

My friend the storyteller and I sometimes met on the bank of the Jordan River to talk about our lives and our work. We would watch as the river flowed past us, and sometimes witnessed someone drift past in a small boat. We used the relatively quiet time to meditate and discuss our view of God and His interaction with His Creation.

We knew that God was not part of that Creation, but quite beyond it. And we knew that He had “inserted” Himself directly into this time and space, coming from what we think of as His home in “heaven”. God is all-knowing, and time is completely in His view¹. But our “time” must resemble His in some way, as we both must have a sequence of successive events for life to be meaningful. As the beginning is described to us in the Scripture, God did things in a certain logical order².

My friend told me that he had developed a little story, an illustration, that helped him to think about this issue, and that he hoped it would help me and others who might hear it.

“Consider a boat with many people on it floating down a river³. You and I are there, and we come to realize that we are moving, though we cannot discern much about where we are because of the mist that swirls around us. The mist is dense –we cannot see far ahead of us, or the banks on either side of us. We can see only a little bit beyond us. God can see through it, though, as the landscape all around us and above us is part of God’s higher-dimensional domain.

We also have no real control over the direction we are going, as we are in a powerful current that moves us inexorably along. We just carry on our activities of life on the ship⁴. Some never think beyond the extent of the boat – they don’t even realize that there is a limit or edge because they keep themselves to its interior and never get out onto the deck.

The boat represents this world (or universe), and the river represents time. We do not know how the trip started, as we were not around to participate in the launch. We cannot tell on our own where we are going, either.

We can conceive of God as a Spirit that flies above and around us, and perhaps walks on the banks that we cannot see. But He descended upon us as the Christ for a while to offer guidance. He “came down”⁵ to participate in the ride (our physical “place” and “time”) with us, to experience with us our struggles in life. He spent time from infancy to adulthood, even “rabbi-hood”⁶, and then departed by ascending beyond this earth to return again to His true home⁷. He emptied Himself spiritually and then physically to show the true nature of the God of Love⁸. He was absolutely someone that was “good to ride the river with”⁹.

While sharing Himself with us, Christ explained the purpose of our journey. We are merely passing through; we are pilgrims. We are like Abraham seeking a city whose builder and founder is God¹⁰. The river leads us to the ocean, which represents a new universe¹¹ if we live in Him; here there is a different type of current that moves us forward. Once we are there, we enter an eternal life where there is still a logical sequence of thought and activities. But we are at our destination, and time as we once knew it is no more.”

When my friend finished this story, I had a better idea of some of the similarities and differences between our world and the new world to come (which is really just an extension of the heaven that already exists). In the physical life that we now have, time represents our movement toward a goal or destination – it has a purpose. And as we looked at the continuing

flow of the Jordan, I realized that in Christ we are moving, not to a Dead Sea, but to a sea of eternal life¹².

1. Psalm 90:4, A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.
2. John 1:1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
3. perhaps somewhat like Noah's ark
4. think of activities on a modern-day cruise ship
5. think in terms of the Spirit descending in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism; Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32
6. a rabbi was not accepted until he was thirty years old
7. Acts 1:9
8. 1 John 4:8
9. a common statement from the American West
10. Hebrews 11:10
11. 2 Peter 3:13
12. see Revelation 22:1

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