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Sermon 21 February 2021

Giving 3: Giving Time (James 4: 13-17; Ephesians 5:1-2;14b-18)

- Good morning church—we are so glad that you took the time to join us today and we welcome you to our service—I believe God has something to say to us today that will challenge each of us to give ourselves to the fullness of His call for our lives
- We are continuing our four-week sermon series called a Generous Life—The Beauty in Giving, today—and we have been talking about what it means to live a life that is characterised by a willingness to share the blessings that God has provided to each of us with the church and with others, to make what we have available for the building of the Kingdom of God
- We have seen that there are many things that we can give when we are following God's generous example in our own lives—the one of course that most people think of first is that we can give of our financial resources—and we are finally going to get around to talking about that one next week—
- But as we have said each week that's only one way to give—that's only one thing that we can give—and during this sermon series we are also thinking about some other ways to give, some other things we can give
- We started our series by considering that before we can even begin to exemplify a generous life, we need to exemplify an attitude of gratitude—an understanding that God provides for us, that God meets our needs no matter what our situation is, and that we can be thankful in every circumstance—and we can be not only thankful but generous, because we have a perspective of abundance and not of scarcity

- And so we said that giving thanks is a **pre-requisite** to living a generous life, but we saw last week that the *sine qua non* of a generous life, the “without which nothing”—that element that a truly generous life is impossible without, is love—it is that agape love—that divine, Christlike love that is a gift from God and without which, Paul tells us, our gifts and powers and knowledge and even the sacrifice of all we have and all we are, is nothing, gains us nothing, is just meaningless noise
- So we’ve looked at “giving thanks,” and “giving love,” and today for a little while we’re going to think about “giving time.”
- And I want to begin by going way back in time to a little over 30 years ago, and sharing a little of my personal history with you
- When I was a student at Trevecca Nazarene College in Nashville, TN, a movie was released that got my classmates and my professors talking. I was an English major at the time, in 1989, and if my desire to one day be an English professor wasn’t strong enough already, this film settled it for me. The film was *Dead Poets’ Society*, and not to give away any spoilers about the plot if you haven’t seen it, but *Dead Poets’ Society* is about an unorthodox and inspirational teacher, and his students, at a boys’ boarding school, Welton Academy. I want to share with you a scene in which this teacher, Mr Keating, played by Robin Williams, takes his students out of their classroom and begins to let them know that he is going to teach them about much more than just poetry.
 - VIDEO
- “Carpe diem—seize the day, boys—make your lives extraordinary”—those lines are inspiring and motivational even without any theological consideration—the idea that we are not immortal, but that death awaits each of us, the certainty that surely

many of us would rather push from our minds and not be reminded of, that our days on this earth are numbered—that time is short and not to be wasted—

- But how much **more** should we be moved when we consider that the God of the universe, the God who created both space and time, who breathed the breath of life into those he formed from the dust, who in the fullness of time stepped from the eternal into the temporal, into humanity, even to death on a cross and whose resurrection glorifies and transforms our very mortality into everlasting life—how much more so should we be moved when we understand that this very God puts a call into the lives of His followers—a call to build the Kingdom, to proclaim the gospel, to redeem the lost, to rescue the perishing—with our lives—with our words and actions every minute and every hour and every day of our lives until we breathe our last and cross the line of worlds and we stand before our Maker having finished the course, having fought the good fight, having kept the faith.
- We need to be reminded every now and then, I think, that our time on earth is limited.
- This is what we are reminded of when Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and we receive the sign of the cross upon our foreheads and we're told "remember that you are dust and to dust you will return"
- And this what we heard this morning from the Letter of James, who asks us, "What is your life? For you are a mist—a vapour-- that appears for a little while and then vanishes." James says 'you make your plans about what you will do with your time—thinking "we'll go to this city for a year and get rich"—you think you have all the time in the world to do the things YOU want to do, when you don't even know what tomorrow holds—James says that kind of attitude is not only arrogant but evil--

what you ought to say, James tells us, is if the Lord wishes we will live and do this or that—because if you know what you ought to do—if you know the right thing to do—if you know how you ought to be spending your time and you spend your time doing something else—then THAT is sin—verse 17: Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin. James does not mince words—how you spend your time MATTERS, and NOT doing what you know you ought to be doing with the limited time that you have in this life—is SIN—if you are a follower of Christ, your time is to be given to God’s purposes and not your own schemes—but if you’re guided by the Spirit those two things will not be in opposition to each other

