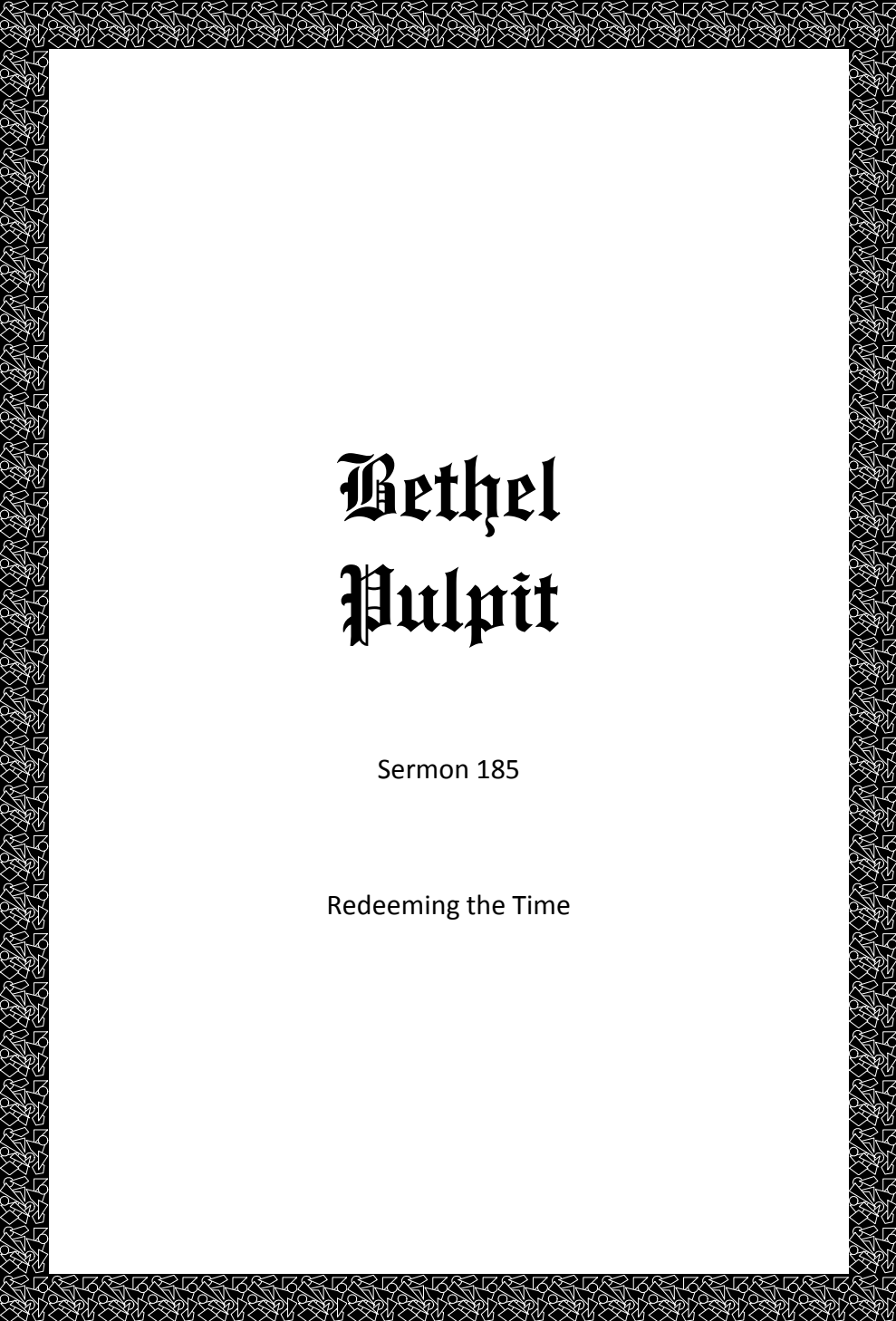




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 185

Redeeming the Time

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 10th January, 1999**

Text: “*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5. 16).

