

'Redeeming the time'

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[0:00] Very encouraging, wasn't it, just to hear how Adopt-A-Child is working, and both working with children, extending and expanding to older people, the projects as well as the regular sponsorship.

! And just how holistic it is, the healthcare, the feeding, as well as the evangelism. And looking at that, I think what a good use, what a good response to the opportunities that are there, and how well thought through.

And how consistent and how loving. And what a brilliant model. Another story that I remember going back a few years is when my son was a student in Hull University, and the Christian students were aware that a lot of people were on the streets late at night.

Hull had several large nightclubs, quite an active nightlife, and people got worse for wear. And this long before street pastors was thought of. And the students in the university, the Christian students, decided they wanted to do something in response, and they decided that they would go out on the streets at night armed with water bottles.

So they invested a lot of money, all that they could afford, in hundreds and hundreds of bottles of water. They went out on the streets in the wee small hours, and when they saw people a bit worse for wear, they offered them a drink of water.

[1:22] And it was sort of just labelled from the Christian students at the university. And it was meeting a very real need, because one of the problems, when you've had too much to drink, you're worse for wear, is that you dehydrate.

And I note more recently, the street pastors often take flip-flops with them as well, because being out on the streets can be bad on the feet too. Again, it's recognising a need, and meeting it in practical ways.

And it was a very powerful and effective witness. The Hull Student Union was noted for its opposition to things Christian. But when they heard about the water bottle project, they actually diverted most of their funds into supporting it.

So the Student Union was very much won over by that as well. A very effective witness. And again, a very powerful and effective response to the opportunity.

And in our reading, we have that phrase in Ephesians 5, verse 16, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

[2:27] Be careful how you live, not as unwise, but wise. And I just want to home in for a few minutes this morning on that line, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

And this is a little bit about time. And I'll take as my excuse, we are still in January just. So it's almost a new year thought.

But we've got most of 2026 ahead of us still. But doesn't time fly? It's the 25th of January already. We're nearly at the end of January.

And the new year seems quite a while ago. We're thinking, well, Burns suppers now. Time is such a strange thing. And we sometimes call it the enemy. Partly because there's never enough of it. Partly because it always seems to go too fast. Partly because it leaves us wondering, where did it go? And so Paul's words in Ephesians 5 are worth thinking about. What do we do about time?

[3:25] And the New International Version, like just about every Bible translation since about 1900, takes Paul's meaning, make the most of every opportunity.

Time is full of opportunities that we may or may not spot. Make the most of them, Paul says. But if you're a bit more traditional and you still use the old King James Version, or you remember it, you might remember the phrase, redeeming the time, rather than make the most of every opportunity. And that is the actual literal translation of what Paul was saying, that time is something that needs to be redeemed. And both the literal meaning, redeem the time, and its actual meaning, make the most of every opportunity, can tell us something important, which I'll endeavour to share with you this morning.

First of all, very briefly, I'll give you two sermons that I'm not going to preach today, because this isn't about doing more, burning out, and becoming simply too busy.

I'm not, this isn't a sermon about live each day as if it were your last. That's a phrase attributed to the Stoic Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. And there is a wisdom in that.

[4:43] Do what matters while you can. Prioritise. Make sure you do the things that you really ought to be doing. Don't put them off. Don't end up with regrets, oh, I never got round to doing that, and I really wish I had.

Live each day as if you're last. Well, if I knew that I only had 24 hours left, I might have a ton of things that I've suddenly realised I really want to get done while I can.

And that might make me extremely busy. But to do that every day, and to live at that pace, no, that's not what it's about.

It's not saying, be too busy. We could be more Christian about it, and say, well, what if Jesus is to return tomorrow? And we could certainly preach that, because we can find in Matthew 24, verses 36 to 51, Jesus is telling parables about how people are not prepared for when the Son of Man returns, and the need is to be prepared.

Jesus is going to come at a time you don't expect him. Are you prepared? Are you ready? But the point of what Jesus is saying there is about being faithful and being ready for Jesus when he comes, not having to get caught out and frantically try and put things in order when you are too late.

