

ROMANS 13:11-14 February 12, 2012

¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (ESV)

- Know The Time
- Wake Up and See the Light
- Walk Only In Daytime
- Wear Some Essential Clothing
- Make No Provision For the Flesh

A friend of mine is a radio talk show host – he covers politics, current affairs, that sort of thing. And he uses an old song by the rock group *Chicago* as his theme song, called, "Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?" It's a catchy song with a horn section that really pops on AM radio, and it fits with the current affairs issues that he likes to talk about.

Paul doesn't have a radio show but he's asking exactly that question. And by asking it, he is reminding folks of *exactly* what time it is: "**You know** the time," he says. In fact, it's something he has been saying in this whole section of his letter that began back in chapter 12, v. 2, when he said, "Do not be conformed to this world." That word "world" is actually the word "age" – don't be conformed to this age in which you live, because you know exactly what time is!" This is a time that requires you to be alert, vigilant, and diligent. It's time, Paul says, to "wake up!"

Well, okay. But wake up to ... what? Paul says, "wake from sleep... for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."

This can sound confusing at first. How can salvation be "nearer to us now than when we first believed," when Christianity says that when we first believed, *we were* saved? And "nearer now than when we first believed" and were saved ... how many times do I have to believe and be saved?

Here is what's going on: it is that idea that many of you have heard about and know, but which we often forget, and that is that we live in this period of the already/not yet (repeat). There IS a sense – an ironclad, once and for all sense – that you *have* been saved, when you first believed. And that idea syncs up well with your personal, subjective experience of being saved.

But read Ephesians 1, and you realize that you were also saved from the foundation of the world. Read the Psalms, and you find out that you were saved in your mother's womb. Read the gospels, and you are very certain that you were saved at the cross.

The bible can also speak about how you *are being* saved (that's the not yet), even though you *have already* been saved. That is, that salvation is in one sense done, and can't be taken away. But that the moment of salvation is not all there is to it. The ultimate sense of salvation wasn't experienced by you when you were born again. That was just one extremely important, declarative aspect to it. The fullness of salvation doesn't really take place until your glorification. Until you enter into heaven.

Paul's point is basically this – the fullness of your salvation (it's simply a fact) – is much closer to you today than it was yesterday.

So let me ask you: "Do you really know what time it is?" Some of you know my aunt died this week in her 70's. We've had people in our congregation who've lost a friend in her early 50s this last week, with children still at home. That sets you to wondering, "How much time do I have?"

Where will *you* be ten years from now? In 20 years? I have never wondered more than I have this past year, how many years I have left. When relationships end – a friend or relative dies – you go through some physical ailments, you look at how old your kids are perhaps, and you end up saying, like I do, "Lord, I can't wait to see you face to face. But can I have at least 20 more years of ministry? I want to see you grow your church. We have so many more things to learn in your word..." Or I say to myself, "If only I could have received the call to ministry at 27 rather than 37." "If I were only 41 and not 51."

Some of you have said, "Yeah, and can we finish Romans before your 61!"

But you know, I *can* tell you where I'll be in 50 years. I won't be standing here. But where will *you* be? Take it from me. It goes fast. Wake up! Because the day IS approaching. Those of you who are seniors at the University – you know this – haven't these been the fastest 4 years of your life? It only goes faster from here.

And that is what Paul means when he says salvation is nearer today.

Now that is good news – that the fullness, the real glory of our salvation, that the Sun of the gospel has already arisen, that it's daytime and the light of the new heavens and new earth has come over the horizon –this is very good news.

But there are implications, too. And here is **the main point: The believer must no longer conform their behavior to the *old* age – that is this present age – which is passing away. No, the believer lives out the values of the *new* age – the values and ethics of *the age to come* – to which they belong through Christ.**

- To Wake Up and See the Light

And it's just this contrast between day and night that Paul uses to illustrate it: "The night is far gone; the day is at hand."

This age – the age in which we live now – Paul calls "the night." And he says that this night in which we live –where yes, people die, and people are in conflict, and there are wars, and famine, and divorce, and we could go on – this night "is far gone." We are, Paul says, in the last watch of the night.

