

Making The Most of It

Ephesians 5:15-21

Joel Richards

Thank you. It's great to be here, as always. And I could spend a whole lot of time telling you all how much our family loves Briarwood, but what a joy to be able to worship with so many congregations, so many different perspectives. It's good to see the Japanese Congregation and the Korean Congregation and the Hispanic Congregation. Being a part of the mission's department I get to serve from time to time with each of these congregations, and it's always been a joy and it's so good to see friends. And so, what a blessing and a privilege to get to be preaching this evening for this service.

I would ask if you would turn to Ephesians 5:15-21. Hear the word of the Lord.

Look carefully then how you walk not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is and do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and forever thing to God The Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This is God's Word. Would you pray with me as we thank Him for it? Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you guided and shaped men, that you breathed through them. Father, we thank you that your word is inerrant. It's infallible. It's inspired. Father, help us to not take for granted the beauty that we can read the word in our own language. Help us not take for granted that your word has so much power. And, Father, I pray tonight as we study your word, we would be lifted up. We would be called to worship you, and it would lead us to praising your glorious name. We ask these things in Jesus' name for the sake of his kingdom as it is expanding across the globe. Amen.

So when the world is evil, what should you do when the age is divided and dark? What should the body of Christ look like? How does it look? What does it look like for us? I mean us? Because the Bible, if this was the West Texas translation, it would say, Y'all pay attention to how y'all walk. It's you, plural, it's us.

How should we walk in wisdom? How do we make the best use of the time? Redeem the time, make the most of every opportunity in an evil age? To find that answer. We're going to walk through three ideas. The logic of Paul's command for us. The how of Paul's command for us and Christ in the command, the logic, the how in Christ.

First, the logic. If you look at verse 15, there's a term you might have passed over if you're not careful, but if you look carefully right after carefully is a subtle word, **then** -- it might also be translated. Therefore, look carefully. And I know that you know that therefore is there for a reason. It always is. And so therefore shows us that there's this chain of commands that Paul is linking from this final command before he expands this idea of submission. He's linking these commands back and they go back to Ephesians four, verse one. And if you look back there, you'll notice another familiar word - says, I therefore well, that therefore is therefore a reason to. So what is it? Ephesians is commonly divided between the first three chapters and the last three chapters. The indicative is what we might call it. It indicates or it tells us something that's a foundation, and then it pivots in verse one of chapter four to the imperative. It tells us to do something -- the know and the go right. What do you need to know before you go? If we could summarize the first three chapters and an oversimplification, we might say this -- because of the Triune God and his wonderful works of salvation therefor Ephesians 4:1 walk in a manner worthy, and that manner is in unity. And then skip over to verse 17. Now connecting I say this because you walk in unity now don't walk like the Gentiles because you walked in unity. Now you walk differently. Skip down to chapter five, verse one. Therefore, because you walk differently now, imitate God and walk in love like Christ, and then verse 15, and because you imitate God and walk in love like Christ, therefore pay attention to how you walk and walk in wisdom.

So each command is pushed forward by the previous, but each command also serves the previous. Imagine there's a young man and he's in love with a young woman. Therefore, he wants to ask her to marry him. Therefore, he goes to buy a ring. Therefore, he begins to save up of money. Each leads to the next. But every step is serving that one idea. How can I ask her to marry me? And the reason I want to marry her is because of who she is. Paul's doing the same thing because of God. Do this. Walk this way, walk this way. But I want you to see it's serving that first command to walk worthily as the body of Christ. And how do you do that? You walk in unity. And if we could simplify it because of God and salvation, walk in unity and therefore walk in wisdom so you can walk in unity.

There's a second reason. The first reason we walk in wisdom is so that we may walk together because of salvation. There's a second reason we need to be wise, Paul tells us It's because the days are evil. Evil days are where we live. These last days. Expect tribulation, expect opposition, expect pain, expect suffering. These are weird things to be told to expect and then to say Count it all as joy. But these are evil days and that helps us to understand a bit of what Paul says because he says make the best use of the time or redeem the time. And we want to ask what is the time? Is Paul saying redeem every single moment of your life, micromanage your schedule, make sure you get your calendar totally ready to go? Or is he saying redeem the time as in redeem this age between the first and the second coming of Jesus and you need to redeem that age because it's evil.

The gospel may be going out, but it's going out into darkness. So make the best use of every opportunity, because these days are evil and the work is great. Notice also this, though. Paul doesn't say walk cowardly. He says, walk carefully. We don't back down from the opposition. We don't bury our talents in the ground and pray that they'll still be here when the master returns, we multiply them, we make the most of them, we use them. We take advantage of every opportunity to make the most of this dark age. And that's a difficult challenge.

