

Redeeming the Time

Ephesians 5:15-21

Rev. Brian Bill

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Last weekend was an amazing time of expressive worship and exposition of the Word during our Good Friday and Easter services. This place was packed on Good Friday as Pastor Kyle and Pastor Chris, along with our youth and young adults, led us on a journey to the cross. It was one of the most meaningful services I've participated in. It was a delight to be able to sit with Beth during the entire service and not be involved with any of the details, knowing everything would go smoothly because Kyle and Chris were running point.

The Holy Spirit was also working powerfully on Saturday and Sunday as we learned how we can move past our past from the life of Peter: *To move past your past, seek the presence of Jesus in the present.* Several were moved to tears as we contemplated the "look of love" that Jesus gives to fallen sinners like us. Many were deeply impacted by the authentic and vulnerable testimony of Jerry and Cathy Thomas. I rejoice that a number of spiritual decisions were made, including several who indicated they were born again.

While there are many reasons to gather with God's people each week, one of the main motivations is because you don't want to miss what the Holy Spirit is doing here! I'm reminded of the young boy who was home sick on Palm Sunday. His dad returned from church with a palm branch which made the boy very curious, "*Why do you have that palm branch, dad?*" The dad took advantage of this teachable moment and explained, "*When Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honor Him, so we each got one to help us remember that.*" To which the boy responded, "*Oh sure, the one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!*"

I'm confident that Jesus shows up each weekend because He is always here, and He is the head of this church. As we've said before, the church is God's Plan A, and there is no Plan B. You don't want to miss a service because something special is happening when we gather together to hear the gospel proclaimed through music and the message.

We shouldn't be surprised because we've been praying Psalm 85:6 for the past couple years: "*Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?*" Could it be happening right now? Is God awakening His sleepy church?

Lord, make it so. Do it here, Lord. Since you revived others in the past, do it again right now, and let it begin with me.

Prayer for Revival

Please stand as we read Ephesians 5:15-21: ***“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 for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”***

I see five holy habits we’re to cultivate:

- **Walk wisely** (15).
- **Watch your time** (16).
- **Work out God’s will** (17).
- **Welcome the filling of the Holy Spirit** (18).
- **Worship well** (19-21).

Here’s the sermon in a sentence: *Christians are to conduct themselves carefully in a corrupt culture.*

1. Walk wisely. Ephesians 5:15 says: ***“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.”*** The word ***“carefully”*** means to be skillful and to be on guard, to look very closely so as not to stumble. It has the idea of exactness, precision, and accuracy. We’re to walk according to the Word and will of God. One Greek scholar renders it this way: *“Be constantly taking heed therefore how accurately you are conducting yourselves...”*

This is a present imperative, meaning we are commanded to continually pay attention to how we’re living. We’re to be *“constantly careful.”* The same word is used in Hebrews 3:12 to warn about unbelief: ***“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”***

Too many of us are spiritual sluggards, living sloppy lives. Instead of fighting sin and staying on the right road, we take exit ramps all the time. Someone has said the tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it.

Let's walk wisely. Secondly...

2. Watch your time. We see this in verse 16: ***“Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil...”*** This is also translated as ***“redeem the time”*** and has the idea of buying up a bargain. On Thursday, I stopped by Walgreen's and saw that all the Easter candy has been discounted to 50%. A worker told me that it would eventually drop to 75% and then to 90%. If I wait too long, it will all be gone. Paul is telling us to buy up the bargain of time right now, before it disappears.

