

Redeeming the time (Ephesians 5:15-21)

Introduction:

Do you ever feel like you are wasting your life? Do you ever feel like you are lost, and you don't know what to do? Do you ever regret doing something and think it was a waste of time and energy? It is not uncommon for people to feel like they could use their time, money and energy on something more worthwhile. That's why many spend their "free time" serving non-for-profit organisations or go into a career which helps the world. The problem is, from a non-Christian perspective our human life only extends to 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 years. There is nothing more to life than the here and now. They live life in anticipation for retirement. That's the end goal. The great thing about the Christian faith is that we believe that there is more to life than our human life. We believe that there is eternity which is infinitely longer than the human life. When we come to our passage today, Paul encourages and challenges us to live life in light of eternity, to live life right now redeeming the time. To live our human life right now as if eternity exists.

3 points today:

- 1. *Live with Redeemed Purpose (5:15-17)***
- 2. *Live for Spirit-filled worship (5:18-20)***
- 3. *Live in Divine Submission (5:21)***

Context:

In Ephesians 5:1, Paul gives a logical conclusion to what he has said in the previous few chapters. Christians are to "be imitators of Christ, as beloved children". And we have already looked at why that is the case. Christ has purchased for us a new life, which in turn means a new identity. Our identity is in Christ. We are to therefore be imitators of Him. We are to reflect our Lord Jesus Christ. 5:2 says, "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." We imitate Christ by walking in love. Living a life which is filled with Christ-like Love. It is grounded on the sacrificial work on the cross. Our lives need to be centred and saturated by a deep and heartfelt appreciation of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

This means we are to be self-sacrificial rather than being self-indulgent or self-centred. We are to present ourselves as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to him, which is our reasonable service (Romans 12:1). And Paul goes to explain more fully on the need to flee from all sexual immorality, impurity and idolatry. Sinfulness should not be and can not be named among Christians. (Ephesians 5:3). It is "improper" for saints to be dabbling in sin. And he speaks very strongly against it in v5 saying "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

Paul's reasoning is that Christians are no longer children of disobedience. Christians are no longer in the darkness. They are children of light. (5:8) Our calling as Christians is to be radically different to the rest of the world because we have something they don't. We have the gospel message. We have Christ who enlightens our eyes and heart to the truth of the

world. Therefore, verse 11 says “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”. Sinful and worldly living is contrary to the life of the Children of light. And Joseph last week reminded us the dangers of sexual immorality, especially with all the news going about sexual misconduct in the church with children. But the list goes on. Abortion is big in the news right now. And so instead of doing these things Christians are to verse 10, “try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”.

When we come to this next section in verse 15-21, Paul gives advice in how we could please the Lord. And I think what he has to say to us in this section is very challenging. It is something we need to be reminded of daily.

Let’s look at the first point in verse 15-17, **Live with Redeemed Purpose.**

What do I mean by Living with Redeemed Purpose? Verse 15-16 Paul says, “¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”

Paul uses the conjunction, “then” or “therefore” to make a logical conclusion to what he has said previously. Now what you are to do is “Look carefully”. “Be watchful”. “Be observant”. “Be Discerning”. The NIV says, “Be VERY Careful”, in how you are living your life. It is an imperative. Christians, “Be watchful”. “Be discerning”. Look at your life and see how you are walking. You are to no longer walk like the unwise. But instead walk wisely. Live a wise life. Think about what you are doing with your time. Don’t live life as if God has not worked in your heart. Christ transforms every aspect of our life. Now that’s a bit tricky isn’t it. Every decision we make can have an endless amount of consequences. There are a number of decisions you could make every second of your life. And the reality is, just because you think things through, it doesn’t mean that life will go completely smooth. It doesn’t mean that you will be living a life which is pleasing to God. That’s why the key to your thinking is wisdom. Godly wisdom. Biblical wisdom. We know that wisdom begins and is grounded with the fear of the Lord, that’s what Proverbs 1:1-7 says.

⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Or in Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight”

The point of proverbs and the word of God is to help you grow in wisdom. And every one can benefit from it. The young, the old, and the wise. But it is grounded on the fear of the Lord. A correct understanding of the majesty and glory of God. If you want to live a wise life, you need to fear the Lord. You need to know his supremacy. You need to know his majesty and glory. Learning from His Word, the holy scriptures and from those who have been shaped by God’s word gives us the wisdom to walk carefully. As we become more familiar with God’s word, we get clarity in how God wants us to live our life. To a certain degree

God's word can help you make a decision on everything in life. There are many biblical principles and instructions which shape the Christian life. And so, if you want to live a wise life, then you need to jump straight into the word. You need to meditate on it.

I quoted Romans 12:1 earlier and in the second verse summarises this part of the text quite well, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2). If you want to be able to discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable, and perfect and wise, you need to renew your mind. You need God's word to transform you.

