

Wisdom and Worship

Ephesians 5:15-20

10/25/15

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We come to the Word of God this morning. We come to the end of this brief series on worship. And this series on worship was, as I said, an extension of a Sunday evening reflection for the Lord's Supper service back in August, and wanting to build on, what does it mean to worship. So we've looked together at the basis of worship, finding enjoyment in the Lord, worshipping him, glorifying him, enjoying the Lord as the chief end of man. And last week we looked together at the role of lament—what does being able to cry out to God between a rock and a hard place, what does that look like for the Christian? As one author I quoted last week asked, "What does a miserable Christian sing?" Is it okay for Christians to be miserable? And any glance—for any time—at the Book of Psalms, you will see, yes, indeed, it's very, very, very possible to be both miserable and to find hope in God—to come to him with that misery and that anguish. Worship is precisely the place to do that.

This week, I'll finish with what it means to have wisdom, and to connect that to worship—wisdom and worship. You'll see this morning, we're going to look together at these verses from the Book of Ephesians. And this part of the Book of Ephesians is just prior to where Paul applies what he has just spend the past four and a half chapters doing, to individuals. But before he gets there, he kind of reaches a crescendo about wisdom and worship. So let's look together at Ephesians 5:15-20.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me?

Now, Heavenly Father, we ask that you would, by this double-edged sword of the Word, go to the very core of our being and enable us to live with wisdom in this day and in this age—to live wisely, and to see that the end of our days, the goal of our existence, is, indeed, worship. What does that look like, then, Lord, now, as we wait and as we work, when Christ will come again? So teach us, Lord, to live with wisdom and to worship. In Jesus' name. Amen.

In 1970, at the announcement, really, at the sharing of his wife, Jim Croce learned that they were going to have a son. Jim Croce was a singer-songwriter you may remember. However, that son would not see the light of day for another couple of years. In 1973, he passed away after an accident. Posthumously, this son would then reach number one. That album on which it was placed would stay five weeks on the #1 Billboard charts. The song was called "Time in a Bottle." He wrote this thinking of his son, who was going to be born into the world. It goes like this—and my apologies to you, for you will now hear this for the rest of your day, if you remember this song:

If I could save time in a bottle
The first thing that I'd like to do
Is to save every day
'Til eternity passes away
Just to spend them with you

If I could make days last forever

If words could make wishes come true
I'd save every day like a treasure and then,
Again, I would spend them with you

But there never seems to be enough time
To do the things you want to do
Once you find them
I've looked around enough to know
That you're the one I want to go
Through time with

If I had a box just for wishes
And dreams that had never come true
The box would be empty
Except for the memory
Of how they were answered by you

But there never seems to be enough time
To do the things you want to do
Once you find them
I've looked around enough to know
That you're the one I want to go
Through time with

Of course, Jim Croce would have little understanding of just how precious time would be for him. When he climbed aboard the plane in 1973, little did he know that that would be the last plane ride he would take.

Time is extremely precious. How do we have wisdom in this time and in this age? What would Paul have us do in regard to wisdom and worship with the time we've been given? Let's look together in his word and see if we can glean something together. First, redeeming the time. Secondly, filling up, pouring out. Redeeming the time, filling up, pouring out.

So, together as we look at this passage, I must tell you that I'm drawing largely on the King James Version. Now, the King James Version, I believe, in some ways, gets at the essence of what the NIV translated here is, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity." Here what Paul is, I would suggest, telling us to do is to redeem the time. And in many ways, I want us to see that redeeming time means a few things. It means, first, cultivating the resource of time. Cultivating the resource of time. Context is also important—our context in which we live. But also connecting it, then, from what Paul was talking about to where we are now. So redeeming the time. Cultivating, context, and connecting. Let's look at that together.

Cultivating resources. One of the things he says there is "being very careful." So he's asking us. He's warning us. He's telling, then, how you live, how you live actually matters. Not how you think, first and foremost, but, indeed, how you think is not always how you live. For how we live is not born of our intellectual reasoning. It's born more of what we love. What we love governs more of what we do than how we think. We've covered this before, but I want to go forward in suggesting that what he's asking us to do is to be careful, then, about what is it that we love. What we love will govern how we live, so we need to be aware of what our hearts love. And so he says we ought to do that, reflect on that, with wisdom. To live with wisdom.

And then he says, verse sixteen, "making the most of every opportunity." The King James Version says "redeeming every opportunity." Redeeming the moment. Redeeming the time. Redeeming this

particular opportunity. Now, when that word “redeeming” is used, translated here as “making the most of” or “redeeming” the time, what he’s referring to there is a marketplace word. That word “redeeming” literally and crassly laid out is this: to make a killing. Taking every opportunity to squeeze out of it all that it’s worth. And so he’s saying to the Christian to live with wisdom, knowing yourself, being careful how you live, knowing your heart, what it is that you love, and, he says, of course, making the most of every opportunity.