Many of us notice just how quickly the new year seems to be speeding away. How many people we have heard mention it that already we have reached the tenth day of the month, of the new year. It only seems like yesterday when December began, and now the new year is speeding away. And the Lord gives us, right at the beginning of the year, this solemn warning this solemn counsel, this solemn exhortation to redeem the time, for the days are evil.

By this expression, *redeem the time*, I understand we are to count time to be something which is precious. We are commanded not to waste it. We are commanded to use it profitably. We are commanded to spend it rightly. “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” The world is not redeeming the time. The nation is not redeeming the time. The professing church is not redeeming the time. But we are called to be different, to redeem the time, because the days are evil. To put this in its context, “See then that ye walk circumspectly” (verse 15). *Circumspectly*. That is, according to God's will, to the honour and glory of His name. “Not as fools, but as wise.” It is foolish to waste time. You can never fully make it up, never really regain it. The loss of time is worse than the loss of money. But the wisdom of redeeming the time, being made wise unto salvation.

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Well, this is a solemn word, a word of warning, a word of counsel from the Lord to us. We are to redeem the time, for the days are evil. Beloved friends, each one of us here this evening, whether old or young, have only one life. We shall never have another. We have one life on earth to live, and the point is, what are we doing with that life? What does it mean to us? Are we living as if tomorrow will be as today? Are we living as if God will not do good, neither will He do evil? Are we drifting along? Are we taking things for granted? We have only one life to live, that is, here on earth. Of course, we have one life to live to all eternity. I am not thinking of the life of the redeemed for ever in heaven with the people of God. I am thinking of our little life on earth. If you and I are made wise, if through grace we are brought to redeem the time, it will be this:

“The chief concern of fall’n mankind
Should be to enjoy God’s favour;
What safety can a sinner find
Before he finds a Saviour?”

Now in a word, that is what it is to redeem the time. One little life that will soon be over. At the end of it we shall either be saved or we shall be lost. To redeem the time, as under the sacred influence of the Spirit of God, in real repentance for sin and godly separation from the world and holy earnestness of soul to seek after Christ and His great salvation until we have it. Like the man with the pearl of great price: he was seeking goodly pearls, he had many pearls, but there was one that really mattered. “If Christ and heaven be mine,” we sang at the beginning of this service, “How sweet the accents, how divine!” O to possess the forgiveness of sins, to possess an interest in the Saviour’s blood, to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, to be made ready for heaven, and then at last to spend a long eternity in singing, “God is love.” That is what it is to redeem the time, if brought by the Holy Spirit of God to seek the blessings of salvation before anything else here below. How many of us here, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit of God, have been brought to redeem the time?

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Then following on from that, this word is addressed to the Lord’s people, to those who know the blessings of salvation. They are under this command to walk as those that are wise, not as fools, and to prove it by redeeming the time, counting it precious, using it honourably, using it profitably, using it to the honour and glory of God. The Apostle Paul, who wrote these words, is perhaps the most blessed example in all Scripture of a man who redeemed the time, for the days are evil. There was no mis-spent time, no wasted time with Paul. You read through the Acts of the Apostles, the way he went, all he did, what he accomplished, how he suffered, and there you see a living sermon on this word, what it is to redeem the time.

Of course, the greatest example of all is the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If you consider the Lord Jesus in His sacred humanity, there was no man who ever accomplished so much. You read through the gospels. Take a gospel like Mark, which is full of action. If you read it through thoughtfully and carefully, you will be amazed how much the Lord Jesus did, even as the Man Christ Jesus, in one single day.

