

Redeeming the Time

by G. Campbell Morgan

G. Campbell Morgan's sermon emphasizes the importance of seizing opportunities to serve God amidst the challenges of evil days.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15

Topics: "Christian Responsibility", "Redeeming Time"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the importance of 'redeeming the time' as a call for Christians to actively seize opportunities for good in a world filled with evil. He explains that the apostle Paul encourages believers to walk wisely and understand God's will, highlighting the need for carefulness in daily life and the influence of being filled with the Spirit. Morgan illustrates that the challenges of the present age should be viewed as opportunities to manifest godliness and to engage in the 'commerce of God.' He urges Christians to recognize their heavenly calling and to invest their time and actions in ways that reflect their faith, ultimately preparing for a higher service in eternity.

Transcript

Ephesians, chapter v., 15 to 18, inclusive: "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit."

These verses form the setting of a passage which is full of value as revealing the responsibility of Christians; "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Instead of "Redeeming the time," the margin has, "Buying up the opportunity." That is a clearer translation of the original word; and I intend to use it as conveying the thought in the mind of the apostle, "Buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil."

"Buying up." The word so translated comes from another word, which means "the market-place." In rural districts the market is often held upon one day of the week, somewhere in the center of the town, sometimes under cover, sometimes in the open; and to that common meeting-place those come who have goods to offer for sale and those who desire to purchase, and there they transact their business. In eastern towns the same habit obtained. The merchantman came to the market-place in the center of the town, bringing his wares with him, there to transact his business; and he watched the market, and waited for a favourable opportunity, either to buy or sell, and when the opportunity presented itself he acted with

promptitude. He bought up his opportunity.

Now, the apostle tells those who are the children of God to buy up the opportunities, because the days are evil. You cannot have carefully read the epistles of Paul without having noticed how he never forgets the relation that exists between doctrine and duty. He perpetually lays down for us great principles of life, and unfolds before us the great truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But he never does so in order that men and women may possess the knowledge as theorists merely --he always does it in order that he may lead on to a practical application of the truth he declares. The apostle never forgets that the wonderful sanctifying force is the force of truth. Take his epistles and look through them, and you will find invariably that there is a statement of some great doctrine, and then you come to the point in the epistle where he uses his favorite word "Wherefore, " and from that point he begins to apply his doctrine to the details of daily life.

This epistle to the Ephesians may well be spoken of as the epistle of vocation. In it the apostle unfolds the truth concerning vocation, and then endeavors to set their eyes upon God's ultimate purpose for them, and when he has done so through the first and second and third chapters, you find that the fourth chapter opens thus:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling."

The vocation is declared in the opening part of the epistle. The effect that the holding of the truth of that vocation would have upon daily life is declared in the after part of the epistle. He begins by taking us to the heights of vision; then he brings us to the every-day level of life, and shows us how the vision, unfolded before us, should affect us, as fathers, and children, and masters, and servants.

A charge has been made against certain ministers during recent years that their preaching has been "other-worldly." I am not perfectly sure that we have not been too much afraid of that taunt. The moment the Church of Jesus Christ ceases to be "otherworldly" she loses her power to affect this world. It is only in proportion as we have a true view of the heavenly calling that we are able to touch the earth upon which we live, as men and women of power. It is only as we realise that everything that transpires to us in the little while between our conversion and the coming of Jesus Christ, all the service rendered and all the lessons learned, is to prepare us for the higher service that lies beyond, that we shall ever be able to render service at its fullest and best upon this earth. I dwell upon that in opening because it lends force to the present duty as laid down in this verse:

"Buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil."

