

Redeeming the time
Market Street Fellowship
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Eph 5:15-16
Redeeming the Time

We're going to continue this morning with our study of the book of Ephesians. We've been off on a few other subjects for the last couple weeks, but we're going to pick up where we left off in Ephesians 5:15 and 16 today. Let's read it.

Eph 5:15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16
redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

What does it mean to walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise. Circumspectly means to walk cautiously, carefully, warily. Why are we told to walk cautiously, redeeming the time because the days are evil?

I can't say for certain that I know specifically what Paul had in mind when he wrote these verses. But I believe I think I have seen something of what is behind this admonition. The language that Paul uses is a bit strange, and it puzzles most commentators. Most seem to believe that he's talking specifically about the days in which he lived. The days of the great persecution of the church. The days of the Jewish revolt and the chaos and bloodshed and absolute insanity that surrounded the manifest end of Old Covenant Israel. These particular days were evil. And I suppose that is possible.

But I would guess that Paul's statement is more broad than this. I would guess that when he speaks of redeeming time, and days being evil, he's not just talking about his particular time and those particular days. I think he had more in view. I think he made this statement out from an understanding of time and days that very few share. The unusual language is expressive of an unusual comprehension, an unusual view of natural life as out from the mind of Christ. As strange as this may sound, Paul the apostle saw himself, quite literally, as an alien from another realm, and time, and universe...a foreign life form passing as a stranger and nomad through natural time in a natural body. I know that Paul had this view of Himself. And I believe that he is talking about walking cautiously through days and time and space with that understanding firmly in place. And it's almost like he's saying, "pass very carefully through this realm because you are not part of it...and whatever you touch has a tendency to stick to you". We'll talk more about that later.

My description of Paul's understanding of himself might sound like an exaggeration to somebody unacquainted with the reality of the cross, or unacquainted with the Scriptures. But, even if somebody hasn't experienced the reality of the cross, and how it divides like a sword between two men, two creations, two realities, two lights, etc....you can tell from Paul's own writings that this is what Christianity was to him.

In Galatians 6 he says that he has been crucified to the world and the world has been crucified to him. In Galatians chapter 2 he says that he has been crucified with Christ and he no longer lives. In 1 Corinthians he rebukes the church for acting

like "mere men". In Ephesians 2 he speaks of being raised up and seated with Christ in the heavens. In Colossians 3 he talks about being mindful of the things above, not the things that are on the earth. In 2 Corinthians 4 he talks about looking at things that are unseen and not at the things that are seen. In chapter 5 he walks by faith and not by site. In Romans 8:9 he says that he is no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit. In Hebrews 12 (if he indeed wrote Hebrews) he says that he has already come to Mt. Zion, this city of the great king. **Paul was not an earthling trying to get to heaven. Paul was a heavenly son of God, trying to pass through the earth circumspectly, with wisdom, redeeming the time.**

If you'll recall, in the verse just proceeding this verse, Paul has just said, "awake, o sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." This is what has been happening to Paul. This wasn't just a Bible verse to Paul. This wasn't a Christian saying. He was literally awaking from among the dead...and was learning to walk in the land of the living. And all of his words, his actions, his thoughts, his emotions were all increasingly governed and constrained by a foreign order, a foreign Life, a foreign law. Paul calls it "the law of the spirit of Life in Christ Jesus". And in every way, living in and by Christ in this way made him an alien to the earth.

Let me read you a fantastic quote from T. Austin-Sparks.

