

Introduction

I want to begin by welcoming everyone here this morning, whether it is your first time here or whether you are a regular attender. If this is your first time you are especially welcome, and it is our hope that you will be so blessed by the service that you will want to return again next week. Our current sermon series is on the book of Romans, and today's message is "It's time to wake up!" from Romans 13:11-14

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Are you a morning person or a night person? I am more of a night person, so every morning it is only the ringing of the alarm clock by my ear that makes me wake up groggily and stumble into the bathroom. And I am pretty sure that all students are night people. I was talking last Friday to our undergraduate coordinator about my Fall class, which could be either at 8:00 am or at 9:00 am, and she said something like "students hate 8:00 am classes".

Our text this morning is Romans 13:11-14

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Rom 13:11-14

11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

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Prayer

So when our text for this message starts with "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber" I can relate to the difficulty of doing this. In my physical life the alarm clock wakes me up, but it is the knowledge that I have classes to teach and papers to write and a Lord to serve that motivates me to get going in the morning. What is the corresponding thing in our Christian life; what motivates (or should motivate us) to get going in our spiritual lives?

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To answer this question we need to go back and remind ourselves of where we are in our studies in the book of Romans. In the first eight chapters we see how the apostle Paul first diagnoses the problem and then describes God's solution. The problem is that we have all sinned, and are therefore under God's judgment:

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Rom 3:22-23 There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

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As a result we are all under God's judgment

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death

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But God loved us and so God in Jesus Christ paid the price that we could not pay by His death on the cross

Rom 3:22-25 There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood

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And so although the wages of sin is death, the gracious gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And then to add to our blessings God not only forgives us through Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us, He also gives us the power to live as new creatures through the Holy Spirit that he gives to all believers

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Rom 8:1-9 (selected)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (God) condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires...the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. You... are controlled by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

And then Paul goes on in Romans 9-11 to explain how God has not rejected his people, the Jews, but has instead showed His kindness to the non-Jewish peoples, or the so-called Gentiles, and this was all part of His plan.

He ends this section with a marvelous hymn of praise to God

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Rom 11:33-36

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"

35 "Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?"

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

So the first eleven chapters of Romans set out God's plan of salvation; how God showed His mercy and love to us to turn enemies into adopted children, and to love us and to equip us to live for Him.

Paul then moves on in Romans 12 to teach about the practical results of being a Christian. This section begins

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Rom 12:1-2

12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this

world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

This entire last section of Romans hinges on this verse. Paul is saying “Therefore, in view of God's mercy, in view of Jesus Christ’s death for you on the cross, in view of the forgiveness you have received through faith in Jesus Christ, in view of the Spirit of God who lives in you, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.”

And then Paul gets down to specifics, and talks about humility and using the gifts God has given us and loving sincerely and being devoted to one another and not repaying evil with evil and our attitude to the governing authorities. And then he comes back to his theme of love, and teaches us that love is the fulfillment of the law.

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Rom 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Chris Faith will expand on this theme next week.

And then Paul gets to our Scripture for today

Rom 13:11-14

11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

So Paul is here saying “do this (that is, live a life of loving your neighbor as yourself), *understanding the present time*.

So what motivates us in our Christian life? What enables us to love one another? The first thing is that we need to understand the present time.

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1. We need to understand the present time.

“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”

In other words; we need to understand that our time is short, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. So what is Paul referring to here when he says “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed”? I believe that in this context “our salvation” refers primarily to the return of Jesus Christ, with a secondary meaning of our death when Christian believers will have the joy of meeting our Lord and the great company of saints who have gone on ahead of us.

Let me talk briefly about the secondary meaning, because we do not like to talk about death, even though it is an inevitable fact of life. One of the huge differences between Christ-followers and others is their attitude to

death. For Christ-followers death is not something to be feared, like those who have no hope. The psalmist wrote

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Ps 116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

I have been to many funerals and memorial services, and the funerals of Christ-followers are a beautiful mixture of sadness and joy; sadness at the loss of a loved one, but joy that he or she is now with the Lord. In contrast, the funerals of those who have died without Christ are all about loss, with no hope for the future. Just over a week ago Beverly and I attended the funeral of Barbara Peters, wife of our brother Don, and it was an occasion of joy at her going to be with the Lord and much laughter, mingled with sadness that we would no longer have her with us.