This first thought must be the very background of all our study. Paul, in these opening chapters, has written down the great truth, that the Church of Jesus Christ will only reach its full sphere of service when it has left behind it the temptation, and the sin, and all the various experiences of these passing years. Not to-day can we render our full service, but in God's great to-morrow, when (as Paul shows in this epistle) the Church of Christ, the catholic Church, the Church redeemed out of the earth, gathered into eternal union with Christ in the heavens, has become the minister of the grace of God to the ages that are yet unborn; a medium through which God shall unfold in perfect clearness to principalities and powers in the heavenly places His own wisdom and His own power. We are a heavenly people sojourning upon the earth; and therefore, through us, the light of the heavenly is to fall upon the earthly. The powers of the world to come are to touch the present age through the men and women who are sons and daughters of the world to come, and who will only find the fulfillment of their highest vocation when that eternal day

breaks beyond the mists and beyond the shadows.

Now, with that thought in mind, remembering that we are a heavenly people called to vocation in the heavens, how are we to act upon the earth? The second half of the epistle answers the question. I choose to take from it this one word, expressing our present duty and privilege: "Look therefore carefully how ye walk"--note the connection with the opening injunction:--"I beseech you to walk worthy of your vocation"--"Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil."

Notice, first of all, the reason that Paul gives why Christian men and women should buy up the opportunity: "Because the days are evil."

Now, if we had come into Ephesus as it then was, and had told the leading men of the city that they had fallen in their lives upon evil days, they would angrily have resented the charge. They would probably have said:

"There never was such a time for Ephesus as this. We were never so prosperous as we are to-day. We were never as wealthy as we are to-day. Progress has marked the past, and to-day we are rich and wealthy."

At that time there was a very peculiar combination in Ephesus. Commerce and religion had been united--that is, of course, the religion of Ephesus. The great temple of their worship was also the banking-house of the merchants, and as the merchants poured their wealth into the temple for safe custody, that became an act of worship. Men were perfectly satisfied with themselves in Ephesus, and thought it was a day of prosperity and a day over which they might rejoice; but Paul was writing, not to the citizens of Ephesus, not to the rank and file of the people who dwelt there, but to the Church of Jesus Christ, to the children of God, to the men and women of heavenly vocation; and writing to them, he said:

"The days are evil."

So they were. They were evil to the men and women who had turned their backs toward idols, to serve the living God. The prosperity of Ephesus was the adversity of the church. That in which the men of Ephesus made their boast rendered the days evil to the called out, separated, sanctified men and women whom God was preparing for the high vocation that lay beyond, in the heavens.

The apostle says to these people, "You are to buy up the opportunities." This great message comes to us. Our calling is a heavenly calling. The life of Christ, bestowed in conversion and coming in in all its fullness in the moment when we fully surrendered to Him, subduing us unto Himself, is preparing us for the high calling that lies beyond. For the present moment the word to us is, that we are to buy up the opportunities, and just as surely as the apostle said to these people of Ephesus, the days are evil, so also for us the days are evil.

Now, in what sense are the days in which we live evil days? The world is perfectly satisfied. We are constantly being told there never was such an age as this an age of progress, an age of advancement, an age of enlightenment. There was a danger of some men dying of pride before the last century ended, because it had been such a wonderful century. The dawn of the new century has increased rather than diminished that pride. Our cities have marks of progress on every hand. Our commerce is more wonderful than it ever was, and throughout the land you hear the voices of men and women telling you that these are

the best days, days full of hope characterised by progress, days in which the race may be perfectly proud of themselves; and yet in these day the message comes to us, "Evil days!"

Now analyse the thought for a moment or two. The majority of the men with whom you come into contact in ordinary business life are not godly, but ungodly. You are bound to mix with them, as matters stand in our cities and in our daily life to-day. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not say that these men are all disreputable, or profligate, or fallen. Never forget that a vast amount of the ungodliness of this age, as of every other, is cultured and refined; but it is none the less ungodliness. You can have an ungodliness which is educated, and cultured, and refined, and accomplished, but it is ungodliness--and I say the majority of the people with whom you come in daily contact are ungodly people. The days are evil days, then, in that sense, for the development of Christian character.

