

New Years Day Service

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2013

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Hasn't the year flown by? It seems like yesterday that we were starting 2012. Where does the time go? Now, if you've said something along these lines in the last 24 hours or so, then you're possibly getting old, and you're certainly less than original. And if it's any comfort, most of us are in the same boat. In fact, all of us are getting older, and few of us are that original when it comes to small talk. And so, this kind of comment is often made by many of us, and often does reflect what we genuinely feel. Time seems to go so quickly. And time is, of course, a precious commodity. And we are perhaps particularly conscious of that as we see time passing. And though a precious commodity, it is a commodity that I think we can say all of us, some in greater measure than others, but all of us are prone to waste and often to fritter away.

We say we are short of time, and yet often the problem is how we use or misuse the time that we have. And the Bible has an interesting phrase that in the form found in the King James Version that many of us are familiar with has entered into everyday usage, the phrase redeeming the time. And that's a phrase that though maybe a little old-fashioned is one that you still hear from time to time, redeeming the time, the need to redeem the time. And I want us to think for a short time about this phrase originally coined by the Apostle Paul that we find in the passage that we've read in Colossians and chapter 4. And we'll read again the verses that we want to particularly focus our attention on this morning, which are verses 2 to 6. Colossians chapter 4, reading from verses 2 to 6. We read there, devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains. Pray that

I may proclaim it clearly as I should. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Now, the first problem, if problem it is, that we confront as we read these verses is that we don't find the phrase that I've just mentioned a moment ago, redeeming the time. The reason that we don't find it is that in this version of the Bible, the Greek phrase behind those words is translated in a different way. The phrase in question in the NIV is there in verse 5, make the most of every opportunity. So, in the older version, the phrase that Paul uses is translated, redeeming the time, and here in the version that we are reading differently, a different way of translating the same words, make the most of every opportunity. Well, what is it that Paul actually says that is translated in these two related but different ways? Well, in the Greek in which Paul wrote, the phrase is made up of two words that we're going to look at and think about very briefly as we enter into our consideration of these verses. The first word, the first Greek word that the phrase is made up of is the word *kairos*, time.

We'll come to think about that just very briefly in a moment. And the other word is a compound verb which can be literally rendered in English as buy back, buy back or redeem. Hence, the translation that we are familiar with, redeeming the word, redeeming the time, buying back the time. Well, let's think about these two words. First of all, the verb, to buy back or to redeem. Now, this is a word that is employed in the New Testament to describe something of great importance. It's used to describe what Jesus has done for us. He has bought us back. He has redeemed us. He has bought us out of slavery to sin and to death. We can refer to the words of Paul in his letter to the Galatians in chapter 4, verses 4 and 5. We read, Well, this is the word that Paul uses here when he speaks of redeeming the time, buying back the time.

The word that relates to us, the wonderful work that Jesus has done, the price that he paid to set us free. But the other word that makes up this phrase translated redeeming the time or making the most of every opportunity is the word kairos. Now, in Greek, there are a couple of words that mean time. One is kairos, and the other is chronos. Now, we don't need to be linguists to recognize the connections in the word chronos. In English, we have several words that incorporate that Greek word, a chronometer, chronological. And chronos generally has that limited meaning of time in relation to timekeeping.

[6 : 18] But kairos, the word that Paul uses here in our text, kairos is a different matter altogether. It is a word with a much richer and broader range of possibilities in terms of its meaning. Kairos can carry the idea of the opportune time, or the opportune moment, or the critical time. This is the word that is used by Jesus as he begins his ministry. In Mark chapter 1 and verse 15, we read the words of Jesus, the time has come. The kairos has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.

