

SERMON FOR THE 19TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Cape Town - 21 September 2008)

Text: ¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-20)

There is an interesting interplay between our sermon text and the topic of the Sunday. The topic is the “Greatest Commandment”. We heard this commandment in our Gospel Reading this morning. Jesus said to the inquiring scribe: “(The greatest commandment of all is) **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength**” (Mk 12). And most of you will most probably say: “I agree with these words of Jesus: Loving God is the greatest of all commandments and indeed a priority in my own life.”

Well, today we are going to probe this. And we are going to do so from the perspective of our “time management”. How to manage our time wisely, is the exact issue being addressed in this sermon text. Paul writes to the Ephesians, and I am going to give you a literal translation: ***“Buy back the time, because the days are evil”***

Now that is interesting. It is interesting because these words indicate that even in ancient times, 2000 years ago, managing our time wisely was a topic.

Today time management is not only one topic amongst others, but it is a major or hot topic. Time seems to rule our life. I wonder if anyone has ever counted how many comments are made in a day about “time”. We look at our watches and say: “Just look at the time”. Or We hear others saying: “Gee, it is September already. Christmas is around the corner.” And most of us will say at least once day: “I must get a move on. I am running short of time”. There is little doubt that the clock rules our lives.

I read this past week about a funeral company that has proposed something unique to help busy people at the time of death. For those people that are too busy to come inside the funeral chapel to view the deceased person and to stay for the service, a “drive through window” is proposed. It is like a McDonald’s concept. I can’t stop. I am just too busy. So I just drive through. “Goodbye ma, I have to rush”.

We want to reflect on this concept of time today from a Christian perspective.

And the first, very obvious point I would like to make is: We all have the exact same amount of time. We all have 24 hours in a day. We all have 7 days in a week. We all have 365 days in a year. But interestingly some people are always rushed and they never have time. Others, though only a few, always seem to have that extra time needed. Personally I sometimes marvel at those people that have top positions in our country, top positions in their company, a schedule that reads like a telephone directory, but they have time.

So the problem can hardly be that there is not enough time. The problem lies with our choices. The Bible states quite categorically, “there is a time for everything”. So time is not

the problem. The problem is - to use Paul's words - we don't always use the time "wisely". In others words, when we decide to do either this or that, we make poor choices.

So if somebody always seems to have more time than you have, it could be that he or she simply makes better choices. And that, by the way, is usually the mark of successful people: They know how to make wise choices.

The second point I would like to stress is, that time is not a commodity that I owe, but rather a gift that I manage.

What does this mean? It means, from a Christian perspective, I am never the owner, but only the *manager* of something that is given to me by God.

If God is the creator of all things, as we confess (in the Apostle's Creed) every Sunday, then everything I have really belongs to him. I just need to manage it. God gives me possessions and money and he wants me to manage them for him. God gives me my intelligence and other talents and gifts and wants me to manage them for him. But God is also the creator of time. So he gives me time as a gift. And he wants me to manage that time according to his good will and rules.

What are his rules? There are two basic rules, which we can sum up with the acronym 24/7. There are 24 hours in a day. But those 24 hours were created as "day" and "night". You cannot work all the time. You need to rest. If you don't (because you work too hard or party too long), even your days become unproductive.

Likewise there are 7 days in a week. God deemed, one day "of the week to be a day of rest. One day is to be "The Lord's Day". You can ignore it. But if you do, you will not be as rested and refreshed as God intends you to be. And that includes "spiritual" refreshness, which is sometimes the first thing that goes when you are overworked

This leads us to a third point: If God is really in charge, then he provides us with enough time to do the "important things".

Now this is something you need to learn early in your life: You cannot do everything. You don't have the time, nor the talents. But for those things that are *really important*, you have enough time.

This is where our sermon text kicks in again. Listen to what Paul writes: "**Buy back the time because the days are evil**". What is the assumption behind these words? The assumption is that the evil in this world has taken my time, it encroaches on my God-given time, and I need to buy it back again.

Paul just gives one example of what we can call a "time-water". It is the evil of drunkenness. He writes: "**Do not get drunk on wine**" (v.18). That is about all they drank in those days. We can add beer, whisky, brandy & Coke, and other alcoholic drinks. But here we are faced with something, if it is not controlled, that robs us of our time.

It leads to "**debauchery**", Paul writes. Debauchery is defined as a behaviour with no concern for consequences. I stay up late. Drink too much. And don't care. I will deal with

my life “tomorrow”. But tomorrow I have “babalas” and there goes by good God-given time. In one word: I am “foolish”.

But drinking is not the only time-water. There are more subtle evils that encroach on our time as well. Excessive materialism: I must have this, I must have that. I am never satisfied with what I have. Or unchecked ambitions. I will do anything to get to the top.

What is the problem? The problem is: You are never quiet to search for *God’s plan* for you. God has a plan for you. He knows where he wants to lead you do. He has already prepared the good deeds he wants you to perform. And for everything that God has planned for you, those things “really important”, *there is enough time*.

Now Paul cannot tell God’s specific plan for each and every member of his congregation. That is a personal thing between the individual and God. But Paul does give an indication of the root of all goodness that we all should pursue.

He writes: “Don’t get drunk with wine ... ***instead be filled with the Spirit***”. If you are full of wine, there is no place for the Spirit. If you are so full about what “you” want to achieve in life, there is no place for the Spirit. The success of “good time management” stands in direct relationship to being “filled with the Spirit of God”. Because He is the one that will guide me to put the first things first. Without him, I will get it wrong. I need the Spirit.

But where do I get the Spirit? Or to put it in another way: Where and when do I make room for the Spirit of God to fill my life? This leads us back to the 24/7 principle, in particular the 7. Paul writes: “***Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs***” (v.19). This happens here. This happens when I respect the order of God and set a day aside to be with my Christians brothers and sisters. On your own you cannot sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to “one another”. You need the “community of believers”.

But even here the “evil” tends to encroach on my God-given time: I must do my shopping, I must do my washing, I must catch up on my work, I must rest! I guarantee you: If you buy your time correctly, if you make the right choices, you will never fail to complete something, *because you made time for God*. It is just a matter of setting priorities.

Filled with the Spirit, we “***make music in our hearts to the Lord***”, Paul writes. Here we can dump all our worries on our Lord, who loves us. Here we learn to put our trust in him again and learn to “***give thanks to God the Father for everything***” (v.21). We all know, a person whose heart is full praise and thanks, can work so much harder.

We summarize: The greatest commandment: “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength**” goes hand in hand with good time management. In fact the way you prioritise your day, the way your prioritise your week, will reflect your love for God.

But don’t hear that as “The Law”. That will just burden you again. Hear it as a promise. Loving the Lord your God with your body, mind and soul, does not restrict you, but sets you free. It gives you time.

When Jesus said to his disciples: “***Seek first his [God’s] kingdom and his***

righteousness”, there is a “promise” that follows. Jesus continues and says: “***And all these things [that you worry about] will be given to you as well.***”

So use your time wisely. Buy out the time and you will always have enough time for what is important in life. Amen.