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Sermon Notes

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The Wisdom of Redeeming Time

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-17

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Introduction

The Miracle of a Late Conversion

Amen. Some time ago, I was reading one of John Piper's most moving books, at least for me, personally. And in that book, he shares a powerful memory from his days traveling with his father, who was, among other things, a traveling Evangelist. And his father went from church to church and they would do revival services in that style, that pattern, and there would be a very, very clear, powerful preaching of the Gospel. And there was one time that stuck out in John Piper's memory, unforgettable, in which there had been a particularly notorious, hard-hearted, elderly man whose family and friends had been praying for years that he would come to faith in Christ. And finally, really, to the amazement of everyone, this man accepted Christ after hearing the Gospel clearly explained by John Piper's father, and with tears and repentance and brokenness, he received forgiveness of sins and came to faith. And it was just an amazingly powerful, moving moment.

But then, something crashed in on this elderly gentleman with vivid reality, and he began to realize how many years he'd resisted people coming to him with the Gospel, how many family members he'd turned away, how many times he'd said no, and all of the years that had been wasted, "walking in vanity and pride," as the hymn puts it. All the years of his life that he had wasted. And he began crying out from the bottom of his heart, "I've wasted it, I've wasted my life."

We Will Give An Account for How We Spent Our Time

Well, in the spirit of that kind of bitter realization and to remedy that, Piper wrote his book, "Don't Waste Your Life", and I would commend it to you. But it's in the spirit of that that I stand before you today, and I want to preach this text. The deepest desire I have is that you would redeem the time, that you would realize how precious a thing time is. And if I could speak just quite bluntly, that you would stop wasting it. And I'm speaking to myself, to all of us, that we would not waste our lives. The basic concept of that book and of this text today is that there's going to be a day coming in which we will give God a careful account for everything in our lives, everything that we've ever said or done, or everything we didn't say and didn't do. Everything, we're going to give God an account.

2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.*" I just think about that Bible verse every day. Someday, I'm going to give God an account for this day. And this text, Ephesians 5, especially verse 16, this text, with this section, verses 15 through 17, is of incalculable assistance in helping us get ready for Judgment Day. "*Be very careful, then, [or look carefully] how you live [how you're walking], not as unwise, but as wise, not as fools, but as wise.*" I'm going to stick with the more literalistic, "*Redeeming the time.*" Many translations say something like, "*Making the most of every opportunity,*" which I think gets at the spirit of it, but I'm going to stick with these words, "*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*"

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

So, we're looking this morning at the issue of time. I've been thinking much about time this morning. I have my app up, it's 11:11. I have timed this sermon. It started at 27 pages. It went down to 21. Now, it's at 17. So, there's some hope we'll finish it today. And isn't that ironic? I thought, "Alright, I've shortened it, I've shortened it, I've shortened it." Now, I've given you folks the gift of 12 minutes you didn't think you would have. Now, you have no idea what I'm talking about, but trust me. I gave you the gift, and I thought, "How will you spend them?" And that's another message, another day. But what will you do with your extra 12 minutes?

But from the very beginning, God has wanted us to be aware of the passing of time. "There was evening, there was morning, the first day. There was evening, there was morning the second day. And He put up in the sky, the sun and the moon and the stars." It says in Genesis 1:14, *"To mark seasons and days and years."* Since that time, we, using inventiveness that God gave us, have developed various time-keeping pieces, like this smartphone and like this clock and other time-keeping devices, that let us know where we're at in the day. So, early on, there were sundials, which would trace the movement of a shadow across a face. Certainly thereafter, the Egyptians invented water clocks, the Chinese invented candle clocks. About 100 or 200 years before Christ, someone invented, in Alexandria I think, the hourglass, so dry sand, very fine sand, moving down through a necked in place in the glass and flowing down, so there's a sense of, "How many more grains of sand are left in my life?" Or how much is left in the day? Mechanical clocks really came in when something called an escapement, which is a sprocket, or something like that, which would rock back and forth and it enabled accurate mechanical time-keeping.

