

Sermon Draft

Text: Ephesians 5:6-21

Sermon: Walk in the Light

"Both the hummingbird and the vulture fly over our nation's deserts. All vultures see is rotting meat, because that is what they look for. They thrive on that diet. But hummingbirds ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead, they look for the colorful blossoms of desert plants. The vultures live on what was. They live on the past. They fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But hummingbirds live on what is. They seek new life. They fill themselves with freshness and life. Each bird finds what it is looking for. We all do." (Steve Goodier)

That is the essence of Paul's teaching: In life, there are two birds. The one bird looks for foolishness and stupidity, the other looks for wisdom. The vultures seek to fill themselves with the rotting flesh of drunkenness and debauchery, the hummingbird sobriety, freshness, and the Spirit. In the desert of this world we have our scavengers who are angry and ungrateful, but we also have those who hum a grateful hymn of thanksgiving. The irony is that we find what we are looking for.

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians Paul outlines proper behavior for good living. In our short passage he admonishes his readers to be careful how they live. He is brief and to the point. Three things we must do: Be wise, be sober, and be thankful. It's a short list but if we can orient our daily lives around these three—be wise, be sober, be thankful—we will transform not only our lives but also the lives of our family, friends, church, and neighbors. Paul then offers three admonitions.

The first? Be wise. Paul says, be careful how you live not as unwise but wise, making the most of every opportunity. Wisdom. It is a virtue that has gone out of our vocabulary. Wisdom, to acquire it, takes too much time, too many failures, too many hard knocks, too much listening, too much being still and watching. We cannot download wisdom from some third-party vender, so we prefer to move and do without. But Paul warns that if we are careless we will miss opportunities. Every day we are bomb barded with choices and wisdom is required to make the most of them.

In the early 1900's automaker Henry Ford asked electrical genius Charlie Steinmetz to build the generators for his factory. One day the generators ground to a halt, and repairmen couldn't find the problem. So Ford called Steinmetz, who tinkered with the machines for a few hours and then threw the switch. The generators whirred to life. Later that week Ford got a bill for \$10,000 from Steinmetz. Flabbergasted, the rather tightfisted carmaker inquired why the bill was so high. Steinmetz's replied: For tinkering with the generators, \$10. For knowing where to tinker, \$9,990. Ford paid the bill.

Steinmetz had what the repairmen lacked—an understanding of how the machines were put together. They had knowledge; he had wisdom. They knew how to repair generators; he knew how to build them. It takes time, and failures, and disappointments to learn how to build something but there are always greater opportunities in being the author.

As it is in life, so it is with God. We must be wise and make the most of every opportunity. Why? Paul tells us why and it may sound a little archaic and out of touch. He says we must make the most of each opportunity because the days are evil. Evil.

That sounds a bit heavy handed doesn't it? Most people spend their days getting children to school, working at jobs, preparing meals for the family, and doing chores. What could possibly be evil in that? Indeed, on the surface the world usually seems quite pleasant. But let me ask. What is your attitude while doing these things?

Paul gives us a long list in chapters four and five of do's and don'ts for Christian living. In fact, he insists we follow these admonitions. Here is an abbreviated version: Put off your old self. Put off falsehood. Do not let the sun go down in your anger. He who is stealing must steal no longer. No unwholesome talk. Get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. There should be no hint of sexual immorality, impurity, or greed. No obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse jesting.

Now, I know that many churches no longer talk about sin. They don't want to make anyone uncomfortable. But I'm talking about sin! This is evil behavior in the site of God and it has no place in his Kingdom. Listen to Paul's rather harsh words: You can be sure of this: no immoral, impure, or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of God.

But Paul also talked about holiness, living a God pleasing life. In these same two chapters he insisted that the Ephesians: Speak truthfully to your neighbor. Share with those who are in need. Do something useful with your own hands. Build others up. Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. Be imitators of God.

Do you know what wisdom is? It is not the accumulation of facts or even experience; this is simply growing in knowledge. Listen to Webster's definition: "Wisdom is the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting."

Paul is right then when he tells the Ephesians do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is. Wisdom discerns between what is right and what is wrong. Wisdom insists there is good and there is evil. The wise are careful. They make the most of every opportunity. They understand there is evil in the world. And they seek the will of God. That is wisdom.

Second, Paul says, "be careful how you live...Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery, instead, be filled with the Spirit." Wisdom and sobriety go hand in hand. A drunk will find it difficult to grow in knowledge and wisdom, but the sober take advantage of each day's opportunities. The sober mind is an alert mind. Fill a people with alcohol and you will fill the world with fools. Fill a people with the Spirit and you will fill the world with sages.

Paul asks a man who desires to be wise, which spirit will you allow to control your life?" Both promise life but only one will fill you with it. But it's not the use of alcohol that is the problem it's the miss use or over use of it that leads us into sinful behavior.

The Bible is not against drinking alcohol. A little alcohol is not a harmful thing; it is people who do harm with it. You fill your life with it; you will drown in its power. But if you fill your life with the Spirit you will have life and have it in abundance. So, then we must be careful how we live. First, be wise. Second, be sober.

Thirdly, Paul says, “be careful how you live...sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let’s see. We are to be wise seeking the most of every opportunity. We are to be sober otherwise we will miss many opportunities. And wherever we are, whether making or missing those opportunities, we are to be thankful.

As Paul says elsewhere, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, therein we should be content. It’s like the story of the man who goes to his rabbi and complains, "Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?"

The rabbi answers, "Take your goat into the room with you." The man is incredulous, but the rabbi insists. "Do as I say and come back in a week." A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before. "We cannot stand it," he tells the rabbi. "The goat is filthy." The rabbi then tells him, "Go home and let the goat out. And come back in a week." A radiant man returns to the rabbi a week later, exclaiming, "Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there's no goat -- only the nine of us."

It's all a matter of perspective isn't it? We can be grateful, or we can be bitter. We can seek wisdom, or we can live as fools. We can be sober learning what the Lord's will is, or we can fill ourselves with wine. What are you looking for in life? Whatever it is I am sure you will find it.

Two birds that fly over our nation's deserts: One is the hummingbird and the other is the vulture. The vultures roam the desert and they find the rotting meat because that is what they look for. But hummingbirds ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals.

They look for the colorful blossoms of desert plants. The vultures live on what was. They live on the past. They fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But hummingbirds live on what is. They seek new life. They fill themselves with freshness and life.

Amen