

FROM THE INHERITANCE OF OUR FATHERS

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THE PRECIOUSNESS OF TIME

Jonathan Edwards



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Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is often regarded as America's greatest theologian and philosopher. Born in Windsor, Connecticut as the only son of eleven children to a well-known pastor, Timothy Edwards, whose wife, Sarah, was the daughter of the famous minister, Solomon Stoddard, Jonathan received his early education in his father's school, where he was nurtured in Reformed theology and Puritan piety. At age 13, he went to college at New Haven, earned the BA degree in 1720, and stayed on at Yale to complete a master's degree. He was ordained as a Congregationalist minister and as pastor of the church in Northampton, Massachusetts, where his powerful preaching was abundantly blessed in stimulating the Great Awakening. From 1751 to 1758, he ministered in Stockbridge, while evangelizing the Indians. In 1758, he accepted the presidency of Princeton, only to die a month later from a smallpox injection. Edwards was a prolific writer of scores of books as well as a champion of Christian zeal and spirituality.

The Preciousness of Time

Redeeming the time.

—EPHESIANS 5:16

The term “redeeming” relates to something that is either lost, or in some way gone out of our possession; or at least something that is ready to be lost, or that is about to be taken from us.

The words here may be interpreted in various senses. The Apostle may have respect to how others misspend their time. He says, “Redeem the time, because the days are evil. The days being evil, ye see others lavish away precious time; but do you endeavor to redeem it.”

Or it may have respect to their past loss of time. The Apostle puts the Christian Ephesians in mind—how in time past

they misspent their precious time. "For ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). He may be advising them now to redeem it.

Or he may have respect to the great danger of time being lost, by reason of the days being so evil. It being so, there was abundant temptation to an ill improvement of time. If they did not take great care, time would slip out of their hands, and they would have no benefit by it. They had need therefore to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise," as it is found in the foregoing verse, that they might save their time.

Or, lastly, it may have respect to redeeming the time from those awful calamities that God was about to bring upon the wicked. The apostles were often foretelling terrible judgments that were coming. He perhaps advises Christians to take the greater care to live holily, and to labor to reclaim others from their bad courses, so

that God might defer His anger; and so time might be redeemed and, as it were, saved from that terrible destruction that, when it came, would put an end to the time of God's patience. And it may be upon this account that this reason is added: "because the days are evil." The corruption of the times tends to hasten threatened judgments; but your holy and circumspect walk will tend to redeem time from the devouring jaws of these calamities.

But in which sense whatsoever the expression will be understood, this much is certainly held forth to us in the words: that time is a thing that we should set a high value upon; that we should be so careful that it is not lost, and are exhorted to such wisdom and circumspection to redeem it. That which is of little worth, is not worth our while to be at much pains or cost to redeem when it is ready to be lost. Therefore the:

DOCTRINE

Time is a thing that is exceedingly precious.

For the following reasons:

1. Because eternity depends on the improvement of time. Things are precious in proportion to the importance of them, or according to the degree wherein they concern our welfare. Men are prone to set the highest value on those things that they are sensible of, and that they have their chief dependence upon. Other things they may easily part with, but they won't very easily part with such things. And this renders time so exceeding precious because our welfare, and interest of it, depends upon the improvement of it.

Time is precious upon other accounts. It is precious, because our welfare in this world depends upon the improvement of it. It is precious because, if we don't improve it, we shall be in danger of coming to poverty and disgrace. It is

precious because, by the good improvement of it, we may obtain those things that will be comfortable to us here. But it is above all things precious, as eternity depends upon it. The importance of the improvement of time upon other accounts is in subordination to this, and is little, or nothing, in comparison. According as we either improve or lose our time, so shall we be happy or miserable to all eternity; without the improvement of time, our eternity will be miserable; and with a good improvement of time, our eternity will be happy. Gold and silver are esteemed precious by men, but they are of no worth to any man, but only as he thereby has an opportunity, either of avoiding or removing some evil, or possessing himself of some good. If a man has never so much silver or gold, if it gives him no opportunity, either of avoiding any sort of evil or procuring any good, it is of no worth to him.

