

Episode 184 “Time Has Come Today”

with Jack Wisdom

This transcript has been edited for clarity and space.

Jack Wisdom

I'm Jack Wisdom. I'm an enthusiastic grandfather, conscientious dog owner, above average trial lawyer. And I'm still pretty good at pull ups.

David Capes

Jack Wisdom, Jack. Welcome to The Stone Chapel Podcast.

Jack Wisdom

Well, thank you, brother. Glad to be here.

David Capes

It's good to see you here. We're on the campus of the Lanier Learning Center. Hey, tell us a little bit about who is Jack Wisdom. For those who don't know you.

Jack Wisdom

I've got 68 years of explaining to do. And when you ask about who I am, I'm a Christian. I'm not quite the Christian I thought I was. I've learned in the last year that I'm not quite the resilient, always faithful person that I presumed I might be in adverse circumstances. But I'm a Christian. I orient my life around the basic idea that God is love, and love wins, and God loves me. And he has given me an opportunity to love a lot of fine people. And that's what I'm looking forward to doing the rest of my life.

David Capes

Now you've got a seminary degree.

Jack Wisdom

I do. I went to Gordon Conwell, let's call it in the early 80s. I went there not because I was training for some professional role in Christendom. I went there because I wanted to sort a few things out theologically. And I'd saved a bunch of money as a police officer by eating all my meals on duty, for free. So I'm sitting on a pile of cash and I went to seminary to see if I can get my theology fine-tuned and out of the ditch.

David Capes

You're the author of two other books before the one we're going to talk about today. Right? Tell us about those two books. By the way, they are a fun read. They really are and I've enjoyed them both.

Jack Wisdom

Well, I appreciate you saying that. The first book I wrote is called *Get Low: Reflections on Pride and Humility*. I'm pretty much convinced it's the second greatest book ever written on the topic of humility! It was a great exercise to write it. I started writing that book during a seven week trial, where I would go for days at a time without any of my witnesses needing to be asked any questions by me. And I started roughing out the first few chapters of that book on a yellow legal pad. And somebody was paying me a reasonable hourly rate while I did it. So I wrote that book on humility. If you write a book on humility, it turns out that people that know you well are always pointing out the gap between the book you wrote and the way you actually handle your business.

So I realized I needed to write another book. And I wrote a book on repentance called *Breaking Good: Repentance as a Way of Life*. Because, you know, it occurred to me, as I reflected on how I just had this persistent pride that I knew better. Nevertheless, I continued to make the same kinds of mistakes. So, I wrote the book on repentance and developed this whole way of approaching my faith where I thought that I should become a Christian every day. That's really what I started boiling it down to is making sure I became a Christian every single day. And that's not to cast any doubts about how solidly embraced we are by the love of God. But I think us saying a big solid "yes" to God everyday matters. When I got into this thinking about the importance of today as a chance to say yes to God, that's when I started reflecting on this question of time.

David Capes

Well, this is the book that we're going to be talking about for the rest of our time together. *Time Has Come Today: Time, Eternity, and the Life of Joyful Urgency*, by Jack Wisdom.

It's a beautiful book, I had a chance to read it. There's a lot of things I liked about your books. First of all, they're not long books. It's the kind of thing you can digest. I have to read enough long books as a scholar. I also love the way you infuse humor into almost every paragraph. And I love the way you deal with country music or any kind of music, because it's such a language that people can, I think, identify with. All those things make this book very commendable. I love the book.

Jack Wisdom

Well, thank you. You know, Steve Martin is right when he says comedy is not pretty. So, I'm glad you found something funny in there. I had a lot of fun writing the book. I have had fun writing all my books. And yes, I intentionally write short books with short chapters. The mission here is to hand them a book where they can read a chapter a day, comfortably. But hopefully put enough in there of substance that they've got a lot to think about, even though they haven't had to read a whole lot of words.

David Capes

That's exactly right. If you could boil it all down to one big idea, one grand idea, what's the big idea of your book?

Jack Wisdom

The big idea is the importance of recognizing the value proposition of each moment God gives us. Time is God's gift to us. Time is a gift God gives to us for a very specific purpose. And like other of God's gifts to us, the fall has distorted, defaced, vandalized the gift. And so, what I'm trying to do as a person who's had an adversarial relationship with time, in light of what Jesus has done for us, is to reclaim the opportunity that every moment presents for us to connect with God who is love.