- As we’re thinking about a generous life, about giving of our resources—it’s worth remembering this morning that whatever resources we may have or not have—whatever resources we have to give or not—whether money, talent, skill, strength, knowledge, ability—there are folks who have none of these to give, but each and every one of us has the resource of time—even someone who has nothing else—as long as there is breath in our lungs and consciousness in our minds, we have time—and time is a resource like any other that can be wasted or it can be used wisely—and the wisest use of time is this: giving it up—handing it over to God for the building of the Kingdom, offering it as a sacrifice to God who transforms it and sanctifies it and makes it efficacious—in short, who glorifies it—and so today we are thinking about giving time
- And I’d like us to continue to consider what it means to “give time” by looking also at a few verses from the Epistle to the Ephesians, in which the Apostle Paul or someone writing in his stead says to the church at Ephesus these words—in chapter 5 beginning with verse 1:

- Therefore be imitators of God,—this is what we’ve been talking about in this sermon series—having a generous life because we serve a generous God whose example we follow—we are imitators of God
- as beloved children, 2 and live in love---we talked about that last Sunday, this is that agape love, that self-emptying love—that we are to have and to give—echoing the love of God for us and for others—the writer continues,
- as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us—elsewhere Paul says “let this same mind be in you”—be imitators of Christ who gave himself up for us-- a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. This is how followers of Christ are to view themselves—as an offering, a sacrifice, poured out to God—this is how we are to live, this is how we are to spend our days and hours and minutes—to give our time
- Now let’s skip down to verse 14: Therefore it says,
- ‘Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’
- This is a call to wake up—to shake off our slumber and unconsciousness—to get up—to rise up—and Christ will shine on you
- But, the apostle says in verse 15—**Be careful!** Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. The King James translation says “redeeming the time because the days are evil”—we’ll come back to that in a minute
- 17 So do not be foolish, the writer cautions-- but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; --don’t go through life in a state of inebriation, intoxicated, in a stupor, stumbling uselessly about without clarity of mind—but wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead—there is work to be done

- Do not be foolish, and do not be drunk-- but be filled with the Spirit.
- Now I'd like to take just a few minutes and consider two perspectives on this passage of scripture from Ephesians—the theological perspective and the practical perspective—
- And so first, let's think about the theological point that is being made here
- In general, the letter to the Ephesians is about God's plan to unite all of creation under the Lordship of Christ
- We see again and again throughout Ephesians this basic narrative, that the world because of the sin of Adam and Eve is fallen and under the wrath of God, but God in his mercy and grace has moved to redeem all of creation through Jesus and his crucifixion and resurrection. We read in chapter 1, beginning with verse 20: 20 God put (His) power to work in Christ when he raised (Jesus) from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places. . . . verse 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 **which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**
- Now notice there that description of the church: the BODY of Christ, the fullness of him who fills all in all —
- Now, ALL of creation is being offered redemption through Jesus—not simply through the work of Jesus' earthly ministry and crucifixion and resurrection, but also through those who are called the body of Christ because they are the **fullness of him who fills all in all**—and they are to be poured out as well, they are to build the kingdom —so the church is the body of Christ and each of us are members of it—and the work of the body of Christ is the redemption of a fallen creation—

- And when we understand **that** as the theological background of the letter to the Ephesians, when we read in verse 16 of Chapter 5 that we are to “redeem the time”—that’s the language that the King James uses—because the days are evil—then we realise that the writer is talking about the **redemptive work** of the church.
- When I was younger, growing up in the church, I used to hear that phrase “redeeming the time because the days are evil” all the time—and I used to think that it sounded very theological and poetic, but I really didn’t have any idea what it meant—what did it really mean to “redeem the time” as the King James says—or here in the NRSV, to “make the most of the time”—“BECAUSE the days are evil”—how can days be “evil”? What in the world was that about?
- And when I began later in my life to really study the Scriptures I found that the word there that is translated “redeem” in the King James version and “make the most of” in the NRSV literally means to purchase—to ransom, to rescue—and so “redeem” is a pretty good translation there—when we talk about the redemption of the world—when we say the world is in need of redemption—we’re talking about this idea—when we say that Jesus’ sacrifice saves us, ransoms us, rescues us—when the hymnwriter says “Called unto holiness, church of our God, PURCHASE of Jesus, redeemed by His blood,” she is referring to this idea
- And so the writer of Ephesians charges us, the church, to “redeem” the time—to rescue it, to purchase it, to ransom it, --BECAUSE the days are evil—the days are evil—now what does that mean?
- Well the root word that is translated as “evil” there is “ponéros” and “ponéros” doesn’t just mean evil or bad—it literally means “painful”—in fact Hippocrates uses

that very word often in his medical writings to refer to pain that patients

experience—but poneros doesn't just refer to things that are bad and painful, but

