

Walk Wisely

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I hope that singing those songs about your Redeemer refreshes your heart and mind as we come to God's word today. We all know what it's like, don't we, to walk through the week and to have some successes but also to have our failures that convict us and that we are ashamed of and wishing that our lives were more holy and yet we see that sin still clings to us; to be able to come and to sing about our Redeemer and to remember afresh together corporately as the body of Christ that we have a Savior who has intervened for us. We have a Savior who laid his life down in order to cleanse us from all of that sin and that God does not hold them against us any longer, is a wonderful blessing to have and to be able to come together and so I trust that you as a believer in Christ are refreshed and energized as we come to God's word today to receive it with a joyful spirit, and I know that I'm grateful to be able to share this moment and this hour together with all of you.

We gather together this morning as the redeemed whom God has saved for his glory. You are the object, as a Christian, of divine love and you are the recipient of an inheritance that you will one day fully enter into in heaven. Everything is great for those of us that know Christ and there is an aspect of that that I want to kind of bring out with our passage here this morning and that it says something very important to you about your existence: you are not random; you live for a reason, particularly as a believer in Christ. There is an appointed purpose in your existence as you sit here today and as you go through life. Whether God gives you another 50 years or another 50 minutes, you exist for a purpose and simply recognizing that gives us a lot of clarity about what we should think and how we should approach life. The question is: now what? Okay, I've been redeemed and I sing of my Redeemer, I live for a purpose, well, now what? Where do we go from that recognition?

In the book of Ephesians which we've been studying verse by verse as you all know that come here on a regular basis, in the book of Ephesians, God is impressing upon us the importance of the Christian walk. God saved you – watch this – if you want to be able to answer the question why do you exist, well, here's the answer: God saved you in order to have you do what he set before you before the beginning of time. God had a purpose for your existence which was established before the foundation of time and if you will look at Ephesians 2:10, you will see this as we review a couple of things before we get into our text today. Ephesians 2:10 says, actually, we'll start in verse 8. Those of you who are here that have not been born again, you need to hear these words from verses 8 and 9 and

through these verses God once more extends to you the offer of his perfect salvation and lays before you how you can receive Christ and have the full forgiveness of your sins. It's not through anything that you do, it is through a gift of God received through faith.

Look at Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves," abandon your self-effort, abandon your self-righteousness, abandon your pride, abandon your life and give yourself wholeheartedly to Christ without qualification. Verse 9, "not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." You receive the gift of salvation through an act of faith and appropriate what Christ has done for sinners on the cross and make it your own. Well, for those of us that are Christians, what do we say? How does this impact our lives? Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works," there's the purpose, "for good works." You were saved by God in Christ Jesus so that in this life you would do works that were pleasing to him. What do we say about these things? How do we go out and find them? Well, it says that God prepared them beforehand so that we would walk in them. You see, God had a master plan in mind. The Master of your soul had a master plan for your life and mine before the Spirit of God ever moved into your heart, ever moved on your heart through the preaching of the Gospel. God had prepared what he wants you to do with your life before he even saved you, before he even created the world.

So now as we sit here in time, in my case as I stand here in time, as I stand here in time and you sit here in time, here's the thing that you need to see and recognize and embrace: God has ordained a purpose for you to maximize, for you to live out as you go through life. You have a reason for your existence and here is part of what you need to see about it: it's not some big mystery that can't be uncovered or that you need to ascertain through some kind of mystical experience with God. No, it's not that complicated and it's not that remote. Look at the life that God has given to you now whether you're a young man and unmarried, whether you're on the tail end of life in your 70s, 80s, 90s, whatever it may be, whether you're a young person on the front end of life, God has given you your life in this circle of relationships that you have, in these circumstances with these skills, and he has given you those things in order to be a furtherance of his purpose of your salvation in Christ. God prepared you for the life that you now have and your perspective on that is to be, "Oh, whatever I have, it may not seem like too much, it doesn't seem like much to me," just understand that whatever it is is what God has given you. He has given you this life in this place in this time in this era of history because there are things appointed for you to do to his glory as you go through life. You say, "My life is really hard and miserable right now." Okay, we sympathize with the difficulty of life. We all know something about walking through dark times, walking through the rainy, stormy seasons of life. We understand that. We sympathize with that. But beloved, just understand that God has given you that stormy period in life in order for you to say, "Okay, here's how a Christian glorifies God in the midst of stormy times in life." All of a sudden your stormy times are elevated with a noble purpose that goes beyond the earthly. Things are great, you're prosperous, things are going well, God has given you that prosperity in order for you to be a servant of his and to show the world and to display before the angels how it is that you use prosperity to the glory of God. Whatever your circumstances are, there it is.

