"The Preciousness of Time"
(Ephesians 5:15-17)

Introduction: What is the first thing you think about when the new year is just around the corner? Do you think about the things that you would like to do in the upcoming year? Do you think about the things that you did in the year that is just past? The first thing that I think about is that I now have one less year to finish the things which the Lord has given me to do on this earth. Another thing that I think about is whether or not I have really accomplished anything over the last year that will have any eternal significance, for good or for bad. Each year that passes reminds me that time is running out, and soon it will all be gone.

Time therefore is very precious. Something is considered to be precious when it is rare and expensive. Is there a lot of it? Is it cheap and easy to get? Then it is not too precious. But is it rare? Is it something which is expensive, something that only a few people can afford? Then it is usually considered to be precious in the eyes of most people. How precious then is time? Is it rare? It is something that each person only has so much of, and something which one person cannot give to another? Is it expensive? Once it is all used up, all the money in the world cannot buy back even one second of it. Is it precious? Ask the person who has used up all but the last seconds of his life, and see whether he thinks it is precious.

Since time is so precious, we should be careful to use it very wisely. If we take such care with other things which are not nearly as valuable to budget them, why don't we do so with our time?

This morning, as we look forward to the new year which is just around the corner, I want you to consider what the Bible teaches about time. And what I want you to consider is that,

Because of the preciousness of time, you should do everything in your power to use it as wisely as you can.

I. First, It Would Be Profitable for Us to Reflect More Carefully Upon Why Time is So Precious.

A. It Is Precious First of All Because Each of Us Only Has a Limited Amount, and None of Us Knows How Much That Amount Is.

1. Remember that God determined our days in eternity.
   a. Before anything was, before God created the heavens and the earth, and time, He decreed how much time He would give us.
      (i) The psalmist wrote, "THINE EYES HAVE SEEN MY UNFORMED SUBSTANCE; AND IN THY BOOK THEY WERE ALL WRITTEN, THE DAYS THAT WERE ORDAINED FOR ME, WHEN AS YET THERE WAS NOT ONE OF THEM" (139:16).
      (ii) We have no more time than what He has given us, nor less. And we have no way of knowing just how much of it we have left.
      (iii) Are you a child here this morning? You might think that you have another seventy or eighty years of life left. But can you really be sure? You could run out of time today, or tomorrow, or next week.
      (iv) On the other hand, are you advanced in years? You may not have much time left either. Or you may have more time than some of the children here. You simply cannot know. God has given each of us so much, but He has not told any of us how much.

   b. But one thing we can know. The time which He has given to us on earth is a priceless treasure that He has entrusted to us.
(i) All which He has given to us is a gift of His goodness, and He gave it to us that we might serve and glorify Him.

(ii) Remember the words of our Lord, "FOR WHOEVER WISHES TO SAVE HIS LIFE SHALL LOSE IT; BUT WHOEVER LOSES HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE SHALL FIND IT" (Matt. 16:25). He has given us life, that we might lose it to Him. Can you honestly say that you have lost your life and given it wholly to Christ?

(iii) Looking back over your years already lived, how much time have you used to accomplish the Lord's work?

(iv) Have you been faithfully denying yourself and serving your Lord?

(v) If the Lord were to call you to give an account of the stewardship of your time today, could you honestly stand in the confidence of a life used up for Him, or would you be ashamed that you had devoted so little to His work?

(vi) Life is a priceless treasure, and it must be spent on the One who gave it to you, or you are throwing it away.

2. Think as well about the fact that most of us here have already used up a good portion of our time.

   a. Consider that once you have spent those precious minutes, they can never be regained (Edwards 2:234).

      (i) There are certain things which if we lose them, we can often get them back, or can replace them with things just as good.

      (ii) But that is not the case with time. Once it is gone, it is gone forever. All the money in the world could never buy back even one second.

   b. Consider as well that you cannot hold on to time as you can to money.

      (i) Money you can save, but time is spent even if you don't want to spend it.

      (ii) How much then should we try and use it as best as we can?

      (iii) Think about the times in your life when you have had your heart set on something, and you worked diligently to accomplish it. Think about how, when you looked back over that time, you were amazed that you had done so many things in so little time. This is how your heart should be set on the things of the Lord.

      (iv) Think of how much good you could do in a day, in a month, or in a year, if your heart was really in it.

      (v) There is much you could do for the Lord and for the good of your own soul. But have you done so?

      (vi) What have you done with your time? Have you spent it wisely, or have you wasted it?

      (vii) Have you spent most of it in the pursuit of the things of the world, or in the things of God? Do you find that you are growing more in love with food and clothing and worldly pleasures and recreations, or with God and His Christ and the things of His kingdom and glory?

