

August 15, 2021

Texts: Psalm 111; Ephesians 5: 15-20

Title: “Making the Most of Life”

When you were a kid did you ever dream of finding a magic genie that would grant you wishes? Kids tend to imagine many things yet their power is fairly limited, so they like to imagine a genie who can instantly give them whatever they want. But, the stories along these lines almost always come with a moral: Be very careful what you wish for—you just might get it (and it may not be what you hoped it would be!).

Like this story for instance: An angel appears at a college faculty meeting and tells the dean, “In return for your unselfish and exemplary behavior, the Lord will reward you with your choice of infinite wealth, infinite wisdom, or infinite beauty.”

Without hesitating, the dean says, “Give me infinite wisdom!” “Done!” says the angel before disappearing in a cloud of smoke. All heads now turn to the dean, who sits surrounded by a faint halo of light. “Well,” says a colleague, “say something brilliant.” The dean stands with a blank expression on his face, looks around the table, and says, “I should have taken the money.” But that’s a hard choice, isn’t it? Wealth and beauty are important in our culture. But wisdom—what difference does that make?

Wisdom isn’t often going to get you a nicer car, or a bigger paycheck. It won’t win you any awards or make you the life of the party. And yet, there are so many verses in the Bible about the value of wisdom. In fact, the Bible makes it clear

that the way of the foolish person leads to emptiness and even death, while the way of a wise person leads to joy, peace and eternal life. So, if an angel suddenly appeared to you and offered you the choice of wealth, beauty or wisdom, well, maybe the choice is a little easier than you thought?

The apostle Paul understood this better than most of us. Before he became a follower of Christ, he'd been a member of the Pharisees, an influential Jewish sect that practiced strict, legalistic observance of Jewish traditions and religious observances. As a Pharisee, Paul would have held a position of respect in his community. But when he became a Jesus-follower, he gave all that up. He gave up his influential, respected place in society. He gave up his community and home to travel all over training early church leaders. His life from then on was full of danger, persecution, beatings and imprisonment for his faith. The letter to the Ephesians was written during his first stint in jail. He writes as one who shares the wisdom gained from all he has been through.

The first thing Paul wants us to understand is that “the foolish person lives as if there is no God.” If there is no God, life has no purpose. It's perfectly logical for us to seek out anything that can make us happy for a few moment because that's all there is. I'm thinking of this verse from the old testament book of Judges (21:25) “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

If there is no God then the values of our faith are in question. Psalm 14:1 says quite plainly, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” And thus, for the

foolish person, life becomes about living only for themselves and only for the moment.

Warren Buffet's a self-made billionaire, one of the richest men in the world. One time he was speaking to some college students. This is part of what Warren Buffet said: "I know people who have a lot of money, and they get testimonial dinners, and they get hospital wings named after them. But the truth is that nobody in the world loves them. If you get to my age in life and nobody thinks well of you, I don't care how big your bank account is, your life is probably a disaster." As he sees it, the accumulating of money during one's life is insignificant compared to being loved and being respected and leaving a legacy of loving God and loving your neighbor. The fool sees no value in knowing God. The wise person discovers that knowing God is everything.

Secondly, Paul wants us to know is that wise folks know that wisdom, in the words of author James Merritt, "...to see life through the eyes of God, and live life in the will of God."

Would anything in our lives change if we were able to do that in a more intentional way? Would it change our attitude? Relationships? Priorities? Work? Future?

Someone has said that "Christians are like magnets." They have an opportunity to draw others to God, to hope, to truth, to new life. But magnets have the power to attract and to repel. Here's how Christian can repel. It's when we claim to be Christian, but we're still living like a "foolish" person, then we repel people away

from God, wasting the opportunity that God has given us to share his love and joy.

And finally, when you know God and live in God's will, then you can't help but be thankful. That's when you begin to know you're on the right path, gratitude. You see every moment of your life as a blessing, a God-given opportunity. Paul closes the passage with this, "Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Remember he's writing this from a prison. There's nothing comfortable or controllable about being in prison. He has lost everything that once defined him. And yet the joy and thanksgiving that flow through his letters are witness in such a powerful way to the truth of God. You can't get this from owning stuff or having power over others or in making lots of money. It doesn't exist. It's a gift that comes from knowing Jesus Christ in your heart.

So now what looks more attractive: the way of the wise or the way of the fool? "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (v 15-16). Paul knew what he was talking about when it came to making the most of his life.

Do you have it? Do you want more of it? It begins with a prayer...right now. Let's pray. Dear God, we all struggle daily to live as people of spiritual wisdom, to make the most of our lives. Help us to see when our priorities do not serve you. Fill us with your Spirit. Amen.