

The Fulfillment of Time

By David Feddes

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14–15).

What did Jesus mean by saying the time is fulfilled? We've seen that Jesus is the king of the Jews, and when he speaks of the kingdom, he's the king who's bringing it. But when we think of him as king of the Jews, we have to think also of the Jewish understanding of time that they had as revealed by God, and the way they measured time and marked time.

When I ask you, "What time is it?" you might look at your watch or at the clock on the wall and say, "Oh, I think it's 10:13." Well, that's one way of telling time. Or if I say, "What season is it?" you might say, "I saw a few snowflakes drifting this morning, there's a chance of snow showers tomorrow and the next day, and the wind chills are about 20 degrees below freezing. I'd say it's winter." But you might look at the calendar and say, "It's March 23. We're two days into spring. We had a warm day a couple of days ago. We know the days are getting longer. We know that the way the earth is in relation to the sun at this particular time, no matter what it feels like, no matter how chilly it is—it's spring." And spring is going to keep getting springier.

When Jesus says the kingdom of God is near, it doesn't mean that the kingdom of this world and all sorts of bad stuff aren't still going to be pretty chilly and pretty nasty. But nonetheless, the corner has been turned, and the King has come close, and the time is fulfilled.

Sabbath structure

As we think about what time is like and how we experience it, we need to put ourselves into the shoes of Jewish people for a moment. Again, think about the structure of time—and in particular, the Sabbath structure that God had for his people.

- **Sabbath day:** Every seventh day, people and animals must rest. This expressed creation rhythm and Exodus liberation.
- **Sabbath year:** Every seventh year, the land must rest. No tilling or planting was allowed.
- **Jubilee:** Every 7x7 years, a super-Sabbath year, Jubilee, was a time to free all slaves, cancel all debts, restore to each family their land, and get life back on track. This was a once-in-a lifetime Exodus for everybody.

God had time marked for his chosen people so that every **Sabbath day**, every seventh day, the people and even their animals were called and given the opportunity to rest. There were two major reasons for this. One is that when God made the world, he did it in six days and then rested on the seventh day. That's the reason given in the Exodus 20 version of the Ten Commandments. In the Deuteronomy 5 version, the reason for resting is the exodus liberation: you were slaves a long time, working 24/7. Now that you've been set free, why would you work 24/7 anymore? Don't be a bunch of knuckleheads. Take a day to enjoy. And so every seventh day, all of you and even your animals are to rest, because God rescued you from slavery. So because we have a

Creator who worked that way and a redeemer who rescued us from slavery, we're going to have a Sabbath day, a day to rest every seven days.

They also had a **Sabbath year**, where every seventh year the land was supposed to rest, and no tilling and planting was allowed during that Sabbath year.

Then every seven times seven years, you would have a super Sabbath year: the **Jubilee**. It was a time where anybody who had had to go into slavery because they owed too much money would have the debt canceled, and they would be set free from their slavery. Those who had to sell off some of their ancestral land that God had given them could receive their land back again. Every family got its rightful land back. It was a way that every super Sabbath year, things got back on track no matter how unequal they had gotten over the years. This year was designed to set things straight. There was a sense in which it was a once-in-a-lifetime exodus for everybody. Everybody who lived a certain number of years would experience this Jubilee year at least once in their lifetime.

God had this Sabbath structure of a weekly Sabbath, of every seven years, and then every seven times seven years. It was a way of marking time, and you got to sense, if you were part of it, that God is the Lord of time. Every week, every seven years, every half-century—you're marking that off as God's time. It started with a time when God created all things. It was really launched when God brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, and gave you a chance again to taste God's time and to have God's time be part of your time and to enjoy that.

Jubilee: year of God's favor

When Jesus came, he declared himself to be the Jubilee. "The year of the Lord's favor" is the phrase that's used for it in Leviticus. Jesus announced, when he stood up and delivered his message in his hometown of Nazareth, that he was it. The prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 61 had spoken of a Jubilee that was coming—that was badly needed, because people weren't celebrating Jubilee anymore, and they were under the occupation of a foreign power in Isaiah's prophecy. The same was true at the time of Jesus.