“Redeeming the time.” Let us be clear, all God’s people under the teaching of the Spirit will be brought to redeem the time; but not all God’s people redeem the time at every period of their life. Now I have been thinking about David. There were times in the life of David when he did not redeem the time. There were many, many times when he most blessedly did – no man more so – when he wrote the beautiful Psalms and the gracious way he acted. He behaved himself wisely, we read, before Saul. That was redeeming the time. But when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, he was not redeeming the time then; and he was not redeeming the time before that, because that sin did not come upon him suddenly. He got in a lazy, slack sort of way. The children of Israel were going into battle and David was lounging about on his roof. He got into a lazy, backsliding condition. When he deceived the priests of God, when he fled to the Philistines and lived in the land of the Philistines, when he feigned himself to be mad, then when he fled again to the Philistines and pretended he was an enemy of God’s people. You say, “Is this David, the man after God’s own heart?” He was not redeeming the time. Yet when under the sacred influence of God, he did redeem the time.

We are called to redeem the time. It is a solemn word and it is a solemn call. It is a call to those in nature’s darkness, sin and death to examine their own hearts, to consider their latter end, to consider the need to flee for refuge to Jesus. And for all God’s people, it is to command them the way they should live, the way they should behave: redeeming the time, setting this gracious example.

“Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Well, let me try to mention a few things which are “redeeming the time.” *Reading God’s holy, sacred Word*, that is redeeming the time, reading it prayerfully, seeking that it might be profitable. I do not think the Lord’s people spend as much time with the Scriptures as they used to do years ago. “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.” When we come to our end, we shall perhaps be grieved about a lot of mis-spent time. I do not think we will be grieved about time spent reading the holy Scriptures. “Redeeming the time.” Some people say you should not make new year’s resolutions. Well, I find in the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm David made a lot of resolutions! Whether they were new year resolutions or not, we have to leave; probably they were not. But he made a lot of resolutions. The point is, we should not make resolutions in our

own strength. But David made a lot of resolutions and almost every one of them was concerning the Word of God, that he would read it and love it and meditate in it. I think it would be a good thing if we were helped more in this new year to redeem the time in reading God's holy Word.

Now another thing is this: *attendance at the services of the house of God*. That is redeeming the time. The world cannot understand it. I know one little chapel in the Midlands with nice neighbours but ungodly people, who say, "We cannot understand why you keep going to that little chapel in the week. Surely you could be doing something more constructive, making something, going to night school, doing some work in your garden." "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Time spent in the house of God is not mis-spent time, not wasted time. But I would just say this: seek that your time in the house of God might be spent profitably, that you might be a true worshipper, that you might be a true seeker, that you might be a true finder, that the Word might be made of real profit to you.

"Redeeming the time." And another thing, of course, is *prayer, secret prayer*. It is redeeming the time, holding communion with your Maker, conscious of your sins, seeking His help, making your wants and wishes known. There used to be a saying, "Praying breath was never spent in vain." And there used to be another saying, when people said, "O but life is so hectic now!" – there used to be a saying that if we are too busy to pray, we are too busy. Again, may there be that resolve, in dependence on the Lord, to spend more time in secret. Not legally, not carnally – legal resolutions, carnal resolutions will do no good. O but that time spent in prayer, and not just for yourself: for the church of God, intercessory prayer for those in trouble, for those in sorrow, for those in need.

"Redeeming the time." But of course there is another aspect of prayer. How can I put it concerning redeeming the time? There will be some times in a day when you have things to do. You wonder how you can manage them, they are so hard, so difficult. They are like mountains. You wonder how you can have the time to get through them. Sometimes, as the old preachers, the old divines used to say, it is like Pharaoh's chariot wheels, they *drave heavily*. You know that. You have something, and there is a lot to do, and it must be done, but you do not seem to be getting anywhere. Pharaoh's chariot wheels *drave heavily*. Have you ever known the experience of oiling those chariot wheels with prayer, with the

