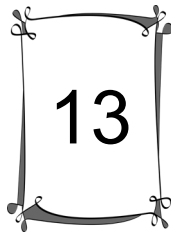


The background of the cover is a photograph of a scenic landscape. A paved road curves through a valley, bordered by a fence. To the left, a railway track with overhead power lines runs parallel to the road. The trees are in autumn, with yellow and orange leaves. In the distance, a large mountain peak is visible under a cloudy sky.

Sermons of Robert Murray M'Cheyne

13. 'Time is Short'

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of
Robert Murray
M'Cheyne



'Time is Short'

“But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” 1 Cor. 7:29-31.

In this chapter the apostle is discoursing concerning marriage. The mind of God upon this subject seems to be:

(1). *That in ordinary times marriage is honourable in all, provided it be in the Lord.* There are some who seem to imagine that there is peculiar holiness about an unmarried life; but this seems quite contrary to the Word of God. In the sinless world before man fell, God said: “It is not good for man to be alone;” and the closest walker with God in Old Testament times was a married man: “Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.”

(2). *That in a time of distress and trouble to the Church it is better not to marry:* “I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress.” (Verse 26.) When the ark of God is in danger, as at present in our Church, it seems the mind of the Spirit, that all who can should keep themselves as much as possible disentangled from earthly engagements. When the wife of Phinehas heard that the ark of God was taken, she travailed in birth, and died, calling her child Ichabod — The glory is departed. So, brethren, it does not become those who love Zion to be marrying and giving in marriage when the ark of God is in danger.

(3). *That even in such times it is lawful to marry:* “But and

if thou marry, thou hast not sinned.” (Verse 28.) I doubt not, brethren, the days are near when they shall say: “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck.” Still, if any will venture to meet these times, and if you think the faith of two may bear you up better than the faith of one, “I spare you.” I would lay no snare upon you. You have not sinned.

Having opened up this subject, the apostle proceeds with this affecting statement, suitable to all, married or unmarried: “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.” In these words there is:

(1). *A statement made: “The time is short;”* and again: *“The fashion of this world passeth away.”* The time to be spent in this world is very short; it is but over; and all that is here is changing; the very hills are crumbling down; the loveliest face is withering away; the finest garments rot and decay: *“The fashion of this world passeth away.”*

(2). *A lesson drawn from this:* Believers should sit loose to everything here. Believers should look on everything in the light of eternity. Value nothing any more than you will do then. Sit loose to the objects, griefs, joys, occupations of this world; for you must soon change them for eternal realities.

Doctrine. The shortness of time should make believers sit loose to all things under the sun.

I. The shortness of time. True in two respects.

1. *The time a believer has to live in this world is very short.*

(1). *The whole lifetime is very short.* From the cradle to the grave is but a short journey: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” The half of men die before the age of twenty. Even when men lived for many hundred years, it was but a short life; a moment, compared to eternity. Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty nine years, and he died. Men are short-lived, like the grass. “*All flesh is as grass;*” and the rich and beautiful are like the flower of the field; a little fairer and more delicate. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it” (Isa. 40:7). “For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). You know how swiftly a weaver’s shuttle flies; but your life flies more swiftly: “My days are swifter than a post; they are passed away as the swift ships; as the eagle that hasteth to the prey” (Job 7:6).

(2). *How much is already passed away.* Most believers spent their first days in sin. Many hearing me gave their best days to sin and the world. Many among you have only the lame, and the torn, and the sick, to give to God. All of you can look on the past as a sleep, or as a tale that is told. The time since I came among you appears to me just like a dream.

(3). *What remains is all numbered.* All of you hearing me have your Sabbaths numbered — the number of sermons you are to hear. The last one is already fixed upon. Your years are numbered. To many this is the last year they shall ever see in this world. Many will celebrate their next new year in glory.

The disease is now in the body of many of you that is to lay you in the dust; and your grave is already marked out. In a little while you will be laying quietly there. Yes, dear brethren, **“the time is short.”**

2. *The time of this world’s continuance is short:*

“The end of all things is at hand” — ”The fashion of this world passeth away.” A believer stands on a watch-tower — things present are below his feet — things eternal are before his eyes. A little while, brethren, and the day of grace will be over — preaching, praying will be done. Soon we shall give over wrestling with an unbelieving world — soon the number of believers shall be complete, and the sky open over our heads, and Christ shall come. His parting cry was: “Surely I come quickly.” Then we shall see him “whom, having not seen, we loved.” A little while, and we shall stand before the great white throne; a little while, and the wicked shall not be — we shall see them going away into everlasting punishment; a little while, and the work of eternity shall be begun. We shall be like him — we shall see him day and night in his temple — we shall sing the new song, without sin and without weariness, for ever and ever. In a little moment, brethren, all this shall be: “For a small moment have I hid my face from thee; but with everlasting mercies will I gather thee.”

