

The Sermons of John Wesley

1872 Edition

(Thomas Jackson, editor)



SERMON NINETY-THREE

ON REDEEMING THE TIME

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

Abridged and Updated by Ashley Hodge

1. "Look carefully how you walk," says the Apostle in the preceding verse, "not as unwise, but as wise, 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 apathy, ease, pleasure, worldly business; the more diligently, because the present "are evil days," days of the grossest ignorance, immorality, and irreverence.

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 not been considered, even by devout men. Many that have been extremely 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 self-control.

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

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

II. The evil of not redeeming it. And

III. The most effective 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 vigor 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 he will also need more sleep when his strength and spirits are exhausted by hard or long-continued labor."

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 vigor, 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 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 neighbors 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 candor 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; 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 is in Jesus.

3. Do you really desire to know what harm there is in not redeeming all the time you can from sleep? Suppose that you sleep an hour a day more than nature requires? 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 don't have a trade, still you may so employ the time that it will bring money, or money's worth, to yourself, or others.

4. Not redeeming all the time you can from sleep, and 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 disorders arise, not 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 becomes soft and flabby." The nerves, in the mean time, are quite unstrung, and all the train of sad 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 overindulgence 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 gluttony. It breeds a 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 striving?" 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 laborer, or a tradesman, or a servant.

We conceive an abhorrence of a man that is in bed when he should be at his labor. 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 up early in the morning.

11. It is not possible for a wealthy person 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 a wealthy person does. It does not disorder his life, as notorious acts of excess 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 labor?

12. Some people will not hesitate 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 lack 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 were 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 are the irritants 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 practice this important branch of self-control?

I advise all of you who are thoroughly convinced of the unspeakable importance of it, do not let the conviction 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 confused. I never found an exception. I never knew one who trusted in his own strength that could keep this resolution for a year.

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 comes 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 labor. 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, pleadings, 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 delay; 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 tomorrow; 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 self-control 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.



Stewardship Mandate

www.stewardshipmandate.com

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.”

Luke 12:48