

## REDEEMING THE TIME – WINNING SOULS TO CHRIST

*Redeeming the time* means taking advantage of every opportunity that presents itself for doing God's work; not allowing a suitable moment to pass by unheeded. There is a special urgency on redeeming the time for Christians because of the evil character of the days in which they live, and soon it will be too late. *Time* in this context is not **chronos**, "time as such"; it is **kairos**, which refers to season, opportune time, opportunity (CP Eph 5:15-16; Col 4:5). Here Christians are to redeem the time by prudent and blameless conduct toward the ungodly. *Salt* in Col 4:5 is both a seasoning agent and a preservative. In this context it is used of Christians' speech directed to those outside the church being wholesome and preserved from corruption (CP Ecc 10:12 and Mk 9:50 with Eph 4:15, 29-31; 5:4; Col 3:8, 16; Tit 3:9). Just as salt not only flavours, but prevents corruption, Christians' speech should act not only as a blessing, but also as a purifying influence upon all who hear it. By the sweetness and courtesy of their conversation Christians are to impress favourably the unsaved, and make the most of every evangelistic opportunity. This is what *redeeming the time* means (CP Psalms 119:46; 1Pe 3:15).

Every day of their lives Christians are faced with opportunities to witness to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. They must utilise every moment possible for winning souls to Christ (CP 2Ti 4:1-2). In the Greek construction of this passage of scripture Paul commands Timothy, and by extension every professing Christian, to be in a constant state of readiness to preach the gospel, whether they feel like it or not, or whether the time is opportune or not (CP Jn 4:34-36; 9:4). In Jn 4:34-36 Jesus impresses upon Christians the urgency of harvesting souls for the Kingdom. He uses the Samaritans sent by the women he spoke to at the well at Sychar as an object lesson to teach His disciples about the urgency of preaching the gospel for souls to be saved (CP V 5-42). In Jn 9:4 *day* refers to the time allotted to do God's work. *Night* is the limit set to do it. In Jesus' case night referred to His impending death.

Death or the rapture is the limit set for Christians, and until then they must also do the works of God, like Jesus (CP Mt 7:21-27; Lu 6:46-49; 13:22-30; Ro 2:13; Jas 1:22-25). Those scriptures all teach the necessity of doing the work of God's word as a prerequisite of salvation. That includes redeeming the time by making the most of every opportunity to win souls to Christ. That is the Christian calling (CP Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lu 9:59-60). This is all part of what redeeming the time means. It is folly for Christians to think they are saved without they have redeemed the time doing the work of God's word (CP Lu 9:59-60). Jesus is not being insensitive to the propriety of funerals here but is teaching against procrastination – deferring or putting off taking the gospel out into the world and winning souls to Christ (CP 2Cor 6:2). Christians must be in a constant state of readiness to

win souls to Christ. It is the most important part of their Christian walk, as Jesus meant it to be: *now* is the accepted time, *now* is the hour of salvation (CP Jude 21-23). Everything else in the life of the church is simply a consequence of souls being won to Christ by Christians redeeming the time.

Christ has assigned to every Christian in the New Testament church the responsibility to preach the gospel and be a soul-winner for Him (CP 2Cor 5:18-20). It is obligatory upon Christians to get as many sinners saved as possible, and as both Jesus and Paul teach, time is of the essence, and it must be redeemed (CP Ro 1:14-15). As Paul was a debtor to the lost, so are all Christians (CP Eph 2:10). God has saved Christians to serve Him, and He expects them to bear fruit for Him (CP Lu 8:14-18; Jn 15:2, 8, 16; Ro 1:13; Col 1:3-6). Fruit in this context is used metaphorically of souls won to Christ. The ingathering of souls for God's Eternal Kingdom is also compared to harvesting grain in scripture (CP Psalms 126:5-6; Mt 9:37-38; Jn 4:35). While Psalms 126:5-6 does not literally refer to sowing the gospel and winning souls to Christ, that is included in its meaning. It expresses the great truth of sowing and reaping; that sowing into the Kingdom in a spirit of brokenness will reap abundant blessing from God. This encourages Christians to sow to righteousness through deeds of righteous obedience for a rich harvest of God's blessings (CP Pr 11:30). Christians produce eternal life for sinners by winning them to God.

It should be noted here that there is a false teaching that persists in the contemporary church called "lifestyle evangelism", which advocates that sinners can be won to Christ by letting them see the exemplary lifestyle of Christians. But scriptures clearly refute such teaching (CP Psalms 22:22; 40:9-10; 119-13; Eze 33:9; Jn 5:24; Ro 1:16; 10:14, 17; 1Cor 1:21; 4:15; 1Ti 4:16; Jas 1:18; 1Pe 1:23). Those scriptures are representative of the many that refute lifestyle evangelism. They all teach that the gospel has to be proclaimed in order for sinners to hear it and be saved, and Jesus holds Christians responsible for proclaiming it and getting sinners saved. Lifestyle evangelism places no urgency on winning souls to Christ, which Jesus and Paul both emphasised. As the end of this age of grace draws near and it will soon be too late to harvest souls for the Eternal Kingdom, Christians must be reminded that the words of Jesus in Jn 4:35, must be heeded and acted upon now

*"Say not there are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest".*

(For a related teaching on this subject see author's study *The Christian Calling – Winning Souls to Christ* in his book, **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith**).