If you remember In Ephesians 4:1, Paul already said "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called". He has already challenged Christians to live the life they are called to. And so, Paul clarifies this by saying we are to "make the best use of our time". The NIV says "making the most of every opportunity". I like how the KJV translates it, "Redeeming the time". The exact same phrase comes out in Colossians 4:5 where Paul says to the church of Colossae, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time." When we read Ephesians 5:15-17 however Paul has been talking about the mystery of God being revealed. He has presented a broader view of God's redemptive plan. He has expanded our eyes to the truth of God's cosmic purpose for the church and so we are encouraged to live in light of God's declared intentions for the universe. That has huge implications for every aspect of life. In every moment of our life we should be living a redeemed life with redeemed purpose. New morality. New desires. New mission. Our mission to preach the gospel to all nations, making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that God has commanded us. We should be very missional in our lives.

And that makes sense when we read the end of verse 16, "because the days are evil". It gives the impression of living in the last days. We are living in the end times where this whole world is dominated by sin and is in darkness. So, we as Christians live right now in anticipation of Christ's return. We live right now as salt and Light of this world. And the world is not getting any less sinful. It is only going to get worse and more evil. And so, it is imperative for Christians to therefore "be very careful and redeem the time".

The general exhortation in v15-16 is further explained in 17 and we have touched on it a little already. "17 Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Instead of being unwise/foolish, we are to be wise which is synonymous to understanding what the will of the Lord is. Are you living life right now in light of the will of God? Are you living life right now in light of eternity? There are some who think that redeeming the time means to be busy. Being busy does not necessarily mean you are living a wise life. We can easily deceive ourselves in thinking that we are having a very purposeful and unwasted life by keeping busy. There are many people who are busy. Children and youth these days are very busy playing hours of computer games per day. Many people easily spend half their day watching the television. That's why companies like Netflix, HBO, Amazon are booming. If you don't know what they are, they are companies where you pay a monthly fee to stream tv shows, movies, documentaries etc. I googled this week, Netflix had approximately 149

million subscribers at the end of 2018. In 2017 it was shown that per week, 1 billion hours of shows was being streamed. That's just Netflix. That is not including the normal television, other big streaming companies, youtube. And if we were honest with ourselves, we might be like everyone else. I know I have been guilty of it. We can even busy "doing ministry". We can easily "make new ministries", spend "hours preparing ministry" but neglect our family and not love others. Being busy even for good things might not necessarily mean you are redeeming the time.

Live with redeemed purpose. Be watchful. Redeem the time.

Now you might be asking what some ways are to live life in light of eternity with redeemed purpose. When we look at verse 18-20 we learn we are to **Live for Spirit-filled Worship.**

Verse 18 opens with a prohibition to not get drunk. ¹⁸ *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*

And it might sound like a very random imperative. However, the second half of the verse will give us a clue. But before we look at it, Ephesians 1:23 tells us that the church is *already* sharing in Christ's fulness. And we know that the Spirit of God is living in believers already. Ephesians 3:14-19 however tells us that Paul prays for the church that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. When we look at Ephesians 4:13, Paul tells us that Christ gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers to the church in order to build them up "until we attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ". There seems to be tension between the "already but not yet". A present reality which has not been consummated just yet. God begins to work in the lives of believers here and now and will continue to work in believers until he brings it to completion in the final days, and only then will we be filled with *all* his fulness. God works in the church to move them towards the fulness of Christ. The Holy Spirit is powerfully transforming God's children today.

The best way I have understood the tension of the "already but not yet" is seeing it like someone being engaged and not yet married. During engagement, couples are committed to one another and love each other even though they are not married yet. Especially as their wedding day gets closer they may make many life decisions together. Where to live? What to furnish the house with? What does the wedding look like? 1000s of dollars are being spent before even marriage has begun. And often couples get very excited because they have tasted a part of married life. It will often feel like they are married already. They will experience some aspects of marriage, but at the same time they are not yet married. They might see it in part, but it is not fully seen until the future. It will feel like they are married "but not yet". Or when a mother gets pregnant for the first time. She will experience many aspects of motherhood. Stressing out about their baby's health. What brand is good for cots and prams. They will be careful in what they eat. Often it may feel like a head ache, or morning sickness. But when they get their first ultra sound scan and they see their baby move, and when the baby kicks, it can be very exciting, and she might feel like she's entered motherhood already. But until the baby is born she has not fully experienced motherhood. Already but not yet.

And so, what I think is happening here is Paul is stressing on being filled with the Spirit to emphasise the need for Believers to be conformed to God's own character. The Holy Spirit who exists in perfect union with the Father and Son, the trinity, is fulfilling his role by living

in believers, working in their heart and is the agent in which God's fulness dwells in his people. The living God is already living in you. And so, we can, here and now, experience a taste of God's fullness. Even if it's only in part. And when we meet our Lord Saviour, we will finally be able to enjoy the fulness he is talking about here. Eternal communion with the Lord that will be ours when are glorified, when we meet him face to face. And that is exciting. More exciting than anything in this world. That should lead us to worship and be joyful in him.