Wisely Spending Time

Calvin and I were in a museum of technology in Dresden, and my favorite part, I don't know what Calvin's favorite part was, but my favorite part was the clock section because right around Dresden, there's some of the most advanced watchmakers in the world. Switzerland's known for it, and well, they should, but also that area of Dresden, Germany, has some incredible watchmakers. And so, I saw one watch about that big, about 100 years old, that kept the day and the month and the year as well. It was over 100 years old, but it's all from gears and springs, and I was just amazed at the technology. But as I stood in that part of the museum, I could literally hear just almost deafening "tick-tock, tick-tock." I was standing near a pendulum clock that was going back and forth, the sense of just the consistent measuring and the passing of time.

Now, for businessmen, the adage "time is money" is well known. And I don't think that all of the clock inventors really cared about the themes I'm preaching about today. Their desire was to make the most of the day, so that they wouldn't get behind in business. So that they could run the race, what we have called perhaps the rat race, against competing businessmen, and be able to make the most money. Benjamin Franklin had a lot of proverbs and adages about that, that type of thing, making the most of the day. And so, that's just kind of a worldly wise theme, but if I can say, that kind of hard working non-Christian businessman, who is very aware of the way he's spending his time at every moment and is driven by a desire for material gain is every bit as much a fool as the lazy heir of an oil tycoon who sits around in the Riviera and just get a tan all day long, they're actually equally foolish.

To the hard-working, time conscious, non-Christian businessman, Christ would speak these words of wisdom from Mark chapter 8, *"What would it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Or on judgment, what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* So this idea of redeeming the time in Ephesians 5:15-17 has not so much to do with the accurate measurement of the seconds and hours and days, etcetera. I think it's there, that's something we're aware of, but it more has to do with a unique opportunity that God has set up every day. That you would cherish that opportunity maximally. Ephesians 2:10 says, *"We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance that we should walk in them."* The same verb of walking, "walk wisely" equals, so in 5:15, "walk wisely" equals 2:10, "walk in a pathway of good works if you've come to faith in Christ." If you haven't come to faith in Christ, this is the work of God, believe in the one that God sent, believe in Christ. That's the work. But

having come to Christ, walk wisely equals do all of the good works that God has set up for you to do today.

God's Desire for Our Use of Time

So, God created this world with its physical laws, including the rotation of the earth on its axis for 24 hours a day, evening and morning a day, and then the revolution of the earth around the sun. There we have the seasons, and they changed, and the years passed by, 365 days is a year, but he did all of that, I believe, to tell a story, a true story of His own glory, in the redemption, in the salvation of sinners. From Satan's dark kingdom, that's what all of this was for. That's what the history was for. I don't think history has any other purpose apart from that, and so you and I and every person that God has ever created or ever will create are a part of that story, and God has a role for us to play in that story.

And sin wants to intervene, and wants to intercept and stop you from playing that role, so if you could picture it like a play, you missed your cue, and you're supposed to come out and say these lines on the stage but you missed it because you were asleep, or drunk, or missed the bus. And that's what sin wants to do at every moment. And it never happened, we missed that good work that God had set up for us to do, and that is a great tragedy. And we will not comprehend how great a tragedy that missed opportunity is until Judgment Day, then it will be clear.

My job as a pastor is, by the preaching of the Word, by the ministry of the word, to make invisible things very vivid to you. And like the invisibility of Judgment Day is a hindrance to us when we don't have a strong faith. So my job is to make that Judgment Day very vivid to you today this morning, so that you will be wise and not be a fool, and that you will redeem the time and make the most of your life, to make the most of every opportunity.

Wisdom vs. Foolishness

A Powerful Warning

So, as we go to verse 15, we begin with the issues of wisdom and foolishness. We have this very powerful warning from Paul. *"Be very careful then, see."* [look is the verb,] *how you live*, [therefore, how you live, or how you're walking,] *not as fools but as wise*. So in context, as we've said, this is in the application section of the Gospel, Ephesians 1 through 3, those chapters lay the foundation of God's saving purpose, His eternal saving purpose in Christ. And then Ephesians 4-6 says, *"How then shall we live?"* So Ephesians 1, "from the very beginning, we celebrate the grace of God the Father, for He chose us in Christ before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. And in Christ, we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of sins. And how we, when we heard the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation, having believed we were marked in Him with a seal." And how, in Ephesians 2, there's this vision of a glorious church, a temple, a holy temple rising, little by little, little by little, more and more glorious, larger and larger every day, being built in the heavenly realms, a place where God presently does, and in the future will, live by His Spirit. That's what's going on in the world.

