

Time John 9:4, Eph 5:15-17

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We're starting a three week series on Stewardship.
The idea of stewardship comes from the managers in Jesus' parables.
Managers tasked with stewarding the resources their master gave them.
Those parables are pictures of the Christian life.
We are stewards of the resources that God has given us.
It's our job to use them wisely to build his kingdom.

We're going to break the resources down into three categories.
If you've been part of the church for some years,
you will have most likely heard this before.
It's common, perhaps even a cliché.
We're going to think in turn about our time, talents and treasure.
So today we are going to think about our time.

Now I have to say,
it was a bit of a struggle to come up with Bible passages to preach on.
There is in fact surprisingly little in the Bible
about how Christians should use their time.
Well at least there is plenty
about making sure you dedicate time to worshipping God.
That's what the Sabbath was about in the Old Testament.
And Christians too are told not to neglect meeting together.
That's Hebrews 10:25.
But in terms of how we are to use our time,
the instruction is very sparse.

Why then has stewardship traditionally been broken
into time, talents and treasure?
Perhaps it might be true,
that what we've traditionally done,
is to work back from what the church wants,
and find ways of preaching that.

There's no doubt the church functions
on the basis of the generosity of its members
regarding time, talents and treasure.
Unless we all are generous in those three departments,
then we just couldn't do what we do.
And there's no question that in the next two Sundays,
the Bible speaks strongly about our talents and our treasure.
But about time, it was a bit of a struggle to find a passage.
So what I've done is to choose two.
But I'm going to be honest
about teaching what I think they are actually saying,
rather than stretching them to say what we might like them to say.

But first it's probably worth thinking for a minute
about why we can't find what we might want to find
in Scripture about time.
Did you realise we live in a time obsessed culture?
My friends who graduated from uni as lawyers
had to mark down every seven minutes of the day
what they have done with their time.
Every seven minutes has to be accounted for,
so the company can know which customer to bill for it.
Time management courses are very popular.
People are prepared to pay big money
to be taught how to squeeze the last bit of value
out of their precious allotment of minutes and hours.
Once upon a time,
it was believed that the wonders of modern technology
would mean the folks would need to work less than they did before.
So we brought in things like the 40 hour week.
We still have a public holiday, Labour Day, to celebrate.
But it must be a pretty hollow celebration for most people.
Many people today are working longer than they ever have,
and the availability of mobile phones and social media
means there can be an expectation that they will respond immediately

at all hours of the day or night.

But apart from making people stressed.

Apart from an epidemic of burnout.

Apart from a steady stream of people choosing to go 'off the grid' and live a more 'balanced life'.

It's not at all clear that we have achieved much by all this extra work.

Jesus didn't come from a time obsessed culture.

They didn't have watches.

They didn't have electric lights

which are one of the main things that enable people to work at night.

And if you talk to Africans or Pacific Islanders today,

you get a similar picture of people

who are relaxed about material possessions

and this enables them to be relaxed about their schedules,

and more committed to their relationships with other people and God.

And they don't seem any worse off for it.

So with the bit of social commentary to get us started,

let's turn to our passages.

The first is John 9:4.

Jesus says,

"As long as it is day,

we must do the work of him who sent me.

Night is coming when no one can work."

Taken at face value,

you might read this to mean,

'We have to work really hard in the day time doing God's work,

because you can't work in the night time'.

Work hard all day.

Don't stop or take a break.

But what is Jesus actually talking about?

Well in the next verse he describes himself as the light of the world.

So when he says 'as long as it is day',

he actually means 'as long as I am with you'.
It's day because the light of the world is there with them.
Night comes when he is taken away.
And we can see that in the lives of the disciples.
When Jesus was crucified,
they were completely paralysed.
They locked themselves in the upper room
and they couldn't do anything.
So how does it apply to us?
Well because of the coming of the Holy Spirit,
Jesus is with us.
In some sense, it is day.
And as long as it is day,
we must do the work of him who sent the Lord Jesus.
That is, we must do the Father's work.

But what is that work?
Well specifically in this story,
the work is healing the man born blind.
And Jesus' disciples join in on that work,
because they are travelling with Jesus
and associated with the healing miracle he does.

What could we say are the works of Jesus the light of the world?
In this story there are three works that Jesus does.
The first is the healing.
Jesus heals the man both physically and spiritually.
The man receives his sight,
that's the first healing.
But after the Pharisees have thrown him out,
for having the temerity to question them,
Jesus went and found the man.
Jesus asked him,
"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"
And the man wound up saying,

"Lord I believe" and worshipping Jesus.
That's a spiritual healing.
The man received eternal life.
That's the first work.
The healing.

The second work that Jesus does is judgement.

That's in verse 39,

"For judgement I have come into this world,
so that the blind will see
and those who see will become blind."

He's talking about the Pharisees here.

They are judged by their failure to respond to God's work
in the life of the blind man.

The consequence of failing to respond correctly to Jesus
is that it brings judgement upon us.

Notice that Jesus isn't going out of his way
to bring judgement on the Pharisees.

He goes out of his way to bring salvation to the blind man.

And judgement is brought on the Pharisees
because they respond poorly.

But Jesus wasn't trying to set them up.

He was just healing the blind man.

Nevertheless, Jesus' actions were the catalyst
that brought the Pharisees under God's judgement.

The third work that Jesus does
is to expose the secrets of the human heart.

Look it's related to the last one.

In verse 41 he says to the Pharisees,

"If you were blind,

you would not be guilty of sin;

but now that you claim you can see;

your guilt remains."

