

Ephesians: *Making Most of the Time*
Ephesians 5:15-17

Good morning Church! It is my joy and honor to stand before you this morning...I have missed you dearly. For those of you who are new to Colonial, my name is Jim West and I serve as the Lead Pastor here at Colonial; however, I have been away from the pulpit for the past seven weeks due to a packed travel schedule that included a few weeks on mission in Guatemala, a week on vacation with my bride, a week in Wyoming with pastors and leaders from around the country, a week of study leave, and two weeks of family reunions on the east coast. In my absence, Pastor Mark, Pastor Greg, and Pastor Tami have led you well with outstanding messages and outstanding leadership, and Pastor Todd has been by your side providing care and counsel! It is appropriate to express our gratitude for our pastoral team, amen? I am particularly excited about the vision that has been cast by our Campus Pastors to actively and intentionally Be the Light of Christ in our local communities, our city, and to the ends of the earth. If you have been away this summer as I have, I hope you will take some time to review the *Can I Get a Witness* series as well as Pastor Tami's thoughtful and challenging series on *Godly Parenting*.

This morning, we will resume our journey through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Again, if you are new to Colonial, it is my practice to teach through a book of the Bible, and we are currently working our way through Ephesians. We began our journey last fall, and we made it halfway through Ephesians 5. So, please stand and let us resume our journey as we read Ephesians 5:15-17: 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. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

My message will fall under three subheadings this morning: 1) Walking Accurately; 2) Redeeming the Time; and 3) The Daniel Adventure.

I. Walking Accurately

In order to grasp the significance of our short text, we must first notice that Paul employs the word, "then" in vs. 15: "Look carefully *then* how you walk..." The word "then" indicates that Paul is summarizing and drawing a conclusion here that appeals back to what he has already established. And what has he already established? Let's quickly review what Paul has already said regarding the way Jesus-followers should "walk."

First, Paul taught us in Ephesians 2 that we were all once "the walking dead." He writes in 2:1-3, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind."

It was only by God's unmerited grace that any of us were rescued from the death march of the damned and given a new identity as those who now walk in freedom...but that grace should now change everything including our identity, our hope, our calling and our behavior.

Paul teaches that when it comes to our behavior... which is our "walk," there is and should always be a clear distinction between "before Christ" and "after Christ." People who remain

unforgiven and unredeemed walk in one way...it is a walk characterized by blatant sin and rebellion, indulgence, and slavery...it is a walk that leads to death. However, Paul goes on to say in the following chapters that for those who are in Christ, we are to now “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called” (4:1); we are to “no longer walk as the unbelievers do” in the futility of their minds, their darkened understanding, and their hardness of heart (4:17-18); and we are to “walk as children of light” (5:8).

Church, our walk matters, and the NT makes it quite clear. Our walk will be on one of two paths: we are either the “walking dead” traveling the wide path that leads to destruction, or we walk the narrow way as the redeemed children of God...it is a way that brings glory to the Father and hope to the world because we are “children of Light.” Now, that may strike some of you as overly simplistic, but these two “ways” of walking are the clear teaching of the New Testament.

Jesus said it this way in Matthew 7:13, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Now, we must remember that Christians are *empowered* to walk the narrow way as the adopted children of God. Christians have been forgiven, and with that unmerited grace comes a new life, a new identity, and the power of the Holy Spirit...and all of that was God’s doing through Jesus on the cross. We are saved by grace and grace alone when we repent and place our faith in Jesus. Our walking doesn’t save us...Jesus saves us to walk in a new way. And we never walk alone: we are filled with the Holy Spirit, following our Lord Jesus, stepping in His footsteps, and we do so as part of the Body of Christ in the fellowship of believers. Again, let me be perfectly clear: our “walk” is not the means by which we earn our salvation, but our “walk” should consistently and accurately reveal to the watching world who we are: we are the redeemed children of God. If our walk is not set apart and easily distinguished from those who are perishing...if we are not walking carefully in a way that brings glory to God...we are walking inaccurately...and Paul wants to address that.