It's laid out before you. God has given you your present life in order for you to honor him with it so that you would walk in a manner that is worthy of Christ.

Now, Paul uses this metaphor "walk" a lot in Ephesians and I want to just give you a little bit of a review of it. What is the walk of which he speaks? It's a figure of speech; it's a picture of step-by-step ongoing progress, steady progress through life, but it's a metaphor for your total life activities. The walk refers to the way that you conduct yourself in life. Understand that what's given to you and the way that you walk is given to you and that your life is a response to the glory of God in your salvation. It's a response to the blood of Christ on the cross and you are to view what you do, here's the thing, we're talking about the whole way that you view life and that life isn't given to you simply to maximize your pleasure or for you to maximize your profit in your business activities or simply to be completely human focused in your relationships as good as the relationships might be. You are to walk with a perspective that says, "God has given me this life. God has given me these circumstances, this personality, this realm of ability, and I am to offer it back up to him as a sacrifice of praise." Unless you're thinking about life that way, I can assure you, you're not living properly. This is to be the defining way that you think about life.

So what Paul has done, the Apostle Paul has done for us in the book of Ephesians, is he has given us a comprehensive bit of teaching about the walk. This is one of the primary purposes of the book of Ephesians is to help us think through the walk of the Christian life in light of the great salvation that God has given to us. So what should your walk be like as a Christian? Let's start here, for starters: there should be a distinct clear understanding in your mind, there should be a profoundly deep conviction in your heart that says, "My present life as a Christian is going to be distinctly different from the life that I used to live when I was not a Christian." That is very obvious in what Paul says.

Look at Ephesians 2:1 and 2. This is by way of review here and we haven't gotten to the two main points of today's message yet. It's all by way of review. Paul says in Ephesians 2:1 and 2, he says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins," notice the past tense, "in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world." He says, "You were dead, you were spiritually bankrupt and dead and lifeless before Christ saved you and in that spiritually dead condition, you spent your physical life pursuing the things of this world, living in a manner that was consistent with the philosophies and conduct of this Satan dominated sphere in which we exist." He says, "That's what you used to be like."

Well, do you understand, beloved, the importance of verb tenses in your Christian life? Do you understand the importance of verb tenses in understanding Scripture? Paul here is drawing a contrast. He says, "This is former, this is past tense, this is what it used to be like. It's no longer like that now. This is what it used to be like." Well, understand that that should be clear in your mind as a Christian that whether you came to Christ at an early age and you just look back on a few years of settled selfishness and lying in your years as a childhood and now it's different, or maybe you're like some of us and you came to Christ in your adult years and you can remember lots of really dark things about your life: the anger, the pride, the boastful arrogance, the love of an argument just for the sake of an argument, just to be contrary. You remember what all of that is like. Well,

understand that Scripture lays that out to you and says, "Think about that just long enough to realize that you were saved from that. You were delivered from it. That is past tense to you as a Christian," and therefore you say, "Okay, I've got a new purpose, then. In a negative sense, that's put behind me. That's not why I exist, to fulfill the greed that used to animate my existence."