And we are told in Ephesians 4:1, "to live according to the calling, or live up to the calling, a life worthy of the calling that we have received." This is just a part of that whole appeal. It's all part of that section. Live a life worthy of that calling, a calling to be holy, a calling to build the church, etcetera. That's the calling. And then, in Ephesians 5, he talks about, and this is the immediate context, *"You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, and righteousness and truth, and find out what pleases the Lord."* And don't have anything to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness that he's been unfolding from Ephesians 4:17 on. He's been very clear about the way pagans live, the way you used to live, the non-Christian life, a life of lying, a life of stealing, a life of sinful anger and bitter disputes, and unforgiveness, a life of using your mouth to hurt other people, a life of unforgiveness, a life of sexual immorality, a life of laziness. And idolatry. Not that life. Those are the fruitless deeds of darkness. But now, a different kind of life in which righteousness and truth drives out of all of those sin patterns. Truth-telling and hard work, so you can have something to share with those in need. And not

sinful anger, but forgiveness and mercy and kindness to people who have sinned against you. And not sexual immorality, but living a life as pure as light. A different kind of life. That's what it means to walk wisely.

Walk Circumspectly

Now, Paul says in verse 15, in the KJV... I love this. It says, "*See then that ye walk circumspectly.*" That's a great word, isn't it? I guess it's great if you know what it means, so I looked it up. Circumspectly. It's like carefully, accurately, meticulously, that's the idea. There's a sense of accuracy to the walking here. Accurate walking, what does that mean? A precision. Well, imagine that you're a soldier in a war zone, and you wander away somehow from your unit and you get yourself in a place and it's not familiar, and you sense there's danger. You just stop. And then you look around and you notice, because you know what to look for, that you're in the midst of a minefield.

You can see the New Earth and the dirt and all that, and you can see the pattern, but you're in grave danger of having your leg blown off or even your life ended, and you know that. Now, you know you can get out because you have the skill to do it, but you have to be very careful how you walk. So, I want that image in your mind. There's a sense of circumspect walking in this world. There's a precision to the holy walk. The Puritans, the English Puritans, were called by their enemies "Precisionists", and there is a derision to that. It's like, they weren't "live and let live" people. They were very careful. I mean, Jonathan Edwards actually weighed out, and measured his food, and then saw the impact of various foods on his energy level. He was like a scientist of nutrition for the purpose of holiness, the purpose of fruitfulness. "I want to eat in such a way that I'll be maximally energetic for Jesus." And not only that, but physically, but also just, he would analyze how he did every day and how it went in conversations and he was just a very careful man of God. He was walking circumspectly, he's walking precisely in the world.

Wisdom and Foolishness: Basic Definitions

So, what does it mean? Now, how do we live not as unwise, literally "unwise," or "fools." Not as fools, but as wise? Well, I think it has to do with living a life of faith as opposed to a life of the flesh. I think that's what Paul has in mind here. And so, faith, for me, is first and foremost, it's the eyesight of the soul, so we're going to go with "see" or "look", that's the verb in verse 15. Let's see the physical realm, but see it spiritually, and let's see beyond the physical realm into the spiritual realm. And what are we going to see in the spiritual realm? We're going to see Almighty God enthroned, we're going to see Him with eyes of faith. That's wisdom. "*The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'*"

So, fundamentally, lost people are fools because they say there's no God, and they live a practical atheism. But tragically, occasionally, Christians, too, live a practical atheism. We forget the invisible God, God enthroned. And so, for me, to walk as wise means to have a vivid sense of God all the time. A sense of God enthroned, of "*God who is light and in Him there is no darkness.*" A sense of the reality of God all the time. And not just God, His existence, but that He has spoken through the prophets, and He has given us the Bible, He's given us the Word, He's not left us in the dark. And how Psalm 119:105 says, "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" I know what to do because you've told me what to do.

And so, the life of faith is a life of the reality of God, the invisible spiritual realms being real to you, and then the truth of the Word of God. "I'm going to live according to this." That's what it is. So, it says, "*The righteous will live by faith,*" Romans 1:17. It's the faith walk that leads to Heaven. It says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "*We walk by faith, not by sight.*" So, that's what I think it means to walk wise, as a wise man or woman. It means a life of faith, not the life of the flesh. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it this way, that, "Unbelievers are living an anti-faith life, a life of the flesh, by instincts of mental pride, selfish lusts, sensual pleasures, worldly themes. They seem to have no knowledge of what is going to come upon all of us at the end of this age." No knowledge of it, the terrifying day of God's wrath that will come on the world. So, that's what it means to walk as wise, not as fools.