And the greater the evil that any man has advantage to escape, or the good that he has opportunity to obtain, by anything that he has, by so much of the greater worth or value is that thing to him. Thus if a man, by anything that he have, might save his life, he would look upon that thing—by which he has opportunity of escaping so great an evil or death—to be very precious. So if by anything he has, he has opportunity to obtain a kingdom, it will be of great value to him.

And hence it is that time is a thing so exceeding precious, because it is by that that we have opportunity of escaping everlasting misery and of obtaining eternal blessedness and glory. It is upon the improvement of time that there depends an escape from an infinite evil and an obtaining an infinite good. And this puts an infinite value upon time.

Eternity depends upon it, for eternity is of an infinite or endless duration.

And to be miserable through eternity is an infinite evil; it is infinitely dreadful. And so to be happy through eternity is an infinite good.

2. Time is very short, which is another thing that renders it very precious. The scarcity of any commodity occasions men to set a higher value upon it, especially if it be a thing that is necessary to be had, that they can't do without, or that their interest much depends upon.

Thus when Samaria was besieged by the Syrians, "an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and a fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver" (2 Kings 6:25).

When bread is very scarce, they that have bread have but a little of it. They will be more choice of it, and will set a higher value upon it, because bread is what they must have, or perish.

So time is the more to be prized by men, because a whole eternity depends

upon it, and yet we have but a little of it. When a few days are gone, then we must go where we shall not return (Job 16:22). Our “days are swifter than a post. They are passed away as the swift ships, and as the eagle that hasteth to the prey” (Job 9:25–26). Our life, what is it? “It is but a vapor, that continues a little while, and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). It is but a moment to eternity, and bears no proportion to it.

Time is so short—and the work is so great that we have to do in it—that we have none of it to spare. The work that we have to do to prepare for eternity must be done in time, or it can never be done; and it is found to be a work of great difficulty and labor.

We read of silver being so plentiful in Solomon’s time that it was as the stones of the street: it was nothing to be accounted of—they had more of it than they needed or knew what to do with. But this is not the case with us with

respect to time. And it is but a little time that God hath allotted to us—a short space that is soon (all of it) gone.

If a man loses any of that that he has but little of, and yet is absolutely necessary to him, his loss is the greater. It is as if he has but a little food wherewith to support his life. If he loses some of it, his loss is greater than if had an abundance. So we ought to prize our time the more highly, and to be careful that we don't lose any of it, because it is so short, and yet what is so necessary to us.

3. Time ought to be looked upon as very precious by us, upon this account also, that we are uncertain of the continuance of it. We know that it is very short, but we don't know how short. We don't know how little there is of it remaining, whether a year or several years, or only a month, or a week, or a day.

We don't know but that every day may not be the last, or how little of the

day we are to have. There is nothing that experience verifies more than this.

This is another thing that makes time precious, and upon the account of which we ought to be the more careful not to lose the least part of, seeing that our everlasting welfare depends on the improvement of time. If a man had provision laid up for a journey, and knew that he had but a little, and he knew not how little—and at the same time knew that if his provision failed he must perish upon his journey—he would be the more choice of his store, for his not knowing what there was of it. He would be the more careful not to throw any of it away, not to lose any of it. This thought would make him the more careful that he did not know how much there was. And therefore if he parted with but little, it may be there would not be enough to support him through his journey.

How much more would many men

prize their time if they knew that they had but a few months, or a few days more, in the world. And certainly a wise man would prize his time the more because he does not know but that it is so. This is the case with multitudes now in the world that now are in health, and so see no signs of approaching death. Many without doubt are to die the next month, and many are to die the next week. Many are to die tomorrow that now know nothing of it, and think nothing about it. And neither they, nor their neighbors, can say that they are any more likely soon to be taken out of the world than others. How many have died out of this town at one time and another when neither they, nor their neighbors, saw any signs of death a week beforehand. And probably there are various persons now here present, hearing what I now say, that are to die in a very little time, and have no apprehension of it.

This teaches us how we ought to prize our time, and be careful that we don't lose any of it.