I've told you in times past, I've told others anyway, I don't know if I've said it here from this pulpit in this place: my defining existence before I was a Christian, what I really, really wanted was to have a really, really good job so that I could have a Mercedes-Benz 450 convertible, so that when the time came for my high school reunion I could drive back there, the model of earthly success and make them all realize, this is true and it's pathetic, make them all realize how wrong they were not to vote for me for most likely to succeed. Yeah, I know, it's funny. It's okay to laugh at me. It's funny but it's sick that that's what would motivate somebody in their life was that kind of superficial pride and retaliation for perceived slights in my past. Well, what a blessing from God when I was saved to be delivered from that, for that to be past tense in my life and to drive a Nissan with a sunroof. That's cool. But to drive that Nissan to the glory of God as opposed to driving a Mercedes for the glory of Don. You realize that there are different things. That's former. It's past tense. When you came to Christ, that sinful animating dominating core of your life died. Do you realize that? And do you view it as something that you're dead to rather than something that continues to reach its fingers into your motivations?

Look at chapter 4, verse 17 of Ephesians. This former, this past tense aspect of the walk. Remember, we're talking about the walk here, Ephesians 4:17, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind." So there is a sense in which you will look at your past life and you say, "I'm not like that anymore." You look at the world around you and you see its foolishness and its sensuality and its violence and its sin and its love for everything grotesque and you say, "Do you know what? I'm not like that anymore either. I don't belong to that realm." And if you can settle that negative aspect in your life, you've made a big step forward in achieving the purpose of God which he established for you before the foundation of the world. Just to realize negatively, to have that clear and settled in your mind, "I don't belong to that realm. I'm a stranger. I'm a pilgrim. I'm walking through this world but I don't belong to it." And so you start to think that way.

But that doesn't answer the question: what am I, then? Why am I here? What do I do? What should be the conduct of my life? Well, you know, if you think about it, it just couldn't be any simpler or plainer, could it? Your walk should manifest the nature of God's salvation in your life. Look at Ephesians 4:1. Paul says, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk." Oh, here we go. Now I'm being told what I should do, what the manner of my life should be. "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." My. My. Here it is. As opposed to the proud, boastful arrogance of your former life and of the conduct of this world, your life is to be marked by humility and gentleness that reflects something of the nature of the humility and gentleness of Christ

when he left the throne of heaven in order to enter into this world and to purchase your salvation. Your heart is supposed to be humbled as you reflect on that and you reflect on the fact that the sinless, eternal Son of God voluntarily laid his life down on a cross for sinners just like you and you say, "Oh I didn't deserve that." That's right, you didn't. You say, "How lovely his character must be. What kind of humility does God have that he would do that for a rebel like me?" That's right. Well, you see, that's supposed to be like a tsunami force on your heart that sweeps over your prior affections and makes you want to be oriented to be like Christ in his humility, his gentleness, his patience, which he showed to you in such great abundance.

So your walk reflects what the character of God is. Paul says it's a walk of love and it's a walk of light. Look at Ephesians 5:1, he says, "Be imitators of God as beloved children." Oh, you belong to the heavenly Father. You belong to the family of God as a Christian. Isn't that marvelous? Well, just as a healthy child has a love and respect for his or her parents, well, how much more our respect and love for our heavenly Father. How much we want to please him. Paul says, "Walk in love just as Christ loved you." Look at verse 8, "you formerly were darkness." There it is again, past and present. Formerly darkness, "now you are Light in the Lord." What do you do with that? "You walk as children of Light." Okay? So there is this great pattern that is set before you, this great chasm between your former life, between the nature of the world and your present life in Christ and the nature of salvation that God has given you and you start thinking, the cornerstone of truth in your life is a recognition that these two realms have an effect on the way that you think. "I've been saved into this realm and I walk according to it."