- also to things that are associated with toil, with miserable labour--drudgery—and when we put these three things together—evil and pain, and toil—we are reminded of the very things that creation is cursed with after the fall—a fallen creation is one that is cursed with evil and pain and toil—and so the image here is not just that the days are “evil” but that the days are fallen—that time is fallen as a result of sin—that history itself is in need of redemption—and there are things that we see in our days as a result of the fall that are evil and toilsome and painful—poverty and hunger and sickness and injustice and bondage—and the church is called to “redeem the time because the days are evil—because life is hard—because creation is fallen—but the days are NOT irredeemably evil—they can be redeemed—and since the world, the days we live in, are in need of redemption, the church as the body of Christ is called to redeem the time, as the writer tells us at the very beginning of Chapter 5, we are to be imitators of God and live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us in sacrifice
- Because we are followers of Jesus, because we have been saved through faith by God's grace, we are therefore the body of Christ, and just as Christ redeems us we are called to redeem the time, to transform a fallen creation—to rescue the perishing, to set the captive free, to feed the hungry, to give sight to the blind, to proclaim the good news of the gospel to a broken world that strives in darkness—
- This is what we are charged to DO. As Charles Wesley reminds us
 - A charge to keep I have--
 - To serve the present age,

- My calling to fulfill;
 - Oh, may it all my pow'rs engage
 - To do my Master's will!
- We are charged with redeeming the time—serving the present age—and the writer of Ephesians tells us what this entails in chapter 2 where he says in verse 10: 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand **to be our way of life**.
 - What has God made us for? For good works. That is to be our way of life.
 - But take a look at what we read in the 2 verses that precede verse 10—starting at verse 8: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast.
 - Now did you catch that? Verse 10—For we are what he made us, created in Christ Jesus FOR good works—but, verse 8 and 9 make clear that our salvation is not the result of “good works”—but good works are the result of our salvation —we are not saved because we do good works, but we do good works because we’re saved—and doing good takes time—and the church is called to give its time—we are each called to give our time, to doing good.
 - And that brings us to the practical perspective on these verses from the 5th chapter of Ephesians.
 - John Wesley took a practical, and particular, approach to this passage when in January of 1782 he wrote and delivered a sermon entitled “On Redeeming the Time.” It is sermon number 93 in his collected sermons.
 - And in that sermon, Wesley takes almost 4000 words to make one practical point—and that point is this: “Don’t sleep too much.”

- Now you might think I'm joking, but I welcome you to read it for yourself—in fact, I will include it at the end of the transcript of this sermon, so if you download the transcript you can see it there—
- And you will see that Wesley goes into great detail about how sleeping too much is sinful and harmful—and how he recommends that folks figure out how little sleep they need, and make sure that's how much they get—no less, because that's harmful, too—but also no more— of course, different people need different amounts
- But Wesley warns against sleeping too late—and against just lying in bed awake for too long—pointing out that many people who sleep well past 4am are prone to nervous disorders and general ill-health because, and I quote “By soaking. . . so long between warm sheets, the flesh is, as it were, parboiled, and becomes soft and flabby.”
- Now Wesley is quick to point out that simply waking up early will not make you a Christian, but, he says, not doing it “may keep you a Heathen, void of the whole Christian spirit”
- Now let me just say quickly that I think that Wesley may be going just a bit far in putting so much emphasis on how early a person wakes up—but the reasons behind his emphasis are valid—he says that waking up early is just one step among many in taking seriously the fact that we are called to give of our time to the building of the Kingdom, and laying around in bed more than we need to is a waste of our valuable and limited time
- Wesley's point is not so much about sleeping, but about what we do with our time.