I don't know about you, but when I look at the news, watch the news when I'm on social media, which is not a good place to be, what do you find? Division, disgust, derision. You feel like, How can I make the most of any of that?

But Christ has called us to walk together into that fray and not to be cowardly and not to waste our time, but to make the most of it. So how can we make the most of every opportunity? Look at 17, 18, Paul gives us two do's and two, Don't do this, Don't do that, do this, don't do that.

The first one in verse 17, he says, Therefore, because you have to make the best use of your time, because you have to walk with wisdom, therefore don't be foolish. And the foolish said in their heart that there is no God. Instead be the opposite of a fool. He could say, Don't be foolish, be wise, but he says don't be foolish.

Instead, understand what the will of the Lord is. Do you want to be wise? Seek wisdom from above. Do you want to stop being a fool? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And what do you do when you fear and revere the God of the cosmos? You learn what he has to say. You understand his will.

As we heard this morning, there's parts of his will we've got to just go. But there's other parts of his will that he's made crystal clear. Understand it, embrace it. It's wisdom and in a beautiful parallel, do not get drunk for that leads to debauchery, but be filled with the spirit. This is such a cool parallel because if you think about drunkenness, what is drunkenness? I mean, it's when the wine is filling you all the way up. Your eyes are floating, right? It's drunkenness. And what happens when you're drunk? What are you controlled by? When you're drunk, you're controlled by the spirits, right? Too much wine dominates you. That's why we call it alcohol dependence. You are made to be a dependent creature. You are made to have an addiction. And if your addiction is not served by God, it's going to be filled and served by something else. And drunkenness could have been a lot of things, but it's a word that shows us the old order of creation, where we are dominated, where we are filled, and we are controlled by our sinful idolatry. This is a first commandment issue, and instead of being filled with wine, be filled with the Holy Spirit, let that be the dominating force in your life.

Let that be what controls you. And as I said, it could be drunkenness, could be other things. If you're honest and you ask yourself this question, what controls you -- what controls you on

Sunday morning might be different than what controls you on Monday morning. And it certainly might be different than what controlled you on Saturday night.

Ask what controls you, because if you're walking with wisdom, you got to stop being controlled by the old order and start being controlled by the new one. So be filled with the Holy Spirit. How do you do that? Well, notice this. He doesn't say feel yourself. He says, be filled. This is a command that you can't complete. It's not something that you force. It's something that forces you. Interdependence. You can't say, I'm going to go and I'm going to go to church. I'm going to fill myself up. You have to **be** filled. And there are two really good ways to do that. And you know them. It's the answer to every single question you've ever been asked about the Bible or about theology or about the church. What are the two best answers to every question? *You read the Bible and you pray.* And oftentimes we treat that like an oversimplified, almost joke answer. You hear all the pastor kid jokes where they say, into this and this and this and this. What's the best way forward? I don't know. But read the Bible and pray is the answer I was taught. But don't overlook the power and the priority that prayer and the word of God has in the life of a believer. It's a simple answer because it's a good answer and it's the right answer. How can you be filled by the God you do not know? Read his word. How can you be filled by the God you do not cry out to in faith? Father, fill me with your spirit. I'm praying in faith. How can you be filled by someone you do not know yet? Read the Bible and pray that's how you are filled in the Spirit. Let the word dwell richly within you.

So back to Ephesians. Paul says, Don't be drunk, don't be foolish, don't be drunk. And then he gives you these three areas that might be called the consequences of being filled with the spirit. Or maybe it's what being filled the spirit looks like. This is, by the way, how you redeem the time. I want you to notice something first as we look at these, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, Can you do that alone? No. Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. We do that together, giving thanks always and for everything to God The Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. You can pray by yourself and you can give thanks by yourself. But even Jesus taught His disciples to pray. Our Father. -- we pray together, and you certainly can't submit to someone else alone. So you've got these three elements singing, giving thanks and submission. So what is this first one?

Singing-- It says, addressing one another in Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. It could be talking to one another. And there are three options. This could be the first is what Paul does so often, where he writes a hymn or psalm or spiritual song and includes it in his letter to give to you as a blessing. Think Philippians 2 or sending someone a letter, leaving them the notes too. Amazing grace on the refrigerator just to remind them. The second option is call in response singing. Maybe it's like what we do when we when we cite the Psalms, we do response of reading. Or maybe it's this side sings and then this side sings back. The men take a verse and the women take a verse.