Take the activities of your own life for a single moment in this age when we have got away from simplicity, when we are living a terribly complex life. Did you ever try how little you could live on for one single week in your life? Did you ever discover how you are almost compelled by the very character of the age in which you live to give hours' thought and attention every day to an enormous number of things which you could very well do without, material things all of them, with no touch of spirit in them? What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed? These are the questions that we are bound to face to-day, in a measure in which our forefathers did not have to face them. All this is far from being helpful to spirituality. These are evil days.

Then we are told that this is the age of progress. It is the age of rush, of movement, of effort. The old sacred art of contemplation and meditation is almost dead. It is the age when men and women are trying to live, even within the church, by dissipating and exciting forms of so-called religious services. The old solemn hours of quiet loneliness with God, that made the saints of the past, are almost unknown. We are carried up and borne forward before we know it, upon the rush that characterises the times. Oh, when men and women come to me, as they do sometimes, and tell me, "What we need in the Church is just to catch the spirit of the age and keep level with it," I say:

"In God's name, no! What we need is to be led by the Spirit of God, and that will send us against the spirit of the age, and never along with it."

All the rush and restlessness of the age that have crept into the Church of Jesus Christ mark these days as evil days.

The general atmosphere in which we are surrounded is against the government of God. Do not let us deceive ourselves. Do not let us have meetings and sing the praises of what we have done and where we have reached to. I tell you that if Jesus of Nazareth came back to London and preached the Gospel He preached in Jerusalem, they would crucify Him quicker than they did in Jerusalem. If He came again with the same words, the same teaching, the same actual statements of divine will and government, He would find no room for Himself in the very cities that bear the name of Christian to-day. I repeat that the very atmosphere in which we live is against the government of God; and the most terrible thing is this, that while men are against the government of God, they are praying, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done." The most terrible blasphemy of the age is not the blasphemy of the slums, but the blasphemy of the temple, and the church, and the place of worship, where men pray these prayers and then go out to deny every principle of divine government in their lives. And Christian men and women are living in the midst of all this, and the message that came to men at the church at Ephesus is the message that comes to us, "

Buy up the opportunities, because the days are evil."

Now, do you see what the apostle says? He says that the fact that these are evil days, is one which positively creates our opportunities. All these contrary facts are to be treated as opportunities for prosecuting the commerce of God. God calls you, God calls me, God calls every child of His, to be His representative in the world, taking hold of the things that seem to be against the development of spiritual character and turning them into opportunities for prosecuting His work upon the earth. And when we have said all we have said concerning the days, we have simply laid down the foundation upon which we may build for God. We have simply stated the opportunities which throng upon every side for doing His business and buying up the opportunities for Him.

Take any of those I have spoken of. Do I say that the majority of the men that you are surrounded by every day are ungodly men? Every ungodly man that you do business with is an opportunity that you may buy up for God, if you will; an opportunity for the display of your godliness upon his ungodliness.

But you ask: "How are we to do it? We have no time to be talking to these people about religion."

I won't say anything about that. I personally believe that the gift of personal dealing with men and women is a great gift earnestly to be coveted; but apart from the actual definite saying of words, for which I am not pleading for the moment, if you are a truly godly man, your godliness will tell upon ungodliness without your speaking a single word. I am not saying that business men should always put tracts into their letters; I do not know that it would be wise. I am asking that the business man should remember:

"I belong to the heavens, and when I touch the earth I must touch it with the equity of the heavens. When I sell goods I must bring into my transaction the righteousness of the heavens. If I sell a certain measure over the counter, I must remember that the God of the heavens to which I am going for higher service hates an iniquitous measure and an unjust scale; and into every transaction of my business I am to bring the principles that make the foundation of the heaven of God. I must bring into all those transactions the principles of righteousness upon which God is building His city and accomplishing His work. I am to make a name for Jesus Christ in my business. I am so to transact my business amid ungodly men that they shall say, 'You can trust that man because he is a Christian.'"