There are two Greek words for time. One is *chronos*, which is quantitative time and refers to the passing of moments, days, months, years, decades, and centuries. It's how we measure time. Sadly, most people are just going through the motions, wasting time, or passing time. Some are like the passengers on a plane who heard the pilot give this message: *“We have lost our position, folks, and have been flying rather aimlessly for over an hour. That's the bad news. But the good news is we're making very good time.”*

The other word is *kairos* and refers to qualitative time. It's the idea of an opportune moment, also translated as *“the appointed time, a fixed, or special occasion.”* It refers to a period of opportunity which is open for a while and then closes. It's not clock time, but kingdom time. We also see this in Colossians 4:5: ***“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.”***

Are you ready to move from living a *chronos* life to a *kairos* life so you'll focus on living each moment as a supreme moment? William Penn once said: *“Time is what we want the most but what we use the worst.”*

Obviously, only God knows the number of days we have left but we are called to live with an acute sense of a countdown according to Psalm 90:12: ***“So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom.”*** To number means to “weigh” or “measure” our moments so we live them for God's glory and for the good of others.

As I've been officiating at more funerals these past months, I've come to realize these four truths about life.

- It is fast.
- It is fragile.
- It is futile apart from Christ.
- It is final.

The missionary Adoniram Judson wrote: *“A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity...the same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever.”*

Let’s not just ‘mark time,’ but use the time we have left to make a mark for the kingdom. Let’s not waste time, but worship God with our time. Don Whitney writes: *“Hell will howl forever with agonizing laments over time so foolishly squandered.”*

It’s easy to think Paul is exhorting us to action because the days are short. Actually, he urges us to take advantage of the opportunities ***“because the days are evil.”*** We live in a world filled with evil influences and evil individuals.

Doesn’t it seem as if unbridled evil has been unleashed like an out-of-control tsunami in our world? What was considered right is now wrong and what was wrong is now considered right, and to be a right for everyone.

The examples of evil are pervasive in our world today. I was grieved this past weekend when our own president proclaimed Easter Sunday as “Transgender Visibility Day.” Before I go further, please know I am not making a political statement because I would address this no matter what political party was in office. When our previous president made unbiblical statements, I addressed some of them when appropriate. Also, I’m aware that this “visibility day” is not new, and it happens on March 31 every year, but I was greatly troubled by what our president said on Easter Sunday.

Let me also say that the Lamb, who is also a Lion, is at the center of the Throne, not a donkey or an elephant. Our hope does not lie in an elephant or a donkey, but in the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Here’s what our president tweeted on Resurrection Day: *“Today, on Transgender Day of Visibility, I have a simple message to all trans Americans: I see you. You are made in the image of God, and you’re worthy of respect and dignity.”*

While I agree we must treat everyone with respect and dignity as fellow image-bearers, and help those who are confused, he only quoted the first half of Genesis 1:27: ***“So God created man in His own image...”*** But that’s not the whole verse. It ends like this: ***“...in the image of God He created him; MALE and FEMALE He created them.”*** Mr. President, if you had quoted the whole verse, you would have had to say there are only two genders established at conception – male and female.

Sadly, even our “holy” days are now being hijacked for unholy purposes. This week, I read a compelling post by Denny Burk about how whoever owns the calendar, and our annual observances, owns the narrative and imagination of a people:

“Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving were once thoroughly Christian observances embedded in our cultural imagination. They pointed us to incarnation, to cross/resurrection, and to giving thanks...they’ve already taken the entire month of June for LGBTQ observances, and this year they are taking Easter too...they are colonizing the calendar, and I for one am tired of giving it away.”

I’ve shared this before, but here’s something I wrote after reflecting on how our society is slipping into lawlessness and lewdness.

What used to be considered an ABOMINATION which led to LAMENTATION has become a CELEBRATION demanding PARTICIPATION and AFFIRMATION. What was formerly UNTHINKABLE has become UNQUESTIONABLE. Since Christians are often CANCELLED when they tell the truth, many have chosen to CAVE, COMPROMISE, or remain QUIET. We can no longer be silent. We must be UNSHAKEN in our faith and UNASHAMED of the gospel. We must make the best use of this time in which we live to be CONVICTIONAL about sin, COURAGEOUS for our Savior, while being COMPASSIONATE toward sinners as we witness to the TIMELESS TRUTH of Jesus, who alone can set us free from our sins.