- It's well-known that the word "Methodist" was a way that other students at Oxford would make fun of the members of John Wesley's "Holy Club," because they were so "methodical" about time management—because they truly believed that efficient use of our time was an act of worship, and was a Christian duty.
- And it was that belief that led John Wesley to become almost obsessive about how he spent his time
- Wesley believed that being idle—wasting time-- was contrary to following Jesus—he said "No idleness can consist with growth in grace. Nay, without exactness in redeeming the time, you cannot retain the grace you received in justification"
- His first rule was "Be diligent. . . Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time; neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary."
- The familiar image of Wesley reading while riding his horse gives us a little more insight into the way he wanted to make every minute count—it's probably a good thing that Wesley didn't drive a car—he'd probably have been one of these people who read on their phones while they drive—but Wesley wanted to make sure his time was spent effectively.
- That's why he recommended limiting conversations and visits with other people to no more than an hour—he asked, "do you really NEED longer than that?"
- And I suspect we would have disagreed on that point—because I like to visit—and I have missed it something awful during this pandemic—I cannot wait to have long face-to-face conversations with folks
- Anyway, while I have a suspicion that John Wesley might have been for some of us, like me, a little hard to get along with because of his constant drive to make the most of his time—to give as much time as he could to the work of the Kingdom—I

also think that most of us, like me, could use a reminder that our time is a limited resource, and that it is a resource we are called to give to God—to be stewards of—and to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel

- And how are we to give our time? What are we to do?
- John Wesley answered that question like this: “Do good. Do all the good thou canst. (S)upply thy neighbour’s wants; and thou wilt never want something to do. Canst thou find none that need the necessaries of life, that are pinched with cold or hunger; none that have not raiment to put on, or a place where to lay their head; none that are wasted with pining sickness; none that are languishing in prison? If you duly considered our Lord’s words, ‘The poor have you always with you,’ you would no more ask, “What shall I do?”
- How can we give our time? Wesley says “look around you for those in need.”
- But giving time can take other forms as well. There are other ways to give time.
- In the Nazarene Manual, there’s a list of the duties of a pastor—there are 27 of them—things like preaching and administering the sacraments and visiting the sick and receiving new members into the church—but the very first duty that is listed—“job 1” you might say, is this: “pray.”
- And I think that probably ought to be “Job 1” for laypeople as well—any follower of Jesus ought to give time primarily through prayer—I would go so far as to say that prayer is the most powerful use of time available to a Christian—Paul tells us to pray without ceasing—James tells us that the fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much—and you can do it anytime and anywhere and for anyone—
- Give time in prayer. I know there are so many in our church family who give so much of their time praying for others and for the church, and for their pastors

- And during this season of Lent we also think, along with prayer, of fasting. That's a way of giving time by not doing something—Jesus shows us the importance of fasting when, even though his earthly ministry would last only a little more than 3 years, the very first thing he does after his baptism is to fast in the wilderness for 40 days—he takes time to prepare himself for what he is called to do—and preparation is an essential use of time—Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I'll spend the first 4 sharpening the axe.” Fasting sharpens the axe; it refines our focus
- And because preparation is important, reading is important. Give time by reading the Word, reading commentaries, reading devotionals, reading the news, reading a good book—get good information—John Wesley told his ministers in training to read at least 5 hours a day or go back to their old jobs if they couldn't manage that—he told them to “have as often as possible a book in your hand”—in the 21st century we have a lot more forms of media available to us, but educating ourselves is still an important way of giving time to the Kingdom
- We also give time when we worship—you are giving time right now—and today there are more opportunities than ever to give our time by participating in worship online and on TV and the radio—and we'll get back to in-person one of these days
- There are so many ways to give our time each day to the building of the Kingdom, so many ways to show the love of Jesus
- We give our time when we are patient—in situations when we have to wait—in a queue at the post office or the bank or on the telephone—when we don't allow frustrating circumstances to steal our joy—when we give others the benefit of the doubt—when we refuse to be in a hurry or expect others to hurry up for us—when

we are patient with the pandemic—when we don't bend the rules and endanger others just because we're tired of waiting—we give time