Christ is Wisdom

Every One of Us Begins as a Fool

Now, here I want to zero in on Christ as wisdom. Christ, for us, is wisdom. Because at one time, Titus 3:3, *"we were all fools."* We were all of us foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and lusts. We were living the lives of fools. Just like everyone, we were all foolish. But thanks be to God, Christ appeared, and He has become for us wisdom from God, wisdom from God. First Corinthians 1:30, *"That is our righteousness, He is our holiness, He is our redemption. That is Christ."* This is God's wisdom to the human race, and He is the wisdom of God. And the wisest thing any person can ever do is repent of his or her sins and come to faith in Christ. That is the wisest way you can redeem the time.

I prayed this morning as I was going over the sermon. I prayed that God would bring lost people to hear this moment of the sermon. So I did, I prayed that, and if they did, that they would hear with ears of faith, while there was still time for them to flee, from the wrath to come, to flee from judgment that is coming, to see it, to believe that it's true, and to flee to find salvation in Christ. There's no wiser thing you can do. And to not do it would be infinite foolishness. He is offering us full forgiveness of all sins, past, present, future. He's offering the gift of adoption into the family of God. He's offering us a bright future in this world of good works, which I mentioned earlier, and I'll talk more about in a moment. And then, eternity in His presence, and a glorious New Heaven, New Earth. Free, just completely free. Not by works, but by faith. It's what He's offering to you. Christ is wisdom.

Christ is Our Wisdom

And then, for the Christian, Christ continues to be wisdom. Walking as Christ walked in this world. God could have incarnated Jesus and put Him right on the cross as an atoning sacrifice, and in some sense, I suppose, His righteousness would have been met. But in His wisdom, Jesus lived an entire life under the law of physical life and He gave us an example that we should follow in His steps. So Christ has become for me wisdom from God. Live like Jesus did. We'll get back to that toward the end. But now, we come to the centerpiece of my message and what I want to share to you now, redeeming the time.

Redeeming the Time

Fundamental to Walking in Wisdom: Redeeming the Time

Look at verse 16. *"redeeming the time, because the days are evil."* Fundamental to walking in wisdom is this idea of *"redeeming the time."* Now, what does redeeming mean? What does it mean to redeem? It's not a word that we necessarily know or understand fully. I think what it means is to free a captive from captivity by the payment of a price. That's the basic, biblical idea. A captive, someone is kidnapped or someone's enslaved, and a price is paid, and the captive is set free. That's the idea of redemption. That's what Jesus did for us by His blood. He redeemed us from Satan's chains, from Satan's dark kingdom, by His blood. We've been redeemed. But now, we're supposed to redeem the time. So, the idea here is like the time, that word there means the opportunity. It's a different word for, *"the days are evil."* But the opportunity is enslaved, and you have to get up and go do something to it or it's going to be lost. The Romans said, *"Carpe diem"*, seize the day. Now, Christians would say redeem the day. Let's go redeem it.

So, the image I have here is the day is like, I don't know, a snarling beast out there, a wild dog, and I'm a homesteader in the early 1800s. I have a historical imagination, so I'm like Daniel Boone. I'm out there, and every day, these wild dogs go running by my homesteading property. And my job, my mission, is to go out early in the morning and hunt down one of those wild dogs, capture it, and tame it until it's a hunting dog, and it brings in my dinner that night. That's the image of life I have. It's like, *"Wow, what a weird image."* Hey, look, if that doesn't work for you, think of another one on redeeming the day. But the idea is, get up and go grab the day. If we chill, if we hang out, I've always pictured bats hanging upside down. *"What are we doing? We're hanging out. We're just kind of chilling and hanging out."* One of the great dangers of this sermon is that you'll think that I'm going to go so far as to say things like that are never appropriate. I'm not saying that they're not. Jesus, however you defined it, chilled and hung out with his disciples. But He was always purposeful. There was a reclining at table, but there was always a purpose to everything He did. But if you're just going to be kicking back, you're on the inflatable tube of life and you're on the wide water, you're going to get swept downstream. That's the image here. You can't live your life that way. And if that's

how you're living, you're going to lose. You're going to lose every day and you're going to lose on Judgment Day, so that's what we're talking about.

