer of time. Help us to live in recognition of what Christ has done and in anticipation of his return. Praise be to God for ever and ever, Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

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Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Frontline this Week

Where might God be using your weakness this week, to witness to the Gospel?

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Peter at Solomon’s Colonnade” by Al Gibbs:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/peter-at-solomons-colonnade/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* “The Blessings of the Gospel” by John Stott:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=51363&show_file=54568
- *Listen (sermon):* “God’s Raising Agents” by William Taylor:
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/57502/>
- *Read (book):* “Becoming Friends of Time” by John Swinton 📖
- *Read (book):* “How to Inhabit Time” by James K. A. Smith 📖

Series Resources

- *Read (book):* “Strange Religion” by Nijay Gupta. 📖
- *Read (commentary):* “The Challenge of Acts” by Tom Wright. 📖
- *Read (book):* “Why the Gospel” by Matthew Bates.
- *Read (advanced commentary):* “Acts: Witnesses to Him” by Bruce Milne.

📖 [Available to borrow in the Church library](#)

THE FRUIT OF THE SPRIT
Week 4/8 “Reckoned Time Strangely”
by the Rev’d Adam Lowe (17/08/2025)

시간을 새롭게 헤아림 | Köl dë chuṛ | 奇异的时间计算

Bible Passage: Acts 3:11-26

*Gracious Father, please help us to order our time in response to the Good News of Jesus.
The one who is Lord of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Amen.*

You may have seen a *meme* or heard someone once say something like:

- If the past exists in memory, and the future exists in anticipation,
the only thing that is *real* and *therefore* matters, is the thin slither of NOW.
- So you had better seize the moment! /
You only leave once. Carpe Diem — seize the day! /
Every generation seems to have a version of this.
- *Some might think, oh well, I might as well enjoy the moment! Take life easy; eat, drink, be merry.*
- *Others might think, I had better be super industrious and squeeze every ounce out of life.*
- *Yet for most, I suspect it causes an internal panic.*
- Sure, living for the present sounds kind of fun and free on the surface...
- But if the clock is ticking and the sand is slipping through my fingers,
I’m afraid I’m missing out.
Every second becomes a high-pressure test I can’t afford to fail.
And when things are more mundane, *you know — not worthy of an instagram post,
perhaps even difficult and painful, what do we do when the day doesn’t feel worth seizing at all?*
- If all the time I’ve got is now,
how can I find *meaning, identity, and purpose* that lasts?

In the ancient world, part of the Romans' answer to that was the calendar!

- They loved calendaring!
- I don't mean rolling out a fresh wall poster every year, and taking great delighting in populating it with events and goals, carefully colour-coded with bright sticky notes.
- *But the Romans overlaid the daily drudgery of life with an ordered pattern of festivals.*
- They loved festivals!
- They had a festival for just about everything and for every god.
- And your participation in the festivals:
Reminded you of your civic duty.
Marked the various seasons of the year.
Celebrated the greatness of Rome.
Anchored your life in vain hope to the gods.
- Their ordering of the calendar didn't just *tell time*, it gave *time meaning*.
- Or at least attempted to.
- *But the first Christians had a very different approach.*

For *how they lived* and *who they were* in the present, wasn't defined by the Roman ordering of things, or a frantic pressure to seize the day, but a radical understanding of a *past story* that had been caught up in, and a *future hope* to which they now belong.

Some people are preoccupied with the past: be it achievement or failures.

Some people are preoccupied with our future: be it aspirations or fears.

Still others, care not for the past nor the future, but only the present.

But the GOSPEL cuts across past, present, and the future.

- That's what we see in Acts 3.
- That when Peter healed a man who was unable to walk, and people couldn't quite understand how this had happened, Peter launches into an epic speech.
- That if they want to make sense of what they've witnessed now, they need to:
look back to what God has fulfilled in Jesus; *and*
look forward with anticipation to what will be made complete when Jesus returns.
- A Christian's approach to time wasn't just governed by a *calendar*, or *fun*, or *productivity*, but they had a spiritual understanding of time, with Jesus at the centre.
- They were spiritual time-keepers with a:
Past Story; Future Hope; and Present Reality.

PAST STORY | VERSES 11-16

지난 날의 이야기 | Wël thëër | 过去的故事

First, Christians are a people with a **past story**. Verse 11...

While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.

When people are amazed at the healing of the lame man, *Peter launches into a history lesson.*

I've never really taken much interest in family trees, but my wife, Bettrys loves them! Just recently, there was a moment before we went overseas that Bettrys told me that there might have been a relative of mine who had owned and run a gelato shop just outside of Rome in the distant past. I've never been so interested in my family history. All of a sudden, so much of who I am made sense because it was connected with the past.

- Peter is showing all the people that day, *that the only possible way*, that they can make sense of what has happened, is by considering history through the lens of Christ.
- Every strand of the past gets gathered up in him.
- In fact, Peter basically says, *if you understood history, then you wouldn't be surprised at all.*

Peter shows us just how far back that Jesus stretches.