      (viii) Remember that there is a day of judgment coming when the Lord will scrutinize your use of time. If you were to stand before Him today, is there anything that you will have wished that you had done differently? Do it now while time remains.
c. If you are young here this morning, consider the advantage that this gives to you.
   (i) Most of your life may still be ahead of you.
   (ii) You still have an opportunity to use your life for God's glory.
   (iii) But beware of the devil's lie, for he will tell you that since you have so much time, you should not take the things of the Lord so seriously now. He will tell you to play now, and serve the Lord later.
   (iv) But your youth is the best time of your life. You are laying a foundation by the way that you live now that will affect the rest of your days. Don't let this precious opportunity slip through your fingers! Don't let the devil catch you in his crafty snares.

d. Or, if you are along in years, consider the fact that you might not have much time left.
   (i) If you have lived 50, 60, or 70 years of your life, and have not used your time wisely, there is nothing that you can do about it now.
   (ii) Most of your time is eternally gone.
   (iii) All that you can do is to make better use of the time that you have remaining.
   (iv) Don't let the devil trap you in his snare by telling you that since you have wasted so much time, it doesn't really matter what you do with the rest of your life. It does! Use it for God's glory. God wants to see in you a heart of faith and acts of love when He comes for you.

3. Remember that none of us here knows how much time we have left.
   a. We may have a year, maybe several years, or maybe only a month, a week, or a day.
   b. Next year at this time, some of us here may have run out of time and have given our account to God. This has been the case over the last year with several of our brethren.
   c. We never seem to think that it will be us. Few ever seem to take seriously the fact that they might get sick and die. But even if you are not showing any signs of illness, you still cannot know that you will even be around tomorrow.
   d. It is important therefore that we make the best use of any time that we have left remaining.
      (i) James writes, "YOU ARE JUST A VAPOR THAT APPEARS FOR A LITTLE WHILE AND THEN VANISHES AWAY" (4:14).
      (ii) Your time is precious, and you should be careful not to lose any of it (Edwards 2:234).

B. Our Time Is Precious Second of All Because It Is in this Brief Time Alone that Our Eternal Destination Is Secured.
   1. Your stay on earth is your probation for the rest of your eternal existence,
      a. It is only during this time that you will either receive or reject Christ.
      b. It is only during this time that you who receive Christ will be storing up gracious rewards in heaven to enjoy forever.
      c. It is only during this time that you who reject Christ will be storing up wrath for yourself in the day of God's wrath.
      d. Those wretched souls that are now in hell would do anything to be in your place, and to have another opportunity to repent and turn to Christ.
(i) But their time is up, and so is their opportunity to repent of their sins and to embrace the Savior.

(ii) Those of you here this morning who have not believed on Christ for salvation, you need to seek the Lord to save your soul. You cannot change your heart; you cannot embrace Christ with your own strength. You need to plead with God to give you a new heart before it is too late. Your time may run out, and once it does, there are no second chances.

2. But for those of you who are Christ's, don't forget that there is a day of reckoning coming, when you will give an account of your time to God.
   a. When you come to Christ, this is not the end of your journey, but the beginning.
   b. Your time is a stewardship entrusted to you by Christ.
   c. How you spend it indicates whether or not you truly love Him.
   d. But it also the basis upon which God will reward or withhold reward from you on the day of His judgment.
     (i) Time is the money that you have to spend on either the things of God's glory, or on the worthless things of the world.
     (ii) And on the day of God's judgment, He will look into your check register to see how you have spent yours (2 Cor. 5:10).
     (iii) The fact that God is going to hold us accountable for our use of time should make us all tremble.
     (iv) It will be a terrible and frightening day, for it will reveal whether our life actually shows that we are Christians, or betray the fact that we have only been deceiving ourselves.
     (v) Is time precious? Yes it is. How we use it will determine our eternity.

II. Because of the Preciousness of Time and the Reality of the Day of Judgment, We Ought to Do Everything in our Power to Make the Best Use of Our Remaining Time as Possible. And Our Text this Morning Shows Us How.

A. Paul Says You Must First of All Carefully Consider How You Are Living, "THEREFORE BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK, NOT AS UNWISE MEN, BUT AS WISE (v. 15).

