

- 1  **Thanksgiving ... for Such a Time as This**  
Ephesians 5:15-20 NIV
- 2  **Today is Thanksgiving Sunday.**
  - We're singing all these songs about Thanksgiving.
  - We're giving thanks for our loved ones who have passed on.
  - We're proclaiming scripture of thanksgiving to the Lord and blessing his Holy Name.
- 3  **Yet in the back of our minds might be a nagging feeling.**
  - Things aren't going too well in our country.
  - Our nation's politicians are best known for their ineffectiveness – how they bicker and fight.
  - We are in national turmoil over the best way to provide healthcare to our people.
  - Natural disasters surround us.
  - Violence seems to be worse than ever.
  - In the back of our mind we might feel – how can we give thanks in such a time as this?
    - Is this realistic?
    - Can it be genuine and sincere?
- 4  **Yet if we read Paul's words to the church at Ephesus, we get the idea that it is possible.**
- 5  **Ephesians 5:15-20 NIV <sup>15</sup> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.**
- 6  **<sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.<sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,**

- 7  **19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 8  **You see, if we take a closer look, things weren't going too well for Paul or for the believers at Ephesus either.**
- 9  **Paul writes these words while chained to the guards in a Roman jail.**
- The emperor was a man by the name of Nero, a perverted excuse for a king.
  - Before too long he would set fire to Rome and blame the Christians.
  - Later he would order Paul beheaded.
- 10  **And then Ephesus – it was a city wholly given over to heathenism.**
- In Paul's day it was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia.
  - Located near the coast, Ephesus served as a center for international commerce.
  - It was a prosperous, bustling, booming city.
    - If there had been a Fodor's Guide to Ephesus in the first century, it would have mentioned the famous Temple of Artemis.
    - That was the glory of ancient Ephesus.
    - Artemis was the goddess of sex.
      - Her temple was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
      - The central portion contained a statue of a woman with many breasts, symbolizing unfettered sexual freedom.
      - Now we might think our day and time is somehow

exceptional. But, we in the 21st-century have nothing on the ancient world.

- The people at Ephesus worked themselves up into a religious frenzy and then followed their lustful desires.

– One ancient writer said of the Ephesians, “Their morals were even lower than animals.”

– Astrology, black magic, and sorcery joined with sexual perversion to produce a degraded form of idolatry that held ancient Ephesus in its grip.

11  **And, meanwhile, clouds of persecution are rolling in on the horizon.**

- As the gospel spread, it encountered opposition in the form of entrenched interests that saw Jesus and his followers as a threat.
- The crosscurrents of heresy threatened to undermine the purity of the gospel.
- That’s what Paul meant when he said, “The days are evil” (v.16)

12  **What would Paul say to us today?**

- Evil days tempt us to despair, encourage us to give up, to say, “We can’t do it” because the day is dark, the hearts of men have grown cold, and there is nothing to be done.
- That’s not how Paul thought. That’s not how the heroes of our faith thought.
- In the Old Testament, Mordecai exhorted Esther, a Jewish Queen in the Persian Court.
  - She had the chance to save her people from genocide by the scheming of Haman, an evil member of the Emperor’s court.
  - Mordecai exhorted Esther,

13  **“Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?” Esther 4:14 NLT**

14  **And the question for us today is, “Who knows if we live in this age, this time and place, for such a time as this!”**

- Sometimes we give up too soon.
- G. Campell Morgan, the great Bible Scholar said, “Days of moral corruption offer special opportunities for the prosecution of great enterprises for the kingdom of God”
- Folks – strange as it seems - that’s good news! *The things that make it difficult for us for live as Christians are the things that make us shine.*
- It may be a tough pill to swallow but hard times are actually blessings in disguise.
- When the world around us seems to be going haywire, we have an incredible opportunity to display the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.
- The darker the night, the brighter the light shines.

15  **So, could it be no accident that we are here – you and I – in this present age for such a time as this?**


16  **Have you ever heard Martin Luther King’s final speech, the one he gave in Memphis on April 3, 1968, the day before he was assassinated.**

- *What stands out is it is a remarkably hopeful message, especially in contrast to the pressure of those momentous days.*
  - And because we know what happened the next day, we tend to miss the optimistic tone.
  - Though you can sense the unrelenting pressure of opposition and death threats, underneath there is bedrock faith.


17  **Dr. King frames the whole message this way. Suppose God were to come to him and ask this question, “Martin Luther King, which age would**

### **you like to live in?"**

- Dr. King goes on to survey all of human history, starting with Egypt, going on to Greece and Rome,
- then skipping the centuries to the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation,
- then on to the days of Abraham Lincoln,
- then on to the very troubled times of 1968 when the whole fabric of the nation seemed about to unravel.
- Here is Dr. King's imagined answer to the Almighty's imagined question:

18  **"Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, 'If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy.'"**

- "Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around."
- "That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars."
- He goes on to talk about what it means to live at such a crucial moment of history and applies it to the situation with the sanitation workers' strike in Memphis.
- You can feel the power building to that final climax, the one where he utters words both poignant and prophetic:

19  **King says, "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind."**

- "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place.
- But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to

do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land.

- I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy tonight.
- I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."
- "That man could preach! Amen!

20  **A thousand years from now, we will still remember those words.**

- I am struck by this simple sentence in his final paragraph: "I just want to do God's will."
- Those seven words summarize how we all ought to face the future,
  - understanding the fierce urgency of now,
  - grateful for the privilege of being alive for such a time as this, wherever God has placed us:

21  **Did you know that Christians are both pessimists and optimists,**

- Our realism makes us admit that the world is a place deeply scared by human evil and sin. Each of us bear the wounds of such brokenness.
- But actually we are much more optimistic than pessimistic because though we see what is happening in the world around us, we know that Jesus Christ conquered the grave.

22  **It's like being in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified.**

- On Friday pessimism reigned. The sky grew dark, the thunder cracked, the earth shook, and the sky wept as the son of glory suffered and died on the old rugged cross.

- But on Sunday, as the truth slowly dawned that the Lord had risen from the dead, as that one great truth broke through, as they began to believe the best good news anyone would ever hear, sorrow turned to joy, grief turned to laughter, and despair gave way to hope.
- We live on this side of the empty tomb!

23  **So is it possible to experience Thanksgiving in such a time as this?**

- These are great days to be alive. These are ...
  - Exciting days.
  - Amazing days.
  - Uncertain days.
  - Frightening days.
- All those things are true at the same time. When we see evil advancing in the world, keep in mind what Jesus said. "Let not your heart be troubled." (John 14:1 KJV).
- <sup>33</sup> These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33 NASV).

24  **Many of us grew up listening to Paul Harvey on the radio.**

- His warm voice, his wit and wisdom, his intonation, his pauses and sense of timing were remarkable.
- Here's one of his unforgettable quotes:

25  **"In times like these, it helps to recall that there have always been times like these."**

26  **Paul Harvey was right. There have always been times like these.**

- And no matter what happens today, the future is as bright as the promises of God, and because of that, we give thanks.

27 

28  **\* I'd like to gratefully acknowledge the inspiration of Dr. Ray Pritchard, from his message of "Are Christians Pessimists?" for many of the concepts in this message.**