

# Opportunity Knocks

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<i>Text</i>	Ephesians 5:15-17
<i>Readings</i>	Proverbs 2; Psalm 90; Ephesians 5:1-20
<i>Theme</i>	In these evil days believers must be wise and make the most of every opportunity.
<i>Purpose</i>	To help you understand these times and to urge you to be wise in making the most of every opportunity.

“Opportunity Knocks” is the title of this sermon; it is also the title of a movie, and of a game show. And it is a widely used phrase in many quotations.

The briefest of these says; “Opportunity only knocks once.”

Someone else has said; “Even when opportunity knocks a man still has to get up off his seat and open the door.”

Another person has said; “If opportunity doesn’t knock, build a door.”

And one more for the young men; “Opportunity knocks for every man, but you have to give a woman a ring.”

Opportunity also knocks for Christians. In these verses we are called to make the most of every opportunity in these evil times in which we live.

What are these opportunities, and how can you recognise them, and where do you find the wisdom to know what to do with them?

**Context:** In the first part of this chapter Paul explained how Christians are to live as children of light in this dark world; we are to avoid getting caught up in the immorality and foolish talk of unbelievers; instead we are to live in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

That leads naturally on to these next verses where Paul urges us to be careful how we live because the days are evil.

We are going to consider these evil times, and then look at a Christian response.

## 1. These evil times

Paul wrote this about the times in which he lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Yet he knew that sin and evil would be a feature of this whole age, this entire period between the first and second coming of Christ. The Bible describes this period as “the last days.” In his second letter to Timothy Paul warned him; “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.” (2 Timothy 3:1)

We know that Satan's activities and power have been restricted (Revelation 20) but he is still active. He is chained, but God has given him a long chain and he can still do a great deal of harm. He goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. He is the great deceiver, the evil one.

"The days are evil" is a description of this present age, which will last until Christ returns. But evil takes different shapes and forms in different periods of history. What is going on in this day and age in New Zealand? We'll look briefly at four "-isms". Many more could be mentioned, but these four highlight some of the main features of our present situation.

**a. Secularism** is the word we use to describe this secular society.

This means that God has been relegated to the edges of life; pushed away into a corner.

In the Middle Ages God and the Bible were central to all of life. Most people regarded themselves as Christians and the biblical faith touched every aspect of life and society. Often that faith was distorted by superstition and error, but it was still all-pervasive. That has long gone.

Christians today make up a small minority of the population. The biblical faith has little effect and influence on economics and business, political decisions, law-making, medical ethics. When it comes to important decisions, such as the anti-smacking law, very few people go to the Bible or to God for guidance and direction.

Sometimes people will ridicule Christians for their faith, but more often they will say; "That's fine for you, but it's not for me." The Christian faith has been privatised – it is for you and your family, but don't apply it to the issues of justice, medicine, business, or politics. We live in a very secular society.

**b. Relativism** follows on from this.

If *God* is ignored then *the Bible will also* be ignored. And if the Bible is ignored no one will consult the laws and commands of God. If you take away God's laws what are you left with?

Well, then, someone else must make up the rules and decide what is right or wrong.

That "someone" might be the government, or the majority of the people, or each individual person.

Whichever of these you pick the result is relativism. There is no fixed standard. The rules will always be changing, depending on who is in power, or what people believe or think at any particular time.

So in New Zealand today prostitution is a legal business activity, homosexuals and lesbians are permitted to live in civil unions, gambling is a multibillion dollar enterprise, 17,000 babies are murdered every year, but parents are not permitted to smack their own children!

This is what happens when a society abandons God's law as an absolute standard – we are left with relativism, double standards, mixed messages, and widespread confusion.

**c. Hedonism** is another feature of these evil days. This means that people live for their own pleasure.

The mottos of the hedonist are, "Let's eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!" or, "If it feels good, do it!"

Many in New Zealand, especially young people, live for themselves, for their own pleasure, for their own fulfilment. They might find that pleasure in sport, in entertainment, in computer games, in the Xbox, in parties, in sex, drugs, or alcohol.

d. We have looked at secularism, relativism, hedonism, and finally we consider **materialism**.

This is the view that happiness and contentment are to be found in material things – a house – or two, a car – or three, a holiday home, a launch, beautiful furniture, lavish overseas holidays, expensive meals out.

None of these things are wrong in themselves, but if this is all people live for then it is idolatry. They are worshipping material things rather than God. Sadly, this is true of many living in NZ today.

These are some of the features of these evil days in this country – our society is secular, there are no absolute standards, people pursue their own pleasure, and they live for the toys they can buy.

