

Ephesians 5:15–21

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[0 : 0 0] scripture text is Ephesians 5, 15 through 21. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. 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. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. I think I'd like to title this message, Walk in Wisdom. I thought about things more clever, like the swagger or the step of Christ Church Chicago. I thought about the gate that characterizes the Christian's walk, but today I just tried to come at it straight ahead. Walk in wisdom. If you have any question about where I'm getting that from, it's right there in verse 15.

Look carefully, then, how you walk. Not as unwise, but as wise. Why is he telling us to walk in wisdom?

How does he want us to walk in wisdom? What does walking in wisdom look like? When I think about why he is reminding the church of the careful attention that their walk requires, I thought a story might set you up for the verses of 15 through 17.

May 15th, one week ago today, May 15th, 1945, the Western world celebrated what came to be known as V-Day, Victory Day. It marked, in one sense, the end of a Second World War.

[2 : 5 2] Germany had surrendered. Yet, that war walked on till October 15th or so, when the world erupted again in the celebration of song with what was V-J Day, the final conclusive act of the war. It was September 15th then that treaties were signed, and all that had commenced on V-Day, all that had ended on V-J Day, was now consummated in a treaty where the world again was at rest.

In one sense, there was a window of time when the world had to walk between those two days, between the V-Day and the V-J Day, between, think of it in terms of a movie, the movie is done, the credits have rolled, the end is now emerging with a period on it.

There's a time when you walk between the D of the end and the period that puts it all together. That is why he enjoins us to be careful concerning our walk.

He has been arguing to this point that something conclusively has occurred in the resurrection of Christ.

Just look back at the final verse of last week. Awake, O sleeper, and arise from dead, and Christ will shine on you. He has argued that the resurrection of Christ has signaled Victory Day.

[4 : 5 2] That said, he has not yet consummated all things under his rule. Therefore, from the time of this letter to the time that you and I are living, is that expansive period in human history where something has been accomplished but not yet consummated.

It's been done for you, but it isn't all done. Therefore, in that eschatological window of time, that final moment, look carefully then how you walk.

You don't want to mess up when the victory has been accomplished, but not everything has yet been consummated. I love reading letters like this.

I was struck this week. Take a look at it yourself. That third word in verse 15 just opened the whole window of this why-ness to me.

Look carefully then. Then. Since the things I've been saying before, then look carefully now.

[6 : 12] Since Christ is risen. Since the wrath of God continues to unfold until the end. Since there will be a final day in which there is a separation of those who are in God's world and those who are not.

Given that moment. Be wise. Be wise. And not foolish. Look at it there.

Make the best use of the time. The time. I think of the epistle of Clement, wherein we find this little phrase.

The one who is righteous walks in this world and waits for the holy age. That's where we are.

We're walking in this world while waiting for the holy age. Therefore, we want to be, it says, verse 17, those who are seeking out what the will of the Lord is.

[7 : 15] How would he have me live? If his kingdom has come and his rule is already won within my heart, then how do I prepare now for that which I will be doing forevermore?

Why? Walk wisely. Because you and I live in the last days, which are evil, and where we can still be derailed.

Therefore, walk in wisdom. How? How are we to walk in wisdom?

Well, look at verse 18. It's right there. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit.

It's this comparison, this contrast, which we've seen throughout the letter. This writing that says this, but not that.

[8 : 25] How do I walk wisely? Well, not this way, but that way. Not in drunkenness with wine, but by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let's just look at this for just a moment. This drunkenness. Do not get drunk with wine. That's, do not be in a sense, overly indulged.

In wine. It doesn't say, don't drink at all. It says, don't be drunk. Now, why do we drink?

Thought about that this week. It seems to me, we drink for a number of reasons. People do. I'm just going to generalize. We drink for comfort. We drink for comfort.

We drink for celebration. We drink in a sense to console ourselves over what is or was, or what will not be.

[9 : 36] And yet we drink because we're aware that I'm born V-Day. I am something. It's not over yet.

I'm not dead. And so I'm going to eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow. I die. We, we console ourselves and we celebrate the life that is within us now through the consumption of alcohol.

I was remembering this week back to Les Mis and this moment in the play where the song begins with the men who are gathered before the great battle at the dawn.

If you don't know it, it goes something like drink with me. Today's gone by. I'm not going to sing the whole thing for you.

For the life that used to be. Let the stories of friendship never say die. Let the wine of new friendship never run dry.

[10 : 54] Here's to you. And here's to me. What's going on there? Something very important.

It is a, an important gathering of friends that stand knowingly between two worlds.

That tomorrow, it'll either all turn for them or they will be turned away from the land of the living. Think of it on campuses.

Think of it at weddings. Think of it on the backside of funerals. Think of it on Friday at last. Think of it on Wednesday, He says here, though, do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.

He doesn't say it's going to lead to debauchery. He says, by the time you're drunk, it is debauchery. Drunkenness, then, is when wine has guided us and we are no longer guiding our walk.