There will be a great revolution before that day comes. People do not say that now. alas! And we--because we have labelled men Christians who are not Christians, because we have said these men are God's own children who are not His children, because we have a false label on the nation, and a false label on men, and a false label everywhere--we are causing the very name of Christ to be blasphemed. What we need is, that the true children of God, the members of the Church with the light of the heavenly calling upon them, should take hold of ungodly men, and should look upon them as an opportunity for influencing them by the godliness of their own lives.

So with the activities of life. Jesus Christ was no ascetic. No Christian man has any right to attempt to create saintliness of character by hiding himself from the activities of every-day life. No. I must live in my home, but that home must have upon it the stamp of the heavens. I must mix among my friends, but my contact with my friends is to be that which will draw them towards God. I very well remember when I was married, my father came into my home. He was a Puritan, and I used to think that it was hard lines that he was; but to-day I thank God for it. He came into my home soon after I was married, and looked around. We showed him into every room, and then, in his own peculiar way, he said to me:

"Yes, it is very nice; but nobody will know walking through here whether you belong to God or the devil."

I went through and looked at the rooms again, and I thought, "He is quite right"; and we made up our minds straightway that there should be no room in our house henceforward that had not some message--in picture, or text, or book--for every corner, which should tell them that we, at any rate, would serve the King.

It is our privilege to take the home in which we live, all the recreations which we have, and turn them into opportunities for manifesting godliness. We should take all those things and let the light of the heavenly fall upon them; we should go through life showing how all the things of the earth may shine in new beauty as the glory of the heaven falls upon them. Everything in life is to be an opportunity for prosecuting the commerce of God.

The unrest of the present age is a glorious opportunity for manifesting the quietness and the calmness of the secret place of the Most High. Oh, for quiet men and women, men and women that know how to be at peace in the midst of the strife! We know a few. That man who, whenever he walks into the committee meeting, brings heaven's calm as he comes. His words are few, but his presence tells. As he comes you feel that you are coming into contact with one who, amid the rush, and the bustle, and the hurry of a godless age, dwells in the secret place of the Most High, and abides under the shadow of the Almighty. A blessed thing to have men and women who have learned the secret of quietness, and so buy up the rush of the age and turn it into account for a manifestation of the peace and the quietness of God!

But if I am to take all life in this way, if I am to seize these opportunities as they go and come, and turn them into account for God, there are certain facts that I must bear in mind: the responsibility that lies upon me that I see the opportunity in the first place, and seeing the opportunity, that I should be willing to make some sacrifice in order to possess it; and that if I am to see an opportunity and make a sacrifice in order to possess it, I must maintain perpetually a right attitude before God, living forevermore in the power of the heavenly calling, and allowing Him to have His way with me and do His own work through me. Now there are just three laws revealed in the surrounding verses which condition the prosecution of this commerce of the heavens. Let me very briefly point them out to you.

I. The first is in the fifteenth verse. Men and women who are going to do God's work, "Look therefore carefully how ye walk." "Walk circumspectly," the old version has it. Look carefully how ye walk.

My dear brother, my dear sister, you cannot do God's work in the world, buying up opportunities for Him, transacting His commerce, if you are careless and indifferent about it. Look therefore carefully how ye walk. I know men and women who are very careful when they are at home and awfully careless when they get away from home. I know other men and women who seem to imagine that they can live the Christian life and do God's work without carefulness in the small details of every-day life. If I am to translate my life into service for God, not merely in the deeds done in connection with the church, but in all hours, I shall only do it as I live carefully day by day.

That word "circumspectly," what does it mean? Let me give an illustration, which I believe originated with Mr. D. L. Moody, which is very quaint and forceful of what it is to walk circumspectly:

You have sometimes seen the top of a wall covered with mortar, and in the mortar pieces of glass are stuck all the way along, so as to prevent boys from climbing and going along. You have also seen a cat walk along the top of that wall. That was walking "circumspectly." How it picked its way! With what

carefulness it put down the foot every time. It made progress by walking very carefully, and looking for each place where the foot was to be put among those pieces of glass.

