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Let's Play ... "Where Were You on ...?" - Part 3
What Does the Passing of Time Mean from a Christian Perspective?

By Tal Davis

In North-Central Florida, there is a beautiful park called Ichetucknee Springs State Park. Each year thousands of people come to the park to enjoy picnics and the nice Florida weather. Perhaps the park's greatest appeal, however, is going gently tubing down the Ichetucknee River stream that runs through it fed by the spring. The water is cold (constant 72 degrees), but on a hot summer's day it is exceptionally refreshing.

We all know that life is much like a journey down a flowing river. In our case, the river is the ongoing movement time. We move through time riding on the river of reality. As we go, the things we do, the people we meet, and the events we witness, plant a storehouse of memories in our minds. Some of them that are especially significant; we never forget. Others slip out of our minds as time rolls on.

In the last two installments of this three part series, titled, "Let's Play ... Where Were You On...?", we looked at a long list of major historical events that transpired over the past 100 years. I asked you to try and remember where you were and what you were doing when you first heard or witnessed each event. Some of you older folks (like this writer) may have recalled a lot of them. Others of you younger people probably did not remember very many at all. (To play the game and review the events go to these links:

- Let's Play Part 1

[<http://www.marketfaith.org/2021/05/lets-play-where-were-you-on-part-1-1900-1959-tal-davis>]

- and Let's Play Part 2

[<http://www.marketfaith.org/2021/05/lets-play-where-were-you-on-part-2-1960-present-tal-davis>].)

For the Christian, this exercise illustrates a wider issue: What exactly is the Christian Life? As we said, everyone's life is a journey through the time stream of reality. For the believer, however, the journey involves striving to relate all things we say, do, or witness, to Jesus Christ and His will. So, as Christians we must be willing to go forward boldly down the stream of life with faith and confidence.

An example of someone who fully understood this principle was the Apostle Paul. In the 20th chapter of the book of Acts, Luke relates the time that Paul met with the elders from the Ephesian church. It was a church he had started some years before and now wanted to inform its leaders what was going on at that point in his life. Paul was at a place of changing realities, so he addressed his trusted friends, the Ephesian elders, before proceeding on to Jerusalem.

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. Acts 20:17 NASB

Using the example of Paul and his conversation with these church leaders, we can discern several important principles about how we, as believers, can move confidently through the chronological journey of life.

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials

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which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ 22 And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:18-24 NASB

First, Paul shows us that we must take time to reflect upon and evaluate the past. It is important that we remember the past. This is why God gave us a memory. No other creature possesses consciousness of time. For even the highest animal species the present is all they know consciously. Humans however have the ability to remember in great detail events and ideas we have experienced or learned. Some things are remembered in greater specificity than others, usually depending on the significance of them.

The past was an important aspect of what Paul discussed with his old friends from Ephesus in verses 17-21 of this passage. He talks to them about his previous ministry among them. Notice that he uses the past tense: *"I was with you...serving the Lord"; "how I did not shrink..."; "teaching you..."; "solemnly testifying."* Paul makes it clear that when he was with them his sole purpose was to preach and teach in the face of the hardships he had endured. He had spent three years there

building the church which contained Jews and Gentile believers. He knew he had succeeded because these elders had maintained the health of the church and kept it on track doctrinally.

On occasion we must reflect on our past. We must evaluate both the good and the bad, the successes and the failures. It is always a good feeling to look back, especially at our successes, whether in school, business, sports, family life, or in spiritual life. That being said, we have to admit that not all memories are so good – we all failed at something. For some of us it was lot. We all make mistakes, some more serious than others. We even commit sins.

The point is, we need to evaluate our lives by God's standards. In His eyes, what may be seen as a success in the worldly sense, may be a failure spiritually. In those cases we may need to confess our sins and repent. Remember the example of Zaccheus. By the world's standards, he was a wealthy chief tax collector. He was well paid by the Romans and he also overcharged his taxpayers. But when he was confronted by the love of Jesus, his life changed and he promised to repay four-fold everyone he had cheated. Jesus then declared, *"Salvation has come to this house."* (Luke 19:1-10)

So, yes we need to reflect on the past. There is a danger, however. We must not be prisoners of the past. Too many people, when they get to a certain stage in life, become locked in to what used to be. They may languish with regrets about past failures and sins. They may glory in things they did when young but do nothing of value as older adults. I have met many men and women who can't shake the failures or triumphs of the past.