So we have to think in very basic fundamental terms just like that. A holy God, a God of truth, has saved you. Now, Paul says, apply that to your life. It's very simple. It's very basic. You don't need to know a lot of million-dollar theological terms to understand this. This is just a common basic decency of response to a great gift that has been given to you that has changed your very fundamental nature. So you settle things in your mind in principle, understanding that we have to work these things out in application, that's really not our point, we're talking at a bigger level right now. We're talking about, "Why do I exist? What drives my heart? What is my motivation for life? What realm to which do I belong?" And you settle those things and when you understand that and when that is anchored in your mind, then you have a foundation upon which to stand; you have a broad sidewalk in your Christian life upon which you can walk with steady steps and say, "I know why I'm doing this. I know why I'm here. This informs my response to everything in daily life."

Now, as we come to our text for this morning which is Ephesians 5:15 and 16, Paul gathers all of this up with the word "therefore" and he just gives you a very broad general statement about what you do with all of this that we've just been discussing. Paul says, "Therefore be careful how you walk," there's our word again, it's the last time it appears in the book of Ephesians, "be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time because the days are evil." And we saw the evil days displayed on the news just a day or two ago, didn't we? It's one illustration among many of that principle.

Let me just make a general observation before we get into the text here today. There are four verbal forms in this passage: be careful in your English text, how you walk, making the most of the time, the days are evil. There are four verbal forms there. Every one of them is in the present tense in the original language, what's known as the present tense in the original language. That's significant because these verbal forms emphasize that this is to be the continual pattern of your Christian life. This is to be the habitual course of the way that you live and it tells you that your approach to life is not supposed to be haphazard, simply responding to whatever the next desire that hits you is; that there is to be an intentionality about it that what we've talked about frames it in such a way that you walk in this and you're continually repeatedly applying it as situations come up, as relationships wax and wane, as they say. You say, "Okay, this defines life for me. This defines why I exist."

Here's what Paul wants you to do with this. This is what God wants you to do with it based on what Scripture says. I'm going to give you two commands that flow out of this passage. Very simple commands, it is going to be easy to remember the structure and outline of today's message. First of all, what do you do with the purpose of God in your life now that you understand that this walk is the appointed means for you to live by? What do you do in response to the fact that you belong to a heavenly Father who graciously saved you through no merit of your own? What do you do with the fact that a blood spattered Savior suffered 2,000 years ago because he loved your soul enough to lay his life down voluntarily? What do you do with that? Well, first of all, be wise. Be wise. It's interesting, Paul doesn't go for an emotional hammer here and try to generate and gin up a lot of sentiment. He appeals to your mind. He says, "You think about this. Be wise. Be enlightened about how you respond to this." Paul here is cultivating an inner attitude to govern everything else in your life.

Look at verse 15 with me again. "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise." Paul is saying here, "Be diligent. Be diligent to consider life in light of your salvation. Don't simply think about your existence. Don't think about your career path. Don't simply think about what you want out of life defined by and informed by purely human motives." It's not simply about how can you live the most comfortable life until you retire in wealth. It's really not about that at all. It's not about having necessarily the most calm and undisturbed existence as if we would move out to some remote area where no one is around and no one can bother us in our contemplations of life and we don't have to deal with conflict and we don't have to deal with people who don't know the Lord. That's not it. That's not it at all. Paul says here, "You be careful how you walk. Consider what you're doing so that you won't stumble. Consider what you're doing so you won't trip over the enticements of your flesh and the enticements of this world as you establish your priorities and affections that will run your life. Don't do that. Be careful because so many people fail in this way."