- You give time when you simply do your job, whatever it is, in a way that reflects the love of Jesus—when you carry out your day's activities with a Christlike attitude and outlook
- There are so many in this community who cheerfully and willingly give their time—and the pandemic has only increased that number--those who connect with others through calls and notes and texts and emails of encouragement and concern—I know I sure appreciate a text or a phone call when I get them, and I do every week
- People who walk their neighbour's dog, or get their groceries or prescriptions for them, those who deliver meals to folks
- Folks who know how to make crafts that they give to others, even those they don't know, just to encourage them and show them that they are appreciated
- People who keep our church building clean and functional
- People who contribute to our online church videos—providing music and using their talents for the Lord
- Folks who volunteer at the Food Bank and the Living Room
- Folks who serve on our church board, who give their time to the business of the church, faithfully and with joy
- All of those who give their time to our Hospitality Ministry—those who plan, and cook, and package and label and distribute meals—those who bake and those who pray and those who peel potatoes
- Those who take the time to attend prayer times and Bible studies—without them those things wouldn't happen

- This is a church that gives time—and we live in a community that gives time—and that is why revival is not only coming, but revival is here—the Kingdom is being built and lives are being changed—because the body of Christ is redeeming the time—we are seeing the transformative power of sacrifice in our world
- It's an exciting time—and I'm glad I'm part of it—I hope you are too—we appreciate you so much—have a great week and we'll look forward to seeing you next Sunday if not before—may God bless you.

On Redeeming The Time (John Wesley, sermon 93)

"Redeeming the time." Eph. 5:16.

1. "See that ye walk circumspectly," says the Apostle in the preceding verse, "not as fools, but as wise men, redeeming the time;" saving all the time you can for the best purposes; buying up every fleeting moment out of the hands of sin and Satan, out of the hands of sloth, ease, pleasure, worldly business; the more diligently, because the present "are evil days," days of the grossest ignorance, immorality, and profaneness.

2. This seems to be the general meaning of the words. But I purpose, at present, to consider only one particular way of redeeming the time," namely, from sleep.

3. This appears to have been exceeding little considered, even by pious men. Many that have been eminently conscientious in other respects, have not been so in this. They seemed to think it an indifferent thing, whether they slept more or less; and never saw it in the true point of view, as an important branch of Christian temperance.

That we may have a more just conception hereof, I will endeavour to show,

I. What it is to "redeem the time" from sleep.

II. The evil of not redeeming it. And

III. The most effectual manner of doing it.

I. 1. And, First, What is it to "redeem the time" from sleep It is, in general, to take that measure of sleep every night which nature requires, and no more; that measure which is the most conducive to the health and vigour both of the body and mind.

2. But it is objected, "One measure will not suit all men; -- some require considerably more than others. Neither will the same measure suffice even the same persons at one time as at another. When a person is sick, or, if not actually so, yet weakened by preceding sickness, he certainly wants more of this natural restorative, than he did when in perfect health. And so he will when his strength and spirits are exhausted by hard or long-continued labour."

3. All this is unquestionably true, and confirmed by a thousand experiments. Whoever, therefore, they are that have attempted to fix one measure of sleep for all persons did not understand the nature of the human body, so widely different in different persons; as neither did they who imagined that the same measure would suit even the same person at all times. One would wonder, therefore, that so great a man as Bishop Taylor should have formed this strange imagination; much more, that the measure which he has assigned for the general standard should be only three hours in four-and- twenty. That good and sensible man, Mr. Baxter, was not much nearer the truth; who supposes four hours in four and twenty will suffice for any man. I knew an extremely sensible man, who was absolutely persuaded that no one living needed to sleep above five hours in twenty-four. But when he made the experiment himself, he quickly relinquished the opinion. And I am fully convinced, by an observation continued for more than fifty years, that whatever may be done by extraordinary persons, or in some extraordinary cases (wherein persons have subsisted with very little sleep for some weeks, or even months,) a human body can scarce continue in health and vigour, without at least, six hours' sleep in four-and-twenty. Sure I am, I never met with such an instance: I never found either man or woman that retained vigorous health for one year, with a less quantity of sleep than this.

4. And I have long observed, that women, in general, want a little more sleep than men; perhaps, because they are, in common of a weaker, as well as a moister, habit of body. If, therefore, one might venture to name one standard, (though liable to many exceptions and occasional alterations,) I am inclined to think this would come near to the mark: Healthy men, in general, need a little above six hours' sleep, healthy women, a little above seven, in four-and-twenty. I myself want six hours and a half, and I cannot well subsist with less.