II. The believer should learn from this to sit loose to all things under the sun.

1. *Sit loose to the dearest objects of this world:*

“It remaineth, therefore, that they who have wives be as though they had none.” Marriage is honourable in all. Husbands should love their wives, even as Christ loved the

Church: “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.” Still it must not be idolatry. A married believer should be, in some respects, as if he were unmarried — as if he had no wife. “Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” You cannot be too kind, too gentle, too loving, to the parents whom God has given you; yet be as though you had none. Parents, love your children, and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; yet feel that the time is short. They are only a loan from the Lord. Be not surprised if he take his own. Esteem your ministers highly in love, for their work’s sake; yet be as if you had none. Lean as entirely on Christ as if you had never seen or heard a minister. Brainerd mentions an instance of one woman, who, after her conversion, was resigned to the divine will in the most tender points: “What if God should take away your husband from you — how do you think you would bear that?” She replied: “He belongs to God, and not to me; he may do with him just what he pleases.” When she longed to die, to be free from sin, she was asked what would become of her infant; she answered, “God will take care of it; it belongs to him — he will take care of it.” Rutherford says: “Build your nest upon no tree here; for you see God hath sold the forest to Death, and every tree whereon we would rest is ready to be cut down, to the end we may flee and mount up, and build upon the Rock, and dwell in the holes of the Rock.” Set not your heart on the flowers of this world; for they have all a canker in them. Prize the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley more than all; for he changeth not. Live nearer to Christ than to the saints, so that when they are taken from you, you may have him to lean on still.

2. *Sit loose to the griefs of this world.*

They that weep should be as though they wept not. This world is the vale of tears. There are always some mourning. No sooner is the tear dried up on one cheek that it trickles down another. No sooner does one widow lay aside her weeps, than another takes them up. Those that are in Christ should weep as though they wept not; ***“for the time is short.”*** Do you weep over those that died in the Lord? It is right to weep: “Jesus wept.” Yet weep as though you wept not; ***“for the time is short.”*** They are not lost, but gone before. The sun, when it sets, is not lost; it is gone to shine in another hemisphere; and so have they gone to shine in a brighter world. It is self-love that makes you mourn for them; for they are happy. You would not mourn if they were with a distant friend on earth — why do you mourn that they are with the sinner’s Friend? “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them unto fountains of living waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (Rev. 7:16, 17) ***“The time is short;”*** and you will follow after. A few days, and you may be leaning together on the bosom of Jesus; you are nearer then today than you were yesterday. ***“The time is short;”*** and you will meet with all the redeemed at the right hand of Christ — we shall mingle our voices in the new song, and wave together the eternal palm! “Weep as though you wept not.”

Do you weep over those that died out of the Lord? Ah! there is a deeper cause for weeping here; and yet the time is short, when all this will be explained to you, and you will not be able to shed a tear over the lost. A little while, and you

will see Jesus fully glorified, and you will not be able to wish anything different from what has happened. When Aaron lost his two sons, he held his peace.

Do you mourn over bodily pain, and poverty, and sickness, and the troubles of the world? Do not murmur: "***The time is short.***" If you have believed in Christ, these are all the hell you will ever bear. Think you the dying thief would complain of his pains when he was within a step of paradise? So it is with you. Your hell is dried up, and you have only these two shallow brooks to pass through — sickness and death; and you have a promise that Christ shall do more than meet you — go with you, foot for foot, and bear you in his arms. When we get to the presence of Jesus, all our griefs shall look like children's griefs: a day in his presence will make you remember your miseries no more. Wherefore take courage, and run with patience.

3. *Sit loose to the enjoyments of this world.*

It is quite right for a believer to use the things of this world, and to rejoice in them. None has such a right as the believer has to rejoice and be happy. He has a right to use the bodily comforts of this world — to eat his meat "with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God." He has a right to all the joys of home, and kindred, and friendship. It is highly proper that he should enjoy these things. He has a right to all the pure pleasures of mind, of intellect, and imagination; for God has given him all things richly to enjoy. Still, he should "rejoice as though he rejoiced not, and use this world as not abusing it;" for "***the time is short.***" In a little while, you will be at your Father's table above, drinking the new wine with Christ. You will meet with all your brothers and sisters in Christ — you will have pure joy in God through ceaseless