*"I do not know how you read the four Gospels. Perhaps you read them as the life of Jesus here on earth, what He did and what He said - purely as a historic record. I suggest to you that you go back to those Gospels with this one thought: Here is the embodiment of another 'order' of things, in constitution and in behavior, in ways of life and in laws and principles governing the life. Here is Heaven in evidence. Here is Heaven in control. Here is another world embodied: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" - here is another world that has come in this Person. Read the Gospels in the light of that, and you will begin to see that He does not do and speak as the people of this world would, even the wisest of them. He is getting everything from Heaven; He is getting every word from Heaven; He is governed by Heaven. That is the meaning of the so-oft repeated phrase: "the Kingdom of Heaven" - the rule of the heavens. "The Kingdom of God" - the rule of God. **As we learn Christ, so we pass more and more from this world in our inward life, and find ourselves more and more in conflict with it, and incapable of accommodating ourselves to it or being at home and happy in it. It becomes more and more a "far country" - something to which we do not belong. That is true in the consciousness of the true child of God, but growingly so.** The true child of God, as he or she goes on in this inner, spiritual change of knowing Christ, will often ask the question: "What is happening to me? I used to be able to do this and that, but I cannot now. At one time I had no qualms or difficulties, but today I have a question." I think if we stayed here long enough we would find this world an utterly impossible place to live in spiritually. We could only live in it as Heaven came down to help us stay here at all. Well, that is a way of putting things - we are just 'going home' all the time."*

Let me ask you a question. Is this what Christianity is to you? Because this is what Christianity is in reality. It is not a collections of beliefs to have and ways to live in the earth. It is actually a veritable exodus out from the earth. It is a birth into a far distant land, and then the awakening of the soul to that heavenly country – which is Christ.

Christianity is meant to be an exodus, a moving out from one country, kindred, and house into another. The types and shadows in the Old Testament demand this to be true. The experience of the Apostles confirms it. Never mind that we have made it into something altogether different. Never mind that we have put off this transition until the death of the body or the coming of future natural events. To Paul, Christianity was the end of one universe of natural men, natural thought, and time, and place....and the ongoing discovery of the universe of Christ through the revealing of the Spirit of truth.

As Sparks says, "as we learn Christ, so we pass more and more from the is world in our inward life, and find ourselves more and more in conflict with it, and incapable of accommodating ourselves to it or being at home and happy in it. It becomes more and more a 'far country' – something to which we do not belong".

Do these words feel familiar to us? Does natural life and reality chafe against our spirit-born souls? If it does, then I think we can begin to understand a little of what Paul meant when he tells us to walk circumspectly during our time on earth, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Paul came to realize that our great exodus can be helped or hindered by how we conduct ourselves in this realm. Can you understand what I mean?

To be clear, your soul is fully born of Spirit the moment you are born again. I probably don't have to explain this, but I will just to be safe. Paul is not talking about conducting ourselves in this realm in such a way that we can go somewhere that we're not. Paul is talking about conducting ourselves in this realm in a way that is conducive to awakening to where we already are...and transitioning, IN OUR SOULS, to where we can see that realm, abide in that life, walk in that light, live by that faith. If we are Christians, the exodus is finished as a fact. That much is finished and perfected by God. **But, just like the Israelites, having come out of Egypt there remained the inward journey of leaving Exodus in their soul.** Do you see?

One could argue that all of the Israelites made the exodus through the blood of the lamb and through the sea. And there is certainly a sense in which that is true. But you could not read the rest of the book of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and fail to realize that most of them never made that exodus in their hearts. That is where they failed. They were brought into a land that they never realized. They were brought out of a land that they never really left behind. And this is our struggle.

When they were in the wilderness, God very much wanted to teach them the reality of where He had brought them, and into what kind of relationship. That was on God's heart from the very first moment they crossed the Red Sea. But they would not learn His truth. They would not loosen their grips on Egypt. They would not walk through the wilderness in such a way that they were awakening to what they had become. In other words, they would not make the exodus in their soul. No. On the contrary, **they remained in the wilderness with their fists clinched tightly to all their familiar needs and fears and demands.**

And that is more or less how we walk, at least most of the time. We are thankful for new birth, but really have no intention of inwardly making an exodus. We are glad to be out of Egypt, but don't really have any plans to let Egypt pass from our

hearts. But even for those who do embark on this journey, this experiential exodus out of one life and into another...there are still so many ways that we do not walk in wisdom. We are not careful how we walk. We want to follow the Lord in this way, **and yet we walk as fools – holding on to things that are dead to us, turning our heads to stare at things that have been divided from us, wasting time and days hanging on to a realm and reality that the cross has made a distant country. A place that is no longer our home.**

I think it is with this in mind that Paul says what he says in chapter five of Ephesians, verse 15 and 16. I think Paul had learned something significant about what it meant to redeem the time as he lived in a natural vessel. He's not talking about discipline of the flesh to make us appear spiritual. He's not talking about do's and don't to please God through actions. **He's talking about maintaining the kind of relationship with the earth that is conducive to making an exodus from it.** He's talking about using time in the earth in such a way that our hearts are not bound to it. They are free to become less and less conscious of it. Making choices in the earth that are conducive to abiding in the heavens.