5. If anyone desires to know exactly what quantity of sleep his own constitution requires, he may very easily make the experiment which I made about sixty years ago: I then waked every night about twelve or one, and lay awake for some time. I readily concluded that this arose from my lying longer in bed than nature required. To be satisfied, I procured an alarum, which waked me the next morning at seven; (near an hour earlier than I rose the day before,) yet I lay awake again at night. The second morning I rose at six; but, notwithstanding this, I lay awake the second night. The third morning I rose at five; but, nevertheless, I lay awake the third night. The fourth morning I rose at four; (as, by the grace of God, I have done ever since;) and I lay awake no more. And I do not now lie awake (taking the year round) a quarter of an hour together in a month. By the same experiment, rising earlier and earlier every morning, may anyone find how much sleep he really wants.

II. 1. "But why should anyone be at so much pains What need is there of being so scrupulous Why should we make ourselves so particular What harm is there in doing as our neighbours do -- suppose in lying from ten till six or seven in summer, and till eight or nine in winter"

2. If you would consider this question fairly, you will need a good deal of candour and impartiality; as what I am about to say will probably be quite new; different from anything you ever heard in your life; different from the judgment, at least from the example, of your parents and your nearest relations; nay, and perhaps of the most religious persons you ever were acquainted with. Lift up, therefore, your heart to the Spirit of truth, and beg of him to shine upon it, that without respecting any man's person, you may see and follow the truth as it in Jesus.

3. Do you really desire to know what harm there is in not redeeming all the time you can from sleep suppose in spending therein an hour a day more than nature requires Why, First, it hurts your substance; it is throwing away six hours a week which might turn to some temporal account. If you can do any work, you might earn something in that time, were it ever so small. And you have no need to throw even this away. If you do not want it yourself, give it to them that do; you know some of them that are not far off. If you are of no trade, still you may so employ the time that it will bring money, or money's worth, to yourself, or others.

4. The not redeeming all the time you can from sleep, the spending more time therein than your constitution necessarily requires, in the Second place, hurts your health. Nothing can be more certain than this, though it is not commonly observed, because the evil steals on you by slow and insensible degrees. In this gradual and almost imperceptible manner it lays the foundation of many diseases. It is the chief real (though unsuspected) cause of all nervous diseases in particular. Many inquiries have been made, why nervous disorders are so much more common among us than among our ancestors. Other causes may frequently concur; but the chief is, we lie longer in bed. Instead of rising at four, most of us who are not obliged to work for our bread lie till seven, eight, or nine. We need inquire no farther. This sufficiently accounts for the large increase of these painful disorders.

5. It may be observed, that most of these arise, not barely from sleeping too long, but even from what we imagine to be quite harmless, the lying too long in bed. By soaking (as it is emphatically called) so long between warm sheets, the flesh is, as it were, parboiled, and becomes soft and flabby." The nerves, in the mean time, are quite unstrung, and all the train of melancholy symptoms -- faintness, tremors, lowness of spirits, (so called,) come on, till life itself is a burden.

6. One common effect of either sleeping too long, or lying too long in bed, is weakness of sight, particularly that weakness which is of the nervous kind. When I was young, my sight was remarkably weak. Why is it stronger now than it was forty years ago I impute this principally to the blessing of God, who fits us for whatever he calls us to. But undoubtedly the outward means which he has been pleased to bless was the rising early in the morning.

7. A still greater objection to the not rising early, the not redeeming all the time we can from sleep, is, it hurts the soul, as well as the body; it is a sin against God. And this indeed it must necessarily be, on both the preceding accounts. For we cannot waste, or (which comes to the same thing) not improve, any part of our worldly substance, neither can we impair our own health, without sinning against Him.

8. But this fashionable intemperance does also hurt the soul in a more direct manner. It sows the seeds of foolish and hurtful desires; it dangerously inflames our natural appetites; which a person stretching and yawning in bed is just prepared to gratify. It breeds and continually increases sloth, so often objected to the English nation. It opens the way, and prepares the soul, for every other kind of intemperance. It breeds an universal softness and faintness of spirit, making us afraid of every little inconvenience, unwilling to deny ourselves any pleasure, or to take up or bear any cross. And how then shall we be able (without which we must drop into hell) to "take the kingdom of heaven by violence" It totally unfits us for "enduring hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ;" and, consequently, for "fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold on eternal life."

