

## Returning the Time

✠ in reverent fear (vv.17-19)

✠ with faith and hope in God (vv.20-21)

In the Name of Jesus, who holds all our time in His loving hands, dear family of God:

When it comes to time everyone has concerns. Remember the complaint in China? “You American pastors preach too short!” Sermons must last an hour, the entire service for several. God knows how hard I try to match the “hour-and-five” of our culture. One woman shook my hand and said, “Pastor, your sermon was too short.” The sister right behind her replied, “I thought I might have to bring a lunch.”

Moms understand the challenges of time. Your little ones grow up so fast. Every day is a race to teach as much as you can in hopes of enjoying their tiny tunes a little longer. Our heavenly Father also wants His children to grow in grace and wisdom. That's why He calls pastors to preach. And God holds us pastors accountable for the eternal welfare of every soul He entrusts to our care. It's hard in “an hour and five” once a week. May I again beg your prayers for this and every pastor? Peter's counsel on living today could be translated more literally, **Returning the Time**. Let's get busy **Returning the Time...**

✠ in reverent fear (vv.17-19)

What if you knew your time on earth was running out? Actually, we all know that. But what if you could be absolutely sure that in ten minutes, you would meet your Maker? Are you confident you would go to heaven? Heaven and hell must be real since God's own Son had to die on the cross to save us from hell and bring us to heaven. What would you answer if God asked, “Why should I let you into my heaven?” Through Peter, the Holy Spirit advises: *“Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.”*

Not to shock anyone, but membership in the Wisconsin Synod is not in God's criteria. God commands us to have no other gods before Him. That means to fear, love and trust in God above all things. Do you fear what people think more than you fear God? Do you love God most of all if the rest of Sunday is more important and pleasing than praising God for this brief time of worship? Do you trust in God above all things, or rely more on your beauty, intelligence or talent?

Have you fathers failed to **in reverent fear** to honor your wife as God's daughter and equal heir with you *“of the gracious gift of life”* (3:7)? Have wives and mothers failed to respect their husbands in the beautiful reverence of Sarah? God the Holy Spirit says, *“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.”* (3:3-6) Marriages and ministries fail if we give way to fear of someone taking advantage of us.

The clock is ticking on our lives. How could any of us face our righteous Judge in the light of His commandments to love God and our neighbor? What a heap of sin we've piled up. But God has done a miracle **Returning the Time** so we can live **in reverent fear** like a dear son who truly loves and respects his father and mother. God reassures us *“that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”*

Even Peter had to admit that without Christ his own Jewish forefathers passed down empty family traditions. It's nice for everyone to get together on holidays like Mother's Day. But what we really need to know is that God paid the price to redeem every mother, father and child not with gold or silver which tarnish in time. God paid for our sins with the blood of His own Anointed One. Christ the unblemished Lamb of God has taken away all our sins. With this Good News God gives **reverent fear** that will not run and hide, but will come to pray, praise and give thanks to God for being so good, kind and generous.

You can't turn back the clock on your life. But God did. Now He calls for our full cooperation as day and night we keep **Returning the Time...**

### ✠ with faith and hope in God (vv.20-21)

Few things in life are as beautiful as a mother holding her baby to her breast. Our culture has nearly lost the tenderness of this and the importance of that God-blessed nurturing of the earliest moments of a child's life. Mother love is so universal that God uses it to picture His own love for us. Yet God is right when He says that some women do forget their child. And Mother's Day can be extremely painful for those who have somehow hurt their children in the past. God wants to ease your pain with this.

*“The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.”* (1 John 1:7) When God says, *“All,”* He means *“all,”* without exception. Our worst sins are forgiven because Jesus told the repentant criminal on the cross next to Him, *“Today you will be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:43) God saw all your sins before time began. God planned for Jesus to say, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34) In fact, the Holy Spirit here tells us that Jesus *“was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”*

I remember when our youngest baby was born, how she would lie in her mother's arms and just look into her eyes as her mother was talking or singing to her. That's how God wants you to rest in His Word. He wants you to look into His eyes through Christ and see kindness, tenderness, and joy eternal.

When you keep **Returning the Time with faith and hope in God**, you have uncommon courage. One of my favorite examples is a woman named Monica who lived long ago. Everyone knew she was a Christian and that her husband and son were not. Other Christian women would ask Monica, “Why is your husband so good to you even though he's a nonbeliever? Our husbands are Christian, but they are so harsh.” Monica kindly looked at them and said, “There is much you can do to help your husbands. Stop complaining and criticizing them. Respect them as God commands. When my husband is moody, I give him some space. I pray for him and let God take care of the problem.”

Monica was applying in a practical way what God says through Peter in this same letter to wives whose husbands are nonbelievers. This sounds strange in our western culture, but any woman who has knelt at the foot of the cross to see God's Son submit to His Father for us all, knows just what God means: *“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives.”* (1 Peter 3:1 NIV84)

In time both Monica's husband and son became Christians. In fact, her son became the great church father we call Augustine. God used his mother to teach him about **Returning the Time**. It's why our heavenly Father gives us mothers to help us sense the boundless love that beats in His heart. My mom doesn't even remember some of those incidents I've shared with you of my misbehaving. You know why? Because God cannot remember the sins that He washed away with the blood of His own Son.

“Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away. Change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me.” (CW 588:2) With Christ in mind and heart keep **Returning the Time in reverent fear** – eager to love as you have been loved, to forgive as you have been forgiven. Cherish every moment **with faith and hope in God**. Amen.