Jesus is the light of the world.

His presence amongst them had shone a spotlight on their hearts.
He was doing the work of the Father.
He was exposing the human heart for what it really is.

So what does it mean,
"As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me?"
It means because Jesus, the light of the world
is shining in our hearts by his Spirit,
that we are proactive to bring healing and salvation in Jesus' power,
and that as we do that,
God's will expose the secrets of peoples' hearts
and in some cases that will bring them under God's judgement.
It happens as their response to God's wonderful saving work in Jesus
becomes obvious for all to see.

What does that mean about our use of our time?
Not an awful lot,
other than we want to make sure that shining the light of Jesus
is a priority for us as we live our lives.
That might be a small point, but it's an important point.
It's quite possible to be frenetically busy doing Christian stuff,
but actually not be involved at all in shining the light of Jesus.
Certainly, I've had folk in churches I've been involved in, in the past,
who were given quite a hard time
because they intentionally made decisions,
that they were going to concentrate their efforts
on shining the light of Jesus.
So they didn't want to go on this roster or that roster.
And people would say to them,
"We're extraordinarily stretched to fill all the gaps on our roster.
And you're not pulling your weight."
But actually they were pulling their weight,
service leading or running a youth group or praying,
meeting with friends to talk about Jesus.
Jesus says, "As long as it is day,

we must do the work of him who sent me."
Let's not be distracted from the work of God the Father.

Our second Bible passage is from Eph 5.

"Be very careful then, how you live
not as unwise but as wise,
making the most of every opportunity,
because the days are evil."

Back in the days when the King James Version reigned supreme,
this was a favourite bible verse
to encourage people to use their time well.

In the KJV, instead of "making the most of every opportunity",
it said "redeem the time".

"Redeem the time" - you can imagine
how that spawned all kinds of time management thinking.
This kind of light hearted but seriously intended messages.
This one was put up like a lost and found notice,
imagining a broach or something.

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

And look, it's very creative and 100% true.

You can never get back wasted time.

It's just not what Ephesians 5 is talking about.

"Making the most of every opportunity" is the right translation.

What's the difference between "making the most of every opportunity"
and "redeeming the time"?

Well time is something that ticks along all the time.

Whatever you are doing,
time is ticking away.

And the vibe of "redeeming the time" is
that every little bit of time is a gift from God.

So we must ensure that every little bit of time is put to good use.

But "making the most of every opportunity" has a different vibe.
There's not an opportunity presented to you all the time.
Who sends opportunities?

God does.

And for God's own reasons,
sometimes he makes us wait for opportunities.
Perhaps it's because he wants to teach us patience.
Perhaps it's because he wants us to realise that he's in control not us.
But the Christian life is testimony to the fact
that sometimes we have to wait on God.
And God sends along opportunities in his own time.

I read a story this week about Charles Simeon.
Charles Simeon was one of the stand out Anglican ministers
of the nineteenth century.
One day, he was moseying around a graveyard reading headstones.
He was actually waiting for a burial service,
but it wasn't for some time.
He was very early.
He was definitely not redeeming the time.
If he had been reading a book on time management,
he would have been doing something productive before the burial
and arrived punctually but not early.
But thankfully, he was early.
And as he moseyed around the graveyard,
he 'chanced' upon a young woman who was clearly in distress.
So he proceeded to explain the good news of the gospel to her.
The young woman heard about Jesus' love for her
on the cross of Calvary,
and she put her faith in Jesus.
Simeon might not have been redeeming the time,
but he was making the most of every opportunity.
God sent along someone who was open to receiving the gospel message.
And Charles Simeon grasped hold of the opportunity that God sent.
He later found out when he saw her again some years later,

that she had been in the graveyard considering taking her own life.
And it was only through Simeon's intervention
that she was diverted from taking that course of action.
What a wonderful opportunity to serve the Lord!
But what an unexpected opportunity!
There's no way that Simeon entered the graveyard that day
thinking 'I wonder who God is going to send along
for me to share the gospel with'.

What do we need to do to make the most of every opportunity?

It's possible

that sometimes we fail to make the most of every opportunity
because we fritter away our time
and a good bit of time management wouldn't hurt us.

But I actually think that for Australians,
we are far more likely to fail to make the most of every opportunity
not because we waste our time,
but because we fail to recognise the opportunities
when they come along.

And one of the main causes of failing to recognise opportunities
is actually being too busy.

If you are so run off your feet,
that you are nearly dropping from exhaustion,
how are you going to respond to an opportunity from left field?
"Sorry, too busy. Have to keep focused.

I have a deadline to meet."

I think it's actually good for Christians to keep some space in their lives
so that when there's a person who needs someone there for them,
that you are actually able to say,

"Would you like to stay for dinner?"

The other thing that's a great help in recognising opportunities
is being a prayerful person.

When you are consciously coming before God
with an attitude of "How would you like me to serve you today Lord?"
It's amazing how God sends along the opportunities.

Or looked at another way,
it's amazing how God enables you to recognise the opportunities.
I'm sure you've noticed like I have,
the way that wise and mature Christians
have a way of just sensing what needs to happen.
I think that is God enabling them to make the most of every opportunity.

So what is all this telling us about our stewardship of time?
I would say,
let's think less about time,
and more about opportunities.
As long as it is day,
we can shine the light of Jesus.
And God will send along opportunities for us to do that.
Let's pray that we would recognise the opportunities as they come.