Now, y'all understand this. That's right, I just used the word y'all. I never would have done that in California but I'm happy to do it when I'm just north of Kentucky as I stand here. Y'all understand this. If you're climbing a steep path, if you're walking on uneven

ground, you're walking on unsteady sand on a beach, maybe, you watch for obstacles that might make you fall. You kind of slow down and consider what you're doing. If there is a big drop off to the side, most of you have enough sense to say, "I'm going to be careful here. I'm going to be aware of my surroundings. I'm going to be aware of the dangers. I'm going to be careful because I don't want to fall off and destroy the purpose of my existence." Well, it's that same idea; what you understand intrinsically physically is the way that you're supposed to be living life spiritually. "Ah, I'm in a hostile environment. Ah, there are remnants of sin in me. Ah, there's purposes of God laid out before me for me to find for the reason that I exist to do what he has appointed for me to do. Well, let me be careful to find that. Let me assess what I'm good at. Let me assess the opportunities that are there before me. Let me assess the relationships that God has given me and say, 'How can I take all of that and use it to the glory of God in the brief time of life that he has given to me?'" And if you're on the back half of life which, you think about it, the back half of life is 35 or 40 and beyond. That's kind of a creepy thought when you're about that age. You say, "Oh, I'm young. I'm not like the pastor who is that old." You start to realize middle age isn't the 50s, middle age is 35. Wow. All of a sudden there's a sense of urgency about this. For most of us, you hit 30, 35, most of your life is already behind you. The days are short and so there is an urgency to take this and say, "I've got to maximize what's left because I have squandered so much, squandered so much of my life in trivial pursuits. Squandered it in arguments and hardhearted refusals to forgive others for what they've done and I've just squandered life that way."

Well, look, this isn't designed for those of us that are on the further end to that back half of life, this isn't designed to discourage you, this is just designed to wake you up as verse 14 says, "Wake-up, sleeper, and recognize that the opportunity is going by. The window of opportunity is closing so be wise with what you do with what's left." This is commanded by God. This isn't optional. This isn't human motivator speaking. This is about recognizing the eternal value of Christ, first of all, realizing the eternal value of his salvation, the eternal purpose that he has appointed for our salvation and saying, "Do you know what? I've got to live according to that. I've got to line up life so that it reflects something about the strategic value and importance of that." That's why you were saved.

Now, it doesn't mean that you abandon your secular job. Your secular job is part of the purpose that God has given to you and praise be to him that. What Paul is saying here is he's calling for you to make a conscious choice on whether you're going to live a wise life in response to your salvation or whether you're going to dabble in the realm of darkness and worldliness without really taking to heart what salvation is supposed to do and the way it's supposed to transform your life.

You know, Jesus gives us a really good commentary on this. Turn over to Luke 12. We'll just step aside and give Jesus the floor here for a moment. Not that he hasn't had it all along, but specifically given over to his words in the Gospel and this illustrates it as someone with earthly concerns comes to him, somebody who is angry, somebody who's got a dispute, and wants the Lord to take his side. How often do you see that? Somebody has a disagreement and they say, "Well, I know God's on my side." Well, let's think about

that a little bit before we talk that way and see that salvation and Christ dwell above that Rome.

Luke 12:13, "Someone in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.'" Now, can you imagine how foolish that is? Honestly, this is as foolish as my high school desires were. Absolutely. This is ridiculous for a man talk this way in the presence of Christ. Do you know why? The Son of God is in front of him and what is he doing? He's bickering with family over finances. Why is he not saying, "Jesus, save me from my sin. Jesus, take my life and use it. Jesus, tell me about the Father." He's totally wrapped up in his earthly existence and Christ will have none of it. Verse 14, and if your life is solely only given over to your earthly pursuits, understand Christ wants none of it. He didn't save anyone, he didn't come to bring salvation simply to give you a pass out of hell and then for you to live selfishly like you had never been saved at all. That's not Christian salvation. Let's just be really clear and definitive about that.