difference when those wheels begin to go so smoothly and so easily? You know the difference, don't you? The wise man in Ecclesiastes speaks about the husbandman whetting his scythe, sharpening his scythe, before the harvest. I think it was Matthew Henry who said, speaking of those days when they used to reap the harvest fields with a scythe, the man who spent a few minutes each morning sharpening his scythe was not wasting his time. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." May we spend more time at the beginning of the day sharpening our scythe. It may just be the upward glancing of the eye, not trying to do things in our own strength.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." But beloved friends, I do not want you to think of this redeeming the time as just sitting reading the Bible, just sitting in prayer, just attending services. Each of us has a life we have to live, and there is redeeming the time in *your daily occupation*. In Puritan times, the expression was not of a person getting a job, or what work he did. It was this: what was his *calling*? If you read the old Puritan divines, or just people speaking generally in Puritan England, they would say, "That man by *calling* was a farmer. That man by *calling* was a shoemaker." It is a point that is often forgotten: redeeming the time in your daily work, your daily occupation, whatever it is. If only you can see what you are doing as your calling. We talk about a minister. He is called, and he must redeem the time. He must not waste his time. He must use it profitably. But every sinner saved by grace is equally in a calling. Seek that you might be in that calling that the Lord appoints. Seek that it might be something useful. Seek that you might live useful lives. And if what you are doing, you cannot regard it as a calling from the Lord, may you seek something different.

The Word of God speaks of the necessity of labouring for the bread that perisheth, but may it be a calling. People often think of work like a nurse as being more of a calling, but with a child of God, whatever he does, it should be regarded as a calling. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord." You may feel it is not a very high calling. The point is, is it the calling that God has appointed for you? Didn't John Newton on one occasion say that if God sent two angels from heaven to earth, and He appointed one to rule over a kingdom and the other one to sweep the streets, they would not be jealous? There would not be any argument between them which should do which. They would be perfectly happy doing that to which the Lord had called them. Seek that it might be your

calling. I think of the story of the poor old Strict Baptist roadsweeper down in the West Country years ago who was summoned to appear at County Hall, and he was so nervous and afraid. He thought they were going to dismiss him. When he got there, he was ushered before these important dignitaries. They said, "We have called you here to tell you the piece of road you look after is the best-kept piece of road in the whole of the county." That is redeeming the time. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." The Sabbath school teacher redeems the time. That one who goes to visit the sick, lovingly to lend that helping hand, redeems the time. A mother caring for little children and often with so many trials and problems and difficulties, she is redeeming the time. It is not just preaching and praying and reading the Bible: it is the whole life of a believer which should be redeeming the time.

And I would counsel you against *not* redeeming the time, spending your time idly. They used to sing, and every child in England used to learn it, "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." But do seek to be a help and seek to be useful. We read elsewhere of those in the Epistle to the Ephesians, of those in the church of God, who were *helps*. Do not be a hindrance, but seek grace to be a help. And avoid all those things which are wasting time. Watching a television set is not redeeming the time. Apart from all the vileness and evil and God-dishonouring things, it is one of Satan's great masterpieces as being a time-waster. Beloved friends, we are called to redeem the time for the days are evil.

But as you see this word set here before us in Scripture, the great point of it all seems to be this: *living a humble, godly life*, walking worthy of your high calling, living to the praise and honour and glory of God, and so, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Things like this: "I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (chapter 4. 1). That is redeeming the time, walking worthy. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," in the church (verse 3). That is redeeming the time. You and I can never create the unity of the Spirit, but we can spoil the unity of the Spirit and we are commanded to keep it, and we are commanded to *endeavour*, and that is a strong word: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit." This is redeeming the time: "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down

upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour” (verses 26, 27, 28). This is redeeming the time: “Working with his hands.” This is redeeming the time: “The thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” Wasn’t it the old, seventeenth century poet, George Herbert, who in one of his hymns says, “Who sweeps a room as by Thy laws makes that and the action fine”? You can sweep a room to the honour and glory of God. “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (verse 30). This is redeeming the time: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (verse 31). This is redeeming the time: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (verse 32). These things are redeeming the time. It is this walking worthy, this walking in obedience to the Lord. “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (chapter 5. 1). Some follow a man. Some follow fashion. Some follow the world. “Be ye followers of God.” That is redeeming the time. “Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (verse 2). That is redeeming the time. And then he gives this catalogue of awful things. You have to avoid fornication, all uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting. That is not redeeming the time; that is dishonouring the Lord. “No whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (verse 5). That is not redeeming the time. O but this walking worthy! “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.... Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (verses 8, 11). That is avoiding things when you do not redeem the time.