That's another possibility. Or the third, which I'm partial to. And you know that because it's the third one and not the first one. Sing to God, but sing for each other. What does that mean? Sing

Not because people are watching you -- sing because the words are true and recognize that everyone else in this room needs to hear it. I've got to be honest. I mentioned Amazing Grace on Sunday morning. Sometimes it's hard to get started. Sometimes my kids don't want to get in the car and they don't want to get buckled up and they don't want to put their shoes on and they don't want to keep their shoes on and they don't want to get out of the car and they don't want to go to the nursery and they want to eat a mint and they're losing their minds and I'm losing my mind. And suddenly I'm sitting in the pew and there's no wretch quite like me. I need to hear the person behind me singing Amazing Grace, really clear and really loud. You're singing to God, but I need to be benefited by your voice and your citation of those words that I once was lost I now I'm found. He sees that I'm a wretch. He knows that I'm a mess. He knows that I'm not doing a great job as being a dad. But guess what Jesus did. He died on the cross for me. Sins past, present, future and next Sunday morning if you see us climbing out of the van, either give us a hand or just don't look but sing to each other. Sing to each other. How incredible to make the best use of the time. Step one Sing like you mean it. Sing from your heart. Sing from the core of your existence And do it because your worshipping the Lord, But do it because everyone else in the room needs to hear the words of the song. And we did it tonight.

We didn't sing along when it was being sung in Spanish. Unless you speak Spanish and you didn't sing along in Korean, you didn't sing along in Japanese, but you saw the words and it was sung to God. But Lord knows it was a blessing for you and for me. Sing to one another.

Second, give thanks some of the time, some of the things all of the time for all of the things. It's incredibly heavy. The days are evil. It's murder out there. But in here give thanks always and for everything. It doesn't mean, by the way, that you're naive and you pretend like it's not so bad out there and give thanks. It also doesn't mean that you are fake and you say, Well, I know I'm supposed to be thankful. So Lord, thank you for today and then go back to singing. But I'm going to complain about it. Be thankful with a sincere heart. And despite evil days, we need to overflow with gratitude. Here are the rules for the world. The world says it's dark, it's dangerous, it's an assault out there. You should gripe. You should complain a little bit.

We do not play by the enemy's rules and we do not use their rulebook. The Lord did not say grumble. When things get tough in Christ, count it all is joy. And we can thank God for everything. Because what does he use it for? The good call on His name. He uses everything, everything for the good and remind yourself of that. But also, why is it such an important corporate body element? When the bad things happen to me, I'm going to have a hard time remembering to give thanks. Help me, help each other, give thanks always.

And third -- submission. Paul will spell out what this submission looks like. Starting in verse 22, there's a biblical ordered submission. We could talk about submission for forever, but I think there's a good summary for it Paul wants us to do.

He writes it in Philippians chapter two *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, regard one another as being more important than yourselves. Do not merely*

look out for your own personal interests, but look out for the interests of others, and have this attitude in yourselves which is found in Christ. Jesus. Submit means think of others. So consider this. Paul says You need to walk wisely and by walking wisely you need to make the best use of the time and to make the best use of the time. You must be wise and to be spirit filled. And when you are walking wisely, using your time properly spirit filled, what will you be doing? You're going to take advantage of the blessings that it is to be in the body of Christ. You're going to take advantage of being part of the church. And it seems counterintuitive, but this is a crucial reality. What does it look like to make the most of the time? You've got to sing, you've got to give thanks and you've got to submit to one another because it's dark out there. And we've been called to walk united. And this has the most incredible evangelistic function.

So let's look at Christ in this command. Remember, help You see this from the singing, the giving thanks and the submission that this is supporting walking in Unity and unity is quite the witness for the Gospel of Christ. Turn back to chapter three of Ephesians. We're going to read verses seven through ten.

Paul writes of this Gospel...

I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of His power to me, although the very least of all the saints this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring light for everyone. What is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages and God who created all things so that through the church, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities and the heavenly places. Go back to chapter five, verse ten. The previous section. We'll get a running start in verse seven. *Therefore do not become partners with them. That is the world. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light and the Lord walk as children of the light. For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.* So, the church is the light that we walk in. It is the bears witness to the cosmic heavenly authorities. And I want you to think about that for a second. The church is a cosmic witness of the manifold wisdom of God, and it's a cosmic witness because we serve a cosmic king. It's not just a witness to your neighbor. It's not just a witness to the government. It's to the highest authorities. And those are good some, bad some in the spiritual realm. The church bears witness through the church. God's wisdom, which is found in that mystery, is shown.