As I've already said, there is no doubt in my mind that Paul understood himself to be a nomad from another universe passing through the earth for a time. He was in one realm, but OF another. His vessel, his members were of one realm. His soul had been newly born of the other. And even though his vessel continued to walk in the realm of the one, his soul was seeing and experiencing the other. This is what he describes in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 7.

In fact, if you have your bible's with you today, you can turn to that verse because I would like to point something out for the record. I am generally happy with most modern translations of Scripture that are not paraphrases (i.e. the NKJV, the KJV, the NASB, the NES, the LITV). But there are a few places in the New Testament where translation has so completely ruined a portion of Scripture that the original meaning is almost entirely obscured. This is one of those places, and I think it is worth pointing out.

In chapter 3 of 2nd Corinthians Paul describes the reality of seeing the glory of God, as it were, in a mirror...and being transformed into the very same image from glory to glory. In chapter 4 he describes that this reality is happening within our own souls because Christ, who is our life, is shining the light of His life in our heart. In verse 7 he says that we have this reality, this treasure, in earthen vessels. We are the actual body of the living God. He lives in us. He is joined to us.

And THEN...in utter contradiction to everything that Paul has been saying, our translators tell us in chapter 5 verse 6 that Paul says "while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord". It's like Paul says "forget everything I just said...as long as you are in the body, you are cut off from God. Sorry about that". It boggles my mind that a translator, even if they didn't see the reality of Christ's indwelling life, could choose English words that so blatantly contradict Paul's own letter! Especially when any Greek lexicon will give you good definitions of these two words.

There are two words that are translated incorrectly here and therefore change the entire meaning of the passage. You may want to mark this in your margin. And please feel free to look this up in a lexicon if you want to confirm it.

The two words in question here are those that are translated “home” and “absent”. This is the only place in the entire New Testament where these two words are used. They are unusual words. This is not the normal Greek word for “home”. This is not the normal Greek word for “absent”. Both of these words have to do with the place, or country of residence. The word that is here translated “home” is a word that means “to be in a particular country or land”. In this case we’re talking about being in the land or country of the natural body. The other word, translated “absent” is actually a verb that means “to be in a strange land, to be on a journey, to have left one’s homeland, to leave one’s country”.

And without getting into more detail...the passage should read something like this – “so we are always confident, knowing that while we are in the land of the natural body we are in a strange land, a foreign country, as those who are out from the Lord”. We are like emigrants, nomads...away from our true home in a sense. Paul is describing his own life here. I am always confident. Why Paul? Because even though I pass through this strange land, I am not truly of this land. I am a citizen of heaven. I have another home, and I am here as an emigrant from that home in the Lord.

This is how Jesus Spoke of Himself. I am from above, you are from beneath. I speak the words of my Father. I do nothing of my own initiative. Though I am here with you, I am in the bosom of the Father. The Father abiding in me does his works. Though I am talking to you, I always see my Father. I walk by a different light.

And Christ has brought us into this exact same reality, if faith will only see it. “Father, these are not of the world, even as I am not of the world”. And this is what sets the stage for Paul’s next comment. This is what makes the next statement make sense. “for we walk by faith, not by sight”. Now THAT makes perfect senses.

