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# S E R M O N,

DELIVERED IN LEOMINSTER,

AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE YEAR,

LORD'S DAY, JAN. 1st, 1815.

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BY TIMOTHY FLINT.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

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LEICESTER,

PRINTED BY HORI BROWN.

1815.

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# S E R M O N.

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I. CORINTHIANS VII. 29.

*The time is short.*

**MANKIND** are very ready to agree in their avowed estimate of the value and importance of time. We discover their inconsistency, when we see the manner in which they spend it, and the purposes, to which they devote it. They mourn over its shortness and uncertainty, and rise from these melancholy remarks to squander and trifle it away, as though it were the most certain and inexhaustible possession.

But, spend it, as we will, "the time is short; the days few and evil," before these, our frail tabernacles of clay, will be crushed by violence, or will *crumble* by our innate principle of decay, and fall of themselves. Any limited period of time, however great, to our immortal being must be short. Short to such

a creature must be that lapse, which is every moment diminishing, and will soon have its end. The whole history, it is remarked, of those that lived before the flood, is comprised by the sacred historian in stating, that they lived eight, or nine hundred years, "begat sons and daughters, and died." A single line is sufficient to detail all, that was memorable in a life of nine hundred years. If their career was so short, that a line was sufficient to note the incidents and the interval between the cradle and the grave, in comparison what is the life of man at the present day?

But it is useless, and worse than useless, to spend of that precious, rapid and uncertain time in fruitless and repining complaints against the irreversible law of our being. If murmurings could avail us, they would but poorly become those, who do by no means make the best use of the time, they have. Let us not feel authorized to mourn, that the days of our pilgrimage are so brief and transient, until we have with all economy and good fidelity devoted our passing days to the proper duties and the great business of life. We will not complain; for we must all be sensible, that we do not thus appropriate our time. Instead of indulging fruitless sighs, while we contemplate that unchanging course of things, which the Almighty hath established, let us spend the present moments to better purpose, in attempting to ascertain, how we may best improve and appropriate this short span. As we are tenants at will in these houses of clay, let

us see, in what manner we may be ready, cheerfully and submissively to retire from them, when it shall please the Almighty proprietor to dispossess us.

*The time is short,* because we have much to perform on the earth. This is our first doctrine ; and the inference is, that we ought to appropriate all our time to the proper duties and the great business of life.

*The time is short,* because it is utterly uncertain. This is our second doctrine ; and the inference is, that we ought to be in habitual readiness to resign such an insecure and transient possession. May God give us wisdom to consider these things.

Part 1. *The time is short,* because we have a great work to accomplish. The ten thousand about us seem to have no higher notion of the business of life, than, that it is to obtain subsistence and make an eligible settlement for ourselves and family in the world. Food and raiment, wealth, honors and distinctions constitute the grand objects of pursuit. To obtain as much of these, as we may, to hold upon them as long as possible, and to retire from them with the most tranquility in our power, seems to be the ultimate object of desire. And to a certain extent both reason and scripture authorize us to pursue these objects. We are bound to be industrious in the calling, pursuit, and occupation, *wherewith God hath called us.* We may innocently make a reasonable provision for those, whom providence has peculiarly charged upon us. He, on the contrary, who neglects this provision, saith

the holy apostle, *hath denied the faith, and is worse, than an infidel.*

These, though duties in their place, are however, but a small part of the object, for which God sent us into the world. They are duties, which grow out of that part of our natures, which connects us with the lower orders of being, and the dust, and which can endure but for a short period. They must therefore be comparatively trifling and unimportant to those, who expect to live forever. God hath placed us here upon probation for an eternal state. Into these frail and dying natures he hath transfused a reasonable, spiritual and immortal existence, which is that part of our natures, which is alone worth any serious regard. When he sent us here, he sent us to try and prove these immortal minds. Our condition on the earth bears all the marks of commission and trust. He gave us a great charge to execute, duties to fulfill, a post to defend, important preparations to make for the time of account; and but a very short and uncertain period, in which to accomplish all. And, that he might be merciful, and righteous in his judgments, and leave nothing to his creatures, wherewith to reply against his decree, or to charge upon the necessity of their condition, he hath left no natural impediment in the way of their answering the end of their being. Every one, that faithfully and with his whole heart improves the means, placed in his power by God, will obtain the incorruptible crown, that is promised, as the reward of fidelity.