Jesus took a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19; see also Isaiah 61:1–2). And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Jesus is launching the grandest Jubilee of them all—to set people free from slavery and to release people from their blindness and from all that afflicts them. Jesus launched his ministry in that manner.

Lord of the Sabbath

Throughout his ministry, Jesus deliberately did things on the Sabbath that provoked a lot of questions. Why was he operating that way? Why did he do such things on the Sabbath? Well, let's read a few of the stories of Jesus in action on the Sabbath.

On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. ² But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" ³ And Jesus answered them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?" ⁵ And he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

⁶ On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. ⁷ And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. ⁸ But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there.

⁹ And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" ¹⁰ And after looking around at them all he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored. ¹¹ But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. (Luke 6:1-11)

For them, the Sabbath was becoming a club for whacking people. When Jesus healed somebody's crippled hand, he was committing an awful crime!

Here's another story of Jesus healing on the Sabbath and infuriating the religious leaders.

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." ¹³ And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." ¹⁵ Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?"

¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" ¹⁷ As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him. (Luke 13:10-17)

On another occasion, the Jews said to a man who had been healed from being paralyzed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed" (John 5:10). Jesus had said to this man who was paralyzed, "Take up your bed and walk" (John 5:8). So he took up the mat that he had been lying on and walked with it. Oh, what a crime! He was supposed to stay paralyzed. The Pharisees were experts in paralysis.

"The Jews were persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.' This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him—because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:16–18).

Here's another similar story. Jesus healed a blind man. Then he said, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes... So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" (John 9:4-5, 14-16) Meanwhile, the man himself said, "You say he's a sinner—all I know is one thing: I was blind, now I can see. You deal with it" (see John 9:25).

What's going on with all these stories? Let's face it—there were six other days in the week. Jesus could have done a lot of healing on those days. He could have taken a break. He could have taken one of those days of prayer when he went off by himself. He could have done that faithfully on the Sabbath and not broken the Sabbath by healing people on the Sabbath. What's going on?

The Sabbath sign

N.T. Wright is a theologian who's done a lot of study in Jewish understanding of things, and he has some good insight into what's going on with the Sabbath in the ministry of Jesus. He says,

When God made the world, he 'rested' on the seventh day. This doesn't just mean that God took a day off. It means that in the previous six days, God was making a world—heaven and earth together—for his own use. Like someone building a house, God finished the job and then went in to take up residence, to enjoy what he had built. Creation was itself a temple, *the* Temple, the heaven-and-earth structure built for God to live in.

And the seventh day rest was therefore a sign pointing forward into successive ages of time, a forward-looking signpost that said that one day, when God's purposes for creation were accomplished, there would be a moment of ultimate completion, a moment when the work would finally be done, and God, with his people would take his rest, would enjoy what he had accomplished.

Remember Jesus' words: "My Father is working, and I am working" (John 5:17). So there's a future day when this work that God is continuing will be accomplished, and God and his people together will rest.

Wright explains,

The sabbath was the day when human time and God's time met, when the day-to-day succession of tasks and sorrows was set aside and one entered a different sort of time, celebrating the original sabbath and looking forward to the ultimate one... the sabbath was the time when God's time and human time coincided. The sabbath was the regular signpost pointing forward to God's promised future, *and Jesus was announcing that the future to which the signpost had been pointing had now arrived in the present.* In his own career. He was doing the "God's-in-charge" things. He was explaining what *he* was doing by talking about what *God* was doing. The time was fulfilled, and God's kingdom was arriving.

You don't need the sabbath when the time is fulfilled... the future, the new creation, was already here. The sabbath law was not, then, a stupid rule that could now be abolished... It was a signpost whose purpose had now been accomplished... If the sabbath now has a purpose, it won't be for rest from the work of creation, but rather for celebrating God's victory over the satan... Jesus is the walking, celebrating, victorious sabbath.