Such is why Paul literally writes here in vs. 15: “See, then, that you walk accurately.” I know that’s not how the ESV translates vs. 15, but I’m going to pick a fight with the ESV here because the Greek word *akribos* is more likely describing the way we are to “walk” rather than the way we are to “see.” And although the Greek word *akribos* can mean “carefully,” in most instances in the NT *akribos* means “accurately.”

The great and insightful Scottish preacher, Alexander Maclaren agrees with this translation. He writes:

So here is a practical direction, walk strictly, accurately, looking to your feet; as a man would do who was upon what they call in the Alps an *arrête*. Suppose a narrow ridge of snow piled on the top of a ledge of rock, with a precipice of 5000 feet on either side, and a cornice of snow hanging over an empty space. The climber puts his alpenstock before his foot, he tests with his foot before he rests his weight, for a false step and down he goes! ‘See that you walk circumspectly,’ rigidly, accurately, punctiliously. Live by law—that is to say, live by principles which imply duties; for to live by inclination is ruin. No great, noble, right, blessed life is lived without rigid self-control,

self-denial, and self-crucifixion. The narrow way that leads to life is the way of peace, just because it is a way of restrictions.¹

I know...Maclaren's choice of words made you wince...it made me wince, too. We don't like words like "rigid, accurate, law, principles, and duties"...and I suspect less than one percent of us have any idea what "punctiliously" means! (It means to perform your duties carefully and correctly.)

We don't like that kind of language because it seems stifling, as though we would be forfeiting our freedom and spontaneity if we were to walk with such care and accuracy. But herein lies the great irony of the Christian faith. When we live as wise people...when we submit to the law of God and discipline our lives to walk in His ways...when we are careful and accurate in the way we walk as followers of Jesus, we actually experience tremendous freedom. However, when we embrace the libertine lifestyle and throw caution to the wind, we end up in a life enslaved by indulgent desires that are never satisfying and demand more and more of our time, energy, and resources. To live as those who are wise is to find great meaning, joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment with our days. To live foolishly is to live a life of regret. You know that's true...and so let me ask you: *Are you walking as one who is wise, or are you walking as one who lacks wisdom?*

Paul writes in vs. 17, "Do not be foolish..." He is appealing to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, particularly the teachings that we find in Proverbs that regularly compare the "walk" of a wise person as compared to the "walk" of a fool. There are 74 references that pertain to "the fool" in the book of Proverbs...let me walk you through a few of those references while you consider the way you are walking through your life right now.

Here are a few of the characteristics of "the fool" as articulated in Proverbs: fools are lazy (24:30); they have uncontrolled tongues (18:6-7; 29:20) and thus lie (6:12), slander (10:18), quarrel (20:3), and are quick-tempered (14:29; 29:11); they are proud (13:16), hate knowledge (1:22), and despise advice or correction (12:1, 15; 15:5); and they are reckless and careless (14:16).² Now, Church, I'm not asking if you know a fool...I'm sure you do. I'm asking you to consider if YOU are walking as an unwise person...if YOU are playing the fool. This is what our text demands this morning: "See, then, that *you* are walking accurately...not as unwise but as wise..." I'm quite certain that Jesus would have us examine the log in our own eye before trying to address the speck in the eye of another, amen? As believers, we all must give considerable care to how we are walking, for it is assumed in the NT that as believers, we will walk as those who are wise.

So how do wise people walk? Paul provides three criteria: 1) Wise people make the best use of the time; 2) wise people know the nature of this age; and 3) wise people understand what the will of the Lord is. We shall unpack all three in our second subheading...

II. Redeeming the Time

¹ Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Ephesians*; p 333.

² Clinton Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: Ephesians*; p 347.