[6:05] The point is that it doesn't matter if you are prepared in your heart and in your life. Jesus could come in the next five minutes. You are prepared.

You are ready. It's not a question of reordering things at the last minute. And if we feel uncomfortable about Jesus coming and seeing what we're doing, perhaps we shouldn't be doing it. If we are comfortable that if Jesus was to come back now and find us doing what we're doing, we are doing the right thing. It's a question of being prepared, being ready.

We could look at Ecclesiastes 3 in connection with redeeming the time because it's that wonderful passage about there is a time for this and a time for that and a time for a whole list of different things.

And there is a time for being busy and there is a time for resting. So this isn't about the tyranny of the urgent, of making ourselves feel guilty because we're not busy enough.

[7:06] So let's have a quick look and see what it does mean. Redeeming the time, the Greek for that is actually, basically, shopping. The Greek for redeem is from the market, *ex agorazo*, get it from the market.

It's shopping. When you go shopping, if it's physically down to the shops or it's online, you see something, you look for something you want, you spot it, you put it in your basket and then you pay for it and then it's yours.

That's what shopping's about. In darker times, it included buying slaves. You had a slave market as well. And everybody that Paul is writing to would be familiar with that.

Many of the people he would be writing to were slaves. They'd been bought and sold. It's an evil trade. But Paul uses it to make a point about the grace of God.

In Galatians 3 verse 13, he says, Christ redeemed us, bought us, from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. He paid the price for our sin.

[8:16] He paid the price for our falling short. He took our place. He suffered in our place. He redeemed us. He paid the price from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

In the next chapter in Galatians 4 verse 5, he says, to redeem those under the law that we might receive the full rights of sons. So there is a sense of buying someone and then setting them free

and adopting them.

So this is tying in at the next time with adopt a child as it happens. That sense of not just being bought and set free, but bought and adopted. Of actually given something positive instead.

That said, some Christians took it literally. And there is an account in the 5th century by St. Augustine who lived in a place called Hippo which was on the North African coast.

It was a major seaport and it was a focal point of the African slave trade. Slaves were shipped into Hippo and there they were shipped out across the Mediterranean to all sorts of different places.

[9:25] And the church in Hippo had a conscience about this. They could see that it was wrong. And Augustine writes about how the church almost bankrupted itself by doing as much as it could, going down to the slave market, buying slaves, and setting them free in the name of Jesus.

They saw that as their water bottles, as their flip-flops, as their pastoral support, as their adoption. For them, their practical response to the need they could see on their doorstep, we must invest in buying slaves so that we can set them free.

They redeemed the time. That was, and Paul is basically saying, redeem the time. Time is this, this actually, not just neutral, it's evil.

What's this about the days are evil? There is something here where we're going against the tide and we're having to take action to redeem it from what it would naturally revert to.

What's Paul meaning here? Is he simply saying, we're in dark times? And we can link it to a fallen world. That's why we perhaps say time is the enemy.

[10:36] Not just because we run out of it, there never seems to be enough of it, but because in this fallen world things have a habit of going wrong or falling short or failing or decaying or breaking or wearing out or simply that they're full of temptations as well.

Some link it to that fallen world or possibly it simply means that time stays on the shelf unless we put it to good use and it goes.

We don't get it back. We can't say, I'll reserve tomorrow for another day. We have tomorrow and then it's gone. And we never get time back.

So it could be in that sense that Paul is saying, you've got to take positive action if you want to get anything from the time. In that sense, to walk faithfully with Jesus means making constant choices of being active disciples, of being aware of what's going on round about us and responding to them. Of learning to say no and sometimes it's a struggle. Of learning to take action and sometimes it's intimidating. And when we're faced with those situations and those occasions, how can I respond to these as a Christian for Jesus?

[12:08] And that is something that we are constantly, all of us, learning more and more about throughout our lives. And as I'm saying this here, I'm thinking, oh yeah Mike, I need to do this and I need to learn that still.