4. Time is very precious, because when it is past, it can't be recovered.

There are many things that men possess which, if they part with, they can obtain them again. If a man has parted with something he had, not knowing the worth of it, or the need he should have of it, he oftentimes can get it again, at least with pains and cost. If a man has been overseen in a bargain, and bartered away or sold something that he had, and afterwards repents of it, he may oftentimes get a release, and recover what he has parted with.

But it is not so with respect to time. When once that is gone, it is gone forever. No pains, no cost will fetch it back. If we repent never so much that we have let it go, and did not improve it while we had it, it will signify nothing.

Therefore we should be the more choice of it, while we have it; for that which is well improved is not lost; though the time itself will be gone, yet the benefit of it abides with us.

It is so with our time, both in whole and in every particular part. When any part of time is lost, it is irrecoverably gone. The offer is never but once made unto us whether we will improve it or not. Every part of our time is as it were successively offered to us, that we may choose whether we will make it our own or not; but there is no tarrying to wait upon us, to see whether we will or not. But if we refuse, it is immediately taken away, and never offered more. As to that part of time that is gone, if we haven't well improved it, it is out of our possession and out of our reach. It is only what is yet before us that we have any opportunity to make our own, whether that be less or more.

If we have lived fifty, or sixty, or

seventy years, and haven't improved them, it now can't be helped. It is all eternally gone from us. All that we can do is to improve the little that remains. Yea, if we have spent all our lives, and but a few minutes was improved, all that is gone is lost, and it is only those few remaining minutes that it is possible should be made our own.

And if the whole of our time is gone and it is all lost, it is irrecoverable. Eternity depends on the improvement of time; but when once the time of life is gone, when once death is come, we have no more to do with time. There is no fetching of it back; there is no obtaining of a repetition of it, or another space to prepare for eternity in. For this reason we ought to set the higher value upon time while we have it. If a man loses his money, oftentimes he can get more, and so make up his loss. If a man should lose the whole of his worldly substance, and becomes a bankrupt, it is possible that

his loss may be made up; he may have another estate as good. But when the time of life is gone, it is impossible that we should ever obtain another such time. It is utterly and everlastingly gone.

IMPROVEMENT

Use 1 may be of *Self-Reflection*, to put persons upon reflecting and inquiring about what they have done with their time. You have heard now of the preciousness of time, and you are a person concerned. You are one to whom God has committed that precious talent. You have had a great deal of time. You have had a great deal of time that is past. And time is as much worth to you as to others, whether you are so sensible of the worth of it or not. You are one that has an eternity before you. When God created you and gave you a reasonable soul, He made you for an eternity. And He gave you time here in order to prepare for eternity.

And your future eternity depends on the improvement of time.

Consider therefore what you have done with your past time. You are not now beginning to spend your time, but a great deal of your time is past and gone; and all the wit and power of the universe can't recover it. How have you spent it? Let your own consciences make answer.

There are many of you that may well conclude that half your time is gone. If you should live to the ordinary age of man, your glass is more than half run, and perhaps there may be but few sands remaining. Your sun is past the meridian, and perhaps just setting, or going into an everlasting eclipse. Consider, therefore: What account can you give of the improvement of your past time? How have you let the precious golden sands of your glass run?

Every day that you have had has been precious. Yea, your moments have been

precious. But have you not wasted your precious moments and precious days, yea, and precious years? If you should go to reckon up how many days you have lived, what a sum would there be? And how precious has every one of those days been, and what have you done with them? What is become of them all? What can you show of any improvement, or good done, or benefit obtained, answerable to all this time that you have lived? When you look back and search, don't you find this past time of your life (in a great measure) empty, having not been filled up with any good improvement? And if God, that has given you your time, should now call you to an account, what account could you give to Him?

How much may be done in a year? How much good is there opportunity for doing in such a space of time? How much service may persons do for God, and how much for their own souls, if persons do

their utmost to improve it? How much may be done in a day? But what have you done in so many days and years that you have lived? What have you done with the whole time of your youth, you that are past your youth? What is become of all that precious season of life? What have you to show for it all? Has not all that precious season of life, even the time of your youth, been in vain to you? Would it not have been as well or better for you if you had been all that time asleep, or in a state of nonexistence?