Certainly in a situation so interesting ; and under responsibilities so solemn, with such natures and such duties, no one can claim to be idle for want of employment. Yet I know not, says the man immersed in schemes, that centre and terminate in himself, what I have to do. What is written in the law ? How readest thou ? Is the great object to establish and distinguish yourself, to marry or be given in marriage, give your names to your children and your lands, and retire ? Is it to consume the fruits of others' industry, *to eat and drink and be merry ?*

What have you to do ? The answer is easy. You have a polluted nature to cleanse, *a new heart* to obtain, and preparations to make for that day of "dread decision," when the destinies of your soul will be settled forever. What is now the condition of that soul ? Have you a *new heart*, and are you *renewed in the temper of your mind*, and the tenor of your life ? Is your nature sanctified ? Have you *passed from death unto life* ? On which side are you of that awful line of decision, that separates between the friends and the enemies of God ; between those, who are bound to heaven, and those to hell ? Have you possessed the vessel of your body in purity and sanctification ? Are your inclinations, tastes and desires such, that you sincerely love that heaven of spiritual and holy enjoyments, which is revealed in holy scripture ? Have you so repented of every sin, that you do sincerely hate and abhor all sin ? Do you

know *Christ taught, and the fellowship of his sufferings, and the power of his resurrection?* Should God see fit immediately to summon you into his presence, do you feel safe, to have your character, as it now is, irretrievably fixed and sealed up by death for the judgement of the great day? Who will dare to reply to all this in the affirmative?

What have you to do? *A new nature to obtain; desires to regulate; passions to restrain; pride to subdue; selfishness to vanquish; and many great and painful duties to perform.* Are you not passionate, revengeful, easily moved to wrath, cruel, retaliating, and hard to forgive? are you not given to your appetites and pleasures? With what eyes do you look upon this *world that is passing away?* To remove all these obstacles in the way to heaven is to *cut off a right hand, to pluck out a right eye, to crucify your flesh, and the world;* that is, it is a task, hard, self-denying, and to the last degree painful. To do all this is through *faith to remove mountains;* it is to remove from the heart propensities, as firmly rooted there, as the oaks are upon the hills. What! is it nothing to conquer your stubbornness, your pride and selfishness, your indifference to religion, the coldness of your love to God, and your disposition to murmur against his righteous, and eternal providence? And yet all this must be accomplished before you can have one founded hope of entering into the kingdom of heaven. Alas! the penitence and the exertions of

three score years and ten, excited and fostered by the divine grace and compassion, would seem scarcely sufficient to remove these mountains, *to make of these stones children of Abraham*, to prepare their polluted natures for the society, the purity, and the employments of heaven.

What have you to do? Why *to work the work, the work of him, that sent you; to do good and communicate to the bodies and the souls of men, to rear your family in the fear, the nurture and admonition of the Lord; to give a good example; to instruct the ignorant, enlighten the blind and reclaim the wandering; to become eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; and to obtain the blessings of those, that were ready to perish.* Do you ask then, what you have to do? Alas! You will hardly find, where to begin the enumeration of duties, that thicken in the detail, and press upon every one of your rapid moments. Your appointed task commences its obligations, as soon as you are capable of reason. It only ends, when God calls you to retire from your labours. The whole prospect before you is a wide field of duty. It is a *race*, and you must *run for the prize.* It is a *warfare*, and you must *gird on the whole armour of God*, and must resist your *spiritual adversaries*, without and within, *unto blood.* It is a *vineyard*, in which you must patiently *endure the heat and burden of the day.* It is not to lie on a bed of down; nor to chaunt the *sound of the viol and the harp*, nor to *annoint your-*



*self with the chief ointments.* It is not to stretch yourself supinely in the shade. It is a labour of self-denial, of humiliation and tears ; a conflict, a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. God is the spectator and the judge of the manner, in which you *fight this good fight of faith.* Heaven is the reward of fidelity, and hell of those, who are *found wanting.* Surely he, who aspires to the high character of a christian, will not doubt, that he has much to do. Instead of being discouraged by the endless succession of duties, that he sees rising before him, he will *gird up the loins of his mind,* and will be chiefly anxious to devote all his precious moments to the proper duties of life.