Jesus was not saying that the Sabbath was just a silly, manmade rule. That might be a misunderstanding we get from reading of Jesus healing on the Sabbath and arguing with the religious leaders. Jesus was not telling those Jews, "That whole Sabbath thing was just dumb. You're a bunch of nitpickers. You should have never made a big deal about Sabbath." Jesus was not saying that Sabbath never was important or had any value. Sure, they got a little too picky about it, but Sabbath did matter. Jesus was not just saying, "Hey, let's all ease back and relax and not make such a big deal about the Sabbath." He said something a lot more important than that.

The Sabbath was a signpost—marking time, marking time, marking time. When the fulfillment of time came in the person of Jesus, that was the reason why the Sabbath was now changing. It was now time for celebrating God's victory over Satan, the adversary. Jesus is the walking, celebrating, victorious Sabbath. He's not breaking the Sabbath. He **is** the Sabbath. That's the point. He **is** the Sabbath—to which all of those Sabbath days and Sabbath years and Jubilees were all pointing. He is the fulfillment of time.

The hour

Jesus often speaks of "the hour." He's talking to a Samaritan woman at the well, and he says, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21, 23). The hour has come when temples don't matter anymore, when holy mountains don't matter anymore, because the living, walking, breathing temple has showed up, and he is showing people how to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). He’s saying there’s resurrection going on right now. Every time somebody hears my voice, the hour has come when the dead are coming to life. So there’s a sense of this special hour that God has appointed, and that hour has showed up because the Son of God has showed up.

Then is the ultimate hour. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name... Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:23, 27–28, 31–32). The hour has come, says Jesus. It’s going to be a terrible hour, but it is also the hour of my glory and my triumph. And so Jesus is not going to shy away from fulfilling that hour.

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him” (John 13:31). This is Thursday night. It’s the beginning of the Passover, and he knows that the hour has come for him to be glorified by his death and his victory over sin and death.

Fulfilling times of yearly feasts

Now let’s think about the way Jesus fulfills another aspect of Jewish time, not just Sabbaths and Jubilees, not just the appointed hour, but the yearly feasts.

- **Passover:** A lamb’s blood was poured out so that people would not perish. Jesus died the day Passover lambs are sacrificed.
- **Feast of Firstfruits:** The first day of the week after the high Sabbath following Passover. Jesus arose on that day as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20)
- **Feast of Weeks (Pentecost):** 7x7 days after Firstfruits, it was a day to celebrate fuller harvest. Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on this day, seven weeks after his resurrection.

Jesus is the fulfillment of time. All of the markers of time that God had put in place are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that’s how Jesus knew the exact hour when his time had come. He knew that this is when the Passover lamb gets sacrificed. He knew the Firstfruits day on which he would rise again. He knew the Pentecost day on which he would pour out his Holy Spirit. These things didn’t happen by chance. God didn’t just randomly say, “This looks like a good day for this,” and “That looks like a good day for that.”

God is the Lord of time. He’s the one who created the whole space-time continuum that physics tries to study and understand, and that we will never fully grasp. God is the Lord of time. He is the one who put in all these markers of time. And Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of time.

Fulfilling seventy sevens

Here's another thing the Bible reveals about time. The prophet Daniel had spoken of seventy sevens:

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. “Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ ... After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. (Daniel 9:24-26)

I won't get into all the details. I'll just say that the Persian King Cyrus had decreed that Jerusalem would be restored. If you count off the years from that decree, you end up with the year that Jesus Christ died on the cross.

So you have a whole host of things about time in the times preceding Jesus—all of them fulfilled in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fullness of time

That's why the apostles, when they're witnessing to Jesus, make a big deal that he is the fulfillment of time. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4–5).