So the knowledge that our time on this earth is limited should motivate us to live for our Lord, and not just for ourselves. And for some of us our time might be very limited. In my case I discovered that I am living in negative time. In preparing for this message I came across the Death Clock website. You enter in your age and height and weight and so on, and the program then tells you when you can expect to die. I did this and got a message that said something like “Sorry, you died in 2012. Have a nice day”.

But whether our death is five days away or more than fifty years away, we will all one day stand before God to answer for our lives here on earth.

But I believe the event Paul is primarily referring to when he says “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” is the return of our Lord. This is a major theme of the New Testament. According to John Walvoord, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, one out of every twenty-five verses in the New Testament refers either to the rapture of the church or to Christ’s coming to reign over the world, and approximately twenty major references to Christ’s return are found in the New Testament. For example, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in these words:

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1 Thess 4:16-17

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Paul and the other NT writers expected Jesus to return soon, but Jesus himself told his disciples that no-one knew when he would return

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Matt 24:42-44

42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

So Paul is telling us that we need to understand that Jesus could return at any time. He could come today, or not for another 2000 years. Only God knows when Jesus will come back, but when he does there will be a final separation between Christians and non-Christians. Christ-followers will be joyfully welcomed into God’s

presence, while non-believers will be sent into outer darkness. So we need to be ready, understanding the present time.

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2. We need to wake up

It is one thing to hear the alarm clock go off, and understand that the present time is 5:45 in the morning, and it is another thing to wake up and stumble out of bed. And it is the same in our spiritual lives. It is one thing to hear and understand that Christ could return at any time, but it is another thing to allow this truth to motivate us to live Christianly. And although it has been almost 2000 years since Jesus ascended to heaven, this just means that his return is 2000 years nearer than it was for Paul and the other apostles.

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Paul uses four phrases to describe the nearness of Christ's return and our need to wake up: Rom 13:11 "The hour has come" Rom 13:11 "our salvation is nearer" Rom 13:12 "The night is nearly over" "the day is almost here"

Jesus used similarly urgent language in His teaching about his return

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Mark 13:35-37

"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back — whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

So what does it mean to be asleep and what does it mean to wake up? To be asleep is to live as if Jesus Christ had not died for your sins; it means to live in the same way was everyone else; to live only for money or sex or praise from others or art or scientific achievement. Now note carefully that I am not saying that any of these things are necessarily wrong in themselves, but if we live for them, if they are our only reason for getting up in the morning, and if our lives revolve around them, then they have become idols and that is a terrible way to live.

So what does it mean to wake up? Well, what do you do when you wake up? After certain bathroom exercises like using the toilet and shaving (if you are a man) you take off your pajamas and put on your clothes for the day (including of course a bow tie in my case). So Paul uses this simple analogy of taking off our night clothes and putting on our day clothes to help us understand how to wake up to Christ.

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3. It is time to put off our night clothes

Rom 13:12-13 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness... Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

John McArthur states that the Greek verb translated "put aside" is a term that speaks of being ejected or expelled forcefully. The Greek term is used only three other times in the New Testament, and in each case it speaks of excommunication from a synagogue (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). So Paul is saying that we are to vigorously eject these sins from our lives.

Paul describes six different categories of sin in three groups that can tempt Christian believers but must be ejected. The first group include sins that involve what today we call "substance abuse" because to drunkenness we must add drug addiction in all its various forms. Christians can legitimately differ on the moderate use of

alcohol, but drunkenness is always sinful, and one only has to read the paper to see the harm that drunkenness does every day. And extending to today, anything, whether alcohol or cocaine or heroin or any other drug that causes us to lose control of our actions, is something that causes harm to ourselves and potentially others.