9. In how beautiful a manner does that great man, Mr. [William] Law treat this important subject! [Viz., Redeeming time from Sleep] Part of his words I cannot but here subjoin, for the use of every sensible reader.

"I take it for granted that every Christian who is in health is up early in the morning. For it is much more reasonable to suppose a person is up early because he is a Christian, than because he is a labourer, or a tradesman, or a servant.

"We conceive an abhorrence of a man that is in bed when he should be at his labour. We cannot think good of him, who is such a slave to drowsiness as to neglect his business for it.

"Let this, therefore, teach us to conceive how odious we must appear to God, if we are in bed, shut up in sleep, when we should be praising God; and are such slaves to drowsiness as to neglect our devotions for it.

"Sleep is such a dull, stupid state of existence, that, even among mere animals, we despise them most which are most drowsy. He, therefore, that chooses to enlarge the slothful indolence of sleep, rather than be early at his devotions, chooses the dullest refreshment of the body, before the noblest enjoyments of the soul. He chooses that state which is a reproach to mere animals, before that exercise which is the glory of angels.

10. "Besides, he that cannot deny himself this drowsy indulgence, is no more prepared for prayer when he is up, than he is prepared for fasting or any other act of self-denial. He may indeed more easily read over a form of prayer, than he can perform these duties; but he is no more disposed for the spirit of prayer, than he is disposed for fasting. For sleep thus indulged gives a softness to all our tempers, and makes us unable to relish any thing but what suits an idle state of mind, as sleep does. So that a person who is a slave to this idleness is in the same temper when he is up. Every thing that is idle or sensual pleases him. And every thing that requires trouble or self-denial, is hateful to him, for the same reason that he hates to rise.

11. "It is not possible for an epicure to be truly devout. He must renounce his sensuality, before he can relish the happiness of devotion. Now, he that turns sleep into an idle indulgence, does as much to corrupt his soul, to make it a slave to bodily appetites, as an epicure does. It does not disorder his life, as notorious acts of intemperance do; but, like any more moderate course of indulgence, it silently, and by smaller degrees, wears away the spirit of religion, and sinks the soul into dullness and sensuality.

"Self-denial of all kinds is the very life and soul of piety; but he that has not so much of it as to be able to be early at his prayers cannot think that he has taken up his cross, and is following Christ.

"What conquest has he got over himself What right hand has he cut off What trials is he prepared for What sacrifice is he ready to offer to God, who cannot be so cruel to himself as to rise to prayer at such a time as the drudging part of the world are content to rise to their labour

12. "Some people will not scruple to tell you, that they indulge themselves in sleep because they have nothing to do; and that if they had any business to rise to they would not lose so much of their time in sleep. But they must be told that they mistake the matter; that they have a great deal of business to do; they have a hardened heart to change; they have the whole spirit of religion to get. For surely he that thinks he has nothing to do, because nothing but his prayers want him, may justly be said to have the whole spirit of religion to seek.

"You must not therefore consider how small a fault it is to rise late; but how great a misery it is to want the spirit of religion, and to live in such softness and idleness as make you incapable of the fundamental duties of Christianity.

"If I was to desire you not to study the gratification of your palate, I would not insist upon the sin of wasting your money, though it is a great one; but I would desire you to renounce such a way of life, because it supports you in such a state of sensuality as renders you incapable of relishing the most essential doctrines of religion.

"For the same reason, I do not insist much upon the sin of wasting your time in sleep, though it be a great one; but I desire you to renounce this indulgence, because it gives a softness and idleness to your soul, and is so contrary to that lively, zealous, watchful, self-denying spirit, which was not only the spirit of Christ and his Apostles, and the spirit of all the saints and martyrs that have ever been among men, but must be the spirit of all those who would not sink in the common corruption of the world.

13. "Here, therefore, we must fix our charge against this practice. We must blame it, not as having this or that particular evil, but as a general habit that extends itself through our whole spirit, and supports a state of mind that is wholly wrong.

"It is contrary to piety; not as accidental slips or mistakes in life are contrary to it; but in such a manner as an ill state of body is contrary to health.