David Capes

So that every moment is connected time. And that goes back to your book on repentance. Because as I remember that word repentance in the New Testament is not just a once for all, get it over, get done. But keep on turning to God, which is what you were talking about earlier. Every day I want to be a Christian.

Jack Wisdom

It's a way of life. It's a way of life, and we imperfectly live it. Which is why repentance matter so much. To try to square that up on a regular basis. Own our deficiencies, confess our sins, embrace God's forgiveness, and try to do a little bit better next time. I mean, that's the rhythm. We're never done with that. But the time to do that is, well, there's only one time to do anything. And that is right now. It's right now. There's two times that really, ultimately, you're going to count. Now, and in the hour of our death. There's a famous prayer that a lot of people on the planet pray, that has that phrase in it: "the hour of my death." I don't know that hour. I can't control or predict it. But what I have in front of me is right now and what am I doing with it?

David Capes

Yes, this very moment. Because the past is gone. It's been lived. It's a memory, perhaps. The future is not really guaranteed, in any real sense. But now is the time that we have. I love it. I love that kind of idea. Now, you got some of your inspiration here, not only from scripture, but also from country music, as I recall.

Jack Wisdom

You're talking about Hank Williams. So yes, I listen to a lot of great music. I have a strong preference for blood and guts, real country music. A lot of great Texas artists have influenced me in the way they put words together. And so yes, when I think about things that are true, very often, country music lyrics will come into my mind. And don't confuse what I'm talking about with some of that stuff they're playing on the radio right now. I'm talking about real country music, y'all. But yeah, read my book and you can see what I think about them.

David Capes

It's the kind of musicians you don't usually hear on the radio.

Jack Wisdom

It's not on the radio. You may get it on that satellite radio, if you're fancy enough to have one of those.

David Capes

As I opened the book, there's lyrics from Robert Earl Keen. That's how the book opens, with lyrics from Robert Earl Keen.

Jack Wisdom

Yes, Robert Earl Keen and I are both Houstonians. We're pretty much the same age. He turned out to be one of the greatest singer-songwriters that ever lived and I turned out to be one of his biggest fans. And Robert Earl Keen's written a couple of songs, very profound songs about time. And so that's where I start in the book with Robert Earl Keen's reflection on two ways we can just botch it when it comes to time. We can botch it by being a slacker, and we can botch it by being frenetically busy. And neither is what God has called us to.

"I am guilty of a dreadful selfish crime. I had robbed myself of all my precious time."

David Capes

We really need to understand the time that we're in and to really value it so much. Now, you point out that there's a distinction in the Greek language with two words used for time. Let's talk about that distinction.

Jack Wisdom

Lots of people have made this observation. I'm not making any linguistic breakthroughs here. But you know, famously, the Greek language gives us the word *chronos*, from which we get chronology. Chronometer. Its time as we measure it. Time as we experience it. Time as a relentless succession of seconds, minutes and hours, days and weeks and month. The time that we try to kill. Time that kills us. Time that we think we can manage, the time that frustrates us. That's *chronos*.

And then there's *kairos*, this amazing word that shows up in so many different surprising places in the New Testament. And this speaks about the opportune time, the momentous moment, the time that matters. And so, we have those two words. Look, it's not semantically clean, I'll confess. There are places where *kairos* is used for time as we experience it or measure it. And there are places where *chronos* is used where you expect to see *kairos*. So, I'm not trying to make a case here for each and every instance of the words, but I think that rule generally holds. And it opened up some doors to me, as I started looking for these words in the New Testament.

David Capes

I was fascinated by the way that you talked about *kairos* here in the book, and particularly as it relates to the Garden of Eden. I thought that was really interesting. I had never thought about that before. You say that you haven't broken new ground here but I think you have, at least with me. There might be other people that have had these thoughts before. "There's nothing new under the sun," Ecclesiastes says, but I thought that was really interesting. Take us through that.