## **2. The Christian response**

### **a. "Be very careful, then, how you live..."**

Literally the Greek text reads; "Look carefully how you walk."

The days are evil so you need to pay close attention to where you are going. Don't walk around blindly; look out for the right direction. Watch your step, your life, and your behaviour.

Are you doing that?

Are you aware of what is going on around you?

Are you watching the trends in our society?

Are you paying attention to your own lifestyle?

Are you being careful how you live?

### **b. Our second response is that we must **make the most of every opportunity****

Literally this phrase reads; "Redeeming the time". It pictures a prudent businessman making wise purchases, buying up at the right time, looking for opportunities.

The NIV has captured the sense of this well with its translation; "Making the most of every opportunity."

The ESV reads; "making the best use of the time."

In one sense all of us have the same amount of time available to us: there are 60 minutes in every hour, 24 hours in a day, 365 days in a year.

But in another sense God has given each of us a specific allocation of time; we are here on this earth for a season; there is a particular period assigned to us. For some that is only short – a few months or years. Others die in their middle age, and still others live into their 80s and 90s.

We *don't know* how long we will live, but we *do know* that we must make *good use* of the time we have.

In Psalm 90 Moses prayed; "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."  
(Verse 12)

*Jesus did this.* He told his disciples; "As long as it is day we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4)

*Are you doing this?* Are you numbering your days aright so that you may gain a heart of wisdom?

Are you working while it is day, doing the work God the Father has given you to do?

It is easy to waste time. Somebody once advertised as follows:

"LOST, yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward offered, for they are gone forever."

Jonathan Edwards offered a contrast to this. He was a famous American pastor, theologian, and philosopher living in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In one of his *Resolutions*, just before his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, he wrote; "Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can."

Let's consider **three applications** about making the most of every opportunity.

*First of all, are you using your time well for your own spiritual growth and progress? Are you reading the Bible for yourself and praying? Are you guarding against that greatest of all time-wasters, the TV?*

In Philippians 4:8 Paul wrote; "Finally, brothers whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." Are you using your time to focus on these things?

Secondly, are you using your time well in *loving your neighbour*?

In Galatians 6:10 Paul wrote; "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

He wrote similar words to the Christians in Rome, reminding them to love their neighbour. He wrote; "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over, the day is almost here." (Rom 13:11-12) There is urgency in his words. The time is short! In the time you have are you looking for opportunities to show love to your neighbour?

Thirdly, are you using your time to work for *the church and kingdom of Christ*?

Are you seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness?

Are you seeking to be a salt and a light?

Are you praying for opportunities to speak to others about Jesus?

Are you aiming to glorify God in the use of your time?

When you come to the end of each day do you ask; "Have I made the best use of my time?"

How should we respond as Christians to these evil days in which we live?

Be careful how you live.

Make the most of every opportunity.

### **c. And finally, don't be foolish, but wise.**

Paul draws this contrast in both verses 15 & 17.

In verse 15 he urges us not to be "unwise", and in verse 17 he adds, "do not be foolish."

The man who is unwise is without sense. He doesn't know what is going on around him and does not know where he is going. The Christian is not to be like the unbeliever who lives in the darkness.

To be foolish is to be ignorant of God and his Word. The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Psalm 14:1)

Rather, be "wise" and "understand what the Lord's will is."

Paul had already alerted his readers to this. In verses 8-10 of this chapter he urged them to "live as children of light...and find out what pleases the Lord."

Biblical wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord and knowledge of the Holy One. (Proverbs 1:7)

Wisdom is to know God through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our wisdom from God.

And wisdom is this knowledge applied to life; wisdom is the skill of godly living; it is the truth applied to everyday situations.

*How can you be wise and understand what the Lord's will is?*

Read the Bible, especially the wisdom literature of the Scriptures – the book of Job, the wisdom psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the letter of James.

Read Christian books – have a look at the church library.

Turn off the TV at home and use the time to read and to think.

Turn off the radio in the car and use that time to meditate and to pray (with your eyes open!)

There is an ancient Greek statue made by Lysippos out of bronze. It is a statue of a man named "Kairos", which is the Greek word used here for time, or opportunity.

The man had wings on his feet so he could fly with the wind.

He had a forelock of hair to make it easy for someone grab hold of him as he came up.

But he was bald on the back of his head so that no one could grasp him after he had passed by.

The sculptor, Lysippos, has this statue in the porch of his house as a lesson.

These verses also have a lesson.

We live in evil days.

But Jesus said; As long as it is day we must do the work of him who sent me."

Are you doing the work of the Lord Jesus?

Are you being careful how you live?

Are you making the most of every opportunity?

Amen