You have had a great deal of time of freedom from your worldly business. Consider what you have done with it. To what purpose have you spent it? What have you done with all the sabbath days that you have had? You haven't only had ordinary time, but you have had a great deal of holy time. How have you spent it? Consider these things seriously, and let your own consciences make answer.

Use 2 is of *Reproof* to those who lose and misspend their time. How little is the preciousness of time considered, and how little—of a sense—do the greater part of men seem to have of it, and how lavish are they of it. To how little good purpose do many spend their time. There is nothing more precious, and yet nothing that men are more wasteful of.

Time is with many as silver was in the days of Solomon. It is as the stones of the street, and nothing accounted of; but not because it is in great plenty, as silver then was.

Mankind acts as though time is a thing that they have in greatest plenty, and as if they have a great deal more than they needed, and know not what to do with it.

If men were as lavish of their money as they are of their time, and it was as common a thing for them to throw away their money, as it is for men to throw away their time, we would think of them as persons

beside themselves. And yet time is a thousand times more precious than money, and is what can't be purchased for money. When it is gone, money won't redeem it.

There are several sorts of persons that are reprov'd by this doctrine that I shall particularly mention:

First. Those that spend a great deal of their time in idleness or doing nothing: in following no business at all, neither of their general nor particular calling; doing nothing that shall turn to any account, either for the good of their souls or bodies; nothing either for their own benefit, nor of the benefit of their neighbors, nor of the family, nor of public society.

There are some persons that time seems to lie heavy upon their hands.

Instead of it being their concern to improve it as it passes, and seeing to it that it shall not pass without their making of it their own, they act as if it was rather

their care to contrive ways how to waste and consume it; as though time, instead of being precious, was rather a mere encumbrance to them, and that it was their contrivance to get rid of.

Their hands refuse to labor; and rather than to put themselves to it, they will let their families suffer, and will suffer themselves. "The idle soul shall suffer hunger" (Prov. 19:15). "Slothfulness shall clothe a man with rags" (Prov. 23:21).

Some spend much of their time at the tavern over their cups, and in wandering about from house to house, wasting away their hours in idle and unprofitable talk that will turn to no good account. "In all labor there is profit: but the talk of the lips tends only to poverty" (Prov. 14:23).

The direction of the Apostle is, as in Ephesians 4:28, that "we shall labor, working with our hands the thing that is good, that we might have to give to him that needeth." But instead of having anything

to give to him that needs, they do but waste what they have. “He that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster” (Prov. 18:9).

Second. They are reprov'd by the doctrine that spend their time in wicked works, who don't merely spend their time in doing nothing to any good purpose, but they spend it to ill purposes. They do not only lose their time—that is so precious—but they do worse than lose it: they do themselves and others hurt with it. That which is such a precious jewel—that is more worth than thousands of gold and silver, whereby they have opportunity of obtaining a crown and kingdom, and securing everlasting blessedness—they wound and kill themselves with it. That by which they have opportunity to obtain life, they improve to their own death. They make a sword of this precious metal to stab themselves with.

Time is precious, as we have heard, because eternity depends upon it, by the improvement of time. We have opportunity of escaping eternal misery and obtaining eternal blessedness. But those that spend their time in wicked works, they not only neglect to improve their time to obtain eternal happiness, or to escape eternal damnation, but they spend it to a quite contrary purpose: to increase their eternal misery, to render their damnation the more heavy and intolerable.

Many spend their time not only idly, but viciously. Some spend a great deal of it in excessive drinking. Some have spent much time in reveling, and in unclean talk and practices, and vicious company-keeping, and in corrupting and ensnaring the minds of others, setting bad examples and leading others into sin, undoing not only their own souls, but the souls of others. They have spent their time in corrupting and infecting the

towns and places where they live. Some spend a great deal of their precious time in talking against others, in detraction and backbiting. Some spend much time in contention, not only quarrelling among themselves, but fomenting and stirring up strife and contention.

What doleful ways are these of spending time that is so precious, as we have heard! This is not only wasting time; it is a worse way of abusing time than a mere wasting of it. It is as making that which is itself most precious to become the most pernicious.