There you see how it's used in such a dramatic and significant way. The time has come. And of course, there within these simple words, you have the whole of the expectation, the messianic expectation, the prophecies that we find in the Old Testament. And Jesus is able to, in these simple words, and with this significant word, refer to all of that, the time has come. And he also, Jesus also uses this word as he nears the end of his earthly ministry. Indeed, as he approaches what is at the heart of his earthly ministry, as he approaches Calvary. In Matthew chapter 26 and verse 18, we read words of Jesus, Jesus, my appointed time is near. My kairos is near. My divinely appointed time to do that which I came to do has come. Kairos then as God's appointed time. And when you bring the two words together, these two words words that make up this phrase in the Greek, the verb to buy back and the word kairos, time, but in that very particular use of the word. When we bring them together, the effect is dramatic and exciting.

The idea that Paul is presenting in this phrase is the idea of buying the moment, of grasping the opportunity. Or if we paraphrase a little, we could say that what Paul is speaking of is of the need to discern the hand of God and act. God's appointed time is one that we must grasp as he presents it to us.

Paul is using this phrase and in doing so is stressing that what he is speaking about is of the utmost importance. It is a matter of urgency, of great moment. It concerns a God-given opportunity that must be grasped before it is too late to redeem the time, to make the most of every opportunity. Well, what is it that we need to grasp? What is it that Paul is speaking about? What is this opportunity that he is referring to? Well, as we read the words that surround what he says, it becomes very clear that the opportunity that Paul is referring to is the opportunity to share the good news concerning Jesus Christ. This is why we must redeem the time. That is why, or that is the opportunity that we must grasp that we would speak of Jesus. Now, why do I say that? We'd all be agreed that it's important to speak of Jesus, but what in our passage would allow us to say that that is particularly or specifically what Paul is speaking about or concerned with on this occasion as he concludes this letter? Well, there's a couple of reasons for us to come to that conclusion. First of all, we notice the reference to outsiders in the words that Paul is using in that same verse, in verse 5 of chapter 4, Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity.

So, it's very clear that what Paul has in mind as he urges the Colossians to make the most of every opportunity. What Paul has in mind are outsiders. They are those who he is particularly concerned with, those who are outside the family of faith, those who as yet have not come to put their trust in Jesus as their Savior. Paul is concerned for them. And when Paul says that we must grasp the opportunity, when we must redeem the time, it is in that connection, in connection with the duty and opportunity of telling outsiders about Jesus. So, that's one very clear evidence that this is Paul's concern. But we can also notice what he says in verse 3. It's all part of the same argument, if you wish, or the same portion of the letter. Because there we read in verse 3, and pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains. It's very clear that Paul's focus is on the need to make

[12:03] Christ known to those who have never heard. Hence the need for a door to be opened. So, this is his concern very clearly. This is the matter that he is dealing with when he speaks these words, redeem the time, make the most of every opportunity. Just as a passing comment in connection with Paul's request that the Colossians would pray for him, that a door of opportunity would be open for the message, a passing comment, but I think a challenging one, is to notice that though Paul writes this letter from prison, he is imprisoned. He makes reference to that in the greetings that follow. Though he is imprisoned, he doesn't ask the Colossians to pray that the door of his cell would be opened, which you might think would be a reasonable thing to ask. No, what he asks of the believers in Colossae is that they would pray that the door of his captors' hearts would be opened, and that he might speak to them of Jesus.

So, it is clear that the concern of Paul when he urges the Colossians and he urges us to redeem the time, to make the most of every opportunity, his concern is that we would speak of Jesus to those who are not yet believers. This is the great opportunity. This is the task of God's appointment. This is the mission to be performed, to speak of Jesus, to proclaim the mystery of Christ, to walk through the doors that God is opening. Well, that's all very well, and maybe in some measure heart-stirring, but I think we'd all be willing to recognize that this is not an easy task. We don't find it an easy thing to do, to tell others about Jesus. I think most of us as Christians would be persuaded that it's an important thing to do, that it's something that we ought to do, maybe even something that we would want to do, but I think most of us would also recognize that it is something we find difficult to do.

