

“The Bucket List”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – August 15, 2021

Ephesians 5:15-20

Did you realize all the things we do with time? We “MAKE” time and we “TAKE” time, for things that are important to us. We “SAVE” time with all kinds of gadgets and doodads. We “MARK” time, we “KILL” time, we “RACE AGAINST” time. AND, the worst thing you can do with time, is “WASTE” time.

One little girl complained to her mother after her first WEEK at school “I’m wasting my time. I can’t read, I can’t write--and they won’t let me talk!”

In our text today we read that we need to “LOOK CAREFULLY THEN HOW YOU WALK, NOT AS UNWISE BUT AS WISE, MAKING THE BEST USE OF THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.” *Ephesians 5:15-16*

It is easy to think that Paul was SIMPLY saying don’t waste your time. But it’s more than that. The Greek word Paul uses here means to “REDEEM” the time. It’s the same word Paul used in *Galatians 3:13* “CHRIST REDEEMED US FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW BY BECOMING A CURSE FOR US...”

To REDEEM means - to purchase, to buy, to obtain by making a payment. Paul is telling us that our time is so crucial, so critical, that we must treat it like a valuable and precious commodity that MUST NOT be squandered and wasted.

We must redeem the time. What’s so critical about time that it must be redeemed? Most of us would think the reason time is valuable because we only have so much of it. Sooner or later, we’re all gonna die. Now, if you’re blessed you may live 80 or 90 or 100 years, but sooner or later your time is gonna run out. So don’t waste your time!!!

But that is not really what Paul says here. “REDEEM THE TIME . . . BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.”

What does that mean? Well, think about it this way. Do you have a bucket list? A bucket list is a list of things you want to do before you “kick the bucket.” And what people have on their bucket list tells you a lot about their priorities. They want to go to Europe, make a “Hole in One,” swim with dolphins, go deep-sea fishing, meet a famous person, or jump out of an airplane. There are all kinds of things you could put on your “bucket list” - and there’s nothing wrong with those things.

It’s a wish list, and God’s OK with that kind of thing. But He warns us not to be foolish. He warns us NOT to leave one important thing OFF that list. What is that ONE THING we must not leave off our bucket list? “THEREFORE, DO NOT BE FOOLISH, BUT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE WILL OF THE LORD IS.” *Ephesians 5:17*

Everything else you put on your bucket list is just for fun, but this one – this “UNDERSTANDING THE WILL OF THE LORD . . .” this one is serious. We live in an evil time, and the choices we make have eternal consequences. We live in a world of evil. All you have to do is watch the news, or spend some time on social media, and you KNOW things aren’t right!

It’s an evil world and God has saved you and me, in order to do something about it - and that SOMETHING is to shine our little light into this dark world. “AT ONE TIME YOU WERE DARKNESS, BUT NOW YOU ARE LIGHT IN THE LORD. WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT . . . AND TRY TO DISCERN WHAT IS PLEASING TO THE LORD.” *Ephesians 5:8 & 10*

Jesus said, “YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.” That means you and I are called to reflect His light into this dark world, and the only way we’re going to do that effectively is to understand what God’s will is.

So, how do we do that? How do we learn God's will? Well, you'd think the answer would be - read your Bible. Memorize huge swaths of Scripture. Meditate on God's Word day and night. And that is good stuff because that's what God expects of us.

But the problem is, if that's all you do, you could end up like the Pharisees. The Pharisees knew more of their Bible than most of us, but there was something missing in their lives. And so, in place of asking us to memorize and meditate, Paul writes this: "... DO NOT GET DRUNK WITH WINE, FOR THAT IS DEBAUCHERY, BUT BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT." *Ephesians 5:18*

What? What's he talking about here? Well, he's saying that in order for us to fully understand God's will, we must be totally controlled by God's Spirit. And then he makes an odd comparison: "DON'T GET DRUNK ON WINE" he says. That seems illogical until you understand what he's trying to say.

Have you ever seen someone who's been drunk? How can you tell if they're drunk if you've never seen them take a drink? Well, you can tell they're drunk by how they walk, by how they talk, by how they think and by how they act. Everything about their drunkenness is obvious by their behavior. They are FILLED with alcohol . . . and it controls them.

By contrast Paul says, don't be filled with alcohol (don't get drunk), but be FILLED with the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit should so fill you that it controls how you walk and talk and think and act. That is crucial for Christians - we need to be so filled with the Spirit of God that people know it when they see our behavior!