It would have been well for some men, and well for their neighbors, if they had done nothing at all; for then they would have done neither good nor hurt. But now they have done a great deal more hurt than they ever have good, or ever will do. Sometimes one ill-disposed person does more hurt than ten well-disposed persons can do good.

There are some persons that it would have been better for the towns wherein they live to have been at the charge of maintaining them in doing nothing, if that would have prevented their doing anything. Such as these not only waste their own time, but consume others' time, in being an occasion of others' ill-spending of time.

Those that have spent much of their time in wickedness, if ever they should reform, and set about a contrary improvement of time, would find not only that they have wasted their past time that they spent in wickedness, but that they have made work for their remaining time. It will probably take up more time from them to seek repentance. They have contracted those ill habits that will take up time for them to mortify and subdue. Sin is a great devourer of time. If we look abroad in the world, and consider how men behave themselves, alas, how

much time is spent in sin, how much of the life of men is spent in it, and how much the greater part of men spend all their time in it.

Time, as it is spent, is good for nothing to them. When they are done with it, and look back, how will they wish that they had had no time. The time that they have spent on earth will be worse to them than if they had spent so much time in hell; for an eternity of misery in hell will be the fruit of their time on earth, as they have improved it.

Third. Those are reprov'd by this doctrine, who spend their time only in worldly pursuits, neglecting their souls. Such as these do lose their time. Let them be never so diligent in their worldly business, though they may be careful not to let any of their time pass so but that it may some way or other turn to their worldly profit.

And if they have never so much success,

and their improvement of their time turns never so much to their worldly advantage, yet they lose their time if they live in the neglect of their souls and their eternal welfare.

Time was given in order to possess eternity. It is designed for a space of probation for eternity. And thence it is that time is so precious, even because eternity depends upon it. And therefore if men don't improve their time to the purposes of eternity, they lose it; they frustrate the end for which time was given them. They that improve time only for their benefit, in time do lose it, because time was not given for itself, but it was given for that everlasting duration that succeeds it.

They, therefore, whose time is taken up only in caring for the world, in inquiring what they shall eat and drink, in contriving to lay up for themselves treasure on the earth—how to enrich themselves, or how to make themselves great, or how

to live in comfortable and pleasant circumstances while here, and busy their minds and employ their strength only in these things, and have the stream of their desires and affections to those things—they lose their precious time. All that time is lost that men have spent only to such purposes, though they may thereby have made themselves fair estates, and have obtained never so much of the comforts, advantages, and honor of the world.

Let those therefore consider it that have been guilty of thus spending their time. You that have lived a considerable time in the world, and have spent your time after this manner; you have been moiling and toiling, and cooking and caring, but what has it been for, but for the dust of the earth. They are those “that pant after the dust of the earth” (Amos 2:7). You have spent a great part of your time, and a great part of your strength, in getting a little of the world. And how little good does it do for

you now that you have got it? What happiness or satisfaction can you reap from it? Will it give peace of conscience, or any rational quietness or comfort? What is your poor, needy, perishing soul the better for it? And what better prospects have you of your approaching eternity for it? And what will all that you ever get avail you when time is gone?

Use 3 is of *Exhortation*, to improve time to the utmost. Consider the preciousness of it: how much depends upon it, how short and uncertain it is, and how irrecoverable it will be when gone. Make these things the object of much of your meditations.

If you have a right conception of these things, you will be more choice of your time than of the most fine gold. Every hour and moment will seem precious to you.

But besides those considerations that have already been set before you in the

doctrinal part, consider also the following things:

First. That you are accountable to God for your time. Time is a talent given to us from God. He has set us our day, and it is not for nothing that our day was appointed for some work. And doubtless, therefore, He will call us to an account at the day's end. We must give Him an account of our improvement of all of our time. We are God's servants; and as a servant is accountable to his master, how he has spent his time when he has sent him forth to work, so are we accountable to God. Our time is God's much more than a servant's time is his master's. If men might consider this, and keep it in mind, would they not improve their time otherwise than they do?