My sister, who is here today, had to call me at 5:30 in the morning this week. And after the call... well, there was no point in going back to sleep. Right? The daytime was imminent. That's what Paul is getting at. The dawn of the fullness of salvation grows closer with every hour, day and year. The time of darkness is passing, and the dawn is about to break in. So wake up!

And this is a metaphor that is used again and again, by Paul, by John, by Jesus. Just as an example, turn with me over to the most famous verse in the bible, John 3:16 (p. 1130). Jesus is speaking to the Pharisee, Nicodemus, and here is what he says:

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Do you see what Jesus is saying? His point is that up until his arrival, people have been by nature, children of darkness. It's a metaphor that Jesus uses to describe sin:

²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

By nature, the bible says, we love darkness rather than the light. In fact, Jesus suggests that even the righteous good deeds we do have that shadow of darkness because we do them to look good. To build up our self-righteousness. We *know* this! We do them, actually, to keep God away. We do them so we can judge ourselves as "good people," "nice people," and avoid his gaze. No, Jesus says that works done in the light are "carried out in God." And if you want that light, you want me.

Look, in the ancient world, without electricity to keep cities lit at night, people looked at the night time and its darkness as the time of evil and corruption. Criminals could far more easily carry out their deeds under cover of night and escape detection. The so-called decent folks would fear to go out after the sun went down. So it was natural for people to associate "evil" with "nighttime." So Paul calls on us to put aside the "works of darkness" and to behave or "walk properly as in the daytime."

Now I don't think that means that every Christian today has to have a sundown curfew! That's way too literal. And it wouldn't help, would it? Because with modern technology, we can do the darker things that the ancients could only do at night, any old time we like – we can even do some of those things in a virtual reality.

But what it does mean is that the Christian life is one where we must move toward the light. We can't get back in bed and hide under the covers or carouse as if the night will never end.

Maybe there is no one better to describe this than the man who was so powerfully impacted by these very verses. And that is, St. Augustine.

As a young man, Augustine had led a life of licentiousness. In defiance of his mother and her Christian commitment, and in defiance of God, he fathered a child out of wedlock and he was a pagan idol worshipper. Now he was no fool. In fact, he was brilliant – a brilliant young philosopher.

One day he was standing in a garden and young children were playing there, and the refrain that they sang with their game was *tolle legge, tolle legge, tolle legge*. Words he had never heard in any song before, let alone a children's song. Words that mean, "take up and read." And apparently, he looked around and his eyes fell on a large bible that was chained nearby for anyone to look at. And he picked it up and opened it to Romans 13:

Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

The reference in the passage is to the pagan practice orgiastic partying under the eye of the pagan god, Bacchus – the god of the vine. He was the sponsor of the bacchanalia, which was a feast where you drank to quiet the conscience, so that you could enjoy unbridled sexual behavior and not feel any accompanying guilt. You'd have enough wine to silence the pangs of the conscience and move toward sin.

But you see, it's these words, these two verses, that pierced Augustine's heart and soul and described him as well as any mirror – he could not silence the guilt. It was always there. He had never been able to escape it. That is, until the word of God was used not only to convict him of sin, but also provided the gift of Jesus Christ and his forgiveness – *to put on Christ*, even as he took off the sins of the flesh. That to put on Christ meant that no sooner had his guilt been shown to him, then he knew the forgiving grace of Jesus and his sins were taken away.

And the ministry of Augustine continues to the church this day.

Now our third point. Is a minor departure. But I think it is an important one.

It's been a while since we've spoken about eschatology – that's the big word for the study of "last things" or "end times." But this is a spot to say just a couple of things, because Paul mentions the so called Day of the Lord. The final judgment.

My old professor, the late Ed Clowney, told of a cartoon he once saw where a husband and wife are sitting at a breakfast table, and the man has a startled look on his face as he is placing the newspaper down on the table. And the wife says, "What's the matter honey?" and the man says, "My antichrist just died."