So to redeem the time means that we ought to cultivate the time that we have. What are we doing with it? As Jim Croce says of the human heart, this idea that it never seems to be enough time. And so the gift that God has given us—if we’re in any doubt, looking beyond our material gifts, looking beyond our opportunities, our access, whatever the case may be—the one gift that we can all agree on, whether you give thanks to God or not, right this moment, everyone in this room is living and breathing, and we are experiencing life. And we have been given this opportunity to live as wise.

What does it mean to squeeze the time, squeeze the value, and redeem the time we’ve been given? This is important for him, because he says—and this is part of the context—he says, “because the days are evil.” Now, by this he doesn’t literally mean—because this is a phrase that Paul uses in his other epistles. He doesn’t mean that he’s experiencing particular evil against him. What he’s talking about is something much larger—the macro-context. That is, the age that is now and the age that is coming are now overlapped. In other words, the time before Christ is now no longer. Christ has come. He has died on the cross. He’s been victorious over sin and death through the resurrection, the resurrection being a historical event. And therefore, God has broken into time with his powerful grace and mercy by his Son and has altered everything.

Therefore, there is already the demonstration that the age to come, of eternity, of the God who is victorious over sin and death has now broken in from the future into the present, into the past, and now the age which is to come is now with us. Now, it’s not already fulfilled in every way. There is a “not yet” aspect. But there is plenty of “already.” And so there’s these overlapping ages, of the age of what has not yet fully been fulfilled or fully demonstrated to this age, and yet God has still broken in. And so he is saying that the context is the days when evil is still present, where sin is still allowed to take place on the earth, and injustice, and pain, and brokenness. And yet the solution, the answer, the covering for sin has already been given. The King, as we’ve already read about this morning, is already victorious—and yet his kingdom has not come to full consummation and fulfillment yet. But it’s coming, because the prelude has already been poured out in the resurrection on the cross.

And so he says here, “cultivate the time which you have been given. Live as wise, not as unwise.” Why? Because we are now in overlapping ages. Christ is not yet come again. So we ought to, in this context, understand that particularly, now, until Christ comes again, the time that we have is a gift. Are we redeeming it? Are we seeking to use it? But for what end? He says, “Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”

So he’s saying, then, that the cultivation of the resource of time, living as wise in the context of these overlapping ages, then, must be connected to something. And it’s connected first to the Lord’s will. How we’re to live, how we’re to redeem the time, how we’re to understand the context in which we live, is this—that the Lord has a will, and he’s already poured that out. And that will he has demonstrated in his Word. And that will is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, to find our rest in Christ, to see that all that we do—everything that we do, as he gets to at the end—“in everything give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” So everything that we have, everything that we are, all of our gifts—it is all connected to the one who is reigning. And we are to take the time which we are given and see that it is redeemed in the context of these overlapping ages according to the will of him who has sent his Son for our redemption.

So how do we connect this to worship? Well, one, it's this great biblical theme of Sabbath. You see, the Scriptures tell us that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And what the Scriptures tell us in Genesis is that God, on the seventh day, rested from all his work, and he called all of his work good. But there's something interesting about the—if you go back and read the Genesis account—that at the end of each day, it says there was evening and there was morning, the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth—but on the seventh, it does not say “and there was evening and morning, the seventh day.” Why? It's telling us something—that God has rested from his work. And that what the Sabbath was made for was made that we might be able to have time in which we are free from work. Free to find rest and to enjoy the fruits of our labor.

The problem is the fall. Our sin. Falling from the state in which we were created through our first parents, Adam and Eve. Now time is no longer something that we think about as—oh boy, our work! We think about, this is what I get to do. Work becomes laborious. It becomes hard. And we become enslaved to striving and to success and working, and we forget how to rest. And so when we gather for Sunday worship, when we gather for worship, it's not because it's something we have to do—it was something that was given to us as a gift, the Sabbath. And so we learn to find rest.

This is not about time management—five ways to learn how to be more productive. Rather, it's understanding how God gave us the gift of a day from which we rest from our work and learn to cultivate and understand, what does it mean to rest in Christ and what he's done for us? What we're able to do in thanksgiving—that all that we have is a gift from God, that we take this time to feast with those who we are in relationship with, our families, our friends, our neighbors, and enjoying the fruits of the labor which the Lord has blessed us with. But because of sin, we've turned work into the goal. And so we forget how to rest. And then what we do is we come to the Sabbath and we turn the Sabbath into all the stuff we're not supposed to do. And yet we forget that it was also about what we get to do—that all of life is gift, and that when we come before the Lord, we remember that the Sabbath—because first, it was a gift for us to find rest from our work and to enjoy all that God is and all that he has given and the fruit of our labor.