You and I have to walk like that, if we are going to do anything for God in the world. You can't go through a single day carelessly and let things go as they will. Every step must be watched. Every moment must be held as sacred for God, and we are ever to live in the power of the thought that we may miss an opportunity. We must take every moment as an opportunity that needs watching and buying up carefully. We must walk circumspectly.

II. Then the second law of this commerce of God is to be found in the seventeenth verse: "Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." That is to say, if I am to do this business of God as a Christian man, I am not only to be careful about it, but I must have keenness, shrewdness. I must know the will of God. I must form the habit of discovering the will of God.

You remember that wonderful word about the Messiah uttered by Isaiah long before He came: "He shall be quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord." One Bible student says this might be rendered, "He shall be keen of scent in the fear of the Lord"--discovering the will of God quickly by a kind of intuition.

You only discover the will of God as you obey it the moment you do discover it. It is in proportion as I walk carefully, obeying the will as it is unfolded, that I become quick to discover the will. We are not to foresee; we are to understand the will of God. We are to be a people shrewd, keen, having in our Christian life--having in our prosecution of this work of God--a spiritual acumen which is as necessary as business acumen to the man that is going to make his fortune in business.

III. And then there is another thing. I must not only be careful, shrewd, and keen, understanding the will of the Lord; but I must have capital, or I never can do God's work in the world. I cannot be a merchantman for heaven unless I have heaven's capital, and here it is in the eighteenth verse:

"Be not drunken with wine, but be filled with the Spirit."

When a man is filled with the Spirit, he has the capital of God, to do the work of God. Then all that I have spoken of will become easy and natural. It will become--I was going to say second nature; I will say something better--it will become first nature. It will be perfectly natural to influence men toward God. This great subject of influence, we have heard about it since we have been children, but we have hardly begun to understand or tell it. We have never seemed yet to grasp this truth, that the influence a man exerts is the influence of what he actually is in himself. You talk about keeping up appearances. You talk about living straight before men. You say, "Well, I wouldn't like to do this, that, or the other before men, because I must keep up an appearance or I will lead them wrong." It doesn't matter. Do what you are; because whether you do or not, you will influence men by what you are. Influence is altogether too subtle to be changed by any outward activities. If a man is filled with the Spirit of God he is spiritual, and his influence will be spiritual.

Some years ago I was at work in Hull, England. God was giving us gracious seasons of refreshing, and a man came to me one night and said:

"Do you know, the strangest thing has happened to me!"

Said I: "What has happened?" He said: "I am a cabinet-maker, and I work at a bench, and another man works by my side. He has worked by my side for five years. I thought I would like to get him to come to

some of these meetings, and this morning I summoned up my courage and said to him, 'Charlie, I want you to come along to-night to some meetings we are having down in Wilberforce Hall.' He looked at me and said, 'You don't mean to say you are a Christian?' and I answered, 'Yes, I am.' 'Well,' he said, "so am I."

This man said to me: "Wasn't it funny?"

"Funny!" I said, "no. Is he here? for if so, both you and he want to get down here and start. You never have been born again."

It is an absolute impossibility for two men born again of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, to work side by side for five years, and neither one or the other find it out. If one man is a Christian and the other isn't, the man that isn't will soon see the difference in the work the Christian man does. Christian men do pure, strong work, and the best work in the world.

"But," you say, "I have had a man working for me who doesn't; and he is a Christian."

No, he isn't! If a man is filled with the Spirit of God, it will be manifest in every action of his life; and if you get this capital behind you, it won't be hard work to influence men for Christ; it will be the necessity of your life. The passion of your soul will be to win another soul for Christ, to weave another garland wherewith to deck His brow, to plant another gem in His diadem; and your life will be doing it as well as your words. You must have the capital of God to prosecute the commerce of God.