There's a sense in which the fullness of time included certain circumstances that God, in his control of history, also determined. Things that weren't very convenient for the Jewish people were nonetheless part of God's timing. The Jews had been scattered into many nations, and many of them had never returned, but continued living in those foreign cities. Meanwhile, the Roman Empire had taken over a huge swath of the world and had built fantastic roads throughout its empire. And so, when Jesus Christ was revealed, and when he died and rose again and his apostles were charged with spreading the gospel, there was a ready-made network of Jewish colonies all throughout the empire, and there were some excellent roads for missionaries to travel on. The coming of Jesus at that particular moment in time, just from a historical point of view, had great advantages for a very rapid spread of the gospel.

But there's more to the fullness of time than just those helpful circumstances for the gospel to spread. There are also the various things I've been talking about: the fulfillment of the Sabbath, the fulfillment of the Jubilee, the fulfillment of the seventy-sevens, the fulfillment of the Passover and the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Firstfruits.

"At the right time, Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). The phrase "at the right time" might be something you sail past quickly when you're reading the Bible. You focus on "Christ died for the ungodly," don't you? But what's this thing about "at the right time"? Or

you're glad God sent forth his Son, but that's not the whole statement. The fuller statement is "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4).

This is all because of what Paul writes about in Ephesians 1. God has a plan that he predestined even from before the foundation of the world, and time is just the revelation of God's plan. It's not God trying desperately to keep up with developments. It is the unfolding of the times that are determined by God: "his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:9–10).

The end of the ages

The inspired writers of Scripture had this sense of time being fulfilled. As Jesus revealed himself, and as the apostles understood, this means that we are at the end of the ages.

The apostle Paul says, "According to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed..." (Romans 16:25–26). Or, writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul says, "These things were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

Now, "end" can mean two things—*telos* in Greek. "End" can mean termination: "It's over." Or it can also mean "goal." It probably means both here: that, in a sense, time has arrived at its goal, and this is the time that puts you at the end of time.

Hebrews 9:26 says, "He appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Again, the way we tend to read it is, "Jesus came and he died." But it doesn't just say that. It says, "He appeared once for all at the end of the ages." The authors of the New Testament had this tremendous sense that something happened once for all at the end of the ages. There had been ages and ages going on—God had been doing this and that in relation to time—but now it's once for all. This is it. This is the end of the ages. This is what time was all about. This is what all of that was leading up to. And this is what gives all remaining time its meaning and its purpose and its goal.

The Last Days

This means that we live in the last days. In fact, Christians have been living in the last days for the last two millennia.

Jesus announced, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). You are living in the fulfillment of time.

Hebrews 1:2 says, "In these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son." These are the last days because God has spoken in his Son, and that's the last major thing God is going to do before Jesus comes again. The rest is a fulfillment. "This gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed to all the world, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). We're living in the last days. The gospel has to spread, and then the end will come.

There are warnings based on the fact that we live in the last days. James says, "You rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you... You have hoarded wealth in the last days" (James 5:1, 3). You're hogging all the wealth. You're letting other people get hungry and starve. The people that work for you, you're not even paying them. Why is it so stupid to that? Because you're living in the last days! James was not just talking to people who would be living 2,000 years in the future. His message applies to us, of course, but he was talking to people in his own time who were already living in the last days.

What are the last days? The last days are the period between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. All the calculations trying figure out exactly how many years or decades we are from the end of time are misguided. We are looking at clocks and calendars trying to figure out time. But with God-time, the last days is the period between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. You see it here very clearly: "In these last days he has spoken" (Hebrews 1:2). They were already in the last days when Hebrews 1:2 was written. They were already in the last days when James was writing. The apostles knew it.

John wrote, "Children, it is now the last hour" (1 John 2:18). What does that mean? It means that during this time between Jesus' first coming and his second coming, God has given the final and fullest revelation of who he is. He has revealed his own Son as the fulfillment of time.

This is it. This is the last hour. These are the last days. This is the period of God's mercy, lasting till Jesus comes again. Then there will be a sense in which time will be no more, when the developments and the goals that are associated with time and its progression are over, and time is merged into eternity again.

"Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). There is coming a time—as Jesus said—when "night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4). This is like the time of Noah, when God waited patiently but eventually closed the door. There were people who heard Noah preach. They probably said, "We've heard that fool preach for many years now, and nothing's happened. He says these are the last days of our world, our final opportunity. He's been saying that for awhile, and time just keeps going." Then one day God shut the door, the flood came, and the laughter stopped.

We live in the last days. Paul said, "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11). If Jesus gave one more major marker after his first coming that would signal his second coming, it is this: "The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

The gospel of the kingdom has spread very, very widely throughout many peoples and nations of the world. Some people might say, "I don't think we're getting very close to that final, final hour yet," but let's pay very close attention, because the Lord of time has given us ways of marking the time. The spread of the gospel is a major sign. The Bible has, in the last century or so, been translated into thousands of languages—more than it was in the previous nineteen centuries put together. The gospel has spread more widely than ever before in Africa and Asia and China and other parts of the world that had less access to the gospel for a while. This has been indeed the

culmination of that favorable time, the day of salvation—when God has been gathering in a huge harvest from every tribe and language and people and nation.

What that means is that we truly are in the last days—indeed, approaching the last hour. And it means for us a time of opportunity, of salvation. Paul says, "We plead with you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:20–21). Right after he said that, he declared, "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Now is a time of tremendous opportunity. But if it slips by, it's a time you will never get back again. And so now is the time to respond. Don't put God off and say, "Maybe when I get around to it." If you are living in the time of his mercy, now is the time to accept it.

Time and eternity connect

The Old Testament says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven... He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11). We were always meant to be creatures of time, but not just of time, but of eternity as well. God has a plan for each person that includes our times and our eternity. He has a plan for the whole universe that includes the times he marked off, and then the eternity.

If you live by faith in Jesus Christ, the Eternal One through the Holy Spirit lives in your heart. Eternity is touching time. And it is filling your life now with purpose, with the touch of the eternal. It's not just an empty routine. It's not just one thing after another, vanity of vanities, and then more vanities, as Ecclesiastes puts it. Vanity is what it's like when you don't get it, when you're out of touch with God and when you're out of touch with Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of time. But when you are in touch with the one who is the fulfillment of time, then your life is not an empty routine. Christ is the fulfillment of time, and he's the fulfillment of your time, the one who gives purpose and meaning and joy and blessing.

There's a question in the Heidelberg Catechism that says, "What is God's will for us in the fourth commandment?"—the Sabbath commandment. And it doesn't give a bunch of details of what you can or can't do. It says God's will for us is that every day of our lives we rest from our evil works and already begin now the eternal Sabbath. You rest from trying to work your way up to God and from all your other evil works, and you start enjoying the eternal Sabbath right now. "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:11)—while we have time.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you so much for being the great Creator of time and the one who gives time its meaning, its purpose, its goal, and its fulfillment. We thank you for sending our Lord Jesus in the fullness of time, and for sacrificing him at the appointed hour and raising him again as the firstfruits on that Day of Firstfruits. We praise you, Lord, that in such miraculous ways you show yourself sovereign and mighty and wise, and that you display the full wisdom of Jesus Christ and of the Almighty God in the ways you have arranged time and fulfilled it in him.

Give us purpose in our lives—to each day and each hour and each moment that you give us. And help us, Lord, to live in that structure of time, realizing we live in the last days, realizing it's the day of salvation. Help us to receive that salvation and rejoice in it. Help us to spread the good news of the kingdom to the ends of the earth, and thus hasten the day of Christ's return, when we can see him face to face and rejoice in him forever as our eternal Sabbath rest, as our eternal source of joy and blessing. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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The time is fulfilled

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Sabbath structure

- **Sabbath day:** Every seventh day, people and animals must rest. This expressed creation rhythm and Exodus liberation.
- **Sabbath year:** Every seventh year, the land must rest. No tilling or planting was allowed.
- **Jubilee:** Every 7x7 years, a super-Sabbath year, Jubilee, was a time to free all slaves, cancel all debts, restore to each family their land, and get life back on track. This was a once-in-a lifetime Exodus for everybody.