Then Sabbath, because of sin, would become a picture of God's redemption. The Sabbath, for Israel, became the place where they were reminded of God's redemption of them out of the nation of slavery in Egypt. And so they were not to work on the Sabbath, so that they could enjoy the bounty that God had given them, to say to the world around them that their rest is not through the work of their hands, but their rest is through the redemption of God their Father. And in the New Testament, we learn that Jesus, the writer of Hebrews says, is the rest for his people. Therefore, Christ is the fulfillment that all that the Sabbath regulations were meant to be in the Old Testament.

And when we come to worship, what are we doing? We're resting from our work and we are rejoicing, giving thanks, feasting, singing, praising all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. And we can rest from the work that we do Monday through Friday—and some of us, Monday through Saturday—and take this day, not because of all the stuff we need to avoid doing, but the thing we can remember that we get to do. The Lord has drawn me out of slavery with sin and death and has given me redemption. The Sabbath is the picture of what Christ has done for you, and you can rest. You can enjoy the fruit of your labor. You can feast with family and friends. You can praise God. You can laugh and dance and sing and eat. Why? Because it is the picture of what Christ has done for you. But all of it is done in his name.

Now, let me say this. Some Christians, some, have turned the Sabbath into the yolk of slavery again. It's all the stuff we can't do. But ladies and gentlemen, the Sabbath is meant to be the day when the thing that you're resting from is the work that God has called you to. So that work that you're doing Monday through Friday or Monday through Saturday—whatever the case may be—the Sabbath is meant to be the day set for you to remember that all that you have and all that you are doesn't come from that, but comes from him who has created you, Christ who has redeemed you. And so it's a gift to you.

And so for me, my work is largely people-oriented. I minister to people. I'm meeting with people all the time. It's people. I get to see people. But Sundays are not exactly a rest day for me, is it? I've been working since 5:30 this morning. And so by the time I reach this afternoon, I want to begin to take my rest. But then, oddly enough, if you were to look at most of my Mondays—which is treated as my day off, part of my full day of Sabbath—you would likely not find me on a couch. I'm working with my hands. Now, some may look in and not see much rest, but I will tell you, I rejoice—Kate, sometimes not as much as others. Some days I will confess to you I don't want to work. But here's the thing—I get to work with my hands. And for me, I get to the end of that day, and I'm exhausted physically, but I'm rejuvenated spiritually.

So the Sabbath, for me, is a Monday. It's not Sunday. For many of you, it is. How are you redeeming the Sabbath, the resource that the Lord has given you, for the sake of resting from your work as a picture of the redemption that Christ has given to you from the slavery of sin? And let me just put it a little bit more. As one writer says, this:

God liberated his people when they were slaves in Egypt. God ties the Sabbath to freedom from slavery. Anyone who overworks is really a slave. Anyone who cannot rest from work is a slave—to a need for success, to a materialistic culture, to exploitative employers, to parental expectations, or to all of the above. These slave masters will abuse you if you are not disciplined in the practice of Sabbath rest. Sabbath is a declaration of freedom.

[Tim Keller, *Wisdom and Sabbath Rest*]

Now, you young people, you're thinking, "You mean, I don't have to do homework on Sunday?" Now, come on. You thought it. Don't go home today and go, "Pastor Lovelace said that I'm liberated." But do you know what it means? It means that we also must cultivate the resource of time on Saturday and Friday, Thursday, so forth. In other words, the reason why the Puritans spent so much time talking about the Sabbath is because they realized, disciplines don't happen in passive ways. You can prepare. So young people, you can study and do your homework prior to Sunday. Because right now, that's the work that God has called you to. Adults? That means that you can do that work on Saturday, so that you can rest on a day.

Now, Paul said not one day is more holy than another. It happens to be that we worship on Sunday, because that was the day on which our eternal Lord was raised from the dead, and the tradition of the church is to worship on Sunday. But there needs to be a day in seven where you can rest from your work to remember that you've been redeemed. Now I spent half my sermon on that—actually three quarters. So I need to do this other point.

Filling up and pouring out. Now, in case you were just wondering, why is he talking about worship? That doesn't seem to have a connection. Listen to what he says next. What is the Lord's will then? "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." He's speaking to the whole church here. Then he speaks to individuals and particular relationships. "Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The filling up is very clear.

He says, "Instead, be filled with the Spirit." What does that mean? That means this is an ongoing thing, throughout the New Testament, particularly in John and in the writings of Paul. And what he literally means is this—that we are to give ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit himself. It is the work uniquely of the Holy Spirit which the Scriptures tell us, particularly in the gospel of John, that the role of the Spirit is to lead us in the Scriptures. But more so than that, the Holy Spirit's task, then, is to unfold the meaning of the work and person of Jesus Christ.

