

**MR. STRONG'S**  
**SERMON,**  
**ON THE USE OF TIME.**

**A**

# **SERMON,**

**ON THE USE OF TIME;**

**ADDRESSED TO MEN IN THE SEVERAL AGES OF  
LIFE.**

**DELIVERED AT HARTFORD,**

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## A SERMON.

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ECCLESIASTES iii. 1.

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.*

**T**HERE is no subject more worthy of general attention than the proper use of time. In this the welfare of the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the honourable and the mean man, together with every person, is deeply interested. This life is the opportunity God gives to secure our own happiness, so that to misuse it is to lose the advantages of existence, and make it an evil to us. The proper use of time does not depend on being perpetually busy about something, for many of the most busy persons, either through a wrong timing of their endeavours, or an application to unfit objects, derive the least advantage to themselves. *To everything there is a season, and to every purpose there is a time,* for which no other time can be so fit. There are appropriate duties for youth, middle age, and old age, which must be attended in their time, or there is reason to fear we shall come under condemnation. No man ought to expect any blessing from God, for which a preparation is not to be made in this life ; neither is it

probable that any will obtain, who do not make use of the best adapted season.

The truth I wish to impress at this time is, *that to do our duty, and secure the blessings we need for this and the world to come, we must use that time, which is best adapted to obtain them.* If such seasons are neglected, we shall be both guilty and unsuccessful.—As the subject demands the attention of persons in every age, I shall begin with an application of it to the young, afterwards proceeding to the elder.

Youth is the time best adapted to obtain all that knowledge, in things natural and divine, which is necessary for their present and their future good. There is nothing to which the young are more exposed, than to neglect their first days, and give them up to pleasure. Time appears boundless before them ; for they have not yet learned by experience that it is as a hand's breadth, and a shadow.—They do not yet know that human life, which now appears so long to them, after they have passed through it, will be as nothing, and that it will seem to them as though they had gained nothing by it.—They ought to consider the present as their favored season, to prepare, both for another world, and for this in which they now live, and feel themselves beginning to act. Doubtless youth feel the first springing of the same ambition that their fathers had before them. They wish to come forward and act a decent part in human life ; to be respected, useful, and happy in the world. But for this, they ought to remember, there is a necessary preparation. They cannot be respectable without knowledge ; useful to others without the principles of moral virtue ; or useful to themselves without the habits of industry and œconomy. Wonder not that I recommend the habits of industry and œcon-

omy, for I do not think it probable, that any one, who neglects his interests in this world, will make a wise provision for his eternal well-being.—The two worlds are very nearly connected ; so that what advances the real good of one, will be most likely to obtain the best blessings of the other. The first principles of moral virtue or religion, are the same, in earth and heaven ; in time and in eternity. Therefore, youth is the most appropriate season, to gain the habit of using every hour to some good purpose, that is useful to God, who made us, useful to our fellow-men, or useful to our own souls. If the young fall into habits of indolence in this life, they will be indolent and miserable for ever. Indolence and misery are perfectly compatible. While indolence opens a door to every temptation, it leaves an immense void for a guilty conscience to exert its power ; and a guilty conscience is the very embryo of eternal torment. Therefore, let no one think that an indolent and unemployed existence will make him happy. If any have imbibed such an apprehension ; let them cast it away, for it will be the means of their eternal destruction. Men must be active, vigilant beings, or they will be miserable. There will be no place for indolence in eternity, except it be in the dark abodes. In the abodes of bliss, all will be life, light, and action.

We cannot tell exactly how the active powers of the saint will be employed, because we are still in the flesh, and unholy. If an angel from heaven should attempt to tell us, we could not perfectly understand him, by reason of our weakness and unholiness ; still, we have reason enough to conclude, that action, and some useful employment will always be necessary for the happiness of creatures.

From the remarks that have been made, it certainly follows,

1st. That youth is the proper season for obtaining knowledge. A knowledge of God, of his natural and moral laws, of the manner in which he manifests himself to us in the exercise of his perfections, of his providence, and the rules by which he dispenses to men, both naturally and spiritually. To know these things, it is necessary to be instructed in human science.—Therefore the youth who gives himself up to ignorance in human science, is giving himself up to temptation, and to uselessness in the world. Those parents, who neglect to instruct their children in natural science, are sinning against them ; and those youth who will not be instructed, are sinning against themselves. It is a certain truth, that the more men know, the more capable they are of doing good ; and the more ignorant they are, the more exposed to temptation.