Jubilee: year of God's favor

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” ... And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:17-21)

Lord of the Sabbath

On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. ² But some of the Pharisees said, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?” ³ And Jesus answered them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?” ⁵ And he said to them, “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” (Luke 6)

⁶ On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. ⁷ And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. ⁸ But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come and stand here.” And he rose and stood there.

⁹ And Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” ¹⁰ And after looking around at them all he said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored. ¹¹ But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. (Luke 6:1-11)

Healing on the Sabbath

Luke 13:10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” ¹³ And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” ¹⁵ Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?”

¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” ¹⁷ As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him. (Luke 13:10-17)

Sabbath work

So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” ... the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:10-18)

Sabbath breaker?

“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” (John 9:4-5, 14-16)

The original Sabbath

When God made the world, he “rested” on the seventh day. This doesn’t just mean that God took a day off. It means that in the previous six days, God was making a world—heaven and earth together—for his own use. Like someone building a house, God finished the job and then went in to take up residence, to enjoy what he had built. Creation was itself a temple, *the* Temple, the heaven-and-earth structure built for God to live in. (N. T. Wright)

A sign pointing forward

And the seventh day rest was therefore a sign pointing forward into successive ages of time, a forward-looking signpost that said that one day, when God’s purposes for creation were accomplished, there would be a moment of ultimate completion, a moment when the work would finally be done, and God, with his people would take his rest, would enjoy what he had accomplished. (N. T. Wright)

Human time meets God's time

The sabbath was the day when human time and God’s time met, when the day-to-day succession of tasks and sorrows was set aside and one entered a different sort of time, celebrating the original sabbath and looking forward to the ultimate one... the sabbath was the time when God’s time and human time coincided. (N. T. Wright)

The future is here

The sabbath was the regular signpost pointing forward to God’s promised future, *and Jesus was announcing that the future to which the signpost had been pointing had now arrived in the present*. In his own career. He was doing the “God’s-in-charge” things. He was explaining what *he* was doing by talking about what *God* was doing. The time was fulfilled, and God’s kingdom was arriving. (N. T. Wright)

The walking, victorious Sabbath

You don’t need the sabbath when the time is fulfilled... the future, the new creation, was already here. The sabbath law was not, then, a stupid rule that could now be abolished... It was a signpost whose purpose had now been accomplished... If the sabbath now has a purpose, it won’t be for rest from the work of creation, but rather for celebrating God’s victory over the satan... Jesus is the walking, celebrating, victorious sabbath. (N. T. Wright)

The hour is now here

“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. (John 4:21-23)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” (John 5:25)

The hour has come

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified... Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name... Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:23-32)

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (John 13:1)

“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” (John 13:31)

Fulfilling times of yearly feasts

- **Passover:** A lamb’s blood was poured out so that people would not perish. Jesus died the day Passover lambs are sacrificed.
- **Feast of Firstfruits:** The first day of the week after the high Sabbath following Passover. Jesus arose on that day as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20)
- **Feast of Weeks (Pentecost):** 7x7 days after Firstfruits, it was a day to celebrate fuller harvest. Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on this day, seven weeks after his resurrection.

Fulfilling seventy sevens

²⁴ “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. ²⁵ “Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ ... ²⁶ After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. (Daniel 9:24-26)

Fullness of time

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5)

At the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6)

... his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

The end of the ages

... according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed (Romans 16:25-26)

These things... were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Hebrews 9:26)

The Last Days

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel. (Mark 1:15)

In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. (Hebrews 1:2)

You have laid up treasure in the last days. (James 5:3)

Children, it is now the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 6:2)

Time and eternity connect

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens... He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart. (Ecclesiastes 3:1,11)

Eternity touches time, filling it with purpose and life. Your time on earth is not an empty routine. Christ is the fulfillment of time.