There are very few words that make me as uncomfortable as “time management”! Why? Well, it’s not lost on me...and I suspect it’s not lost on you...that time is our most precious commodity, right? The older I get, the more that fact hits me right between the eyes. I am now living at the age where there are likely more checked boxes on the calendar than boxes that remain unchecked. I am well past the halfway mark of my life on planet earth, and more than ever I now understand that I will not get any of that time back. Whatever good intentions I had for my 20’s, 30’s and 40’s are in the rearview mirror. There is no rewind button for the human life...we are always moving ahead, and the little decisions we make every day will determine not only our character and our future, but also that which we contribute to this world in terms of love, kindness, friendship, generosity, and hope...those things that will outlive our last breath. Time is God’s gift to each one of us...so let me ask you a question that will likely be asked of us all one day: what are you doing with the time that God has given you? Take a moment to think about that while I humiliate myself with a recent observation.

As many of you know, my family recently returned from a two-week vacation that consisted of 40+ hours of driving time. 40 hours of my life were spent in that mini-van in the company of my wife and my children. Now, how much of that time do you think I spent in meaningful conversations with my family members? If I had to guess, I would say about 3-4 hours. How many of those hours did we all look at our devices (with the exception of the driver!)? How many hours were spent playing video games, watching YouTube clips, and generally keeping to ourselves? My personal game of choice is Solitaire...the very name of the game tells the story, right? There I was, surrounded by the people I love the most in this world, and I burned up a few hours playing Solitaire. I was literally “killing time...”—time that had been given to me as a gift.

Church, we are all far too careless with this precious commodity called TIME, amen? Paul makes it clear: wise people...those who are walking accurately with great care...wise people make the best use of the time that has been given to them. So, what does that look like? Well, I think we all know that we have been given time for a reason, right? We are not accidents...we are not impersonal machines...we are not even our own. We are all those created in God’s image for the primary purpose of being in a relationship with our Creator. Because that relationship was fractured by sin, God took on flesh and became one of us to redeem us through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. The ancient church fathers would say that we have been “purchased” by Jesus through the blood that He shed on our behalf. Thus, we are not our own...we have been “redeemed” at a terrible cost, and our lives belong to Christ. So, as Christians, we exist to follow, obey, adore, and enjoy an intimate relationship with Jesus that brings glory to the Father and hope to the world. The scriptures are clear about the purpose of our time here on earth: “to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love our neighbors as ourselves.” These are the higher purposes of life...these are the things that are eternal. These are the things that develop our character, and it is the character of our soul that will live on for eternity when our bodies finally fail.

Imagine for a moment that God assigned you to label everything in your life with one of two labels: 1) temporary; or 2) eternal. I think we can agree that the vast majority of things in this life are temporary, right? The car, the boat (sadly), the bank account, our jobs, our homes, our vacations, our 401Ks, our bodies, our pleasures, and many of the things that bring us stress...so much of this life is temporary.

Now, what things in your life would get labeled as “eternal”? Well...every person you have ever met is “eternal”, right? People are eternal...people are souls who have temporal bodies, but those souls go on for all eternity. So, whenever we are investing in people, we are investing in eternity. What else? Love...love is eternal...love lasts...so any act of love is an investment in eternity. What else? Worship, right? The adoration of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is eternal, so whatever time we devote to worship is committing time to that which extends beyond our short span of life on earth. What else? The Body of Christ, right? The Body of Christ is eternal...the Church lives on in this life and in the life to come. So, let me ask you a question: *in any given week, what percentage of your time is devoted to eternal matters, and what percentage of your time is consumed with matters that are temporary?*

Now, don't get me wrong...we all have good reason to devote time to earning a wage, caring for our homes, maintaining our vehicles, and even enjoying a Chief's game from time to time. All of these temporary things are part of living life on planet earth as human beings...and they are generally good things. The problem is that we often elevate good, temporary things to the status of ultimate things at the expense of investing our time and energy into those things that are actually ultimate and eternal. In other words, we sacrifice the high things of life in order to accrue, maintain, manage, and enjoy the lower things of life.

Now, listen to what Paul literally writes here in Ephesians 5:15-16: “See that you walk accurately, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the opportunity, because the days are evil.”