"On the other hand, if you was to rise early every morning, as an instance of self-denial, as a method of renouncing indulgence, as a means of redeeming your time and fitting your spirit for prayer, you would soon find the advantage. This method, though it seems but a small circumstance, might be a means of great piety. It would constantly keep it in your mind, that softness and idleness the bane of religion. It would teach you to exercise power over yourself, and to renounce other pleasures and tempers that war against the soul. And what is so planted and watered, will certainly have an increase from God."

III. 1. It now only remains to inquire, in the Third place, how we may redeem the time, how we may proceed in this important affair. In what manner shall we most effectually practise this important branch of temperance

I advise all of you who are thoroughly convinced of the unspeakable importance of it, suffer not that conviction to die away, but instantly begin to act suitably to it. Only do not depend on your own strength; if you do, you will be utterly baffled. Be deeply sensible that as you are not able to do anything good of yourselves, so here, in

particular, all your strength, all your resolution, will avail nothing. Whoever trusts in himself will be confounded. I never found an exception. I never knew one who trusted in his own strength that could keep this resolution for a twelve-month.

2. I advise you, Secondly, cry to the Strong for strength. Call upon Him that hath all power in heaven and earth, and believe that he will answer the prayer that goeth not out of feigned lips. As you cannot have too little confidence in yourself, so you cannot have too much in him. Then set out in faith; and surely his strength shall be made perfect in your weakness.

3. I advise you, Thirdly, add to your faith, prudence: Use the most rational means to attain your purpose. Particularly begin at the right end, otherwise you will lose your labour. If you desire to rise early, sleep early; secure this point at all events. In spite of the most dear and agreeable companions, in spite of their most earnest solicitations, in spite of entreaties, raileries, or reproaches, rigorously keep your hour. Rise up precisely at your time, and retire without ceremony. Keep your hour, notwithstanding the most pressing business: Lay all things by till the morning. Be it ever so great a cross, ever so great self-denial, keep your hour, or all is over.

4. I advise you, Fourthly, be steady. Keep your hour of rising without intermission. Do not rise two mornings, and lie in bed the third; but what you do once, do always. "But my head aches." Do not regard that. It will soon be over. "But I am uncommonly drowsy; my eyes are quite heavy." Then you must not parley; otherwise it is a lost case; but start up at once. And if your drowsiness does not go off, lie down for awhile an hour or two after. But let nothing make a breach upon this rule, rise and dress yourself at your hour.

5. Perhaps you will say, "The advice is good; but it comes too late! I have made a breach already. I did rise constantly and for a season, nothing hindered me. But I gave way by little and little, and I have now left it off for a considerable time." Then, in the name of God, begin again! Begin to-morrow; or rather to-night, by going to bed early, in spite of either company or business. Begin with more self-diffidence than before, but with more confidence in God. Only follow these few rules, and, my soul for yours, God will give you the victory. In a little time the difficulty will be over; but the benefit will last for ever.

6. If you say, "But I cannot do now as I did then; for I am not what I was: I have many disorders, my spirits are low, my hands shake; I am all relaxed," -- I answer: All these are nervous symptoms; and they all partly arise from your taking too much sleep: Nor is it probable they will ever be removed, unless you remove the cause. Therefore, on this very account, (not only to punish yourself for your folly and unfaithfulness, but,) in order to recover your health and strength, resume your early rising. You have no other possible means of recovering, in any tolerable degree, your health both of body and mind. Do not murder yourself outright. Do not run on in the path that leads to the gates of death! As I said before, so I say again, In the name of God, this very day, set out anew. True, it will be more difficult than it was at the beginning. But bear the difficulty which you have brought upon yourself, and it will not last long. The Sun of Righteousness will soon arise again, and will heal both your soul and your body.

7. But do not imagine that this single point, rising early, will suffice to make you a Christian. No: Although that single point, the not rising, may keep you a Heathen, void of the whole Christian spirit; although this alone (especially if you had once conquered it) will keep you cold, formal, heartless, dead, and make it impossible for you to get one step forward in vital holiness, yet this alone will go but a little way to make you a real Christian. It is but one step out of many; but it is one. And having taken this, go forward. Go on to universal self-denial, to temperance in all things, to a firm resolution of taking up daily every cross whereto you are called. Go on, in a full pursuit of all the mind that was in Christ, of inward and then outward holiness; so shall you be not almost but altogether, a Christian; so shall you finish your course with joy: You shall awake up after his likeness, and be satisfied.

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