It is sufficiently obvious, that he, who aspires to be a christian, will take such a view of the number and extent of his duties, as to exclude all pretext for idleness. Yet there are those, who assume to be christians, comforting themselves in their indolence, that they do no harm. What ! is it no harm to slumber at your post, and leave the work, that God gave you undone ? Is it no harm, that, while you have been remitting your exertions, the stream has been carrying you down ? Is it no harm, that the wretched multiplied around you, and uttered their claims in groans and tears, to which you were deaf and blind ? Is it no harm, that the workmanship of God, which should have gained lustre, has tarnished in your hands ? Where are the ignorant, whom you have instructed, the wretched, whom you have relieved, the sinners,

whom you have been instrumental in converting? Had God sent you into the world merely to do no harm, he had probably, rooted you to the earth, as a vegetable. He had given you no head to devise, no heart to feel, nor hands to execute.

It is a most important inference from our first doctrine, and from this view of the subject, that every man, who aspires to be a christian, will feel himself bound with economy, and with vigorous industry, to fill up with duty and usefulness all those rapid and precious moments, on which eternity depends.

But should the indolent and careless be excited to think of the importance of improving their time, if they proceed to the multiplied duties of life without method, or arrangement, they will, probably, be confused and discouraged, with the infinite diversity of those duties. They will scarcely know, where to begin. Their duties will crowd, and interfere, and much time will be lost, and much resolution will evaporate, through perplexity and doubt, and in flying from one duty to another; alternately thinking each the most important.

Therefore, in order to spend your time with most effect, allow me to recommend order, and arrangement in your duties. Life for all its important purposes will in this way be more than doubled. You will find, that *there is a time for every thing*, by doing every thing in its place, and in its season. Next to doing *with your might*, what your hands find to do,

appropriate your time with wisdom and discretion. Place those duties first in order, which are most important. Let those duties, which respect your immortal nature and eternity, the duties of prayer, repentance, self-examination, and communion with God have a place proportioned to their importance. The active and useful pursuits of life, which respect the body, your family and your condition in the world, may afterwards have their due place and attention. Energize every duty ; perform every duty *decently and in order*, and you will find, that even this short life is long enough for its great purposes.

But we must hasten to the second doctrine. *The time is short*, because it is uncertain. •*Redeem the time, because the days are few and evil*. They are evil, because they are treacherous, inspiring hope and presumption, in which the indolent sinner is often cut off in the midst of his sins. It is time, you cannot literally redeem that part of your precious time, that is actually past. But, as God in his great clemency has been pleased to receive the proper improvement of the future, as an expiation through Christ, for what is past, in this way you may redeem your time. And what necessity is there of proving to you that the *time is short*, evil, and uncertain? It is a truth, which nature is perpetually placing before your eyes. It is a truth, which providence is always sounding, loud and solemn, in your ears. It is a truth, upon

which there is *line upon line*, and *precept upon precept* in God's holy word.

*Boast not thyself of to-morrow. Man knoweth not his time.* Amidst perishable and dying things, he stands conspicuously perishable and frail. So countless are the organs, the springs, and constituent parts of his frail machinery, and each one so necessary to his well being and his life, that instead of being matter of surprise, that so many fall prematurely, it is a standing miracle, that we live from day to day.

Such is life, and such is the frail nature of man; and behold the consequence. Death is every where among the works of God on the earth. His shafts fly on every side. The present generation is gradually, and almost imperceptibly disappearing. One after another falls; new faces rise, and a new generation multiplies proofs, that our *days are few and evil*. Where are the hoary heads, which but a few years past were in this temple? Where *are the fathers and mothers in Israel*, that recently gave interest and solemnity to your worship? And you also, on whose head are the hoar blossoms of the grave, where in a few years will your children look in these seats to find you? Alas! You in your turn will be gone, and your seats either empty, or occupied by new possessors.