Jesus says in verse 14, "He said to him, 'Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?'" Why do you think I exist? It's not to serve your selfish interests. Verse 15, then he goes on and he talks about the wisdom that is at stake in our passage here in Ephesians 2. "Then He said to them, 'Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.' And He told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" Retirement is going to be good. "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

What are your life priorities? Have you factored the judgment seat of Christ into the way that you live? Are you conscience of the fact that you're moving toward a destined appointment to stand alone before his throne and to give an account for you life either as a Christian and say, "Lord, this is how I served you with my life," and for Christ to evaluate it to reward you eternally? If you're not a Christian, have you factored into the fact that you are destined as it stands now to stand before the great white throne judgment where unbelieving men will be judged for their sins and cast into hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, with the smoke of demons rising up forever and ever amen? Have you factored that into your life? If you haven't, you are not yet walking wisely. You are not yet living wisely because the whole point of your existence is moving toward that inevitable appointment with God and as a Christian, we view that and say, "Do you know what? I want to show up with a life that has pleased my Father with whatever life he gave me to live."

You here who are not a Christian, the thought of this should leave you undone. "I'm going to be alone before God with no one to represent me, no one to intercede for me. I'm

going to be alone and all that is going to be there are my sins to testify about my violation of the holiness of God." Honestly, if you can hear that and go on indifferent, you're a fool to live that way. And Christian, for most of you here in the audience today, I take at face value your profession of Christ. I believe that. I believe the best about you. I have no reason to doubt it, but let this admonition from Scripture cause you to turn things into greater focus and say, "Wow, I have been so selfish in the way that I have lived. I have very little time for God's word. I'm not at all someone that even thinks about praying most of the time except when I need something. I'm just consumed with being happy in this life." It's time for you to wise up. The time already past is sufficient for you to have pursued the things of this world.

Let's put it this way: what we're talking about is a motivation toward excellence. That's it. We're talking about a motivation toward excellence and most of you in this prosperous suburb of Cincinnati, most of you have something at which you succeed at and something that you excel at, that you care about and you give yourself over to and you're good at, whether it's your family or your job or keeping house or pursuing good grades in your school, college career, all of that. You know something about pursuing excellence in something that you care about. You say, "I want to be good at this. This matters to me. I'm going to pursue it with excellence." Good for you. You know, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. Good for you, honestly, but understand that that pursuit of excellence in that area of the love of your life that you understand and you know, understand that that primary pursuit of doing things well is to a greater extent the way that you are to think about being a Christian. You should be thinking, "I want to be an excellent Christian. I want to be an exemplary man or woman of God. I want my Christian life to be one which displays the glory of Christ and somehow manifests his glory."

The passion that you have for those earthly pursuits should be that which you take and transfer over to a greater passion for the excellence of living for Christ. Why? Because he is one excellent Savior. He has given you one excellent salvation. Heaven is going to be one excellent place to spend eternity. If all of that's true, and it is, then ungodly speech and ungodly attitudes and ungodly relationships, you know, you've just got to turn it around and say, "Look, I've got to bring some excellence here. I've got to bring excellence into my desire for God's word. I've got to bring excellence into my devotion to his people. I've got to bring excellence into everything that I do for him because he is worthy." That's incontestable. No one should have any sense of resisting that because it's true. Look, Jesus, you love Jesus, right? I get that. You love Jesus. Most of you here own him gladly, vocally as Lord. Good. Good. We're on the right track. All the momentum is toward you responding to this rightly. Every bit of it. All the momentum here is good. Preaching God's word to God's people who want God's glory. Understand that Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 in a way that parallels what we're talking about here, he says, "You seek first his kingdom and his righteousness." There is your defining priority in life.

So, beloved, for those of you who pursue the word even when you're mocked for it, those of you who are faithful to Christ even when there seems to be no benefit in it for you, you're playing the wise man. You're the wise man of which this passage speaks. You're

walking in a manner that is worthy of him. The sacrifices that you make for Christ financially or with your time or in taking the blame for something that wasn't your fault, that's wise. That's excellent. That's the way to walk. Beloved, let's just say, though, to round it out on the other side: if you are pursuing the world while only paying lip service to Christ and you know who you are and you know what I'm talking about, if that's your life, you're playing the fool. It won't turn out well for you in this life or in the life to come. This passage that Paul gives us here in Ephesians 5, "be careful how you walk," is your wake-up call. This is your opportunity to pivot. You're at a fork in the road and you say, "Do you know what? I'm going to take the fork that leads to godliness. I don't understand everything that that means right now but the settled conviction of my heart going forward, I'm disowning my ungodly past for the sake of a wise walk with Christ."