[12 : 12] We, we see it. It now has us. We went to it as a friend and now it is our master.

What he says is, that's not wise. It's foolish. It's not smart.

Stupid. You don't stand on the backside of victory when the final curtain yet hasn't been pulled down and give your mind away to things that make you loose in living when your Lord is yet returning.

It's absurd. Gird your mind for action. Have your wits about you. Be sober-minded. All the clarity of your mind is required because you live between two worlds.

It goes on there then and actually gets to the main verb. How do you live in light of Christ's victory but be filled with the Spirit?

[13 : 31] That's the thrust of it. That's what we're to do between the now and the not yet. Rather than filling our bodies with wine wherein we lose our capacities to walk well we imbibe the Spirit.

Now remember the Holy Spirit is what brought you new life and yet you are as you know a broken vessel. We're like clay pots where the wine of the Spirit runs out.

We're not home yet and because we're not home yet we need a continual ongoing conscious imbibing of the Spirit.

We need to meditate on and consider and give ourselves to love joy peace patience kindness gentleness self-control all these things continually giving ourselves to these things.

That ought to be the characteristic in our walk being filled with the Spirit. What I find interesting is what Paul highlights in relationship to this.

[14 : 58] Don't you? Look at all these five ing words. Be filled with the Spirit addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing making melody to the Lord with your heart.

Number four giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. I was knocking my head against the relationship between those five things and being filled with the Spirit.

One commentator put it well when they put it this way do not get drunk with wine and then sing but be filled with the Spirit while you are singing.

Because that's what happens with wine. They're drinking songs. Wine leads to all of the rest. Don't be drunk with wine and then sing party animal.

No. Either songs of joy or lament. No. Be filled with the Spirit while as you are and notice they're all musical almost. They're all of song.

[16 : 20] Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing, making melody, giving thanks, even the perplexing submitting in the final one.

This is what it would say. This is what it looks like. If why we need to walk wisely is we live between the end and the consummation.

If how we need to walk wisely is to be filled with the Spirit, then what it's going to look like in Christian community is a people gathering in song.

It's interesting that that's the first thing mentioned. The first manifestation of the corporate gathering is song. This priority of praise.

Why? Why? If this is what it looks like, I was reminded even this week of thinking about the whole Bible, and I've come up with this line, joyful song has always been and will continue to be the first response of God's people to his saving acts.

[17 : 38] That's long. That's not working, you say. I'm with you. Singing is the immediate response to saving.

God saves, I sing. That's what happens here. That's obviously what happens here.

And when you think about Paul putting this down first, he's not doing anything that the Bible hasn't done from the very beginning. From the very beginning, God's saving acts have always been manifest and followed up with singing.

Can I give you a run of these slowly? Throughout the Bible, joyful songs are the first response to one who understands salvation.

Think of the Exodus, Israel. They had been saved from the tyranny of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. In the book of Exodus, chapter 14, and verse 30, I read, thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians.

[18 : 58] And then chapter 15, verse 1, then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song before the Lord, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously.

The horse and rider he has thrown into the sea, the Lord is my strength and my song, and has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise him.

On that day, the day, then Moses and the people sang. Later, at the time of the judges, Israel was rescued again, this time from the hands of a king by the name of Jabin, who ruled at Hazor, and in chapter 4, verse 23 of the book of Judges, my Bible reads, so on that day, God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, before the people of Israel.

Chapter 5, verse 1, just one verse between them, then sang Deborah and Barak, the son of Abinnoam, on that day, then the leaders took the lead in Israel and the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord, hear O kings, give hear O princes to the Lord, I will sing, I will make melody to the God of Israel.

At a much later time from the Exodus and then the release in the time of the judges, you had Israel returning from 70 years of captivity in Babylon under the rule or the leadership of people like Ezra and Nehemiah.

[20 : 52] And what we read in the scriptures again is after God's saving acts, namely when they built the foundational stones for the temple, guess what? They sang.

Ezra, chapter 3, verse 10 and 11, and when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with symbols to praise the Lord according to the directions of David, the king of Israel, and they sang responsibly, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, and we actually have a verse, a chorus of what they sang, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.

at a much later time, even than that, think of Pentecost. Now you're into the New Testament. Now Jesus' victory has been won.

His saving acts had been done, and Peter has preached a message of his victory and resurrection, of the light of Christ now shining on you, and Luke puts down in Acts chapter 2, verse 46 and 47, a summary of what the corporate gatherings began to look like.

And what he says is, day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

[22 : 27] He saved, we sing. He saves, we sing. He saved, we sing. this is the constant thread of the scriptures.

And so it starts with the song of Moses in Genesis. It actually is going to go all the way to that final day. I mean, just bear with me, run the whole thing out, see it for yourself.

