

**Pulpit Ministry Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church. Lord's Day AM 14<sup>th</sup> Dec 2009**

*Scripture Reading Ephesians Ch 5:16*

*'Motto Text 2009'*

*...Redeeming The Time...*

The subject to which I want to direct your minds this morning, is the same as that of the apostle Paul to the Ephesians in Ch5:16. The subject that Paul is addressing is the Christian's management of time. In v15 Paul is obviously concerned about how time was being used or more appropriately 'abused' by those professing Christ's name.

One of the highest characteristics of a wise man is seen in his use of time, whereas the fool is known for his misuse of time. A man may profess to have much learning, yet if he be seen to be lacking in this area, he cannot be said to be a wise man! In v16 and 18 we have two particular commands that are in the present tense, which means the Christian who has only been allotted a '*brief*' portion of time, that of a few years; is to be engaged in this activity continuously '*filled with the Spirit*', '*redeeming the time!*' The Christian is never discharged from this duty!

**1) The Reminder.** [By Paul] '*Redeem the time.*'

I want only to look at the command here. Paul is not requesting that the Ephesians redeem the time, Paul is telling them; reminding them that this is their solemn duty. With their calling to be Christians, there came increased responsibility, a responsibility to not be idling away time in frivolous activity but rather to be reminding themselves that God has called them to a walk of life that compels them to manage their time. The gentiles were renowned for being lazy and slothful. Paul says that of the Cretians in Titus Ch1:12, that they were '*slow bellies*' [unemployed, lazy]. In Rom Ch16:18 and Phil Ch3:19 Paul speaks of men who make a '*God of their belly*'; I.e. that they enjoy '*loafing around.*' How tragic it is for a Christian to have the reputation for being lazy. The Christian's work ethic should be exemplary! Really what Paul is saying is, '*brethren, this ought not so to be.*' God hath called you to walk not as others walk, as fools, but as wise! So many times Paul exhorts these Ephesians in regards to their walk "*walk in them*"; "*walk worthy*" "*walk not*"; "*walk in love*"; "*walk circumspectly...as wise.*" In Col Ch4:5 Paul again warns Christians don't be a poor recommendation of Christianity to the ungodly, "*Walk in wisdom to them that are without, redeeming the time.*"

The word '*redeem*' involves a number of thoughts, it is not merely a command not to waste time, rather it is an exhortation to buy up opportunities.

Christians need to remember that other younger Christians will be watching them. It is a bit like a parent-child relationship. If you like to lie in bed half the morning don't be rebuked when they want to do the same, if you carry stories don't be surprised if you find that they do. There is a positive side to this, if your Child sees you pray and study, don't be surprised if they want to do the same. As the younger Christians see the more mature Christians redeeming time, they do will engage in the very same.

God has graciously given us time, we can never give it back, once a year slips past it is gone. It is true that the Lord can restore the years that the locust have eaten, of course that does not literally happen, but it does in the sense of joy; the Lord can give back to a backslidden people the years of lost joy experientially. The Christian is to be in the way of buying up the time.

God has called you to be wise, he has set you apart from a world of fools to be engaged in the buying of time. Are you planning in 2009 to go forth to evangelise the lost, to discover and use every available opportunity to further God's cause.

**2) The Resolution.** [By the Ephesians].

The resolution to redeem time is There must be a resolve on the part of the Christian. However, this resolve can only be fulfilled by the grace and help of God. While the redemption of time remains our solemn obligation and responsibility, it can only be achieved through the help of God and his grace. There is a balance dear Christian, a balance that must not be missed, this balance exists between our responsibility and dependence on God.

a) Dependence on God.

By that I mean, that the Christian may desire to do the will of God, but he will find that desire alone is not enough to see the fulfilment of those desires, he will find that God must assist him, or he will fail. This dependence upon God is demonstrated in the place of prayer. We can desire that God fill the pews of this meeting house, our desires do not reach fulfilment without God's assistance, when we realise that we without God we can do nothing, we pray!