2dly. Youth is the only proper season for acquiring a habit of industrious attention to some useful employment. Man was not made for himself only. He was made to honour his God, and to do good to his fellow-creatures. At the same time, he is permitted to seek his own best and highest happiness. Industrious attention to some useful employment is absolutely necessary for a virtuous and Christian life. When we recommend to our youth, industry in some useful employment, we would not be misunderstood. We do not recommend this, merely as the means of worldly wealth and honour ; but for the sake of their own improvement in good works ; and of their being useful to the world in their day and generation. We therefore find, that

while God exhorts us against idolatry, and an undue service of the world, for the purpose of accumulating its wealth ; while he teaches us not to make the world our confidence, he exhorts us to the greatest diligence in every thing that will promote our own good, and the good of others ; whether it be temporal, or whether it be eternal. He hath not only said, that to every thing there is a time and a season ; but that those who do not use the proper season for their own honest advantage, and the advantage of others, have denied the faith. If they have not a disposition to be industriously employed in something that is good, they will certainly be busy in that which is bad. This is the nature of man, which will never be changed. The law of industry in some commendable employment, is so adapted to the good of creatures, that by neglecting it, they both injure themselves, and give proof of a vicious disposition, that is contrary to natural and to revealed religion.

3dly. Youth is the proper season to prepare for another world. At this time they have tenfold greater encouragement of success, than they can have, after the habits of sin, by their long continuance, are become like fetters of brass, and God hath been greatly provoked by their resistance to the spirit of grace. An argument that ought to be very powerful to the young, is that aged and middle-aged sinners are very rarely seen coming to repentance. I would not be understood that instances of this kind are never seen. but they are rare indeed, through much sorrow, and followed by a great degree of uncertainty. There are two sources of evidence in this matter ; one from the word of God, and the other from our own observation. If we go to the scriptures for information, these teach us that those who

seek God early, shall find him ; while the sinner, an hundred years old, is accursed. If we look for examples in the word of God, it is those who had early piety, that became eminent in his service. Or if we recur to our own observation ; have we often seen those, who, being early ensnared, continued through their youth in the immoderate pursuit of worldly properties, pleasures or honours, after this become eminently pious ? Or have they been humble Christians ? It is possible, but the instances are few. On the other hand, have we seen those youth, who persevered in seeking God, fail of obtaining such evidence of his grace, as gave a comfortable assurance to themselves, and witnessed to others the sincerity of their hopes.—The truth of these remarks hath been witnessed to me by a long observation. There needs no other argument to show that youth is the proper time and season to seek God.

II. I next address those, who being in the MIDDLE AGE of life, possessing maturity of judgment, and vigor for action, are under solemn obligation to use all the means and opportunities in their power, for the benefit of mankind, of the church, the state, and the families with which they are connected, or are under their government.

The FIRST thing that is to be said to men, by way of advice in the use of time, of whatever age they may be, is, to be prepared for their own death.

The shadow of death is without order. It is not an uncommon thing to see the hale and vigorous, removed as in a moment, from the midst of their busy and vast concerns into eternity, and leaving a young family around them to the chances of time. That the family, the widow and the fatherless will be suitably provided

for by the kind providence of God, we have no doubt ; for there is his promise, left on sacred record. But where is the departed spirit ? Where is the man of business, who had not religion ? Where is the anxious projector, if he was taken away from the midst of his earthly schemes, without a fear of God, and the faith of the Gospel ? Where is the ambitious candidate, whose arm was reached to seize the prize of his hopes, until it was palsied by the coldness of an immature, an unexpected death ? He is gone, and as is our duty, we leave him in the hand of an holy and merciful Judge ; but though we submissively leave him in these hands ; it is with much more painful feelings than we condole the widow and the fatherless,—and for this important reason ; we know that to the latter, there is an unfailing promise of protection, if they fear God and keep his commandments in the future part of their lives ; also we have many hopes, that their present afflictions, thro' the over-ruling of divine grace, will be the means of *working out for them the peaceable fruits of righteousness*.

It is a very gloomy thought, that there should be any, who have passed over their youth, and come to the busy scenes of life without an interest in Christ. Should there be any such present, they may be asked, what they have been doing, and how they have been bewitched by the false glare of the world, through the depravity of their own hearts ! It is the height of presumption, if they have come to this time, without thinking they must die, and seeking a rational ground for peace in death.

It is not so much the design of this discourse, to prove that religion is necessary for peace in death, as it is to convince and alarm those who are unprepared. It must be repeated—it is a gloomy thought, that any in

the maturity of life are not prepared to die. Neither the wealth they count, nor the honours of which they are ambitious, nor the pleasures in which they have lulled themselves, can compensate for the delay. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, repentance towards God, holy principles of action, and a life of good works, are the only possible preparation for peace in death. Those who have neglected religion to the maturity of life, have all this work to begin. They have lost much time, while there is more to be done. Their habit of loving the world and forgetting God, hath grown strong; repentance will now be more difficult to them than ever before; and this is the last part of that time and season which they have in this world to secure the best interests of another. To these persons our text, so far as it relates to another life, addresses itself with a very solemn voice.