This society in particular has had, for a succession of years, repeated and most affecting proofs, *that the*

*Time is short.* You have seen, during the past year, many of your number, not falling, like ripened fruit, but cut down in the morning, or the noon of life, by violent disease, and falling prematurely into their graves. Fifty persons, lately members of this society, have deceased in this place during the past year. This number, compared with your population, is very great, and on this solemn occasion, while you are standing, as it were on the grave of the past year, and looking forward to that, which is now commencing, this solemn fact calls upon you to open the eyes of your mind, and to receive all the instruction, it is designed to convey. Most of this number had at the beginning of the past year as much promise of life as you have now. To them, perhaps, all the future was as full of hope and expectation, as it is now to you. As you are now, they were probably contemplating the illusions of the future, making their arrangements, and preparing to live and enjoy themselves for many years to come. Their sun set prematurely. Those concerns, so much more important, than any interest below the sun, are settled. A warning voice from their graves calls upon you, that you survive, no longer to squander your time in indolence and carelessness. As you have a great work to accomplish, and the time, in which to complete it, is so short and uncertain, trust not a futurity, which may not be for you ; but begin now to live, as though convinced, that this year were your last. None of us knows, you know not,

nor I, and He, who sees the past and the future at once, only knows, who of your number will be called away this year. Many no doubt will receive the final summons. Let each one repeat to his soul the question, *Lord is it I, that shall be called ?*

Among those, whom you have lost, during the past year, were I personally acquainted with them, I might have selected many, no doubt, to whose memory I might now pay the tribute, appropriate to departed worth. I might have dwelt upon their characters in many respects, as examples. They live, beyond doubt, in the affection and the remembrance of their friends. And when the recollection, of what they once were to their surviving relatives and connexions, comes over their minds, "like a cloud," we hope, they will receive it, as an admonition to them from eternity, to live near to God, and to be ready themselves for a sudden death.

One of the number was, as most of you know, of my particular and intimate acquaintance. Nor shall I think myself trespassing upon your patience, if I avail myself of this occasion, to pay my feeble tribute of affection, friendship and respect to the memory of your late beloved pastor. They, who knew him, as a man, but imperfectly, knew well his hospitality to the passing guest, or stranger ; knew the placidness of his temper, the simplicity of his character, his freedom from guile, envy and ambition. Among the millions, who are verging after him to the grave, there

give, perhaps, scarcely any, who hold on the "equal tenor of their way," so free from the pride and vanity of an aspiring heart, as he was. Content to be known, estimated, and beloved at home, it was nothing to him, who figured, and was distinguished elsewhere. The duties and the distinctions of that sphere, which God had marked out for him among his own people, satisfied his modest mind. I shall not venture, among those, who knew him in his private walks, to enter into the details of his ministry among you. It is for you, who knew him in these relations best, to say how, and in what manner he discharged his pastoral duties from house to house, and in this temple. I speak of him, as I knew him, the cheerful and instructive companion, who relaxed from the sternness and authority of years to communicate the fruits of his wisdom and experience to his younger brethren; as the tried and faithful friend, in whose counsels, there was no reserve, nor guile. But few pastors have had the felicity to live in terms of so much cordiality and friendship with their brethren in the ministry, as he did. His candor commanded the regard even of those, who differed from him in religious opinions. Of all his surviving brethren, there are none, who knew him, that do not respect his memory.

For more than half a century he led you *beside still waters*, in the paths of peace and tranquility; and, if, as we trust, with faithful pastors in a better

life, he, doubtless, looks down upon you, anxious, that you may still walk in love and in peace; that you may call up to memory the solemn exhortations, which at the commencement of the new year, he was used to address to you. Remember how he counselled, and warned you, and *being dead, let him still speak to you.*

While I also wish you the usual salutations of the season, a happy year, allow me to add, that there is but one way, in which it can be happy; and that is, that you now have it in solemn remembrance, that you have a great work to perform, and but a very short and uncertain period, in which to perform it; and that you now resolve before God, to devote the time, whether long, or short, which he shall spare to you, to make preparations for appearing in his presence. This day make a covenant with God, *that shall not be broken*, that, as he has in his great mercy and long suffering spared you to the commencement of another year, that year shall be his. If this day behold you making such a covenant with God, with a true heart and in the strength of the Redeemer, should you see the close of this year, it will assuredly have been a happy year to you. And if God have said, *this year thou shalt die*, even then it shall be a happy year to you, for it shall date the commencement of a happy eternity.

—AMEN.