- He is not only the one who is the fulfillment of what God foretold through the prophets: that this Messiah would suffer and die.
- He is not only the glorified servant who fulfils the promises made by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- But he is the one, *verse 15*, who is the very **author of life**.
- It's not just that Jesus is the fulfilment of all things.
Or that he was there at the beginning of all things.
But that he is the one who has brought into being and redeemed all things.
- The reason that the lame man could walk,
is not because Peter, John, or any of the other apostles had any power of their own,
but it is by faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and and know was made strong.
It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him. /
- *Woah!*
- *The point of course is not that every person for whom we pray in Jesus' name is healed now,*
the point is that this event is a glimpse of the power and the promise fulfilled in Jesus. /
They're fixated on the moment, they need to see it through the lens of all that has led to it.
- The reason I can have confidence of who I am now and the future to which I belong,
is not because of something which God might do but because of something he's done.

- I can have confidence not only because of a theological or biblical case that Jesus is the fulfilment of all God's promises, but because he lived, died, and rose again.
- My greatest achievements are nothing in comparison to what Christ achieved for me. My greatest failures have been obliterated by Jesus dying for me.
- If you're not yet a follower of Jesus—whatever the reason might be, whatever your objections might be—*I want to encourage you to investigate and examine the veracity of the historical claims about Jesus*. Because if these past things happened, it changes everything.
- That's what Peter wanted the people gathered at Solomon's Colonnade that day to see.
- And if you're a follower of Jesus today, that's something we need to: repeat, remember, plumb the depths, and be anchored to. / James Smith said:

Too many contemporary Christians look at history and see only a barren, textureless landscape.

- But we're products of the past, and it's because of the past we can now be connected as a people.
- It's why the first Christians didn't disband what we know as the Old Testament, but that they continued to recognise it as God's Word reading it through the lens of Jesus.
- And so should we.
- It's part of the reason that whilst the Romans ordered their calendar by festivals, the *Christian calendar is ordered in a way to remind us over-and-over again, of who we are in Christ*.

- And so should we.
- It's why when we read of God's unfolding salvation plan, our prayers and praise can constantly be full of thanks for how God has been at work.
- When Stephen was about to be stoned, what did he do? He launched into a history lesson to demonstrate how history has been fulfilled in Jesus.
- When the author to the Hebrews encouraged God's people to fix their eyes on Jesus, they systematically pointed to a great cloud of witnesses, who pressed on in faith and in whom God was faithfully working out his purposes.
- It means, we don't face the present nor the future on a narrow ledge; but we stand firmly on the foundation of God's faithfulness through history.

FUTURE HOPE | VERSES 21-26

미래의 소망 | ṅǽth dē kōl cīn | 未来的希望

Second, Christians didn't just look back with confidence but *also* forward in **future hope**. v.21:

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.' 'Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.

There's quite a bit happening in these verses.

- *We see again that Jesus is the fulfilment and fulfils all that God spoke through the prophets. We see once more that Jesus is the fulfilment and fulfils the covenant that God made.*
- But also note two critical things:
- **That our eternal future as God's people and heirs of all God's promises is dependent on our being connected to Jesus.** Not the quality of our faith, but who our faith is in. *You must listen to him. V.23... anyone who does not listen to him, will be completely cut off...* Without being connected to the author and redeemer of life, there is no life!
- **AND That Jesus will return to restore all things.**

- That's what Peter means by saying *'heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything'*.
- That sounds a bit cryptic, but Peter is simply reiterating that Jesus died, rose, ascended, AND he will return to bring all things to completion.
- *Christians live with a confidence: that is dependent on Jesus not on our own strength.*
Christians live with a confidence: that in the fullness of time Jesus will return and set things right.

Paul said that as surely Jesus rose from the dead, then our future resurrection will follow.

When the whole of creation will be renewed.

When heaven and earth will be joined as one.

When every injustice will be overturned.

When every tear, every pain, will be wiped away.

- In biblical language it's the difference between *chronos* time and *kairos* time.
Chronos time is the ticking over of the clock.
Kairos time is the decisive moment when God's plans will be fulfilled.
- Jesus said that time arrived in him and it will be complete when he returns.
- Christ has died, Christ is Risen, and **CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN**.

The early church lived with an incredible sense that time could arrive at any moment.

- Not in a way that caused them to kick back and do nothing. *[Remember...]*

- *But in a way that spurred them on with urgency to take up their part in Jesus' commission.*
- It gave them the confidence to persevere and face all sorts of challenges and opposition. Different parts of the early church faced all manner of persecution. Many still do today.
- But the Gospel is unstoppable. / The problems of the world will not have the final say.
- That doesn't diminish the pain or the seriousness of the challenges that we face.
- But it gives us a phenomenal perspective that we do not labour in vain.
- That even if we never seem to finish our work, or sufficiently grow in Christ's likeness, that one day, Jesus is going to bring all of that to completion.
- That even though we do not witness perfect justice, that one day, the perfect judge will come and declare the verdict.
- Having an eternal perspective that impinges on our present changes everything.