Isaiah 5:20 says: ***“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”***

Listen. Even in the midst of great evil, there are always God-ordained opportunities to redeem the time. Every day is an occasion to grab the good and shun the sin. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: ***“But test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”*** Let’s lament but also shine the light of Jesus in our dark world. *Every time you can do something good, you should.*

Have you ever used the phrase, *“I’m just killing time?”* I’ve probably said it. I wonder if you’d be willing to join me and never say this again. God doesn’t want us to kill our time; He wants us to fill our time with that which brings Him glory. Wasting the gift of time insults the giver of time.

Most time is wasted, not in hours, but in minutes and seconds. Someone said the only piece of eternity we’ll ever hold in our hand is the opportunity at hand right now. We have no other time in which to live. *Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That’s why it is called the present.*

Speaking of what we hold in our hand, most of us waste a lot of time on our phones. Recently, Pastor Kyle spent some time challenging our young adults in Mainspring about cell phone and social media use. I asked him for some of his notes.

- Many in Gen Z spend up to 8 hours a day on their phones, touching their phones over 2,000 times a day.
- On average, they check their phones 144 times a day, which is once every five minutes. This releases dopamine in their brains, which gives them pleasure, but this doesn’t last, so they need another hit and then another.
- This leads to short attention spans as they are being programmed to be constantly entertained through TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram videos.
- 40% of young adults are self-diagnosed as addicted. Another study revealed up to 57% are digitally addicted.
- At least 33 million Americans are addicted to social media, which leads to anxiety, anger, insecurity, shallowness, and dishonesty.

Pastor Kyle will be challenging our young adults to go on a digital fast. Perhaps we should join them.

Let’s just admit, no matter what Generation we’re part of, that cell phones and social media can become pocket idols that demand our time, attention, and

allegiance. Perhaps we need to start a new group at CR for those of us who are too tethered to technology.

Maybe we should do what the 16th Century reformer Philip Melanchthon did. He kept a record of every wasted moment during his day and took his list to God in confession before he went to bed at night.

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Walk wisely. Watch your time. That leads to the third holy habit.

3. Work out God's will. Ephesians 5:17 clarifies what is most important: ***“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”*** The wise know God's limits, while fools know no bounds. In Proverbs, the fool is the one who doesn't follow God's ways. He's the one who knows the right thing to do but instead does the opposite, or simply does nothing. Proverbs 1:32 says the ***“complacency of fools will destroy them.”***

The ***“will of the Lord”*** is primarily focused on transformation, and less on location. We tend to lock in to *where* God wants us and *what* He wants us to do, while God is all about *who* we're becoming.

Having said that, we are praying for God to make His will clear regarding our next Administrative Pastor and Children's Director. The staff spent some time with two candidates this week and we're very encouraged, but we're waiting for God to make His way and His will clear to them and to us.

The word ***“understand”*** carries the idea of assembling facts into an organized whole, like putting pieces of a puzzle together. It's in the present imperative, meaning it's a command to make this a continual practice. How does one understand the will of God? Simply put, by reading, meditating, memorizing, studying, and applying the Word of God.

God doesn't always tell us everything about the future, does He? Here's a helpful principle: *If you want to know God's will, then do the will of God you already know.* Many times, we ask God to tell us what to do and I imagine Him saying, *“I've already told you in my Word but you're not doing what I've said to do.”* If you want the Almighty to guide you, then start moving on those things you already know He wants you to do.

Let me say it like this: *I don't see biblical exhortations to find God's will; rather, in Scripture we're encouraged to follow God's Word.* If you understand His Word, you'll understand His will. For example, here are ten things we already know about God's will from God's Word.

1. **God wants you to be saved** (2 Peter 3:9).
2. **God wants you to surrender fully to Him** (Romans 12:2).
3. **God wants you to be sanctified and to avoid sexual immorality** (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
4. **God wants you to give thanks in all circumstances** (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
5. **God wants you to grow in Christlikeness** (2 Peter 3:18).
6. **God wants you to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him** (Micah 6:8).
7. **God wants you to gather regularly with His people for worship** (Hebrews 10:24-25).
8. **God wants you to not marry a spiritually mismatched mate** (2 Corinthians 6:14).
9. **God wants you to give what He has given to you** (Proverbs 3:9-10).
10. **God wants you to be a devoted disciple who makes other disciples among your neighbors and the nations** (Luke 9:23; Matthew 28:18-20).