ages. Do not be much taken with the joys that are here. I have noticed children, when they were going out to a feast, they would eat, but sparingly, that they might have a keener appetite for the coming dainties; so, dear friends, you are going to a feast above, do not dull your appetite with earthly joys — sit loosely to them all — look upon them all as fading. As you walk through a flower garden, you never think of lying down, to make your home among its roses; so, pass through the garden of this world's best joys. Smell the flowers in passing; but do not tarry. Jesus calls you to his banqueting house — there you will feed among the lilies on the mountains of spices. Oh! it ill becomes a child of God to be fond of an earthly banquet, when you are looking to sitting down so soon with Jesus — it ill becomes you to be much taken up with dress and show, when you are so soon to see the face that was crowned with thorns. Brethren, if you are ever so much taken up with any enjoyment that it takes away you love for prayer or for your Bible, or that it would frighten you to hear the cry: "The Bridegroom cometh;" and you would say: Is he come already? then you are abusing this world. Oh! sit loose to this world's joy: "***The time is short.***"

4. *Sit loose to the occupations of the world.*

It is right for Christians to be diligent in business. I often wonder how unconverted souls can be so busy in business. I often wonder how unconverted souls can be so busy; how, when you are bustling along, filling up all your time with worldly things, it never occurs to you that there will be none of this in eternity. How can I be so busy for my body, when my poor soul is unprovided for? But those in Christ may well be diligent.

(1). They have a good conscience — that oils the wheels.

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.” A light heart makes easy work.

(2). They love to honour their Lord. They would not have it said that a believer in Jesus was an idler or a sluggard — the love of Jesus constrains them to all that is lovely. And yet a believer should “buy as though he possessed not;” for ***“the time is short.”*** Oh! believers, ye cannot be misers; for you are but stewards. All that you possess here is your Lord’s; and the day is at hand when he will transfer you to take care of another property in a brighter land. You are but servants. It would not do if you were to set your hearts on the things of this lower room; for in a few days the Master is to call you to serve in his own dear presence. Dear believers, be ready to leave your room for the golden harp, at a minute’s warning; be ready to leave your desk for the throne of Jesus — your pen for the palm of victory; be ready to leave the market below, for the street of the new Jerusalem, where the redeemed shall walk. If you were in a sinking ship, you would not cling hard to bags of money — you would sit loose to all, and be ready to swim. This world is like a sinking ship, and those who grasp at its possessions will sink with it. Oh! *“buy as though you possessed not;”* for ***“the time is short.”***

III. What the unconverted should learn from the shortness of time.

1. Learn your folly in having lost the past.

Although life be very short, it is all saving time. This is the reason for which God has given it to us. The long-suffering of God is intended for our salvation. God gives men time to hear the Gospel — to pray — to get saving conversion. But unconverted souls have wasted all the past. Think how much time you have lost in idleness. How many golden

opportunities for prayer, and hearing the Word, and meditation, have you lost! how much time have you spent uselessly in your bed, or in idle talk, or in loitering about your doors! If you saw how short your time is, and how death and hell are pursuing you, you would have fled to Christ; but you have not. Think how much you have spent in sin, at the tavern, or in vain company, or in dances, or in night walking, or in sins of which it is a shame even to speak. God gave you time for saving your soul, and you have spent it ruining your soul. God gave you time to flee to Christ; and you have spent it in fleeing toward hell. Think how much time you have spent in business, without one thought for eternity. Think how you have lost your best time. Youth is your best time of being saved. Many of you have lost it. Time of awakening — Sabbaths — holy time — years of Sabbaths have now gone over many of you. “The harvest is past, the summer is ended; and we are not saved.”

2. Consider what value they put on time who are now in hell.

Once, brethren, they cared as little for it as you — once, they could see their years pass away without caring — once, they could let their Sabbaths slip away; but now they see their folly. What would they now give, brethren, for such an opportunity as you have this day? What would they give for another year of grace — for another week — for another day? It is probable that some of your friends or companions, now in hell, are wishing they could come back to tell you how precious is an inch of saving time!

Oh! brethren, be wise. “Why stand ye all the day idle?” It has come to the eleventh hour with some — your

unconverted head is grey — your feet are tottering. If you saw a man condemned to die, lying in chains, who had but three hours to live; if you saw that man playing at dice, or singing wanton songs, would you not be shocked? You would say he was a hardened wretch. Ah! are there none among you the same? You are condemned already — your days are numbered — you are hanging by a thread over the mouth of hell; and yet you are cutting and slashing at the hand that holds you. In a little moment, brethren, it will be all over. Throughout the never-ending ages of eternity you will remember the few days we spent together. Ah! the remembrance will add fuel to the flame, and be a never-dying worm in your poor soul.