So in other words, just as Revelation was being read to us, what the Holy Spirit was doing in my heart—as I believe he was likely doing in many of you—is, weren't you imagining what that looked like as

it was being described to us? And in that moment, I felt both a longing, but also a deep thankfulness. Just on the edge of tears, of just how beautiful and glorious is the Lord Jesus. And the glory of his face over these past few days as we've experienced this warm sun in the month of October—as that verse was being read, I imagined just how beautiful the sun has been in October, and then imagining the beautiful face of the Son of the Living God.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to take the Word and to fill you with such a vision, such a satisfaction, such a picture of Jesus Christ for you, that you would be filled up with his beauty, his importance, in your mind, your heart. And then, as Paul would say earlier in Ephesians, that we—those who call Jesus Christ as Savior—may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Therefore, the Spirit's work and ministry is to take the truths about Jesus from the Word and take it to the core of who you are, to empower you, to encourage you, to give you a vision for who Jesus is. This is the infilling of the work of the Holy Spirit. And when we come to worship together, the worship service should be the gospel of Jesus Christ enacted through the work of his people in the liturgy of worship—God calling us, God inviting us to redemption through the confession of sin, hearing the grace of Christ that covers all our sin, and then hearing the Word come to us to make us more into the image of his Son. Like a crafter with wood, carving out an image, so the Holy Spirit uses the word of the Word to carve out the image of Christ in us, and then to equip us to walk with him. This is what we do on Sundays. And the Holy Spirit comes and fills us.

But then, more than that, the verses tell us that not only does the Holy Spirit have a task in filling us up—then we get to pour out. That's also the Holy Spirit's task. He gives us a heart-song. Notice just what he tells us to do there. He says to us that we are to speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. A part of that heart-song by the Holy Spirit is, we take the opportunity, redeeming the time, to speak encouragement to each other.

Let me say this to everyone of you who are in relationship with each other. If you're a husband and wife, do this with each other. If you have children, do this with them. If you're in close relationship in a community group, speak this to a friend. If there is only one thing over the next week that you see in your friend or spouse or children that remind you of the character of Christ, take the opportunity this week to speak a word of encouragement that you see Jesus in that person in that way. Speak psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Read the Word to one another. This is the pouring out. That's the encouragement. Then he says for us to sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything. So this heart-song is full of encouragement and praise and thanksgiving.

And I need to hurry, but I want to say to you—the church of Jesus Christ and those who call on Jesus ought to be marked by how ready and quick we are to say thank you. But the hard part is not just thanking God for the good that comes, but that the Lord might cultivate in us the kind of praise and thanksgiving that Job sang, that even we could look at the suffering and the trial and even the lament, and say, "Even in this, Sovereign Lord, you will be good to me." Because if the Lord has worked his redeeming power to take us from slavery into freedom through the work of Jesus Christ, and has placed our feet upon the rock that is Jesus Christ our salvation—if he is our Sabbath rest, then that transcends all of our circumstances. Therefore, we're not encouraging and praising and thanksgiving, our hearts are not singing, because our circumstances are aligning in the right way, but because, regarding of circumstance, it is the Lord who is on our side. He is good, all the time. This is the work of filling up and pouring out. But from beginning to end and everything in the middle, it is sustained by the grace of Christ.

So why do we gather together for worship? Because we have to? No. Because we get to. This is what the Lord is doing. When we rest this afternoon, when we feast together, when we encourage each other, is it because it's what we have to do? No. It is because of the redemption and freedom that we have in Christ. And now we become a singing, praising, thanksgiving, encouraging people, who are able to rest, who keep time differently, because our Lord Jesus has done something. Our Father has done something.

Did you notice, as I finish, the words of Jim Croce's song? He was singing about his son who was going to be given birth. Why do we want to make our days last? Why do we count them? Why do we need to redeem them? It is because of another son—a greater son. The Lord Jesus Christ, born to us, who invites us to live the rest of our days and all eternity with him, who enables us by his Spirit to live with wisdom and to worship him in everything that we do. Let's pray.

Now, Lord, I ask that you would enable us to worship, to redeem the time which we have been given. Make us wise. Make us teachable by your Holy Spirit, to consider what we're doing with our time and how we're living, to live as wise and not as unwise—but to do so aided by your Spirit, filled with your grace. And then saying, "Lord, the time that we have has been given as a gift." Now enable us to worship you and give thanks to you in everything. For in all things, they find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, Lord, restore us, that we may give our time to you, and all of our worship. In Jesus' name. Amen.