It was Will Rogers who said half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save. Someone else put it like this: *"Life is too short to do everything we want to do; but it is long enough for us to do everything God wants us to do."*

I'm reminded of the theme for our Junior High retreat: *Just do something!* The High Schoolers tackled this same topic in the fall. I like what Pastor Chris says: *"We try to over-complicate God's will. But Matt 6:33 tells us we are to first, seek the kingdom of God. So essentially when you try to decide what to do...Just do something that seeks first the kingdom of God."* Oh, that's rich.

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Walk wisely. Watch your time. Work out God's will. The fourth habit is very important and is really the key to the passage.

4. Welcome the filling of the Holy Spirit. If you try to make changes on your own or try to live the Christian life in the power of your own flesh, you'll fail.

Listen to verse 18: *“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”* While the Bible does not forbid the drinking of alcohol, it does strongly warn against drunkenness. Here are just a few verses:

- Isaiah 5:11, 22: *“Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink.”*
- Romans 13:13: *“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.”*
- 1 Peter 4:3: *“For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.”*
- Proverbs 20:1: *“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.”*

Proverbs 23:29-35 vividly spells out six adverse effects of alcohol.

- **Alcohol has harmful, never helpful consequences.** Verse 29: *“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?”*
- **It promises what it can never deliver.** We see this in verses 30-31: *“Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.”*
- **Alcohol can kill you.** Listen to verse 32: *“In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.”*
- **Alcohol corrupts reality.** Check out verse 33: *“Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things.”* In light of that, I guess we shouldn’t be surprised alcohol is referred to as “spirits.”
- **Alcohol causes physical impairment.** Verse 34 portrays the unsteadiness of one under the influence of alcohol: *“You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast.”*
- **Alcohol will disorient and control you.** We see this in verse 35: *“‘They struck me,’ you will say, ‘but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink.’”*

Interestingly, the word *“debauchery”* has the idea of *“wasteful and excessive squandering.”* The way of the world is wasteful, isn’t it? If you’re struggle with

alcohol, or with any addiction or issue, our Celebrate Recovery ministry meets every Friday night at 6:00 pm.

Instead of getting drunk, we are to be filled with the Spirit. At its core, this verse is helping us see the ultimate issue is control. Who or what is running my life? Is it alcohol or drugs or pornography or codependency or anger? Am I controlling my life or is it the Holy Spirit? Am I addicted to me, myself, and I? Am I controlled by outside influences or by the Holy Spirit who dwells within?

The word **“but”** shows a contrast, or antithesis. Instead of squandering your life, surrender your life by being filled with the Holy Spirit. The word **“filled”** means, *“to make full; to cause to abound; to fill to the brim so that nothing else is wanting.”* This is a command, not a suggestion. It’s an ultimate imperative. Because it’s in the present tense, it means, *“to be filled constantly”* or *“to keep on being filled.”* If you are saved, you received the Holy Spirit at conversion. The question is not, *“How can I get more of the Holy Spirit, but how can I give more of me to Him?”*

Here are three questions to ponder:

- Have I given control of my life to the Holy Spirit?
- Am I cooperating with the Holy Spirit?
- Am I staying in close contact with Him?

As the Holy Spirit fills you with His fuel, He will give you fruit and help you lead a fulfilled life.

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5. Worship well. Once we’re filled with the Holy Spirit, we’ll see some results according to verses 19-21: ***“Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”***

Scholars differ on the distinctions between **“psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.”** Bob Kauflin writes: *“He seems to be encouraging diversity in the songs we use to praise God. ‘Psalms’ might be referring to the songs in the Book of Psalms, ‘hymns’ to songs that praise Christ [not the hymns we think of because they weren’t around then], and ‘spiritual songs’ to more spontaneous expressions. If*

that's the case, Paul is encouraging us to say and sing all our songs—short, long, fast, slow, old, new—with gratefulness to God.”