Time is Precious

Now, I'm following here as a mentor Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest sermons he ever preached was on this very text, "*redeeming the time, because the days are evil*". I would suggest it to you. You can read it for free online. It's called *The Preciousness of Time*, and I just want to follow somewhat his warnings and outline in this section of my sermon. His doctrine of the sermon is this: Time is a thing that is exceedingly precious. That's what he was trying to teach his people. Time is a thing that is exceedingly precious.

Reason number one: Time is precious because eternity depends on how you improve the time. It is in these days now, in this present era of time, that we hear and believe the Gospel. And so, your eternity will depend on whether you improve the time wisely. So, time must be a pretty valuable thing if your eternity depends on it. And not only that, but salvation isn't an instant, but it's a life process. There's a whole race of salvation to be run. That initial, justifying faith will be with you for eternity, but then there's a sanctifying race to be run, and we run it in time. And so, the soul is to be saved in time, so time must be a precious thing. That's his first point.

The Brevity of Time

Second point: Time is precious because it's very short. If I can add a word here, it's shorter than you think it is. It's shorter than I think it is. The more scarce a precious commodity is, the more valuable it is. Basic economics, law of supply and demand. If there's a high supply, low demand, it's valuable. Or, vice versa. If there's a high demand, low supply, it's valuable. Well, I've already established that time is precious, but it's even more so because it's short. The Bible testifies that there's not much of it. So, Job said, in Job 7:6, "*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle.*" So you picture like an old loom like that and the warp and woof etcetera, you got the strings like that and you got the weaver's shuttle with the thread on it and the weaver goes like this, "woosh" and just it's gone. Job said that that's what my life is like. "*Swifter than a weaver's shuttle.*" Blink of an eye. It's gone. James said, "What is your life? It's a mist that appears for a little while then it vanishes." It's like the morning mist. I've seen that out where I live. There's one field in particular, it's misty almost every morning and then give it an hour and it burns off it's gone. Our time on earth is like a blink of an eye, compared to eternity. Time is so short for the greatness of the work that's in front of us. And if time is already short, and then we squander a proportion of it, how great is that loss?

Louis Zamperini's Chocolate Bars

Some of you may have seen the movie, or I read the book and saw the movie *Unbroken* about Louis Zamperini. I don't know if you know that story, but Louis Zamperini was a World War II bomber pilot, or was on a bomber and the plane got engine trouble and crashed in the Pacific and only three men survived. And they are in two inflatable rafts, in the middle of Pacific with very scant hope of survival. They had very small supplies of food, and very small supplies of water and among their supplies of food, were some candy bars, three of them I think, and they calculate if they broke off squares each of them having a square a day, could extend their lives, but one of them in the middle of the night freaked out and ate all the candy bars. All of them. Just out of terror and fear and whatever and just ate them all. I was telling that story to somebody I said, "I would have thrown him overboard at that moment" But no, I mean they overcame and it's really quite an amazing story, but that's an image of it was the time was already short and now we wasted some. That's the sense I have here. It was already short, now we wasted some.

Reason number three, time is precious because time is actually uncertain. You don't know the amount you have. So it's precious and it's short and it's uncertain. Our lives could end tonight, or they could continue for many years, we actually have no idea. And we have to make the most of what God gives us. How much more would many people prize their lives if they knew they had but a few months to live, or even a few days left in this world. And so it is with multitudes in this world who assume that they have many years left to enjoy. They're in good health, plenty of money, resources, like the rich fool of Luke 12, remember who's land produced a bumper crop? He said, "I don't know what I'm going to do, what I'm going to do with all this

harvest, I know what I'll do, I'll tear down my barns and build bigger barns and then I'll say to my soul, "Soul you've got things laid up for many many years, take life easy, eat and drink, and be married". But God said to him, "*You fool, this very night, your soul will be required of you*". Meditate on the word required, not requested. Death doesn't come and make a request. That's it. And yet how many will be surprised by the coming of their death, and think to themselves and this is from John Bunyan, "Cries from hell", "I always thought I would have more time. I always thought I would have more time." I wonder if there are Christians saying that. I always thought I have more time.