Jack Wisdom

Well, just to be clear, I'm not suggesting that the Greek translation of Genesis 1 includes these words. What I'm saying is we find in Genesis with the opening chapter of the Bible, this amazing refrain about

the gift of time that God gives us. There was evening, there was morning, there's the first day. And you see that God gives us time. He gives it to us as a balance of time. Time to rest and time to work, time to enjoy the creation that we have. And time is given to us as a gift. Now, what God really gives us in Genesis 1 is himself, his presence. Not just a mission, not just a place to be, but a relationship. And my observation there is that in Genesis 1 before the fall in Genesis 3, the *chronos* is the *kairos*. And the *kairos* is the *chronos*.

There's not an adversarial relationship with *chronos*, with time as it passes. Because time is a gift and every moment of time of *chronos* is "*kairotic*", because God is present. Because there is no broken relationship with the Creator, no fractured relationship with the creation. I find in that pre-fall context, there is not the problem of time as we experienced it today. There's the gift of time that is enjoyed as it's intended to be enjoyed. The purpose of time, why God gives us time is for love. To love Him and love people. That's, exactly what we're built for. And that's why he gives us time and space.

David Capes

And those moments are precious, they're unique. And sometimes we can't remember the exact time of something but we remember what happened in time and in space. We can't say well, that was Tuesday at noon, or that was a Friday at 11 o'clock at night. We can't put it on the *chronos*, we can't put it on the meter. But we know that something unique, something beautiful happened in that moment.

Jack Wisdom

That's when beautiful things happen. They always happen in a moment. And it's a moment that passes. And that's the frustration of time. We want it to last. We want what we experience in a moment, to last. And of course, there's many laments in the Hebrew Scriptures about how it doesn't last. But ultimately, what we find is God's plan works itself out. It will last. The love that we experienced now, in a moment that seems to pass, is love that we will participate in for eternity.

David Capes

When the Lord comes again, when new creation comes, is that all *kairos*? In your mind and imagination?

Jack Wisdom

Yes! It's the reconvergence of *kairos* and *chronos*. So, you know, there's this interesting verse in Revelation, time will be no more. And, of course, I've read a lot of interesting things about that. Because, you know, without time, you really can't have music, can you? You're a musician? Can you picture music without time? But there's music in heaven. So Polkinghorne, among others has made the argument that heaven is not timeless. But it's time restored. Every moment is kind of "*kairotic*". It's not a timeless place. Now this is all speculation. Lots of smart people have disagreed about it. But the idea, when it says time will be no more, I think it's speaking of time in the frustrating way we experience it. There will be no more of this relationship with time where it either drags or it flies, depending on whether we're having a good or a terrible time. That kind of time will be no more. Because every moment will be filled with the presence of love, with God Himself.

David Capes

Yes. Paul describes it in a phrase, redeeming the time for the days are evil. So that's something we can do. Do we have control over that?

Jack Wisdom

Well, I don't like the translation. The Greek word there is *exagorazo*. The base of the word there is *agora*, the market. The prefix intensifies the verb which has to do with engaging in a smart transaction and a buy-sell opportunity in the marketplace. Which I think we can all enjoy buying low and selling high every once in a while. Paul recognized the value proposition of the *kairos*. Now the *kairos* breaks into history as a reality in time and space. *Kairos* breaks in through Jesus Christ. In his very first sermon he talks about what has come today. *Kairos*. The time has come, the time has come, the *kairos* has come. I make the argument in the book. I think there's plenty of evidence for this in the text. And a lot of good support from a lot of great thinkers. Jesus Himself is the reconvergence, the restoration of the proper relationship between time and eternity, between *kairos*, *chronos*, and eternity. Jesus Himself embodies that in time and space. And then through Jesus, and now and the Holy Spirit, we have the opportunity in every moment for it to be a "*kairotic*" life that we live.

David Capes

That's a beautiful image, a beautiful image. We're talking to Jack Wisdom about his book *Time Has Come Today: Time, Eternity and the Life of Joyful Urgency*. It's a great book. I hope you go out and get it. Thanks, Jack, for being with us today.

Jack Wisdom

Thank you, brother.

A Nugget of Wisdom from Jack Wisdom

This nugget of wisdom is actually brought to you by Robert Earl Keen, a great Texas singer-songwriter who in a famous lament about our frustration with time puts it this way, and I quote. "I am guilty of a dreadful selfish crime. I have robbed myself of all my precious time." May that not be true for you.