

January 1, 2017 BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“THIS IS THE DAY!”

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Scripture: Philippians 3:13-14

I'm sure you've noticed that each year almost all the major news magazines put out an issue with special pictorial sections recalling people and events that made news during the previous year. Some even go as far as to make predictions for the coming year or years ahead.

So here we are, at the first Sunday of 2017. I wonder how we'll do this year? Will we be as busy? Will we make any better use of our time? In 365 days, when this year is over, will we be looking back with joy, or with regret? Will we be looking at the future with anticipation, or with dread?

There is a passage of Scripture that I believe can be of help to us as we look forward to the rest of 2017 if we'll listen to it. The passage is Ephesians 5:15-17, and here is what it says, *"Be very careful, then, how you live not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."* I think that in this passage the Apostle Paul presents some important lessons that we need to consider.

I. OUR TIME ON THIS EARTH IS LIMITED

First of all, we must be very careful how we live because our time on this earth is limited. The Psalmist wrote, *"Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life"* (39:4).

Now, I realize that for some of you younger folk, 70 or 80 years sounds like a long, long time. In fact, I can remember when I thought anyone over 40 was ancient. But no longer. It is all rather relative, isn't it?

The Psalmist also tells us to number our days so that we will develop a heart of wisdom.

A few years ago People Magazine published an article entitled "Dead Ahead" telling about a new clock that keeps track of how much time you have left to live. It calculates an average life span of 75 years for men and 80 years for women. So you program your sex and age into the clock, and from then on it will tell you how much time you have left. It sold for \$99.95.

I didn't buy one. But it is an intriguing idea. Isn't that what the Psalmist told us to do to number our days?

When I first heard about the clock I figured out that if I lived to be 75 years old that I had just about 2,345 days left to live. That's all, just 2,345 days left to live. But wait a minute. Neither you nor I have a guarantee of even one day more to live.

In fact the Bible tells us not to count on tomorrow because tomorrow may not come for you or for me. All we have is right now. So our time on this earth is valuable because it is very limited.

II. MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY

Secondly, Paul tells us that we must make *"the most of every opportunity."* And he gives a reason, *"because the days are evil."* Jesus said that Satan is a robber and a thief, and one of the things he tries to rob from us is our time because time is a very precious possession.

Just think of the time wasted in sinning. Think of the time wasted in bars or in gambling casinos or in shallow affairs. Think of the time wasted in gossiping or spreading rumors. Or think about all the time wasted worrying about the consequences of the sins we have committed. Satan is a thief and a robber!

But it is not just sin that makes demands on our time. Sometimes even good things can make demands.

Jesus went to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. He sat down to teach, and Mary was sitting at His feet just soaking in every word. Meanwhile, Martha was out in the kitchen preparing dinner.

Now, you know the story. It is found in Luke 10. Martha gets upset because Mary is not in the kitchen, too. So she complains to Jesus, *"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

"Martha, Martha," Jesus answered, *"You are worried & upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, & it will not be taken away from her."* [Luke 10:40-42].

Now was Martha committing a sin by fixing a meal in the kitchen? No, of course not! But here's the problem. She was so preoccupied with what she was doing that she didn't realize that God was in her living room.

That's the same mistake you and I make almost every day. We get so caught up in the here and now that we fail to deal with the eternal, the things that will last forever and ever.

We are just plain overloaded.

1. We're overloaded with commitments. We've committed ourselves to go here and there, to take part in this activity and that social function. As a result, we soon begin meeting ourselves coming and going because we have overloaded ourselves in the area of commitments.

2. We're also overloaded with possessions. Our closets are full, and our garages are overflowing. We've gone into debt to pay for all of these things that we "simply must have." And now we're so afraid that someone will steal them. We are overloaded in the area of possessions.

3. Thirdly, we have an overload in the area of work. We get up early, fight traffic, and experience intolerable working conditions because we have to if we're going to pay for all those possessions that we've accumulated.

4. There is also an information overload. A doctor friend of mine said that as a doctor she has to read 220 articles a month just to keep up with all the changes in her profession. And now with the internet there's an information superhighway. But the problem is that we can't possibly absorb it all. So we feel an overload in this area, too.

Well, I could go on and on, but you get the picture. There are so many demands on our time, so many good things that need to be done. But there are just 8,760 hours in this year, and we've already used over 8 (over 10) of them. We do want to make the most of every opportunity, so what are we to do?

III. UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LORD'S WILL IS

Well, to answer that, Paul tells us, "*...do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*" Now what do you think God's will is for you in this new year? Do you think He wants your mind so saturated with worries and anxieties that you can't think spiritual thoughts? Do you think He wants your calendar so crowded that you don't have time for the important things? What do you think God's will is for you this year?

Let me make a couple of suggestions for you to consider. First of all, establish your priorities.

1. I'm assuming that since you're in church this morning that you believe God should be a part of your life. But when you begin to establish priorities, you have to decide just where He stands in your life. So ask yourself, "Who or what is most important in my life?"

And I'm hoping that your answer will be, "My relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, is most important to me." If so, then put that at the top of your list of priorities, and say, "This will affect my decisions, my scheduling, my relationship with others, and my whole outlook on life." "Therefore, when Sunday rolls around neither rain nor shine nor football kickoffs will interfere with my being in church, because He comes first in my life. I'll worship the Lord and nothing will interfere with that."

2. You also need to schedule some definite time each day to pray and to read His Word. Pray for yourself and for your family and for people around you. Pray for the church, and for the missionaries. Sometimes they feel so alone and so far away. You'll never know how much your prayers will mean to them. But you'll be blessed as you grow in your faith and trust in the Lord!

3. You must also spend time with your family. Every person in a relationship here ought to have a date night with their partner. I'm serious. You ought to have a date night with your wife or your husband, a time when just the two of you get away and don't have anything else to interfere. No phones, no interruptions, and you can just talk. Maybe at a nice restaurant or maybe at home. Wherever it is, spend some time together.

Spend time with your children, too. They're growing up ever so fast. These are precious moments. Don't let them get away. Make sure that you spend quality time with your children. Make sure that your family is very high on the list.

So first of all, establish your priorities.

And then, learn how to live today. The two greatest enemies of time are regrets for things we did in the past, and anxiety about what will happen to us in the future. Many of us are living either in the past or in the future.

In fact, many of us are engaged in the little game of, "I wish it were." "I wish it were next week," or "I wish it were next month," or some such thing. Kids go to school and say, "Boy, I wish this day were over."

Someone said, "Life is what happens to you while you're making plans to do something else."

True, isn't it? Another year has come and gone. A new year stretches before us. Help us Lord, to redeem the time. So have a happy new year!

And during the New Year may you have:

enough happiness to keep you sweet - enough trials to keep you strong.
enough sorrow to keep you human - enough hope to keep you happy,
enough failure to keep you humble - enough success to keep you eager,
enough friends to give you comfort - enough wealth to meet your needs,
enough enthusiasm to make you look forward to tomorrow,
and enough determination to make each day better than the day before.

Lord, please help us to use the 8,760 hours of this year the wisest way we can for you, and for your glory.

Romans 13:11-12 says, *"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. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness & put on the armor of light."*