And of course, the joke is that the prophesy and predictions that people make about the end times are almost always proven to be wrong. In my lifetime, I've been told that the antichrist is the Pope, King Juan Carlos, Henry Kissinger, Mikhail Gorbachev, 'the beast' supercomputer in Brussels Belgium, Bill Gates, Jimmy Carter, Yasser Arafat, Idi Amin, Marshall Tito, Jesse Jackson, Daniel Ortega, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Elian Gonzalez, Francois Mitterrand, and Justin Beiber.

Every year when I make it over to the PTS book sale, I always see some of those old prophesy books that were written in the 50's and 60's and leaf through them to see what has become of the predictions that were made then with such great power and authority. And what you see is that *they didn't know what they were talking about*. Almost everyone is wrong about the details of Christ's return.

And we're not going to talk about those details either. I think that when the bible tells us that "no man can know the time or hour of his return," that phrase is a figure of speech that means "the day, the hour, *or anything else* about the details of his return."

But, the bible says, over and over, He IS coming back. That is the point. When people get weighed down or passionate in their study of prophesy, they often, if not always miss that main point. Our hope in return of Jesus Christ is all about being prepared. It's all about living in the light of his reality, even as the darkness hasn't yet lifted. It makes us prepared. As Steve Brown puts it, it reminds us that history is *not* moving in circles. That no matter how bad it gets, no matter how messed up the world gets, that no matter how many Bosnias, Rwandas and Somalias there are, the truth is that this world DOES belong to Jesus, and he is Lord of all he sees, and he is allowing us to come to the end of our pride – even as he is building his church through the gospel – before he returns to fix it all. CS Lewis says that when that happens, everyone will know the truth, but for some it will be too late to know the truth.

I was recently watching the film *Moneyball* about the baseball General Manager Billy Beane. Beane – the GM of the Oakland A's – came up with a system to find undervalued players so that he could go up against and compete with teams like the Yankees with huge payrolls – payrolls he couldn't come close to.

The film shows how Beane institutes the system – and then leaves it to the players and the manager to *work with* the system. And for almost an hour of the film, he leaves them alone. He watches every game, but he never sits in the stands. He never misses a pitch, but he stays out of the locker room. He reviews the tape of every at-bat, but he never goes on the road.

And the team ends up going through an endless losing streak. A losing streak so bad, that the players don't care whether they win or lose anymore. In fact, they start partying and celebrating after they lose. Dark times.

The movie – the story – turns, when Beane enters the locker room during one of these parties, bangs a bat against the wall, and states the obvious: You don't celebrate a loss. Losing is bad. And he begins to take over the team, he moves in to fix the mess, and show how to "do baseball" according to his system, and the teams starts to follow. To believe. And to win.

When Paul says, "You know the time... You know that the hour has come for you to wake up," he's saying that the one who created the way things should go and made you and this world... he's rounding the corner, and he is coming to fix this mess. Are you ready, or are you celebrating the fall of humanity, over "works of darkness?"

So what does living in the light of His return look like? He's been telling us since chapter 12. He's been speaking about loving your neighbor, presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice, to not think of yourself more highly than you ought, to use your gifts, to abhor what is evil, to outdo one another when showing honor and hospitality, to never take vengeance, and to honor those in authority above you.

Jesus never lied about anything – even his critics admit that – and he didn't lie about his return, either. He's coming. So if there is someone you need to tell about Jesus, do it. If there is someone you need to make peace with, do it.

What would you do today if you knew Jesus was coming back tomorrow? Of course, you'd cut class and run up your credit card bill. But besides that! Paul wants you to see that you can't drink all night to run from your conscience. The brightness of daytime is coming. Christ is coming.

- Wear Your Essential Clothing

Now did you notice this? It's not just good enough to wake up and get out of your pajamas. You have to (v. 12) put on the armor of light.

The implication here is that this walking in the light is not easy.