In other words, we are in the natural realm because of these bodies, but we are here as those who “pilgrims and sojourners” (as Peter says). We are here as those who are passing through a strange land for a time. This is not the country of our birth. We are born in Zion. We have been born from above. This is not the country of our citizenship. We are citizens of heaven. This is not the country of our heart. Our hearts are set on things above. And this is not the country that we look at, because although sight can see the natural, **we do not walk by sight but rather by faith.**

And that brings me back to what I think Paul was talking about in Ephesians 5. I think he was talking about passing our time on earth in ways that redeem the time because he understood that we were passing through a world that was not our home. How did Paul conduct himself in the earth once he had been born from above? He walked by faith and not by sight. He looked not at things that are seen but at things which are unseen. He minded those things above, not the things which are on the earth. Now consider some of these verses.

***2Co 1:12** For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.*

1 Pet 1:17...conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

1Th 4:4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

1Pe 2:11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

1Ti 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

2Ti 2:4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

It can be a bit dangerous to talk about these types of verses with Christians because these sorts of admonitions and instructions can so easily be turned into religion. Without a firm foundational understanding of the gospel of the cross, these actions and choices can appear to have value in and of themselves. As though we can do things and choose things that have inherent goodness. But that is not the case.

In these verses, Paul and Peter are not giving the church tips in behavioral modification so that they can be pleasing to God. Peter and Paul are talking to the church about how they relate to the world so that their time in the body is not wasted. They are warning those who have come to faith not to entangle themselves in the realm that the cross has put behind them. It is no longer their home. Let the truth sanctify you. Let the light show you where you are and where you are not. Awake o sleeper, rise from the dead and Christ will give you light.

Can you see the difference? So often Christians read these verses and say "ok, here's what I'm supposed to do to be spiritual". But that is getting the cart in front of the horse. These verses are in the New Testament because sooner or later in the experience of Christ being revealed in you, you come to a place where you realize that your interaction with the earth, your choices, can impede what the Spirit is trying to show you.

To be sure, all things of growth and life and transformation are the work of the Spirit of Truth in the revelation of Christ. That is without question. And yet you and I can entangle ourselves with a creation that God is trying to liberate us from. You and I can fix our hearts on Egypt, even though the Red Sea has already let us out. You and I can waste time and days in various ways that make the earthen vessel seem more real than the eternal treasure within. Can you hear me?

This is precisely what Jesus prays in John 17. Father, they are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Now Father, sanctify them in the truth. Show them the reality of this. Set them apart from the world in Me.

I was trying to decide if I wanted to share an analogy that has been on my mind all week. It's a good analogy, but it's a bit gross. I finally decided that I would

share it because I think you all can handle it. It's called the poop-cave analogy. Imagine that you are in a small and narrow cave or tunnel, and you have to get from one side to the other. Sometimes you can walk upright, other times you have to duck or crawl. It's a small little tunnel. And the unique thing about this cave is that the walls and ceiling are complete covered in a layer of poop. I know that's disgusting, but it makes a valid point.

Natural life is like that cave. Everybody has to pass through natural life on planet earth because we have a body. We all pass from one end to another. Some people's time here is longer than others. Others have a shorter cave. Regardless, everybody has to navigate their own poop-cave. The poop on the walls and ceilings represents the natural things that stick to us as we pass through life. It consists of the natural things that takes our attention, and consumes our thoughts. The things that we give our time and heart to.

And as we are passing through life, every one of us bumps up against various walls. And the problem with bumping into a poop wall is that you always take a bit of it with you. It sticks to you and you bring it with you, along with its smell. You carry something of the cave with you on your journey. You see, these are the things in this realm that steal our hearts from truth. These are the things that we entangle our soul with, the things that we give ourselves to. And they take our hearts from the truth. They take time and attention and focus and money and investment. We bump up against so many of them, and we don't even notice the extra weight and odor. We become so accustomed to carrying around so much that has nothing to do with reality. We become used to smelling something that is so unclean...and has nothing to do with the fragrance of Christ. Can you see where I'm going with this?

In this verse in Ephesians, along with the other verses I read, I think the apostles are talking about navigating the cave in such a way that we don't intentionally drag things with us that have nothing to do with what we are or where we are going. That we don't invest ourselves unnecessarily in the earth, and find ourselves stuck under its weight.