I love the doctrinal depth of the songs Pastor Chad chooses each week. It reminds me what Harold Best says, “*A congregation is just as responsible to sing the gospel as the preachers are to preach it.*” Pastor Chad chose songs today which loosely fit these three categories:

- House of the Lord (spiritual song)
- Psalm 150 (Psalm)
- Your Great Name (spiritual song)
- Our closing song is called “Grace” (hymn). I love that we sang, “Christ the Lord is risen today” last weekend.

Our son-in-law Lucas, who is a worship pastor in the suburbs of Chicago, believes “*psalms are Scripture set to music, hymns are theology set to music, and spiritual songs are testimony set to music. Paul clearly cares more about the content that is sung than the style.*”

When we're filled with the Holy Spirit, we'll see some four-fold fruit.

- **Proclaiming.** Notice we're to verbally “*address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...*” We're to remind each other of truth by what we say.
- **Praising.** We're also to be about “*singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.*” We're to *say* to one another and *sing* to God, focusing on both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. We're to edify others and exalt God. While some of us don't have the best voices and may be inclined to refrain from singing, are you aware we're commanded to sing to the Lord more than 100 times in the Book of Psalms? 1 Chronicles 16:23 says, “***Sing to the Lord, all the earth! Tell of His salvation from day to day.***” James 5:13 says, “***Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.***” Oh, I should point out that this includes everyone. Notice the phrase, “***with your heart.***”

If you were here last weekend, you'll know I almost lost my voice during the sermon. What you might not know is I didn't lose my voice from preaching four times but rather because I was so engaged with the music and lyrics

which Pastor Chad chose. I found myself singing at the top of my lungs, even hitting some falsetto notes a few times when my voice cracked.

- **Praying.** Verse 20 calls us to an attitude of ***“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** A complaining heart and the Holy Spirit don’t go together.
- **Posture.** Verse 21 says our posture must be one of mutual submission: ***“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*** To ***“submit”*** means, ***“to place under in an orderly fashion.”*** In a world that encourages everyone to stand up for their rights, the Word exhorts us to submit to one another in a spirit of unity, peace, and harmony. This is lived out when we choose to sing songs and worship in a musical style that might not be our personal preference. Paul will pick up on the theme of loving submission in our next passage as it relates to marriage, parenting, and the workplace.

Christians are to conduct themselves carefully in a corrupt culture. And we do that by:

- **Walking wisely** (15).
- **Watching your time** (16).
- **Working out God’s will** (17).
- **Welcoming the filling of the Holy Spirit** (18).
- **Worshipping well** (19-21).

Invitation

Lord Jesus, I confess I have been wasting my life. I admit I am a sinner, and I cannot save myself. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I’ve been living. By faith I gratefully receive Your gift of salvation. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. With all my heart I believe You are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. Thank You for dying in my place as my substitute. I believe Your words are true. I repent and now receive You as my Lord and Savior. I surrender to Your leadership in my life. Make me into the person You want me to be as Your disciple who looks for ways to make more disciples. Help me to walk wisely, to watch my time, to work out your will, to welcome the filling the Holy Spirit, and to worship well. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Let's transition now to communion. As we prepare to participate in our common-unity bought for us by Christ's blood, let's consider these challenges.

1. Look back – *“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”* (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

2. Look in – *“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”* (1 Corinthians 11:28)

3. Look up – *“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* (Hebrews 1:3)

4. Look around – *“This is my body, which is for you.”* (1 Corinthians 11:24)
The **“you”** is plural. We're reminded we are members of the international, intergenerational, multi-ethnic, global body of Christ.

5. Look Forward – *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”* (1 Corinthians 11:26)

We practice open communion here. You don't need to be a member of Edgewood to participate, but you do need to be born again.

New Members – 9:00 am

Bryan and Mindy LaBerge
Jake and Karissa Arnold