And this is tied to evangelism in such a great way. When you bring them to him, you bring them home. And the church is the house of the living god. It's built on living and spiritual stones. And the Westminster Confession of Faith describes its purpose to gather and perfect the saints. When you bring them to him, you bring them home because you fold them into his body. When you join Christ, you join Christ's body. So bringing them to him necessitates bringing them to where He is.

And where is he? John, 17. The end. John 17 :20-23. What a beautiful prayer. By the way, Jesus is praying for you. He says, *I do not ask for these (only his disciples), but for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one just as you father, are in me. And I knew that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory you have given me I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one. I and them and you and me, that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you love me.*

Jesus asks his father to make us one together and one in Him as God is one in the Trinity. Why? So the world will know that God sent His son and so that the world will know that God loves His people. Unity is not so that we get along. Unity bears witness to the fact that what we say about Jesus in this sermon is absolutely true. Unity bears witness. Samuel Foucacheon, in his breakout session at the Missions Conference last week talked about what happens when people come in. His question was, when someone comes into our church, what do they see and hear? The church as the life testifies to Jesus? And this isn't lifestyle evangelism. This is the beauty of the fellowship of the Saints as they live in Christ Jesus.

From the Heidelberg Catechism-- ***Why are you called a Christian?*** *Because I am in Christ.* And when I am in Christ, guess what I call you? Paul says you are my brother and my sister in the spirit and in the flesh, getting a peek behind the curtain that one day we're family. We're not kind of family. You're my brother, you're my sister. We're brothers. We're brethren.

And so in the world, the flesh and the devil say complain, fight, step on every other person you can to get up to the top and out of the water. What do we do? When someone walks in the doors of the church in an actively evil world? What do they see? Hopefully they see us making the best use of the time because we can do it today. It's a divided world. It's broken by sin. Yet the church - there are races and people who society says should be fighting - but what do we do? We sing together, we give thanks together and we submit together. There are people in this room who ought not to get along on Sunday morning, especially when the weekend had Auburn and Alabama named somewhere. They've got no business giving thanks together. They've got no business singing together and they've got no business submitting to one another because aren't we the enemy? I'm just from West Texas. I don't have a dog in that fight. 😊

But there's a question when different congregations and peoples and races and ethnicities and backgrounds and cultures, when they come together and they sing together, it kind of leads you to ask a question What on earth could make this happen?

Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because only Jesus Christ washes away your sin, He washes away your past. That doesn't mean that your culture and your diversity and your differences that make up the beauty of being people -- does mean this go away, but it means that my identifying marker is not West Texas and the church, my identifying marker is Christian. Only the gospel could do that.

Maybe you're here tonight and you're not a believer, and maybe you're wondering why on earth were they're singing in three different languages, Why on earth are we all here tonight? Maybe you are curious because wouldn't it be nice if you could be united to someone who would unite you, to everyone else, and will bring you perfectly into that kingdom. We've heard it already, and we'll hear it again. You got to turn from sin. Turn towards your Savior. Confess He is Lord and believe that he rose from the dead.

But for us tonight, going forward, got a question? Do you want to stand up to the corruption in the world today? Then sing, give thanks. Submit. Do you want to stand up to the tyrannical empire that assaults the world? Then sing, give thanks and submit. Do you want to bear witness? Do you want to undo the wisdom of the cosmic heavenly authorities as they watch the church and sing, give thanks, submit to one another. The age of evil but the church can shine like a beacon in the dark. And this is something that we can do today. We can do on Wednesday. You can do it every Sunday. Your church here or your church there. If you're lucky, you can do it twice on Sunday. And what is it that you're doing? What is it that we do to walk wisely? We present a foretaste in the age it's dark of the age to come. Sunday morning when our voices join together, you are tasting heaven. We're bringing that reality here. And that bears witness in a mighty way.

So let's put it all together in a tight package. How do you walk in wisdom? How do you make the most of every opportunity? How do you make the most of your time? You do it by investing in your church. You do it by investing in **the** church. You do it by investing in the body. You do it with brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The days are evil. Do not cower, do not fear, Do not give up hope, but sing, give thanks, submit and take every single opportunity to redeem the time. Paul writes that salvation is nearer today than when we first believed. The night is almost gone and the day is near. The time we have left is a mere breath before the king returns. Make the most of it.

Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your word. Thank you for your church. I thank you that you can bring the dead to life. I pray that you were active in our salvation, and I pray that you didn't stop there. But you said *therefore* walk together. *Therefore*, walk differently, *therefore* walk like my son, and *therefore* walk in wisdom.

Lord, help us to go from here and make the most of the days. Help us trust in you. Help us to be filled in the spirit. Thank you. We ask these things in Jesus name for the sake of His kingdom. Amen