Reason number four: Time is precious because when it is spent, it can never be recovered again. Now, hear the illustration that came to me is of a pawn shop. Imagine you had a precious heirloom maybe you men, you had a watch that your father gave you, that his father gave him. Or maybe you women, you would have a piece of jewelry that the same thing your mother gave you, that her mother gave to her. And you're under such economic extremity that you feel like you have no choice and you go sell it in the pawn shop. Actually, you can get it back, if you have enough money, and if it still exists, somewhere on earth, and you pursue it enough and you're willing to spend, you could get that heirloom back, but you can never get last Wednesday back. Never! Another illustration I have of this is of God as a chef and a table waiter. Let me shift the image here, cooked up in advance that we should eat, think of it that way. And so in effect, God in the kitchen, the divine kitchen, the Heavenly kitchen cooks up a recipe for you, it's a soup maybe or a stew or something, and he sets that dish in front of you, and you know what? He will never make that dish again, never. It's got a combination of spices, it's got an aroma to it. He gives you a spoon, and then he just stands back and just looks. And if you just don't eat it, he'll wordlessly pick it up and bring it back in the kitchen or rake it into the dumpster. And you'll never have that particular dish again, ever. You can't find it, you can't go anywhere on planet earth to find last Wednesday, it's gone. You never get it back. That moment was unique, it was unrepeatable, it was special and precious.

Now if we live 50 or 60 or 70 years, and for the most part haven't improved those years it can't be help. There's nothing I can do to help you about that. It's gone. All of it is gone. All that we can do is make the best of whatever time God may graciously give us still. That's the point. So, what do we do with all this?

The Four R's of Valuing Time

I'm going to give you four Rs that I think will help you. First, reflection, second rebuke, third repentance, fourth reformation.

First, reflection. What have you done with your time? Just think. You don't need to tell anyone, just think about it, you've heard now the preciousness of time, this concerns you, it applies to you. God created you. Gives you a reasonable soul. Reflect. How have you lived up to this point? You've already had a great deal of time that was given to you, what have you done with it? Let your conscience answer for you. Perhaps you may conclude that your lifetime is half gone, it may well be, I don't know. If you're 35 or 40, you may think you've got half of your life still ahead of you, you may be right, you may be wrong, you don't know. But let's say you did. You've spent half your life. What have you done with it? Every day that God has given you, has been unspeakably precious. How have you spent it? Have you spent it wisely or foolishly or have you wasted hours and days and months even years?

Now, if you look back and search your memory, do you find that in a large measure, you've wasted your time or used it well? Think of how much can be done in a day in which you gave absolutely everything to Jesus. Think of what that day would look like. You gave yourself fully, energetically, mentally, and physically, everything you had for Christ that day. That's how much you can do in one day. How many of your days have been like that? And what have you done with all the time you spend in spiritual pursuits? How many sermons have you heard? How many teachings, how many books have you read? How many things has God poured into your soul of the word of God, how much has He given you?

Now, we're in America today, not in Jonathan Edwards day. We have far more leisure time than those did who listened to Edwards preach this message back in 1734. They were carving their existence out of a recent

wilderness maybe 100 years before that, a little over the 100 years they began settling in that part, so they were farmers, they were merchants. It was a rough life, they didn't have a lot of leisure time. We are glutted with ways to waste time. I don't know if you noticed that but we are glutted with opportunities to waste time. They didn't have internet, they didn't have Netflix, they didn't have endless sports. I don't think they had sports in colonial New England maybe they did, but they certainly didn't have 24/7. And they didn't have the resources to eat at restaurants or to do the different things that we do, etcetera. They didn't have that kind of life. This is the life we have. The question we're asking in reflection is how have you spent your time?

Number two. The second purpose of this is rebuke. Another way to look at it would be conviction of sin. I really believe in Christ as a Christian the only good thing ever to be gained at looking back at past sins is to repent and be convicted and live differently. So I'm not trying to marinate everyone, so we all go out feeling guilty. That's not it at all. We'll get to that in a moment, but it's all about conviction. To those who waste time, to those who actually are convicted that they have had a habit of squandering it as though it were an endless resource like tap water. Not in a well system, by the way. Just turn it on, it just flows forever. If you've been thinking like that and you've been wasting time, then be convicted. This text kind of stands over you to rebuke that way of thinking.