   1. He says, stop patterning your life after the foolish people of this age (v. 15b).
      a. The foolish man wastes his time in useless activities and sinfulness, heaping up judgment to himself for the day of God's wrath.
      b. If we were to examine our lives, I wonder how much we would really have in common with him.
         (i) How much time have you wasted doing nothing of any value?
            (a) I might ask this especially to those of you who are young. When I was young it seemed as though I had more time than I knew what to do with. My parents were not able to give me much direction, and so they left me pretty much to waste my time as I pleased. Do you waste time?
            (b) And those of you who are older, how much precious time do you waste? There are many things that you could do, such as talk to your neighbors about Christ, visit the prisoners in jail to bring the knowledge of the Gospel to them, give your time
and resources to feed the hungry and cloth the poor, minister to your brethren in the church, read your Bible and godly literature, pray for Christ's kingdom to advance on the earth. But do you instead sit at home, watch television, go to the movies or sporting events, things which have no value in God's eyes at all?

(c) How much of a reward do you think you will have in heaven for hunting and killing an animal? or watching a movie? or sitting idly in your house?

(d) Now don't misunderstand. Recreation is important. But I fear that for many of us, our recreation no longer serves the purpose of renewing us in order to better serve the Lord, but has itself become our goal in life. You work that you might play.

(e) But realize that if your recreation takes you away from God's service, then it is strangling you, it is not truly benefiting you. Remember the words of Jesus: "Teach them to办t' screen on earth, that they may be saved!"

(ii) How much time have you wasted sinning?
(a) This is worse than idle time; it is taking steps backward to destroy Christ's kingdom rather than to build it.
(b) There will undoubtedly be some on the day of judgment who will look back over their lives and wished that they had never lived, for all that they accomplished in life was to add mountains of misery to their everlasting damnation in hell.
(c) And perhaps in the process they have also increased the damnation of others whom they encouraged to the same evil deeds.
(d) It is better to idly waste your time than to spend it upon evil.

(iii) How much time have you wasted in running after the world?
(a) Have you set your heart on fame and fortune in this life? That is a very low goal to shoot for.
(b) You do need a certain amount of money to live on, but too much can be stumbling block.
(c) How much good can it do for your soul? Can it better prepare you to stand before God on that day?
(d) For most people it does more damage to their souls than anything else. Paul wrote to Timothy, "FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL SORTS OF EVIL, AND SOME BY LONGING FOR IT HAVE WANDERED AWAY FROM THE FAITH, AND PIERCED THEMSELVES WITH MANY A PANG" (1 Tim. 6:10).

(iv) If any of these things describe you, you must stop your foolish living. Life is far too precious to waste on these things.

2. Paul says do not walk as unwise, but as wise (v, 15c).
   a. The wise know that knowing the will of God and doing it patiently and from the heart is the right path to travel.
   b. The wise man knows that there is a day of reckoning coming, and so he awakens every day with his eyes set on that goal, praying that he might give a good account of that day to the Lord.
B. Therefore, If You Are to Be Wise, You Must Make the Most of Your Remaining Time! (v. 16, 17)

1. Every minute you live you must make a decision as to how you can serve the Lord.
   a. Use your time as best as you know how, and study to find out better ways of using it, especially those times which are most precious:
      (i) The Lord's Day, and especially public worship.
      (ii) Those precious times of family worship.
      (iii) And, for those of you who are still young, the days of your youth when you have all your natural strength and energy.

b. You must also use your free time to its best advantage.
   (i) All of us have some free time. Some of us have more than others.
   (ii) Do not waste all of your's in worthless activities.
   (iii) Tell yourself, "Only so much rest and so much recreation, and no more!"
   (iv) Budget a majority of it for acts of piety and benevolence. Do good works, for this is why you were created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10).

c. Make the best use of every opportunity that the Lord in His providence gives to you.
   (i) When Paul wrote this letter, the church was under the threat of persecution. It was possible that the door of opportunity was closing to do the Lord's work. Therefore Paul counselled them to grasp the time, to buy it up, to redeem it, before the opportunity for doing the Lord's will was past.
   (ii) Everyday brings with it another 24 hours in which to serve the Lord. Redeem those moments as much as you can to finish your race.
   (iii) Someday your opportunities will all be behind you, and you will enter into the eternal state.
   (iv) Once that time is gone, it is gone, and nothing you can do will return even the smallest amount of it.

2. And so Paul concludes, "SO THEN DO NOT BE FOOLISH, BUT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE WILL OF THE LORD IS" (v. 17).
   a. Do not be foolishly ignorant of God's will, but understand what the Lord wishes to bring about through your life.
   b. Learn to value the things that He values. Put away your worthless things.
   c. Seek to live for Christ with all your strength, relying fully on His grace.
   d. Think about what it will be like for you on your death bed. Think about how if you had to live over again, how you might do so more for God's glory. And then seek to live each moment of your life as one who has the opportunity to do so again.
   e. Seek to use your remaining time as wisely as possible, because when it is gone, all of the universe will not buy back for you even one of those precious moments of life. May God grant to all of us the grace to do so. Amen!