Turn to Nehemiah Ch2:1-4 Nehemiah knows the need back in Jerusalem, the walls are broken and gates burned with fire. He has been praying for many months for the opportunity to ask the king for the opportunity to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls [he was the cupbearer so prayer times were carefully planned around his duties - a wise use of time, not during his employment hours]. However, on a certain day the King asks Nehemiah why he is so sad, Nehemiah prays in his heart for wisdom to answer the king [Ch2:4], he desires a favourable response from the king, but

he knows that *“The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”* Nehemiah dare not rest upon his own oratory skills; he fully depended upon months of praying, and for God now to direct the king. The Lord answered that and other prayers of Nehemiah. In fact as we look at Nehemiah and how he trained his workforce he taught them to unite both responsibility with dependence on God. In Ch4:6 we are told that *“the people had a mind to work.”* They were enabled to build the walls with a mind that balanced between responsibility [this is my job] and dependence [God will protect and help me from all dangers]. God would not miraculously raise these walls my some miracle, he required manual labour, prayer would not build these walls physically; yet on the other hand, it would be God and prayer that would enable them to complete the task. Sadly that is how some Christians think; ‘I don’t have to work!’ God will work a revival miracle and this church will be filled; it doesn’t happen that way! In v17 every man put his hand to the trowel and kept the other hand on his sword. It was the same with Gideon’s men, while they refreshed themselves with water, the wise men lapped and held onto their swords!

It is the same in our personal struggles; [responsibility and prayer go hand in hand] no matter what the area of struggle, the Christian must both wrestle himself and depend on God. It may be the sin of gossip; anger; wandering eyes or thoughts, or wasting time etc. on our own these will defeat us, but by earnest prayer, God will enable us, he wont deal with them, but he will enable us through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body!

### b) Discipline.

When we think of ‘*redeeming the time*’ we inevitably think of discipline. The man or woman who will actually achieve the redemption of time is an individual who life is in order, ‘*an orderly life.*’ An undisciplined individual will never redeem one moment, his life is erratic, consisting of ‘*bursts*’ and ‘*stops.*’ The Christian is not to be like the bubbling stream that produces froth and bubble and noise, yet when the torrent or deluge comes, it is swept away by a force that is greater than it. The Christian ought to be deep and well rooted.

### 3) The Reason “*The Days Are Evil.*”

What Paul says at the end of v16 ought to be seen as both the reason and motivation for buying up time, “*The days are evil.*” Those words were relevant to the Christians in Paul’s days, the Ephesians were living in evil days. The force of Paul’s words are, that with the passing of time Christians will find themselves living in days of increased wickedness. In 1Tim Ch3:1 Paul relates to Timothy a realistic expectation concerning future generations of Christians, “*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*” He then gives an almost identical list of how evil will manifest itself in the last days!

People often use this term ‘*last days*’ in referring to the time immediately preceding the return of Christ. However, if you turn to Acts Ch2:16-17, where Peter is giving a defence of the phenomenal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter quotes the prophet Joel, “*And it shall come to pass in the last days , saith God, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh...*” The reference by Joel is to Pentecost, Peter is seeking to show the critics of Pentecost that this was a promised event. For our purpose, these words clearly show us that Peter and the other disciples at that time were living in the last days. The last days began with the ascension of Christ [ten days later the Spirit falling as Christ had said]. The term ‘last days’ describes that final period of time between Pentecost and Christ’s return.

At what point of that period we are actually living, we cannot say, but this we do know, that we are living in the last of those last days! Furthermore these last days are going to be desperately evil. The Christian is going to find it almost impossible to avoid this last evil. For that reason the Christian must engage himself wholly to buying up time in the service of Christ while he may.

See how Paul describes these days. [Ch5:22 - Ch6:18].

- Personal separation from the world. Christians are going to find that their personal walk with God is going to become more difficult. Paul is telling these Ephesians that some of them will be taken in drunkenness.

- The Christian Family will be increasingly under attack. Husbands and wives growing dissatisfied with their spouses. Children rising up in disobedience.

What is the Christian to do in such terrible times? You might say, ‘*well is there any hope in such circumstances?*’ Though the days in which we will live in will grow hard, crime will rise, sin will abound, the Christian is not left to flounder! Look at Ch6:10, “*Finally brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*” to follow that exhortation will give us resistance not only against Satan but also against the rising tide of evil [v13], “*Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*” Literal rendering [Syriac], “*that ye may be able to meet the evil one.*” We cannot do battle with the enemy without the protective armour! Only a fool would do that, therefore ‘Be wise’, redeem the time, that is, use the time to put on the whole armour of God, the sword of the Spirit, [the word of God], the shield of Faith, all buckled together in prayer!

Some Concluding Application. There may be some today who have heard my words; you know yourself to be guilty of misusing time. A year has passed and you have never been in a Church prayer meeting; the question you must ask is this, ‘whatever it is that keeps me from the place of prayer, is it more worthwhile than my being in prayer! Is that particular thing that requires my time more important than an audience with God? Unconverted too need to be reminded that time is short, life is brief, and still I am apart from God! It is time to seek the Lord!