What are the opportunities that we are to grasp? Too often they appear to be few and far between. As you think of the year that has passed, this year 2012, how many opportunities did you have in this year that is gone? It's gone now. But how many opportunities did you have to speak of Jesus to outsiders? Or how many did you realize that you had? Because that could be a very different number, those that you had and those that you realized that you had. And perhaps an even smaller number would be those that you actually grasped. Maybe you had many opportunities, many of which you didn't even realize were there. Perhaps there was a smaller number that you realized, and all of those may be a smaller number that you actually grasped. I don't know. I don't know your circumstances. It's for you to consider that question. But what about the year that lies ahead? The year that is gone is gone, and let's leave it in the past. But what about the year that begins? Is proclaiming the mysteries of

Christ something that you want to do? Well, let's listen briefly to advice that Paul gives us in this very passage. We find in these verses, verses 2-6 of Colossians 4, three things that we must do that will prepare the way for the opportunities of God's appointing to present themselves, to be recognized, and to be grasped. Three things. The first thing that you need to do is to pray seriously. Notice in verse 2, devote yourselves to prayer, be watchful and thankful. Paul begins this section where he is dealing with grasping opportunities or shading the good news with a call to what we're calling serious prayer. Why do I say serious prayer? Well, for two reasons. Firstly, prayer, we are told by Paul, is something that we are to devote ourselves to. Notice the language there in verse 2, devote yourselves to prayer, devote yourselves to prayer. And the Word carries with it the implication of habitual and persevering prayer. Indeed, in the greetings that follow, we have an example of a man who was devoted to prayer. Let's just notice what is said of Epaphras in verse 12 of our chapter.

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. And then notice how Paul describes this man, Epaphras, and particularly the manner in which he prayed. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. I just pose the question that in verse 13 where Paul testifies concerning Epaphras that he is working hard for you. What was this work that Epaphras was doing? Presumably, it is what Paul has just said in the previous verse, wrestling in prayer for you. This was the work that Epaphras devoted himself to. No doubt he did other things. But as a servant of God, as a Christian, he devoted himself to prayer. And so I say in this matter, if we are to be those who recognize and who grasp opportunities to tell others of Jesus, this is necessary as that which will prepare the way for that, that we pray seriously.

[18:20] Notice also that Paul speaks of the importance that we pray being watchful. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. I don't know exactly what Paul means. There's a couple of possibilities when he says to the Christians in Colossae to be watchful. The language, perhaps, has an eschatological flavor that makes me wonder if Paul is not reminding us that the return of Christ is imminent, and hence, the urgency of proclaiming the good news. Christ is coming soon. The matter is an urgent one. We can't dilly-dally, be watchful and grasp the opportunities. Well, it's possible. But I wonder if the call to watchful prayer is not rather a call to pray, we could put it this way, with our eyes open. Watchful prayer. To pray as we read the signs of the times, as we read the sad stories being written by our society and generation. As we walk the streets and feel the pain and hear the cries of despair, we are to pray, being watchful, not hidden away, untouched and insensitive to the world around us, but as we see and feel the pain and all that is going on. So, in that manner, we are to devote ourselves to a prayer.

Effective evangelism, effective outreach begins with persevering, watchful, and heartfelt prayer.

I think that's the first lesson, clear lesson that Paul gives us here in this matter. But there's a second thing that we must do. Not only are we to pray seriously, we are also to walk wisely.

Notice in verse 5 what is said by Paul, be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Now, the word translated act there in verse 5 literally means to walk, hence this second lesson, to walk wisely.

We are, Paul makes it clear, we are to behave in such a way that we will have a positive impact on those who are, to use Paul's language, outside. Note that Paul mentions walking first, before he speaks of grasping opportunities. A consistent, attractive, winsome, wise walking is that which will open the door of opportunity. And so, the question for us as believers this morning, the question for us is how are we walking? We're reminded of the words that we find in John's first letter and in chapter 2 and verse 6, whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. We are to walk wisely as we walk wisely, as we act wisely and graciously. So, the opportunities to speak to others, will present themselves. It's also worth noting that Paul simply takes as a given, he doesn't need to urge the believers in this regard, he simply takes it as a given that believers will be involved in society. They will be involved with outsiders. They will mix with and relate to those who are outside.