People will laugh at you. Really! You know at Yale this just this past week it was Sex Week. Student-sponsored classes taught by professors on topics that I can't even mention from the pulpit. But you'd be laughed at if you skipped the orgies. It's just what Peter says: "that scoffers will come in the last days" who follow "their own sinful desires."¹

You see, this is warfare. You're in a war. Sinclair Ferguson puts it this way: "Jesus is building his church in enemy occupied territory." In Ephesians 6, Paul goes even further to describe the full armor of God. And no, for those of you appalled at images of Christian warfare... well, we repent for those who have picked up actual swords in the name of Jesus. Because the weapons Paul speaks about are the *belt* of truth, the *breastplate* of Christ's righteousness, the *shoes* of gospel peace with God, the *shield* of faith, the *helmet* of salvation, and the *sword* of the Spirit, which is the word of God.²

¹ 2 Peter 3:3

² Ephesians 6:14–17).

The Christian lives as someone who sees clearly as in the daytime, because Christ has brought light, revelation, Spirit, truth, and righteousness by which to see. The Christian has night vision. Or as Calvin says, the believer is not only to be characterized by good deeds, the deeds done in daylight, but also to "carry on a warfare for the Lord."

Now here is what he means: If you are a Christian, and you see that yes, "when I came to faith, a few things changed. But now, it's been awhile, and there are some other things that need to change... but they don't. Secret sins. Things I like too much to get rid of. But this time, I'm really going to try harder."

Now you see what's going on there. The person is saved *by grace*, but now they are going to stay there or even grow there, *by the law*. You see, the problem with most Christians is that they're trying to be obedient through their own efforts because they think of God as a policeman who is focused on the law, instead of as a Father, who comes to you in love. They're trying to be obedient with the gasoline of guilt. But you don't have to please God – he's already pleased with you! You see, *that's* why Calvin, and Paul say that the way you confront your sin – you still sin! – is not by going into battle on your own, and in your own strength, but to put on more of Christ.

Some of you have been going into battle with little or nothing to protect yourself than your own guilt and shame that screams, "But I can do better." That is going into battle with next to no defenses. No, you go into battle by grace, because you are covered, coated and shielded by his righteousness. That is your essential clothing! Go deeper with him – meditate on the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, credited to your account – and you'll find your taste for the secret deeds of the night having less and less power, but the power of the Spirit to overcome sin and live in the light growing all the more.

Have you ever had to clean up your house for someone like... I don't know.. a repairman, a real estate agent, a township engineer. It's a drag, right? But when you clean up your house for someone you love, who's always loved you, and someone you can't wait to see... it just comes naturally. That's what we're talking about. One way is *covering your* dirt; the other is making it clean *for him*.

- And this takes us to our last point. Make No Provision For the Flesh

Very briefly, putting on Christ means that you must suffocate the old self, the old desires, what the bible calls the flesh. It sounds creepy, but the Christian life sometimes feels like an endless mummy movie, where you're trying to put these desires down, and yet they keep getting up again.

So when Paul ends the chapter with "make no provision for the flesh," what does that mean? It means don't provide an *opportunity* for sin. Or as Luther put it: I can't stop the sparrows from flying above my head, but I *can* make sure they don't build a nest in my hair.

How are you making provision? It's fascinating, isn't it? Because the implication is that we *DO* make provision for our sin before we do it. (repeat) People I have counseled are always making distinctions about "unconscious sin" and "known sin" – where they realized what they had done, or not. But I've never had anyone offer up how they would *plan* to sin. But we do.

Really, almost none of our sin has ever been an accident. If we're really honest about it. When someone says that they used nasty, destructive language during an argument, and they say, "Well, it just came out," they mean it was an accident. Except that it didn't just come out – it had been stored up inside so that when the situation was right, bam, it was right there to pop out. We rehearse sin, we plan sin, we ruminate and marinate over it. *Most* sin is first-degree sin. *Most* sin involves preparing the nest and inviting the birds to use it.

Friends, the night is short, and he's just around the bend. To Him, a thousand years is like a day. So make provision for the Day. Make provision for Jesus Christ. And if you haven't given him space in your heart, do it today. Do it now.

Let's pray.