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Journey to the Center of Time!

By Tal Davis

As a child I enjoyed both American and world history. They were among my favorite subjects in school. I still read a lot of books and watch documentaries about great events in the past, many of which I am old enough to recall personally. For example, in June, 1963, I was in Charleston, West Virginia (the capital of my father's home state), to attend the centennial celebration of the state's joining the union. The keynote speaker that day was President John F. Kennedy, who I was able to see up close and waved to as his motorcade drove by. That was an exciting day for an eleven-year-old boy. Sadly, that experience was superseded forever in my memory only a few months later by one of American history's worst events, President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas.

History has been called the great stage of the drama of past human events. We humans are the only creatures that comprehend the passing of time. Thus, we remember it by marking certain dates on our calendars. Some dates have great historical significance. Here are few notable ones:

- February 22, 1732 - George Washington's birthday (originally it was recorded as February 11, 1732, but changed when the calendars were corrected years later).
- October 12, 1492 - Columbus Day is the day Columbus first landed in the New World.
- July 4, 1776 - United States Independence Day is when the Declaration of Independence was signed.
- December 7, 1941 - Pearl Harbor Day is when Japan attacked the naval base in Hawaii drawing the U.S. into World War II.

- December 25, (ca. 6-4 BC, actual year and date unknown) - Christmas is when we celebrate Jesus' birth.
- Jan. 1, New Year's Day is the day when we are probably the most conscious of time and history when at 11:59 pm on December 31st of one year becomes 12:00 am on January 1st of the next. Of course that day is totally arbitrary. It is really no different than any other night and does not commemorate any special historical event or person. (It does usually have great college football games.)

We are now approaching the end of one of the most bizarre years in our nation's history. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has effected the entire world like nothing else certainly in my lifetime. Whole countries have been forced to all but shutdown their economies and schools. Thank God for modern technology that allows us to still communicate face-to-face (ZOOM, Skype, etc.), something unheard of only a few years ago. Soon this year will pass into the annals of history and will be talked about for centuries in the future.

As Christians we need a proper perspective on history and time. How we understand it is part of our Christian theistic worldview. It is an integral part of our understanding of reality. To fully grasp the meaning of time and history, we must acknowledge three key facts:

- 1) God created time itself and He is not subject to it.
- 2) God chose history as His stage for the grand drama of human redemption.
- 3) Time and history are only finite preludes to an eternity which we will spend with God in Heaven or separated from Him forever.

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Let's examine each of these points as to how they relate to our understanding of the universe, and how they effect our lives.

The physical universe consists of four integrated components: time, space, matter, and energy. The theistic Christian worldview affirms what the Bible asserts, that all of those elements were created by God from nothing (ex nihilo). That is to say, that before the creation event, time, space, matter, and energy did not exist. So what was there then? In terms of the physical realm, there was absolutely nothing. Not just nothing in the sense of the absence of matter as in a vacuum, but nothing in the sense of no time, no space, no matter, and no energy. It is what I call "Nothing Nothing."

Granted, that's a hard concept for us humans to get our minds around. Amazing as it seems, it is a fact that the modern sciences of physics and astronomy have confirmed the biblical view that the universe is finite (but really big), and had an absolute beginning from nothing. So when we talk about what happened before the creation, we need to understand there was no "before" to talk about, at least not in the temporal material universe.

So, in regard to our perspective on time, we assert that God created it. That is only possible because He is transcendent and exists beyond the finite confines of time and space. God is an infinite, timeless, and immaterial spiritual being who is omnipotent and omnipresent. He exists immediately in all places in all time, but He is not subject to it.

That being said, God had a purpose for creating finite time and space. It was to provide an environment for His created sentient living beings, that is, we human beings, to live.

God made the universe and everything in it so that we could exist in this time and place. Unfortunately, as we know, mankind sinned and we are in a fallen state. Nonetheless, God, in His providence, has played out His plan for our redemption on the stage of history. As we read the Bible, we can see the unfolding drama of His working through the Hebrew people whom He called to prepare the world for its salvation. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and the other prophets and kings, set the stage for the ultimate One who would bring salvation to all mankind.

That One, of course, was Jesus Christ. He was born in what we might call the center of time. As the writer of Hebrews declares: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." (Hebrews 1:1,2 NASB) Of course, we know that Jesus was none other than God Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity, in the flesh who came to take the punishment for our sins on Himself for our redemption. As Paul says, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:5-8 NASB) We know it did not end there, but His victory was established in real history by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

That leads to a third proposition. Time and history are only finite preludes to eternity in which we will spend with God in Heaven or separated from Him forever. People today are conditioned to believe life is finite and limited to the

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time we have in this world. Popular slogans and culture emphasize getting all you can out of these few years. Remember this one: "You only go around once, so get all the gusto you can?"

I once had a conversation with woman who worked in Hospice who spoke at a Pastor's lunch I attended. She described how she and her staff made things comfortable for the last days of people's lives. I commended her for doing so, but I could not help but ask, "So what can we do to prepare them for what comes after this life?" I don't know what, if any, religious beliefs she had, but she seemed put off by the question. It seemed almost like it was not even a valid inquiry to think about that.

That is a narrow and unbiblical perspective. With Christ we have the assurance that when this life is over it is not the end. Physical life in this limited time is not all there is. As John emphasized: "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 1:12-13 NASB)

We need to keep in mind that this life and history are but prologs to eternity future. When Christ returns He will create a new heaven and new earth and will break forever the limiting bonds of

time and space. Those of us who put our faith in Jesus will exist continually in God's presence with no end to what we will learn of Him and from Him (it won't be boring!). A million years from now (as we see time today) we will only be barely out of the starting gate of eternity. This is the great hope and assurance of the believer in Christ.

The other side of the coin, however, is equally true for the unbeliever. This life is also a prelude for his or her eternity. Those who leave this world without Christ do not have the expectation of a happy afterlife. The Bible says that those who reject Christ will be forever separated from God's presence in a place we call hell. Not a good prospect, but one about which we cannot be reticent. (Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15)

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At Christmas and New Years, we have a tendency to experience a heightened sense of time and history. Like Ebenezer Scrooge we recall (for good or bad) Christmases and New Years past, and look forward to those in the future. But we must remember that this time, this place, and this life are but an instant in the eternity to come! This year decide to live your life in light of eternity.