[22 : 05] Because evidently, if we're not doing that, then they won't see the manner in which we walk, and it will have, obviously, little or no impact. So, we are to pray seriously, we are to walk wisely, but finally, we are to speak gracefully. Verse 6, what do we read there?

"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." Now, there is debate as to whether Paul here, when he urges the Christians to speak and to have a conversation that is always full of grace, there's debate as to whether he is simply encouraging us to speak in a pleasant and gracious manner in our everyday conversation, or whether Paul is explicitly referring to what we call witnessing, to speaking to other people explicitly and deliberately and consciously about Jesus. Let your conversation be always full of grace. You might say, let it be full of the gospel of grace, the good news concerning Jesus. And it may be that Paul has in mind that those occasions when we are speaking, that they would be occasions when we speak of Jesus. But I think it is more likely that what Paul is saying is that in all our conversation, the manner in which we converse, the manner in which we speak, ought always to be gracious, regardless of the subject matter.

We're not only going to speak graciously when we're speaking about Jesus, but whatever the conversation, however seemingly trivial or insignificant or mundane, we are to be those whose conversation is always full of grace. You see, gracious conversation combined with a wise walk will draw the outsider to us in confidence and friendship, where the opportunity to witness, to use that word, will present itself in a natural and spontaneous manner. So, if you, in this year that has begun, if you resolve to pray seriously and with God's help to walk wisely, and also with God's help, in all of these things we need God's help, also to speak graciously, what will happen? What will happen if you do these things? What will happen if you follow the clear and very practical guidance and direction of the Apostle Paul? What will happen? Well, what will happen is that people will come to you.

Questions will be asked. The opportunities will present themselves. And what are we to do with such opportunities? Well, here we have our text. We are to grasp them. We are to make the most of every opportunity. We are to redeem the time. We are not to let them slip through our fingers, because such opportunities are of divine appointment. And when questions are asked, what will you say? What answer will you give? There in verse 6, Paul refers to the answer that we are to give, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Well, what is the answer that we are going to give? Well, the answer that we will give will, not surprisingly, depend on the question that is asked. But whatever the question is, and however it is posed, and while we will seek, because this is the right and the proper thing to do, we will seek to take seriously the question and answer the question, whatever it is, we will also endeavor in so endeavoring to bring the message of Jesus, that at the heart of our message will be Jesus, the mystery of Christ, the good news that has been revealed concerning who Jesus is and what He has done. We are prone to lament, and I think with good reason, the spiritual climate that prevails in Scotland today, it is not unusual for us to speak of that, to say, oh, isn't it a terrible day that we live in, the things that are happening, and what is going on in Parliament, and the way folk don't go to church, and they don't seem to have any interest in the gospel, and that is a cause of sadness and indeed of lament. And that is not wrong for us to lament that that is our reality. But I think that while there may be some place for lamenting, I think rather than despair, we should view this reality with hope and with expectation. You see, what is happening is that in our society there is an ever clearer or clearly visible vacuum, a gaping hole in our city that only the gospel can fill, a longing for meaning and belonging that only Jesus and His church can satisfy. The toys that material prosperity have showered upon us no longer shine as they once did, at least for many. The liberty to do as you please and believe what you want that once seemed so exhilarating has proved for many to be like a fruit that was pleasing to the eye and maybe even sweet to the palate, but in the end leaves you feeling hungry and empty. And so this provides Christians, followers of Jesus, those of us who have been commended with this great and precious resource, the gospel of Jesus Christ, a tremendous opportunity that ought to fill us with great hope and expectation. We have something that our city needs. We have that which our country needs. Now, many may not recognize that that is what they need. Many may scoff at the very thought that that is what they need.

But if we are persuaded that that is what they need, then this is not a day for lamenting. This is not a day for being disheartened, but this is a day to approach the year that has begun with hope and expectation.

[28 : 43] So, the question really for us individually and also corporately as a congregation is, are we up for it? The opportunity is there. It is there to be grasped. Well, let us pray seriously. Let us walk wisely.

And let us speak graciously. And let us grasp every opportunity. Let us pray.