Haven't got there yet, probably never will, but there's always that learning and growing and maturing process. however old we get. And in that sense, that sense of seeing time as something you've either got to deal with or not, the translation of redeeming the time really does mean make the most of every opportunity.

Redeeming the time is the literal sense, make the most of every opportunity is how it works. time. And actually, again, I'm afraid we're into the Greek, there were two words for time.

One is chronos, which is that non-stop time, that clock is constantly ticking, and I'm keeping an eye on it, don't worry. But time, chronos, never stops.

It's every second of every minute, of every moment, of every day, forever, throughout time. There's another word, kairos, which is more sort of key moments, special times, set times, occasions.

[13:31] That was the time when we did this. That was the time that Janice came and spoke to us about adopt a child. Time in a slightly different sense of those key moments.

And the sort of time that Paul is talking about here is that second sort, kairos. He's saying, redeem the occasions, redeem the opportunities, redeem those key moments.

As you go through life, as you walk through your chronos time, watch out for those kairos moments, which are a little bit different, where you can actually do something with them.

So it's about being watchful and spotting opportunities and responding to them. And again, it's not about being endlessly busy, making every second of every minute, of every hour, of every day count.

It's going through life with an opportunist, this mind, looking for the bargains, if you like, to go back to the shopping model. Oh, that is an opportunity. I can do something with that.

[14:37] And as Paul then goes on to say, make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil, Paul gives a few examples in the next few verses, which is the rest of the passage that Marina brought us.

So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Don't just blunder stupidly through life, but go through it with the mind the Holy Spirit gives you. Where's God in this?

What's the Lord wanting to do? It's a question of not being foolish in the sense of not being ignorant. Take opportunities to learn.

If there's a church Bible study, if there's an evening service tonight, HTC, always looking for students. If you've ever sort of, well, I really want to do some serious study.

Why not? And Paul is encouraging us to use our minds and to use our understandings here and not be ignorant. That's really what foolishness is about here.

[15:35] But understand what the Lord's will is. Then he goes on, enjoy being Christians. Enjoy your time with the Lord. Speak, sing, give thanks.

Our faith, redeemed by Jesus, redeemed in the power of the Spirit, should be a source of joy and encouragement and blessing to us. I'm not saying that being a Christian is constantly happy, happy, happy.

But there is a joy and a fulfillment in walking with the Lord. And Paul is encouraging us to discover and to develop that. Don't get drunk on wine.

Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord. There is a depth of joy there.

And going on into the next verse, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Well, that's a whole another section. So I asked Marina if she could stop at verse 20.

[16:38] But it is part of it. Of redeeming our relationships. Of looking at one another and how can I serve you? How can I support you? How can I be a blessing to you?

That's what submission is all about. And so often, it's still in its head is about a power struggle and domination and being under someone's thumb. That's not what Paul's meaning here.

He's saying, here's another opportunity. Here's another time that you can take hold of. Can I do something for you that's going to bring you a blessing? I'm thinking of you more than myself.

And Paul will unpack that through the rest of the chapter. But the key to this and the key to redeeming the time because the days are evil, the key to making the most of every opportunity is recognizing that we have opportunities.

We have opportunities to serve the community. opportunities, whether it's water bottles, flip-flops, adopting and supporting and sponsoring children, whether it's whatever's going on in the port here and supporting the crews of the ships that come in as you do.

[17:47] Opportunities that we spot and respond to. Opportunities individually in our own relationships, our own friendships. An opportunity for me to help that person.

That friendship that I haven't, I've neglected for so many years, it's a friendship that I really should be re-establishing. Opportunities to forgive. You let me down, you hurt me, but in Jesus I choose to forgive.

And opportunities to redeem the time as they come throughout 2026. And looking ahead and projecting ourselves to the end of December or January 25th, 2027, only a year away.

Looking back over this year, how have I grown? Am I the same person at the end of the year that I was at the beginning? In what ways have I changed for the better in the Lord?

What have I learned? How? Coming back finally to that shopping picture, how will I have spent 2026? Amen.