Should you not behave otherwise, if you considered with yourself every morning that you must give an account to

God, about how you have spent that day; and if you considered with yourself at the beginning of every evening that you must give an account to God, how you have spent that evening? Christ has told us that for “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account” (Matt. 12:36). How may we not conclude, therefore, that we must give an account for all our idle, misspent time?

Second. Consider how much time you have lost already. You have the greater need of diligently improving the remaining part of your time, for your having lost so much time. You ought to mourn and lament over your lost time. But that is not all that you must do. You must apply yourself the more diligently to improve the remaining part of your time, that you may, as it were, redeem lost time.

You that are considerably advanced in the day of life, and have hitherto spent

your time in vanities and worldly cares, and lived in a great measure negligent of the interest of your soul, may well be terrified and amazed when you think how much time you have lost and squandered away to no purpose. You had the more need of diligence for your having lost so much time upon three accounts:

1. Your opportunity is so much the shorter. Your time at longest is very short, as has been shown already. But set aside all that you have lost already, and then how much shorter is it? As for that part of your time that you have lost already, it is not to be reckoned into your opportunity; for that is as it were nulled and destroyed. It never will be any more; and it is no better, but worse, to you than if it had never been. So that it is only the remaining part that you are to reckon your opportunity. And if your whole life is so short, how short is that?

2. You have the same work to do that you had at the first, and that under greater difficulties. You have done nothing at all of your work hitherto. All remains to be done, and that with vastly greater disadvantages and difficulties than would have been, if you had set about it before, so that your time to do your work in hasn't only grown shorter, but your work has grown greater. As your time shortens, your work that you need to do in time grows greater. You haven't only the same work to do, but you have more work; for while you have lost your time, you haven't only shortened it, but you have been making work for yourself. How may this consideration well awaken you to a thorough care, not to let things run on at this rate any longer, but immediately to raise up yourself, and apply yourself to your work with all your might?
3. That was the best of your time that you

have lost. The first of a man's time is the best of his time, i.e. the first after he comes to the exercise of reason, and is capable of his work.

You that have lived in sin until past your youth, you have lost the best of your time. So that here are all these things to be considered together: that your time on the whole is but short. There is none to spare, and a great part of it is gone, and so this time has become much shorter. And that which is gone is the best, and yet all your work remains; and not only so, but with greater difficulties than ever. And the shorter your time is, the more work you have to do.

What will make you sensible of the necessity of the diligent improvement of this remaining time, if these things won't? Sometimes such considerations are ready to have another effect: to discourage persons and make them think that, seeing

they have lost so much time, it is not worth the while to pretend to do anything now.

The devil makes fools of them. For when they are young, he tells them there is time enough hereafter; that there is no need of being in haste; it will be better seeking salvation afterwards. And then they believe him. And then afterwards, when their youth is past, he tells them that now that they have lost so much time, and the best of their time, that it is now not worth their while to pretend to do anything. And they believe him now, too—so that no time is a good time with them. The time of youth is not a good time, for that is most fit for pleasure and mirth, and there will be time enough afterwards. And the time that there is afterwards, when that comes, is not a good time. It won't do, because the best of their time is gone. Thus men are befooled and ruined.

But what madness is it for persons

to give way to discouragement, so as to neglect their work because their time is short? What need had they rather to wake out of sleep, thoroughly to rouse up themselves to be in good earnest; indeed to be violent, that, if possible, they may yet obtain eternity; if, peradventure, God may still give them respect to the acknowledgment of the truth that they may be saved, though it be late in the day.

Yet God calls upon you to rouse up yourself, and to apply yourself to your work. And will you not hearken to his counsel in this great affair, rather than to your mortal enemy the devil?

Third. Consider how those do sometimes value time that are come near to the end of time. What a sense sometimes have poor sinners, when they are upon their deathbeds, of the preciousness of time? Such have sometimes cried out, "O, a thousand worlds for an inch of time!" Then

time appeared precious to them indeed. An inch of time could do them no more good then than before, when they were in health, if they had had but a like disposition to improve it. Nor so much; for a man's time upon a deathbed is attended with far greater disadvantages for an improvement for the good of the soul, than when he is in health. But the near approach of death makes them sensible of the inestimable worth of time. They—it may be, while they were in health—were as insensible of the value of time as you are, and were as negligent of it. But how have their thoughts been altered then! It was not because they were deceived that they thought time of such value, but because their eyes were opened. And it is because you are deceived and blind that you don't think as they did.