But the text hath relation to the duties and interests of the present life, which I now pass to consider,

**SECONDLY.** It is a most important duty of the middle aged to direct the education of youth.

When we address youth, it is to excite them to the first duty of remembering their Creator, and of forming them for the future benefit of mankind; but when we speak to the middle aged, it is to excite them to the discharge of such duties, as it is now in their power to exercise, for the immediate advantage of mankind. We look on our youth, as those who will be pillars of society in years to come, when those who are now vigorous, will be either in the grave, or in the decrepitude of age, and will have no other earthly wisdom to watch around them, but what shall be found in the persons they are now educating. How solemnly, and on the

principles of their own advantage, doth this call upon them to educate their youth aright, by teaching them to fear God, and regard men !

If those, now in the vigor of life, who have the efficient care of educating the young, are not faithful in the discharge of their duty, they will themselves be the first to experience the evil effects. The young are the only hope of the next age ; and these are in the hands of the middle aged ; either in their families, shops, counting-houses, or under their guardianship. They are the natural and legal guardians of the rising generation. If the youth are ever educated to industry and religion, it must be through their care. How great a crime does that man commit against the world, and how great a reproach does he bring on his own memory who suffers the young to be left in ignorance, untaught in the duties of morality and religion ! He is preparing a waster of his own possessions, an opposer of the church of God, and a pest in future society. One of the first duties incumbent on man, is to attend to the virtuous education of youth. Without this they cannot go off the stage in peace with themselves. The man, who, on his dying bed, looks round on an offspring, indolent, ignorant, and vicious, through his own neglect, must leave the scene of human action with a pang of torture, which will never be felt by a faithful parent or master. If there is no hell before him in the abode of spirits, he may anticipate an earthly one, among those whom he leaves behind him.

But it may be asked, to what shall this education be directed ? I answer, to the arts and to the patience of an industrious life. To all the reputable science of the world, so far as they have opportunity of doing it. Try to banish, by good advice and exam-

ple, those untoward appetites of wicked human nature, which lead down to the chambers of death. But above all, be not ashamed to let your youth know there is a reality in religion, and that without it no man can live, and die happily. It is to be feared that some persons say nothing of the need of religion ; because, they are conscious that they have it not themselves. But will this be esteemed a sufficient excuse before the tribunal of the Lord ? Will it do to say we had not religion ourselves, and therefore dared not urge it on those who were under our care. Not a guilty spirit will dare to offer such an excuse before the bar of God, although it may here on earth, serve for a quieting pretext to a neglect of duty. Before the bar of God, we who are aged, those who are in the vigor of an active life, and such as are young will meet together, without distinction, to hear their separate allotments. Their fidelity or unfaithfulness in discharging the present duties of life, will be a principal evidence by which their condition will be appointed.

**THIRDLY.** It appertains, principally, to the middle aged, to support all such institutions as have, by our fathers been formed, for the preservation of religion, morality, science, and civil liberty among their posterity. Whatever we may be, our fathers were pious men, and, as we believe, they were conducted by the grace of God. We have reaped the fruits of their sowing ; we have not only eat from the labour of their hands, but have heard the Gospel, and enjoyed civil liberty, from their wise ordinances. It remains for those, who are now in the vigor of life, and in possession of the fortunes of the world, to support these institutions.

When we look back on our past condition, how

happy have we been, through the wise provision of our fathers ! You, my hearers, who have the agency in the present generation, are those very fathers, on whom the people of a century hence will look back, as the authors of their good or of their evil.

Permit an old man to exhort you, to abide by the covenant of the Lord, to preserve all your religious institutions, your ecclesiastical societies, your churches, your funds, made sacred by law, for the instruction of your children, for the worship of your God, and the purposes of beneficence to the poor ; remember that these are the Lord's poor, and he will be jealous for them. With respect to your civil institutions, you have tasted their safety and their sweetness, and the man, who gives them up, deserves the bitter consequences that will follow.—Instead of weakening, strengthen the bonds of society and of religion. Let not the insinuations of the irreligious destroy your attachment to that liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, or discourage your support of those good works, which adorn society and prepare for heaven. It is a hard thing to build up society in its moral, religious and safe ordinances ; but it is not so difficult to break down. Considering the depraved principles of human nature, this is the easiest thing that men ever set themselves to execute. Therefore the wise man said, “ There is a time to build, and a time to break down that which is builded.”

How often, my hearers, in the history of the world do we read of irreligious children breaking down that which their fathers built with much care, prayer and labour ! When God designs judgments on the earth, he permits it to be done in this way. An unbelieving generation is suffered to rise, to ridicule the piety, and to forsake the good works of their forefathers, and the thing is effected.