And so, this contrast in Ephesians 5:18 tells us unlike being filled with alcohol which leads to drunkenness, foolishness, destruction and wasted life. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, leads to wise living, edification and worship.

And that's why verse 19-20 exists. We are to be filled with spirit, "¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

Our whole life should be shaped for worship. We worship with believers. We encourage with the truth of God's word in song. We are to worship God by our singing and music. We are to worship him with our heart and be filled with thanksgiving for **Everything**. Not just some things. But **Everything**. Are you living a life of worship? Are your words filled with thanksgiving and gospel-shaped words? Is your household filled with praises to God? Are your conversations with friends and family saturated with Gospel-truth? Or are they filled with characteristics of a drunk person? Is your life filled with thoughtless, sinful, meaningless, shallow words? Are you living a life of debauchery? Or in other words are you living a wasted life? Are you wasting the life that God has given you and redeemed you for?

Worshipping God and encouraging one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs is so important. Besides it being an appropriate response to God's work in our heart, we comfort and encourage one another in it. Luther once said, "My heart, which is so full to overflowing, has often been solaced and refreshed by music when sick and weary.". Many of us can attest to that. Bach who was a Lutheran said, "The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul."

You can live a redeemed purposeful life if you live for spirit-filled worship.

Our final point which also serves as introduction for the next few sections in Ephesians is to **Live in Divine Submission**. I don't want to go into the exact details of it since we will be touching on it a bit more in the next couple of weeks but let me give some thoughts on this particular point.

Verse 21 says, "²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

If we are to live a wise life filled with Spirit-filled worship, then we will be marked by submission to one another out of reverence for Christ. Our relationships are divinely ordered. God tells us how our relationships to one another looks like. The literal meaning of submission is to "arrange under" or to "put myself into subjection". For example, the submission of soldiers to those of superior rank. This is nothing new in the gospel message. Jesus says to his disciples that each should be willing to be the least. Just as Christ came not

to be served but to serve and give us life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28), they too must be a servant. (Matthew 20:27, 18:1-4). Paul says elsewhere in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." The Christian life is a life of service. It requires you to be submitting yourselves to others. Now the key to it is in the second half of verse 21. It is "out of reverence for Christ". You don't do it for the sake of doing it. You don't serve to get something out of the church or your brothers and sisters, friends and family or work. You do it because of being awe-struck by the majesty of Christ and how great and mighty he is. It is wanting to follow the example of Christ as a suffering servant king. It is a cross-centred submission. We submit and serve others because we have been divinely saved for eternal purposes.

These being said, I am not saying that all you need to do is serve in the church and just sing worship songs all the time. We don't just isolate ourselves from pagan worshippers. We need a good balance of enjoying God's creation and being missional. I am suggesting this text challenges us to think more carefully in what we are doing with our time and how we are living out our redeemed life.

Conclusion:

Recently, I was having a chat with a friend who is struggling in their Christian walk. And they asked me throughout the conversation, "why is it hard to live life right now in light of eternity?". And that's the question isn't it. It is easy to listen to a sermon on Ephesians 5:15-21, and say "yes I know I should live with redeemed purpose, using my time wisely, yes I know should be worshipping and being thankful to God and encouraging one another, and yes I know I should be serving others and submitting to others in reverence for Christ, but it's hard, I don't want to". It is easy to do other things. It is easy to live a wasted life. It is easy to spend your life that God has given you and use it not for his glory and his good pleasure. And that's the problem with sin. That's the problem with this life. We are bombarded every day, every hour, every minute and second with lies from the world. The world tells us that eternity is not worth it. Eternity doesn't exist. Eternity with Jesus is less impressive than the here and now. That's what the world tells us. That's what the world tries to sell us. It sells us a bunch of lies. It sells us bunch of flimsy, cheap, finite, worthless idols. Church don't believe in that rubbish. Don't let the world rob you of the infinite joy and beauty of the Glory of God. Don't let sin and Satan tempt you. Believe that what Christ has done for you on the Cross is infinitely more precious and amazing than anything the world can provide for you. You need to believe that sufferings of Christ's, his crucifixion on the cross, his resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven is more beautiful and wonderful than anything the world can provide. You need to believe that eternal life in the presence of Christ Jesus is worth living for. You need to believe that living this life and making it count is worth it. All the hardships and rejecting of sin is definitely worth it. Let us remind each other every day. Let us together anticipate meeting Christ and live this life right now in anticipation of his return. It might look hard to live life in light of Eternity. But God has not left us alone. He has filled us by giving us his spirit, he is already working in you. He has already giving you a taste of the victory over sin and death, and the glory and eternal joy there is in Jesus. Live with redeemed Purpose. Live for Spirit-filled worship. Live in submission. Live in joy anticipating the eternal glory and joy of being with Christ Jesus.

Amen