Fourth. Consider what a value we may conclude those that have lost their time so,

do set upon time, that are past the end of time. Those that misspent all their opportunities for obtaining eternal life, and are gone to hell, what thoughts do you think they have of the preciousness of time? Though they were very lavish of their time while they lived, and set no great value upon it, yet how have they changed their judgment? How would they value the opportunity that you have, if they might but have it granted to them? What would they not give for one day under the means of grace?

So you will be convinced of the preciousness of time, at the first or the last. But if you will not be concerned until you are convinced in the manner that they are, it will be too late.

There are two sorts of means of making persons sensible of the preciousness of time. One is showing the persons the reason of it: setting before them the reasons why time must be precious by telling them

how much depends on it, how short and uncertain it is, and the like. And the other is experience, when men are convinced of the preciousness of time by finding—by experience—how much depends on the improvement of time. The latter is the most effectual way; for that always convinces persons, if nothing else does. But if persons will not be convinced by the former means, the latter will do them no good: if the former will be ineffectual, the latter, though it will be certain, yet is always too late. Experience never fails to open men's eyes, if they were never opened before; but if they are first opened by that, it is no way to their benefit.

Therefore you must improve the former means of conviction. You must be convinced of the preciousness of time by the reason that can be shown of it or you never will be convinced to your own benefit.

Let all them therefore be persuaded to their utmost to improve their time. And I

shall conclude by advising three things in particular:

1. Improve the present time without any manner of delay. If you delay, and put off the improvement of time, still more time will be lost; and it will be an evidence that you are not sensible of the preciousness of time.

Don't talk of more convenient seasons hereafter, but improve your time while you have it, after the example of the psalmist: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies" (Ps. 119:59).

2. Be especially careful to improve those parts of time that are most precious. Though all time is very precious, yet some parts of time are more precious than others; as particularly, holy time is more precious than common time. Such time is a time of greater advantage for our everlasting welfare. Therefore, above all, improve your sabbaths; and

especially improve the time of public worship, which is the most precious part of holy time. Don't lose your time, either in sleep, or in carelessness, inattention, or wandering imaginations.

How sottish are they that waste away not only their common time, but holy time—yea, the very time of attendance on God's holy ordinances.

Again, the time of youth is more precious upon many accounts than other time. Therefore if you are in the enjoyment of this time, take heed that you improve it. Don't let the precious days and years of youth slip without improvement. Again, the time of the strivings of God's Spirit is more precious than other time. That is the time when God is near; and we are directed in Isaiah 55:6 to "seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Such a time is especially an accepted time and day of salvation. "I

have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time” (2 Cor. 6:2). Improve such a time as this is, if you are in the enjoyment of it.

3. Improve your time of leisure from your worldly business. Many persons have a great deal of such time, and all have some. Such time may be improved to great advantage if persons are disposed to it. Such time, wherein we are most free from cares for the body and business of our outward nature, is a happy opportunity for the soul.

There is no necessity of your spending such times in idleness, because you have no worldly business to do. Therefore don't spend such times unprofitably, and so as you can give no good account thereof to God. Don't waste away these long winter evenings wholly in idle, unprofitable talk by your own or your neighbor's firesides, nor

in useless diversions and amusements. Diversion should be used only in subservience to business. So much should be used, and no more, as doth most fit the mind and body for the work of our general and particular calling. You may profitably spend the time in talking with religious persons of things of the greatest importance, in prayer and meditation, and reading profitable books. And if you haven't such books, then get them. Don't straiten yourself for advantages for your soul, though you straiten yourself for other things.

You had need to improve every talent, advantage, and opportunity to your utmost, while time lasts. For it will soon be that it shall be said concerning you, according to the oath of the angel, what we read of in Revelation 10:5–6: “And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth, lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for

ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.”

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