Again, in my estimation, the ESV has interpreted this passage for you instead of simply translating the Greek. The Greek verb Paul uses here in vs. 16 is *exagorazo*, which literally means “to redeem” or “to buy back.” The wise person...the believer who walks carefully and accurately...is the one who “redeems the time.” I'll come back to “redeeming the time” in a minute, but first, consider Paul's motivation for this phrase: “because the days are evil.” Wise people know the nature of the age...the days are evil, and our time is short. This perspective of “the days” we live in was commonly assumed in the NT.

Quick question: How many of you know that it takes effort to resist the natural, evil tendencies of this age? Let's be honest: it takes zero effort to be selfish...it's the most natural thing in the world, right? It takes zero effort to be offended. It takes zero effort to complain. It takes zero effort to indulge in an appetite that we know will ultimately harm us. It takes zero effort to gossip and create division. It takes zero effort to tell a little lie to make ourselves look better than we are. It takes zero effort to kill time...killing time comes very easily for all of us. And this is Paul's point: wise people resist what comes naturally in this evil age. The natural, gravitational pull of this age is not towards God and all that is eternal...it is exactly the opposite...and you know that is true. Such is why even those who have been redeemed must be

careful, attentive, and accurate in the way we walk every single day...every single hour of every day...right? Because if we fail to be attentive, the day will get away from us, and the natural flow of the day in this age is away from the Father and all that truly matters in life. If we are going to be wise, we must “redeem the time.”

Now, many of you know there are two words for time in the Greek language, and both are used regularly in the NT. The basic word for “time” in terms of hours and days is the Greek word *kronos* (where we get our English word “chronology”). The second Greek word for time is *kairos*. *Kairos* refers to “seasons and/or opportunities.” Here in Ephesians 5:16, Paul employs the words *kairos* when he says, “redeem the time.” Do you see what he’s saying?

To make the most of the season or the opportunity before us, we must give up something. We must give up the lower things to seize the higher things. Alexander Maclaren writes: There is a need for making the opportunity which is given truly our own; and that can only be done by giving something in exchange for it. That is the notion of purchase, is it not? Acquisition, by giving something else. Thus, says Paul, you have to buy the opportunity which time affords us. Life gives us opportunities and no more. We may, in and through it, become wise, good, pure, happy, noble, Christ-like, or we may not. The opportunity is there...lay hold of it, says Paul, and turn it into more than an opportunity...and how is that to be done? We have to give something away. What have we to give away? Mainly the lower ends for which the moment might serve. These have to be surrendered—sometimes abandoned altogether, always rigidly restricted and kept in utter subordination to the highest purposes. You must barter the lower if you are to secure the higher ends for which life is the appointed season.³

When I read that quote, I deleted my Solitaire game from my phone! And then I began to wonder...what other changes do I need to make in my life in order to seize the opportunities that God has set before me to love Him, know Him, serve and enjoy Him...and to love, know, serve, and enjoy those whom He has placed in my life? What else needs to be deleted, exchanged, or at least subdued in order to ‘purchase’ the opportunity to love God and love others that my short time on earth provides?

I don’t know about you, but I’m tired of living like a fool. I don’t want to waste the time that God has given me. There are some circumstances in my life that are beyond my control, but I can control many things. I can control how much time I look at my phone. I can control how much time I waste watching TV or playing video games. I can choose what I will eat, how I will care for my body, what I will read, what I will think about, how I will intentionally invest time with my children and my wife. These are all choices that I have been empowered to make every day, and those choices matter. Those choices determine to a great extent how I will “walk,” and I want to walk better this year than I did last year. How about you?

If you hear nothing else, I hope you will hear this: when you leave here today, when you wake up tomorrow morning, when you pause to tie your shoes or you have to stop at the red light, ask yourself: “What is the will of God for my life? Why am I here? What is the purpose

³ MacLaren, 331-332.

of my life? What is going to last, and what is temporary? And how am I spending my time? Am I redeeming the time, or am I being swept along by this evil age?" Church, your walk matters...and you have more power to make an eternal impact than you think.