And again, that is true about all the activities of life. People often come and ask me questions about amusements:

"Ought we to do this, that, and the other?" Well, you must only take up amusements in which it is possible for the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus Christ.

You say: "That is very narrow." No, it isn't; it is very broad. That for me settles a great many questions of amusements. I know young people who make tennis an instrument of the devil. If a man gives himself wholly up to it, so as to neglect other things, and make other people uncomfortable in the world, that isn't Christianity. But that, and kindred kinds of amusement can be had as pure recreation, and so played that the very gentleness and beauty of Jesus Christ shall be manifested in the playing. Every activity of life, which is in itself right and pure, will shine with glory the moment you become a Spirit-filled soul; and instead of being narrow and shut up within confined walls, you will be able to see that He has set your feet in a large room, He has unlocked for you all the avenues of life. Filled with the Spirit, you will be able to manifest the beauty and the glory of the will of God, as against all the rebellion of the age in which we live.

And now I want to press a question on you that you will answer to yourself: How much are you worth?

You know how men usually answer that question. I very well remember in England how we were impressed during one month some years ago by the death of two men, one on this side of the water, and one on that. The man over here was a millionaire, and the other was Cardinal Manning. As I traveled in a train just about the time these two died, I was impressed by hearing several commercial men talking, and they asked:

"Well, how much was he worth?"

"Oh," said one, "so many millions."

"And how much was he worth?" said they of the other.

"Well, he died worth five hundred dollars."

Do you see? We measure things this way: we say a man is worth so much. Don't you see the horror of it now?

What are you worth? I don't ask to know anything about your balance at the bank. What are you worth? What do you possess?

You say: "I possess so much. I possess my home."

No, no, you don't! What do you possess? You only possess the things you have bought for the kingdom of God. You are rich according to the number of the hours which you have bought up. The time redeemed is wealth. Every time you buy up an opportunity for Him, every time your life tells upon an ungodly man, every time your dealings with God shine out in some of the activities of your life, every time by sacrifice you influence a soul towards God, in that moment buying up an opportunity, you invest an hour in God, and with those hours God is making your fortune. You are not worth the things you possess upon the earth. They fade and vanish. They are of the earth, earthy. You are only worth the treasure that you have laid at His gates, the influence which you have purchased by sacrifice for Him. These are the things which mark your value and your work, and make your fortune.

Oh, what a day it will be when God gives us back these fortunes! How surprised some will be when the Master comes and says: "You bought up an opportunity one day for me. You met a soul that was thirsty on the dusty highway of life, and it was an opportunity for you to show that soul what I would have done if I had been there, and you gave that soul a cup of water. Now here is the result of it," and what it will be, who can tell? God will meet you some day, my brother, and He will say: "Do you remember that day when in your store you might have made ten thousand dollars at a stroke, and you didn't because there was a trick and a twist behind it, and you said: 'No, I will be that much poorer for the kingdom of heaven's sake?'" God will say: "That was your investment. See, this is the result," and He will show you how you helped that day to bring in righteousness, and to move with God towards the consummation of the purposes of His heart of love.

That is how men are making fortunes. Aren't you going in for this sort of business? Aren't you going to take life anew from this time and say, "I am going to make this life a place in which I prosecute heaven's commerce. I will take the opportunities as they come, and buy them up for God. I will take my home; it is an opportunity which I will purchase for the exhibition of all the beauties of the Christlike character and all the purposes of the divine heart. Life to me henceforth shall be an opportunity for doing God's business and laying up treasure in heaven."

Is that your determination? Then you must go to the King and say, "O King, I want to be Thy merchantman on earth. Give me the capital I need. Give me the filling of Thy Holy Spirit. Then shall all my service be a delight, and I shall be able to take all hours, and all activities, and everything that comes to me, and transmute it from the dross of earth into the gold of heaven."

May God help us every one to be His merchantmen!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/g-campbell-morgan/redeeming-the-time/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net