I recall many years ago, when I was a young pastor, I went to visit an old man named Asa. As I sat in his home with his wife, Asa related that in his early

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twenties he had been a soldier during World War I (yes, World War I). He said had once been given an order to assassinate someone who, as he put it, "Was causing us trouble." He did not say what the trouble was, he may not have even known, but he dutifully carried out his assignment. However, years later he still carried the burden of that act on his conscience. That day we prayed together that Asa would realize the power of God's grace and be freed of his 60 years of guilt so he could enjoy the last years of his life in peace.

Yes, we must reflect on the past. But we cannot stay there. That was then and this is now! We must deal with the situations of our lives as they are today. We must focus on the present.

In verse 22a of Acts 20, Paul, after reviewing the past, arrives at the present. He tells his listeners "*And now, behold, (I am) bound by the Spirit*" He realizes that past is gone and the present is here. Note that he says he is now "*bound by the Spirit.*" Paul recognized that God had a new direction for him at that moment in his history. It was not his choice to make. God's Spirit was in control. Everything he had done and experienced before had inevitably brought him to this point.

In a previous post I once asked if you ever have wondered what is meant by the term "now?" Just what is now? Think about it: "now" is not "now" ... "now!" As soon as we say it is "now," "now" is gone into the past. Physicists try to narrow time to its shortest interval, cutting it down even to nanoseconds (millionths of a second). But even that does not absolutely define NOW. That may be true, but in practical world we tend to measure time in terms of years (2021), months (June), weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds.... So "now" is usually perceived as this minute, or this hour, or today, etc.

In any case, life is a fleeting progression of "nows." Therefore, it is vital we are always living in God's will now, for what is now will quickly become the meaningful past and determine the future. Again, as Paul did, all this must be understood in relationship to God for whom everything is NOW! So, what you doing NOW? Are you confident you are where God wants you and are living in His will? If that's true then you can go forward into the future.

Have you ever noticed how people try to foretell their futures? Millions of naïve folks regularly consult psychics, fortune tellers, and astrologers to get "readings" on their fates. I have in my library a book written in 1969 by the famous late self-proclaimed prophetess Jeane Dixon (1907-1994). The book contains dozens of predictions she made about world events and celebrities in the late 20th century. In nearly every case she got it wrong. For instance, she predicted that a woman would be elected President of the United States in the 1980s. More than thirty years later it still has not happened.

Predicting the future is dangerous business, and false prophecy is warned against direly in Scripture.

20 But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name, a word which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How will we recognize the word which the LORD has not spoken?' 22 When the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the thing does not happen or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you are not to be afraid of him. - Deuteronomy 18:20-22 NASB

Paul could not foretell his future, but he knew it would bring many difficulties (v. 22). Nonetheless, he was absolutely determined to *"finish the course"* as God's Spirit directed him regardless of what might happen. Paul was confident that his future was in God's hands if he was faithful *"to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God"* and live confidently in His will (Acts 20:22b-24)

Fifty years ago, futurist Alvin Toffler (1928-2016) wrote an influential book titled Future Shock. In that tome, Toffler asserted that the world changes so fast people just cannot psychologically keep up. This, he said, causes great anxiety, depression, illness, etc. in humans. Nonetheless, he stated, change is inevitable. Now remember this was a half century ago when most of the technology we take for granted was not even dreamed of yet. No one at that time ever expected the inventions of personal computers, email, cell phones, ZOOM calls, satellite and high definition TV, Facebook, Twitter, GPS, etc. (none of which Jeane Dixon predicted). Indeed, Toffler was right in many ways. It has been hard to stay abreast of all the changes.

Further more, the radical social and political changes of the last few decades have been mind-boggling to say the least. Who would have ever believed that same-sex marriage could be legalized in this country? Or, that, by this time, more than 50 million legal abortions would be performed in the USA?

For the Christian, these anti-Christian social trends are certainly troubling. However, they need not be discouraging. Our hope and trust is in the Lord. If we, like Paul, focus our hearts squarely on doing what God wants us to do and allow His Word to be our life compass, we need not let the chaos of the world throw us off course.

So to sum up, history and time is not a game. We are all moving inevitably forward into the future. Unexpected events happen that will forever be etched in our minds. It is for us like peering into a tunnel. We can only see what is a short distance straight ahead. For most people it is a frightening dark tunnel with no way out. For Christians, we know who will light the way and who can see the whole picture beyond our meager senses. Thus we can go boldly ahead because the light at the end is clear. And though we have no guarantees of how much time remains for any of us, we know that, whether we live or die, we are safely in God's eternal hands.

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