The second group includes sexual immorality, which is uniformly condemned in the Bible and is almost uniformly praised or at least condoned in our culture today, which is a sign of how countercultural the Christian faith is. There are signs of hope, however, as the #MeToo movement has empowered women to speak up against men who have abused them.

The third group includes jealousy, which is a self-harming sin because it has the effect of making you discontented as you compare yourself with someone else who has more money or a better job or a better house than you. As Shakespeare has Iago say

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.

Othello (3.3), Iago

And William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, said

The jealous are troublesome to others, but a torment to themselves.

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4. It is time to put on our day clothes

Rom 13:12-14

So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ...Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

The imagery here is of a soldier who has spent the night in revelry and has stumbled home and fallen asleep in his clothes. He now has to wake up and put on his armor for the coming battle. Though the return of Christ is imminent, Christians are still in a spiritual battle, as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6

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Eph 6:11-13

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

So Christians living in the light of Christ's return will take a deliberate and determined stand against evil and the powers of this dark world. How? By doing both positive and negative things. On the negative side, we are commanded "And do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

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So we are to put off any thoughts of how to gratify our sinful natures. John Piper has a helpful comment here

Quote "If you are bored, or lonely, or tired, or discouraged, or feeling hopeless, don't ponder the relief of alcohol or drugs. They simply put you to sleep; they stir up the sleepwalking that Paul calls the works of darkness. It's like going to work in your pajamas. Don't let those thoughts in your head.

Frustrated housewife or working mom, married to a man who never learned affection, never learned tenderness, never learned how to simply talk about what matters to you, don't daydream about romantic Mister Perfect. Don't let those thoughts into your head.

Frustrated husband or single man, who wonders why there is no woman to embrace or why the woman you have doesn't want to embrace, do not let illicit thoughts into your mind. Don't put them there with your fantasy and don't do it with your computer. 12% of all websites are pornographic. 25% of all search engine requests are related to pornography. Internet revenue from pornography is \$2.5 billion a year. Don't be conformed to this darkness." End quote

And how do we do this?

We are called to put on the armor of light, and to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. And what does that mean? It means many things, but at the least it means remembering that we belong to Jesus Christ, and that we are called to act like him. It means reading the Bible and seeking to obey it; it means praying regularly; it means looking to Jesus as our example and trusting in His death on the cross for our forgiveness. It is becoming in practice what we already are.

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John McArthur says "Think of it in terms of an athlete who puts on the uniform of a great team. It's one thing to wear the uniform and be on the team, it's something else to play up to the reputation of the team. So act like it."

Conclusion

One of the beautiful things about our Christian faith is that it deals so realistically and in such a down-to-earth way with the reality of following Jesus. So yes, Christians are forgiven, or as the hymn puts it "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven". We have changed sides in the war between God and Satan, and we have sworn loyalty to our Lord. But we are still living in enemy territory, and sometimes the enemy succeeds in getting us to forget that we are followers of Christ and we fail our Lord. But thanks be to God, we can put off the dirty clothing of the night and seek forgiveness and put on our Lord Jesus Christ and his mercy and grace.

So here is an experiment to try. When you get dressed tomorrow, as you put on your clothing, remind yourself that you are also putting on Jesus Christ, and ask Him to give you the wisdom and the strength and the courage to live for Him all through the day.

And finally, our faith deals so well with the past, the present, and our future.

In the past we can look back and marvel at God's provision for us through the death of His son Jesus on the cross.

In the present we can look to our Lord for the presence in our lives through the Holy Spirit

And we can look to the future with the confidence that one day Jesus Christ will return and that living or dying we will be with Him forever.

As Moses wrote in Psalm 90

Ps 90:12

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Let us encourage one another with these thoughts. You can turn to your neighbor and say something like “isn’t it wonderful that we can look forward to Jesus’ return” or “I thank God that he saved me by His grace”

But above all, let us be encouraged and challenged by the fact that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Benediction

1 Cor 15:55-58

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

NIV