So I want it to speak to those who spend a lot of time in idleness. That may not be any of you, it maybe many of you, I don't know, I'm just putting out the shoes and if they fit, wear them. But if you know that you're spending a lot of time in idleness, doing nothing at all, following no business, not improving yourself, not working on spiritual strength, not working on a skill set, not working on your spiritual health, not praying, interceding, not studying scripture. Not being out leading others to Christ, not being out serving others in the Body of Christ. You're not doing those things, but instead you're just pouring hour after hour down the hole of mindless recreation, I'm just setting out a pair of shoes. If you know they fit you and you can put them on, then the text calls on you to repent. It calls on you to labor and live differently to a different kind of life.

I want to take Ephesians 4:28 and apply it to you. *"He who has been stealing must steal no longer but must work doing something useful with his own hands, that he may benefit those in need."* So just do that. It's like you've been stealing from God. So use your time going forward well for others. Invest in your heart, in your mind, and your soul, so you can bless others. And then, get out and serve. Use your spiritual gifts, use the Gospel. Get out and do things. Even worse are those who spend their time not merely in idleness, but actually violating their consciences. I'm talking about you know you're sinning. It will be better for those people to have done nothing than to do that because what sin ends up doing it puts you further behind. You're like negative 20 now and you have to put all of this effort to get back up to zero and then go on from there. Jonathan Edward says sin is a terrible time waster.

I'll just take a little example. Let's say a husband and wife are intending to do something and instead they get in some big conflict or argument. They spend a couple of hours to rectify that, just get back to square one. When, if they had been humble and loving and patient with each other, they wouldn't have to spend any time on those things. Or, you may develop a bad habit, a corrupting habit and you have to now invest a lot of time to get out of that hole. I would say invest the time and get out of the hole but just understand sin has stolen from you.

Number three and number four, I'm going to put together, repentance and reformation. Edwards, as I said, makes it clear that the time once spent has gone forever. So Pastor why are you burdening us with this? There's nothing I can do about last Wednesday. No, but you have a memory and you can look at how, if you remember at what you did last Wednesday. And as I already said, "The only reason for looking back in the Christian life is not to have a murky, guilty feeling. But to just do better, repent. Live better. God, in His grace, may give you more time." And so, repent, turn in your mind and thought. The time you've wasted can still serve a useful purpose in your soul's endeavors if a sense of conviction and a kind of holy passion, a zeal, of resolution fills us, then the painful memory of those wasted hours will actually serve us well. God may still be pleased to bless some that up until that moment were in an unconverted state like that man who wasted all those years but still you can gain the victory that overcomes the world, which is faith in Christ,

and all of Heaven will rejoice. So there's that.

But then, for you Christians God wants you to feel the weight of the preciousness of time and reflect seriously on how much depends on it, to feel the brevity of life, and how short time is and how rapidly it's flowing. And you feel the weight of these truths, then you will buy back each hour of the day, and you'll acknowledge yourself accountable to God for how you're living. As part of it, it's like our time to spend how we want. And actually it says in Romans 14:7-8, "*None of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord and if we die we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*" So, seek to find out what pleases the Lord. What good works he has for you to do. You may feel the sting of time already wasted, you should, if you're alive you should feel that sting. Some of you may feel the sting of conviction, realizing you wasted some of the best years of your life, your youth, the years when you had maximum physical energy, maximum vigor, maximum idealism, but you were deceived into squandering it. Now you're middle aged, you're older and there's nothing you can do about that except resolve to spend your middle age years and older years better.

So, do not be discouraged. God is gracious. I remembered a verse this morning, I looked it up. It's Joel 2:25 God is able to "*restore the years the locusts have eaten.*" But I'm going to tell you who he does that for. He does it for people who seriously repent, and feel the weight of what's happened. If you haven't repented, he won't restore the years the locusts have eaten. They'll eat more years is what will happen. So, it is madness at Edwards for you to just sink back in a bed of depression over all this, over what's happened and do nothing. Let me give you an illustration of this. Alright?