So, how do we get FILLED with the Holy Spirit?

Well, first we need to understand that we already have the Spirit inside of us. Acts 2:38 promises us "REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF

YOUR SINS, AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.” *Ephesians 1:14* tells us - GOD’S SPIRIT “IS THE GUARANTEE OF OUR INHERITANCE.” You can’t be a Christian without God’s Spirit inside of you. So, first we need to realize we already have the Spirit inside of us.

But here in *Ephesians* it says we need to be “refilled” with Spirit. What’s that all about?

First, Paul says that in order for us to be filled with God’s Spirit we need to . . . SING. We should be “ADDRESSING ONE ANOTHER IN PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, SINGING AND MAKING MELODY TO THE LORD WITH YOUR HEART.” *Ephesians 5:19*

Did you realize that music has the power to control us?

Sport teams listen to heavy metal and hard rock to get pumped up and play. We listen to soft music to relax. We listen to peppy music to be creative. We listen to country music to... Well, I have no idea why anyone listens to country music. But the point is, music controls us.

And the Bible teaches us that music has even more power than that. Music has a spiritual power over the Spirit world!

Music has power over evil. And it has the power to bring peace to my heart and soul. So, when you’re depressed or struggling - find a song that glorifies God and sing it.

Secondly, Paul tells us, that in order to be filled with God’s Spirit, we need to be “GIVING THANKS ALWAYS AND FOR EVERYTHING TO GOD THE FATHER IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.” *Ephesians 5:20*

Now, quiz time: how often do should give thanks? (ALWAYS), and for what should we give thanks? (EVERTHING). There are a lot of people who have a hard time doing that.

When people come to me and tell me they're struggling with depression, I'll often give them homework. I'll ask them to write down 10 things they're thankful for and ask them to bring the list in the next week. When they come back in, the list is often incomplete. They struggle. They're so low, they can't think of 10 things they're thankful for. BUT, if I gave them a tablet of paper and asked them to write down things they were unhappy about, or disappointed with, or frustrated about, they could fill out an entire tablet of paper . . . and ask for another.

Why? Why are they so unhappy? Well, because most folks aren't used to being thankful for what they have. For example, they don't express thankfulness for the fact that they have two hands. Why should they? They've ALWAYS had those two hands. And they've always had the ability to run and laugh and hear and see and sing. Why be grateful for those things?

By contrast, these folks tend to focus instead on what they DON'T HAVE. They dwell on the wanting of a better job, or a better car, or a better spouse, or a better . . . whatever. And that's why they're so depressed - there's ALWAYS going to be stuff that they don't have, or that they can't possess! So, they end up being miserable/unhappy people.

Philippians 4:4-7 says "REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS; AGAIN, I WILL SAY, REJOICE . . . DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING, BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION WITH THANKSGIVING LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD. AND THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING, WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS."

Learn to be grateful for what you have and quit focusing on what you don't have, and you'll be so filled with God's Spirit that it will change how you think and how you behave. And the world around you will notice.

The Bible tells us that the Spirit is a very powerful force. It teaches us, it comforts us, it helps us in our prayers when we don't know what to say. And *Romans 8:11* tells us that we have the same power living in us that raised Jesus from the dead!!!! “IF THE SPIRIT OF HIM WHO RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD DWELLS IN YOU, HE WHO RAISED CHRIST JESUS FROM THE DEAD WILL ALSO GIVE LIFE TO YOUR MORTAL BODIES THROUGH HIS SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN YOU.” Being “filled with the Spirit” is all about laying hold of the full power of the Spirit that God has given us. You see, in order for the Spirit to operate fully in our lives, we've got to make our hearts decent places for Him to reside.

For example, let's say I invite you to come to my house. But when you come in the door, the first thing you see is that my clothes are scattered everywhere, the dishes are piled high in the sink and all over the counters, and I have cats all over the place . . . 30 or 40 of them . . . and I haven't cleaned up after them for a week. Now, how comfortable are you going to be? How willing will you be to spend time with me and share with me? Not very.

The same is true for having the Spirit FILLING our lives. If we don't clean up our lives by filling our hearts it with singing and praise and such, God's Spirit is NOT going to feel really comfortable with you. But when we learn to sing songs about God's glory, train our hearts to be grateful and filled with thanks, THEN God's Spirit can be COMFORTABLE inside us, and be able to work His POWER fully in our lives.

Make this your bucket list. To be refilled with the Holy Spirit so that God can do wonderful things through your life. Amen.