Of course as you all probably realise, Paul repeats this expression in Colossians 4. He has been saying, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ.... Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” So redeeming the time is walking in wisdom, not just before your family and before the people of God, but before the world, those who watch, those who are outside. Now let us be clear, although the world never will like the truth, the world does not understand the doctrine of predestination, the world does not read the Epistle to the Romans, yet the world does understand the godly, gracious, consistent life of a child of God who seeks to redeem the

time. “Walk in *wisdom* toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” And he goes on, “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

So you see, beloved friends, this is something that comes close, and in one sense it is very practical, in another sense it is exceedingly spiritual, and it is a word which is very needful for us at the beginning of a new year. How are we going to spend this year if spared? What are we going to do? How are we going to walk it out? Well, the Lord has made it clear we are to redeem the time. We are not to waste it. We have to use it profitably. We have to use it to the honour and glory of God. There will be the things of the church, the things of the house of God. There will be all the lawful things, all the daily things, all the natural things. But whatever these things, we are to seek to redeem the time for the days are evil. And the great thing that shines through it all is this: walking worthy of your high calling, honouring Christ in all you do. That is redeeming the time. The Lord will teach you, the Lord will show you, how to redeem the time.

Now coming toward the close, there are two vital principles and one is this: *to seek to know and do the will of God*. The old Church of England prayer book used to say, “Give us grace to know Thy will and strength to do it.” Now we do not have the prayer book, but we like the prayer. “Give us grace to know Thy will and strength to do it.” So immediately after this expression here, Paul says, “Wherefore be ye not unwise” (verse 17). He has said it once, he says it again, continuing this point of wisdom and foolishness. In other words, it is foolishness to waste your time. It is not only sinful and wicked, but it is foolishness. We have not any time to lose, no time to waste. So again he repeats it: “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” That is redeeming the time. That is the first vital principle: “understanding what the will of the Lord is.” The will of the Lord as revealed in Scripture, concerning the life of His people, and the will of the Lord made known to you personally by His Spirit as you wait upon Him in prayer. How are you going to spend your life? What are you going to do? What about your choices? What about your decisions? What about being led? “Understanding what the will of the Lord is.” And when you understand what the will of the Lord is, “redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

That is one vital principle here, and the second vital principle here is this: *to walk as sweetly constrained by the love of Christ*. We have this word *walk* which keeps coming in, and it means the whole of the behaviour of the child of God. How has he to walk? How has he to behave? Well, under the influence of grace, under the sweet constrainings of the love of Christ, with his heart made soft and tender, with a desire to live to the Lord's honour and glory, seeking the welfare of His people, seeking that the Lord's name should be glorified.

Beloved friends, as a congregation and church, as pastor and people, and in the things of the house of God, and in all our daily concerns, in our homes and families and businesses and relationships, may we together seek grace to redeem the time for the days are evil. May we be among those who redeem the time. May we see this across it all, that desire to walk worthy of our high calling. May there be these two vital principles, to understand what the will of the Lord is. If we are not doing the will of the Lord, we are wasting our time. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." "Understanding what the will of the Lord is." And then the other principle, the second principle, walking in love, walking as constrained by the love of Christ in obedience to Him. That is redeeming the time. And really, it comes to this:

"O may my single aim be now
To live to Him that died;
And nought on earth desire to know,
But Jesus crucified."

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."