How to Respond When You Have Wasted Time

Imagine you are a wheat farmer in Kansas 100 years ago. Okay. I love these historic illustrations. So, we were Homesteaders with Daniel Boone in Kentucky. Now, we're wheat farmers in Kansas. Alright, so it's middle of the night's harvest time, but there's a fire in the harvest field near the house. And it's already burned a third of your harvest. And it's now caught the corner of the house on fire, and a friend and neighbor sees it and runs in. It's three in the morning, everyone in the house is asleep and he rouses everyone to wake up. "Get up, get up, you're in danger, your crop is burning, your house is burning get up." And imagine they sit up, the farmer looks out, and sees that a third of the harvest is burned and smells a smoke in his own house, and he's just so depressed and just lays back in bed. It's like, "Wrong answer!" You can still save two-thirds of your harvest, get up, put the fire out in your house, save your life, and run out and save your harvest. Don't get depressed, get energetic, be zealous, have a fire in your belly, zeal for the glory of God. Not, "There's nothing I can do." Last Wednesday is gone forever. I don't do that. That's madness. It's not the right answer. So, understand verse 17 what the will of the Lord is. Understand what He wants out of you. "*My food,*" said Jesus, "*is to do the will of God, and finish His work.*" That's Jesus's wisdom for you every day. What does he want you to do today? And do it.

Application

Mothers of Young Children

I'm going to close with just a couple of specific words of application to you. You may be in a unique place in life. I want to speak directly to you. I want to begin by speaking to mothers of preschoolers. Okay? You have a unique opportunity to pour into your little ones as they're growing. Make the most of it. It's tiring, I've seen it. My wife worked hard with our toddlers. I've seen other moms. I see some of you moms. I see the look of fatigue, I understand. It's hard, make the most of it, it doesn't last long. You turn around three or four times and it's done. So I just want to urge you make the most of it.

Parents of Teenagers

Are you perhaps the father of a teenage boy? You don't have long to teach him how to be a man, to speak into his life, and get him ready for the warfare he's going to have to fight to be a warrior for Christ, to learn how to put on his spiritual armor. Are you speaking into the life of your son? Like I said, a couple of times you turn around and they're gone. Are you the father of a teenage son or the mother of a teenage girl getting her

ready for the things that are going to come? Just make the most of it, that's all.

Teenagers

What about you, are you a teenager yourself? Maybe you just finished Disciple Now. You're barely struggling to keep awake. Alright, I get that. Alright, I get that. Alright, two in the morning. Actually, the kids who are with us were phenomenal. Went to bed. You guys were great. You guys right here. I see you guys, you guys were awesome. It didn't cost me any sleep. So thank you very much, I appreciate that. But I mean, you're a teenager, I already mentioned about five minutes ago, you are about to come into the prime years of your life physically, in terms of zeal, idealism, energy. It's incredible what young men and women have done for the cause of Christ, in missions, evangelism, in church building. Incredible. Don't waste your childhood, don't waste your teen years, don't waste your young men and young women years. Get ready for them. Come to Christ, be sure that you're born again. Don't assume because you're in a good Christian home that you're born again. Be sure that you're born again and then make the most.

Retirees

What about you, are you a retiree? You're thinking, "Lots and lots of my years are passed." Yeah, but you might have some freedom, you might have some money and some wisdom and some resources and some things that, boy, the church could use them. Are you squandering your years? John Piper talks about a couple that spent their years on their shell collection. Wandering the beaches, collecting shells. Early retirement, 59,60. You got extra years of shell-collecting. Don't waste it, don't waste your retirement years. You could go on mission, you could go overseas, you could do things to enrich the Church. Many of you are. Praise God. But don't waste your retiree years.

How about a specific circumstance? Maybe you're diagnosed with cancer or the closest loved one, a spouse to one who is, don't waste it, you're like, "How in the world? What you mean don't waste it?" What I'm saying is it may put you in a unique position, a platform that other Christians can't use to minister.

Single Christians

Perhaps you're single, don't waste your singleness. You yearn for a spouse and God may give you one, he may not, but make the most of your years. 1 Corinthians 7 says that Paul had a kind of a freedom as a single man that he wouldn't have if he were married. So, make the most of your years when you're single, and God may well bless you with a spouse, but he may not, but just make the most of it. Friends, I could go on and on. I actually did go on and on, but I cut it down. Alright. So I'm just asking you each of you to redeem the time for the glory of God. Let's live as though every moment were precious and live it maximally for Him. Close with me in prayer.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for the time you give us. Help us to make the most of every minute. Help us, O Lord, to live for your glory. Help us to be balanced in recreation. Help us to use it only to renew and recharge your battery so we can serve you and others. Help us, O Lord, to run the internal race of holiness, and the external race of evangelism and missions. Oh, God, help us to live for what you have laid before us to do in Jesus' name, Amen.