III. The Daniel Adventure

Many of you will remember Daniel. Daniel was a young and influential Jewish man who was on a trajectory towards greatness, but then his world was utterly demolished. The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, ruthlessly conquered and destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC. Thousands were killed, homes were destroyed, and hundreds of the brightest and best in Jerusalem were hauled into exile and forced to serve the conquering king. Daniel was among those forced to serve. Now, I think we can all agree that Daniel had every reason to feel sorry for himself, right? Daniel could have become embittered, despondent, depressed, and even angry at God for all the loss he endured. But that's not what happened. Daniel resisted what psychologists refer to as "learned helplessness." Daniel resisted adopting a victim mentality. Instead, trusting God to remain sovereign even in the midst of his painful circumstances, Daniel chose to redeem his time in Babylon by honoring God with his diet. He decided that "he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank" (Daniel 1:8). Daniel petitioned the king's steward and requested an alternative diet...a Jewish diet comprised of vegetables and water...so as to avoid defiling himself. Daniel risked upsetting the system of his world to stick out for the glory of God. That's what we learn in vs. 8. Then, in vs. 9 we read, "Now God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs..."

Church, don't miss this. Daniel knew that his life was given to him to bring glory to God and to honor him with the time and opportunity that had been given to him...even during a season of great loss and hardship. But Daniel could not possibly anticipate what the outcome would be of approaching the chief eunuch about changing the menu. What Daniel did know...and what he believed with all his heart...was that *he was not acting alone*. When Daniel practiced an ounce of obedience and trusted God enough to take a stand...to redeem the time by giving up the rich food of the king as an act of devotion to the Lord...God engaged and gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the king's steward.

So many of us forget that we are not alone when it comes to redeeming the time that has been given to us. We forget the "Now God" factor.⁴ We forget that God delights in our obedience and brings His resources to bear when we are willing to act upon our faith!

As the story goes on, the chief steward, who has compassion on Daniel, is still very concerned that Daniel and his friends might stand before the king looking emaciated due to lack of nutrition, so Daniel strikes a deal. He suggests that they perform an experiment. For ten days the steward will feed Daniel and his friends nothing but vegetables and water, and then they will compare the appearance of the Jewish men with those Babylonian men who ate the king's diet.

⁴ The Daniel Adventure and this idea of the "Now God" factor came from John Ortberg's outstanding book entitled *When the Game is Over It All Goes Back in the Box*. I highly recommend his book for anyone interested in getting some conviction and equipping on this notion of making the most of the time.

Now...you know how this story goes, right? The Jewish men looked so much healthier after ten days in comparison to the Babylonian men that the steward changed the royal diet and started feeding everybody vegetables!

So why am I telling you this story? I'm telling you this story as an invitation to take on the Daniel Adventure. You would be amazed what can happen in your life and the lives of those around you should you decide to redeem the time God has given you in one particular area for the course of ten days. So, here's my challenge: pick just one "lower" thing that you know you need to give up in order to redeem a higher opportunity for God's glory, and make a commitment for ten days. Maybe that's a commitment to fast from video games for ten days. Maybe that's a commitment to not speak a single complaint for ten days. Maybe that's a commitment to give your spouse 30 minutes of uninterrupted listening time every day for ten days. Maybe that's a commitment to get up early and wait on the Lord every day for ten days. Maybe that's a commitment to creatively invest in your children for ten days. You can make a choice today to honor God and love others with the time you have been given, and when you make that kind of choice, you invoke the "So God..." influence in your life. The Daniel Adventure teaches us that we can trust God with our obedience, even when we can't anticipate the outcomes.

And here's what Daniel's story also teaches us: new and difficult challenges are always just around the corner for those who belong to God. Daniel's next test was much harder, and his faithfulness led him to the lion's den...but again, God showed up and did what only God could do. That's how it works. The age is evil, and our faith will be tested again and again. But we learn that faithfulness in the little things prepares us for faithfulness in the harder things. Church, the day of a great and painful testing may be coming soon in our lifetime, but we will not be ready for the greater challenges until we learn to trust God in the day-to-day opportunities that each day brings. So Church, "see that you walk accurately and with great care, not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the opportunities because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Amen? Let us pray.