Now, Paul gives us the way forward. What does that way forward look like? How is it that you are wise? It's so practical. Point 2 here this morning: be diligent. Be diligent. Be wise, understand it in principle, and then be diligent to bring it out in the application of your life. Look at verse 16 with me, Ephesians 5:16. How can you be wise? How can you act appropriately in response to God's word here this morning? Again, it's more present tense, it's more an approach to life here, "making the most of your time because the days are evil." Making the most of your time has the idea of maximizing the opportunities that God gives to you. For most of us in most areas of our life, it's going to be the simple way that you interact with family, the simple ways that you interact with people at church or at work, but maximizing that opportunity. When you have an opportunity to do good, to say good, to say the encouraging word, to give your time over to that particular need in the body, act on it. Maximize the opportunity while you can. Why? Because you might not get a second chance. I'm not talking about if you die suddenly. I'm not talking about that here right now, just that the opportunity passes by. The opportunity to say that particularly encouraging word to the person particularly discouraged, it's there at the moment and you recognize it and you say, "I'm too busy for this. I have to go." You don't take it. You're not maximizing the opportunity. You're not making the most of your time.

Beloved, just thinking broadly, our world, your existence is being lived out in the jaws of wickedness, in the jaws of evil. We live in an evil world, an evil society that's getting worse as time goes by and I get the sense that that just gets really discouraging to think about. Look at what has happened in this area of the world and what happened in the news here and what are our leaders thinking there and it just gets really overwhelming especially when you're just honest with yourself and you say, "Do you know what? I can't change that. I don't have the power or the capacity to reorient the whole direction of society," and you feel a little helpless in the midst of it.

Well, what do you do? Well, okay, do you know what? Let's take it for granted. Our world is in the jaws of evil. Okay, well, here's an idea: why don't you do good to the glory of God in the realm that he has given to you and trust him for everything else? Trust him for what you're doing good. But, you know, the fact that the world is in the jaws of the evil one, in John's language in 1 John 5:20, I believe it is, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, okay, that stinks. Do you know what? The good news is it's not going to be like that forever. We're going to go to heaven and everything's going to be

perfect and bliss and righteous so we're just living through a little window of time here before we get to the good stuff so I can deal with it that way. But don't, we just can't let our minds sink into a political reaction to evil as if that was the highest lofty Christian response to it was to be a good Republican. What's that? Honestly, what is that? It's nothing.

No, no, you narrow your sights down and say, "What is the life that God has given me to live? And do you know what? In that narrow realm that God has given to me, I'm going to live to his glory. My words, my attitudes, the orientation of my heart, what I do is going to be given over to the glory of God, to the good of his people, and with an eye toward the fact that I'm going to stand before Christ unashamed." That's how you live wisely and then you're just diligent to say, okay, and that informs hour by hour the nature of your life. What does this hour hold for me? What conversations are going to take place when we dismiss in a little bit? You know, some of you, I understand and you need to hear this, I need to step on your toes this way: I'm sorry but you need to be more godly than you are. It's not godly to bolt for the door, doing everything that you can to make sure you don't have to engage in discussion. I realize you may not want to talk about yourself. That's okay, but do you know what? There are a lot of hurting people in this room right now who have had some really hard days. And if you just took the time to express some love and kindness to them, that would be one way for you to maximize your opportunity rather than just selfishly bolting for the door. Now, look, predominantly we don't have that problem here. Those of you that watch on the live stream, when the camera goes off, there are still people here an hour later so I'm not rebuking the whole congregation, I'm talking to people that like to live on the fringes and in anonymity, for you people at home. Don't live that way. How are you maximizing the opportunity? God brings you into a place where his people gather together and you have nothing to say or to contribute to help those that are here gathered together? What sense does that make? That's just one little way of application.