If you're a parent it means loving your kids in a way that points them to the eternal love of the Father.

If you're a leader it means leading with a vision for your people beyond the deadline or KPI.

If you're an investor it means your primary measure is not earthly reward but kingdom fruit.

If you've been hurt it gives you confidence that one day you will know perfect justice.

If you have hurt someone it means a confidence that one day every damage will be undone.

If you're facing death it means a confidence that in Jesus death is not the end.

We live in an increasingly anxious age.

- And the only *place* to which we can look to give us ultimate confidence is a *person*. In Jesus.

PRESENT REALITY | VERSES 17-20

현재의 실재 | Köl dë nyöth dë Yiith | 当前的现实

Finally, as a people with a past story and a future hope, it transforms our **present reality**.

The past that we look to and the future to which we look towards, take a grip on the now.

If you're not yet a believer, Peter says the primary way that we are to respond is **repentance**.

- Verse 19... *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...*
- That was not just the message of Peter, but that was the message of Jesus.
- To repent and believe in him as Lord and Saviour.
That's the primary response. / Repent means that we would be:
sorry for our sin, seek his forgiveness, and then set about turning our whole lives to him.
- And when you do that, we can be confident that our sins are forgiven, they are wiped out!
- That's a present reality that you can know RIGHT NOW.
You don't need to be left wondering if it is possible.
You just need to look to the cross and so that Jesus has done it.
- That's what Peter wants for all who were present that day!
That's what God wants for every person here today!

And if you are a believer, it is because of Jesus that you are empowered right now, with his Spirit—the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead—to participate in his mission.

- We witness that in the early church in a multitude of ways.
but let me quickly highlight three.
- **ONE: They REJOICED that God was present with them.** Which meant:
they could delight in him any time and in any place;
they prioritised worshipping him together;
they were emboldened and empowered to step out; and
they had an awareness that they carried God's witness wherever they went.
- If you are a follower of Jesus, wherever you go the Spirit of God is present with you!
- **TWO: They RESPONDED in the present with purpose.**
They had an extraordinary clarity of purpose.
- They demonstrated what it means—as Psalm 90 puts it—to number our days.
That didn't mean that were always frantically trying go *do things or God*,
but that everything they did was shaped by the very purposes of God.
- That was reflected in the long-term and the short-term. *In the planned and the unexpected.*
- Whenever I think about Paul's journey in Acts,
I often have a picture of Paul bounding from one place to the next.
Really going places and getting things done. / And that's certainly true to a great extent!

- But what is surprising is how often Paul got seemingly delayed.
He wasn't just moving from one-place-to-the-next.
- It's just a blip of verses in Acts, *but Paul spent two years in prison when trying to get to Rome.*
Was seemingly stuck in Malta for three months after being shipwrecked.
And then another two years under house arrest when he finally arrived.
- Sometimes we can really feel like we're just not making progress.
But that doesn't mean that God isn't making progress.
- Sometimes the very things that feel like interruptions are God's Gospel opportunities.
- *Just because they're not on our radar does not mean that they are not part of God's purposes.*
- Whatever the case, when we know God is present and working out his purposes,
we have the opportunity to get on board with God's agenda and make it our own.
- **THREE: They RESTED with confidence that God was ultimately in control.**
- *One of the most distinctive aspects about the early Christians was their weekly rhythm of rest.*
- Part of that was in continuity with the Jewish practice of Sabbath.
- But part of it was new, as that day not only focused on the Risen Jesus,
but it was a reminder that God's New Creation had begun in him.
- Rest *punctuates* our week to reorientate as God's people.
- Rest *teaches* us to be patient and wait as God works things out in his timing.
Rest *reminds* us that not everything is dependent on us but ultimately on God.

Rest *points* us to the ultimate rest that we can have confidence awaits.

- In a frantic and fast-paced world, keeping rest and gathering as God's people, might just be one of the most counter-cultural things that we can do. /
- Right now. Wherever you go this week. Whatever you face. We can:
- Rejoice that the Lord is present;
Respond in the present with God's purpose; and
Rest with confidence that God will bring things to completion. //

I really love that one of the first purposes of mechanical clocks when they were introduced in the 14th century wasn't to drive up productivity or to make sure the trains run on time, but in order to call people to prayer.

- Time shouldn't squeeze us away from God.
It should push us towards the one who holds all time in his hands.
- Do whatever you can to *keep remembering that*.
- That every time we *set an appointment, make a plan, and look at the clock*, we'd recall:
- **Christ has died:** your sins have been dealt with.
Christ is risen: he is alive and with us right now.
Christ will come again: so we can live with confidence.