III. It remains in the use of this subject, that I address it to those who are of my own age.

The writer of the text, in illustration of the important maxim that it contains, begins with saying, "There is a time to be born, and a time to die."—All men must die; but we who are old must die so soon, there is little more than we can do, and our remaining time is in the strictest sense, *a hand's breadth*.—It becomes us to inquire for what things and purposes our old age is designed? Certainly it is not again to re-act life, in the schemes of ambition, and to amass the fortunes of the world. We who are aged must be so near death, there is little more duty we can do, except it be directly to God and to our own souls.—When I look around on the congregation, my aged brethren, and sisters, and see how few our number is; when I ask myself the question, why are we preserved, after so many of our companions and families are sleeping in the dust; I can assign no certain reason but the sovereign, distinguishing will of God. He knew his own counsels with the reasons for them, and he hath accordingly executed by his Providence. Still, as we live, there is something of which we ought to think, and which we ought to do.

And,

FIRST. Why hath God spared a few of us to old age? We are permitted to conjecture some, although we cannot pretend to tell all the reasons.—It might be to exhibit to the generations after us, the necessary decrepitude of age. The sinful principles of human nature are opposed not only to the *moral* but to many of the *natural* laws of God. It is a law of nature that men should decay after a certain period of years; yet to this there is a reluctance in all men. The young wish to

retain their vigor for ever ; and those who have gone on successfully in their pursuits of ambition, sometimes seem to think this will be their case. When they look on us aged people, they find ocular evidence that it cannot be ; they see our palsied limbs, our failing memories, and our erring judgments ; and from these ought to learn, that every man will soon come to his long home.—If they do not take this warning, it seems as though nature itself was not sufficient to give evidence for their conviction.

A SECOND reason may be to give them conviction that age of itself, will not make men religious, and incline them to serve God, without the special sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. There is a strange disposition in mankind to delay, and think that time will make it more agreeable to them to be religious, than it now is.—But when the young and the middle-aged look back, do they find any evidence for this fact, from the feelings of their own hearts ? Have they found it easier for them to be serious, pious and prayerful, than it was before they entered, with all the hopes of avarice and ambition into the eager pursuits of life ? Or if an appeal to their own feelings doth not convince them, let them look on the aged, who have not yet given evidence of their faith and repentance. Have they observed these persons, by their long lives, becoming pious, prayerful, evangelical in their feelings, and eagerly striving for the holiness of heaven ? We fear they have not.

Perhaps, we who are in age, are preserved to give evidence to the world, that time and age will, of themselves, make it no easier for any man to prepare for death. The sinner an hundred years old, is a sinner

still ; and it needs the power of almighty grace to convert him from his evil ways.

**THIRDLY.** It becomes those of us who are advanced in life, to remember, that we may be preserved for our own trial. If God hath given us a longer trial in life, to show the riches of his grace, it becomes us to be the more obedient ; if we have misused, it becomes us to be the more humble and trembling. A long account of sin, must certainly be an awful one to render before the bar of infinite Justice. But are there no duties of peculiar obligation on old age? Yes! surely there are. We stand on the brink of the grave ; it is but a few hours that we can live ; and after death comes a solemn judgment. —Certainly, if there are any persons on whom the duty of self-examination is incumbent, it is on us. We have had a long day of trial, and have we repented? We have lived through many seasons of the outpourings of God's Spirit, and have we used them aright? If we are now on the borders of the grave, without any right to hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable ; and all which can be said of us is, that it is still possible we may be saved.—If we have not faith and repentance, let us beg God to give them. If we live under the guilt of any known sin, let us instantly reform ; for there is but a moment left us. If we have lived in any covered dishonesty, let us confess it, and remove the guilt.

But temporal duties, according to their value, ought not to be forgotten. If we have any temporal concerns, which we think ourselves the most capable of adjusting, let this be done soon, *for we know not what a day may bring forth.*—Let us give to our families the best advice, for we may be very soon taken from them.

Above all, let us stand watching like men, who every moment expect the return of the king and the bridegroom, that we may hail him when he approaches !

My friends, this ought to be a solemn subject to us all, for it is one practical in its nature, and looks forward to the day of decision.

Let the aged hold themselves in readiness to depart ; let the active possessors of power and fortune be sensible, that they are only stewards of what God hath put into their hands, for the advantage of his kingdom ; and let the young know that this is the time in which they have the highest encouragement to seek the kingdom of heaven.—It is strange that immortal beings should be so dilatory as we are, when time is so short, and the consequences of obedience and disobedience are both infinite and eternal ! Who, if he were not acquainted with human nature, could, without surprise, look on a congregation like this, and then go with those who compose it, through the works of the week, and see how they act, how careless ! how buried in the world and its interests ! how much more attentive to time than to eternity !

Let us beseech the grace of God, to save us from the continuance of such folly....*AMEN.*