Now, the whole point being: the world is evil. Okay, that stinks. I wish it wasn't like that but what about me? What about you? How can you maximize the opportunities that are here right in front of you? You say, "Well, it just seems so little and so tiny." Okay, it's little and tiny but it's good. It's to the glory of God. Jesus said that, "The one who gives a cup of water to a disciple of mine in my name will not lose his reward." You can offer a cup of water, can't you? This isn't that difficult. It's a question of your heart, that's what makes it difficult.

Now, in Matthew 25, we won't take the time to turn there, Matthew 25:14 to 30, I'm not going to read another 17 verses here but in Matthew 25, Jesus distinguished good slaves who use their talents that were given to them from the wicked one who did nothing with his. The good slaves received a reward. The wicked slave was thrown into the outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus said, "I gave you this and what did you do with it?" is the question. Beloved, God has given you your life, your resources, your talents, your personality, your time. God has given that to you, the question is: what are you doing with it? Are you being wise in the way that you think about it? Are you being diligent to take advantage of the opportunities that are there for

you to do good and to not excuse yourself into inaction simply because the world is evil. Listen, yes, the world is evil, that's all the more reason for you and I to act upon what's here. All the more reason to display light when the darkness is enveloping in ever greater degrees. Don't let the wickedness of the world excuse you from what is your Christian responsibility, duty and privilege.

No, Christian, there are boundless opportunities for you to do good in your daily life. Take advantage of it. In fact, as you're thinking about it, go one step further, especially you young people. I love talking to you young people. If you knew how much you are on my heart when I preach, you'd understand. Think about your life on the front end like this: you have one life to live. We all do, but you as a young person, you have one life to live and think about this, don't think about this simply about how you can maximize it in a moment, think about your life and say, "I've got one life to live. I want to maximize my life for Christ. I want to give what I have over to him and use my whole life that way and not let my Christian service simply be incidental to something else. I want my life to be that way." That's true for all of us but for you young people, you have a particularly fruitful opportunity to settle convictions like that into your heart and to act upon them and to set the whole trajectory before the cement is settled, dried out and hard. Your life is still wet cement. It can be molded. It can be shaped into something. Do it for the glory of Christ. We're all going to give an account one day. How are you walking? Don't be a fool. Walk wisely. Be diligent while there is time.

Let's pray together.

Father, we just thank you that you have given us a salvation that is worthy of response. We thank you that there is a purpose to our existence that is defined and revolves around our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask you to give us the grace that we need to seek first your kingdom and your righteousness, to not wait for great opportunities but to be faithful in the little ones that present themselves because you yourself said, Lord, "he who is faithful in a little will also be faithful in much." Father, we pray to God, as it were, Lord Jesus, we ask for your assisting help to help us so that we would maximize those little faithful opportunities and then when bigger ones come, we will have been trained by your Spirit to act upon them and be faithful in those as well. Father, I pray that you would take this message and encourage those hearts that are walking wisely, may your Spirit give us a sense of understanding that says, "This is the pattern of my life." Imperfect though it may be, Father, take those faithful Christians, in rich comfort and affirm them by your Spirit. Father, for those that aren't even Christians, convict them of sin, righteousness and judgment that they might repent and turn to Christ. And for those here that are kind of straddling the fence, maybe in Christ but how does life reflect that priority, Father, may this be a day where commitments and convictions are settled before they walk out of this room that says, "I'm living differently now." And may your Spirit be swift to meet them in that conviction, to affirm it, water it, and to bring forth the change that you would desire from your word. We commit these things to you with gratitude in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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