Revelation chapter 19 on the final consummation day, when all things have happened, when the final curtain has fallen, when the end, with the period now, runs across the screen.

Chapter 19, verse 6, what's happening? Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters, and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice, and exalt, and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. from beginning to end.

[23 : 38] God saves, first response, his people sing. I think that's why he's got it here, but there's actually something else.

Remember, back to Ephesians now, this came on the heels of the writer meditating on Isaiah 60, and verse 1, where he wrote, awake, oh sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

If you were here last week, there were three brief moments in Isaiah where I connected you to this idea of arising, of awakening, of departing.

what I looked at this week was what followed those three occasions. Let me just show this to you. Isaiah himself now has been promising that God is going to do something for his people definitively.

And so he's asking God's suffering servant to accomplish for them a salvation they could not work for themselves. And so in chapter 52 and in verse 1 when he actually says awake, awake, all you've got to do is look down at verses 7 and 8 and find the voice of your watchmen.

[25 : 08] They lift up their voice together. They sing for joy. They see eye to eye the return of the Lord to Zion break forth together into singing because the Lord has comforted his people.

So we're going to alcohol to comfort our souls, but the Christian is going to song to comfort us in our salvation. Next time you're thinking of giving yourself to wine and too much of it, know this, your comfort is in Christ and his salvation.

And so you need to put on some different music. Celebrate good time. Come on. No, no, they're going down. And still God, still good, going on.

Right? Christian music, singing, actually holds you in a wise walk. That was 52.1, but what about 52.11 in Isaiah?

Depart, depart. Remember we heard that last week? But look at chapter 54, verse 1. Sing, O barren one who did not bear. Break forth into singing and cry aloud.

[26 : 31] Or the verse that he was actually thinking about as he put all of these thoughts together. Isaiah 60 and verse 1 where he says, arise, shine, but look at verse 5.

Then you shall see and be radiant and your heart shall thrill and exalt every time. When God saves, his people sing.

That's what it looks like. This is what it looks like throughout history. when the church has recaptured the glories of his salvation, it has spawned music and life-giving song.

I mean, there's times even in the New Testament, Corinthians or even here, where hymns become part of the fabric of the Christian community.

I mean, just look at these three words in our text as we bring all of this together, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

[27 : 53] These are wonderful words. Psalms are basically those Old Testament songbook of 150 in which people were already penning words to how God had acted in the life of his people before.

hymns. Not only are they in the New Testament, but I think forward, at least in the Western world where they erupted with, you know, Wesleyan productivity at the time of the Great Awakening, music began to come out.

Think of the movement in the 20th century itself within Jesus' people in the 60s, the birth of all of these things. Think of all of these things, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Think of the Negro spiritual really bringing its way home in this country in the mid-19th century where the selectivity of the music, and I'm no expert, when the selectivity of the music began to deal with the now and the not yet and to write music that says, I know the now has come, but I'm not yet home, and I'm going to sing on the not yet-ness until I am home.

Or think of the emergence of gospel music that says, well, I know that I'm not home, but there's a few things he's done to make me happy. And think of all of this just flowing through the church.

[29 : 24] Think of the prioritization of praise that the church gave to music in older days. there were benefactors who paid some of what some of you would know as the great composers of our time, and they were writing music for the next Sunday.

Oh, I don't like to go to church and we keep singing new things. Everything great was new once. Why walk wisely?

because you live at a strategic moment. How do I walk wisely? Not that anymore, but being filled with this.

What will it look like when it's taking root in my own soul? It will look like the priority of praise.

Corporate worship will have the gate of thanksgiving. This is why we put an emphasis on it.

[30 : 40] I just think about it in our own church. We must continue to give ourselves to the priority of praise and the fullness of that expression. submission. This little phrase here, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, is interesting to me even in regard to music.

Normally we think this is just mutual submission. Mutual submission means there's no material substance anymore. Anything goes because we all do it to one another.

The next three weeks are going to demonstrate that that's not really true. That's not what it means. To submit to one another then will be in particular ways and in particular fashion. In our own church you've elected elders who are responsible for the corporate worship including singing.

In our own church we've called a pastor to lead us in music and to enlarge our capacity for that understanding and to bring things to us that we did not yet know.

We submit ourselves here to our musical growth through the material substance of that which is before us giving ourselves wholeheartedly to those who are tasked with it and as a result great things will emerge.

[32 : 07] Church family walk in wisdom. Why? Because the hour in which you've been born is so transitional it could conclude at any moment.

Victory is assured but not yet fully accomplished. How do I do it? I got to start finding my consolation and my celebration in things of the spirit.

What will that mean? the priority of praise will begin to emerge from his people. Our heavenly father we give ourselves to this kind of loss.

Lord as your people may we be filled in an ongoing way considering the weakness of our vessels to your leading and from our midst from our heart from stone now flesh emerge a voice that is fresh with praise to you.

Amen. Well let's get on our feet and put this into play.