

*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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.<sup>14</sup> Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:11-14)*

### Understand the Present Time

One day last week, my wife and I went to the library and then we stopped for a cup of coffee. When we were driving home, I pointed to the clock on the dashboard of my car and said that it was already after five. My wife looked at her watch and said, “No it’s not. Your clock is in some other time zone. It’s only 4:15.” I looked at my watch and it said the same time as the dashboard clock and we realized that my wife’s watch had stopped. All of sudden, things took on a new urgency, because I had a Bible class that night and she had a lot less time to make dinner than she thought. Have you ever had an experience like that? We live in a very time conscious society. We parents spend a lot of time trying to teach our children to manage their time well. Especially when it comes to long term assignments, they have to understand how long it’s going to take and how many other things will be competing for their time and attention. It’s not just kids. We all need to understand time. Of course, that’s not just true for scheduling purposes. This morning, St. Paul points us to God’s clock. We need to understand that we are in the countdown to Jesus’ return. My friends, **understand the present time.**

#### I.

Paul says, **“The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”** We all understand the need for a nap sometimes, right? Did you take one Thursday afternoon? Did you fall asleep on the couch during the football game? Did you blame your sleepiness on the “tryptophan” in your turkey? Or did you get up at the crack of dawn on Friday and brave the Black Friday shopping and then collapse on the couch later that day? Over the weekend, it probably didn’t matter much, but tomorrow morning, we’re all going to have to be awake and alive. St. Paul uses that image of sleeping and waking this morning. But he isn’t talking about the need for us to have a healthy sleep schedule. He’s talking about our lives of faith. **Understand the present time. It’s time to wake up from spiritual slumber.**

What does that mean? Well, Paul says, **“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.”** St. Paul pictures morning as the time to get up and be productive, but night as the time when people throw wild parties and the time when thieves break into houses and engage in criminal activity. And right now, it’s spiritual night time. We live in the darkness, when sin runs rampant in this world. All you have to do is look around to see that’s true. But dawn is coming. When Jesus returns, a new day will dawn, a day of joy and holiness, a day when we will live with Christ in perfection forever.

So Paul tells us to wake up from spiritual slumber and to put aside the deeds of darkness. What is he talking about? When you’re asleep, you don’t know what’s going on around you. If a mother of small children falls asleep, she may regret it when she wakes up, right? She can’t keep watch over her children and keep them safe and make sure they behave themselves. Spiritually speaking, it’s very easy for all of us to fall asleep. In part, that’s because living in this sinful world is so exhausting. Every day, we face temptation. Every day we’re bombarded by unspiritual and unchristian attitudes and values. And sometimes, we just get tired of it.

And we fall asleep. We decide not to think about it right now. We put it all out of our minds and we focus on other things. Little by little, we begin to drift away from God and his Word. As we drift from his Word, our life begins to change. It can be a very slow process. I’ve sat down with people who don’t come to church on a regular basis anymore and they’re absolutely convinced that they know what they believe and they haven’t forgotten it. But the mere fact that they no longer recognize that it’s a sin to neglect church shows that they’re drifting away from what God actually says. The more we sleep spiritually, the less we understand about what is really going on around us. The farther we get from God.

Paul tells us all to wake up. Now, when I look around here this morning, it doesn't look to me like many of you are sleeping spiritually. Most of you are people I see here almost every Sunday. But St. Paul was talking to Christians, not unbelievers. He was talking to people who would be in church to hear this letter read. He was telling us that we need every day to wake up from spiritual slumber, because we all have a sinful nature inside us. We all have a part of us that's just tired of this Christian life. We all have moments when we start to drift off into spiritual sleep.

But Paul said these words to us because we are not just sinners. We are children of God. God gave us a new nature when he gave us faith. So Paul tells us to wake up because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Every day, this world marches closer to Jesus' return. And even if we don't live to see that return, every day we march closer to the grave and thus to heaven. So Paul tells us to wake up. He tells us that we really only have so much time left here to give glory to God with our lives. Don't waste the years God gives you here pursuing things that will not last. Give glory to God with your time here.

And because God has made us new, we can answer that call. We can apply ourselves to living for Christ. We can even say that we cooperate in living a Christian life. Now, if we were talking about coming to faith, we could never use that word cooperate. Faith is a gift God gives us. If we were talking about being justified – that is, being declared righteous in God's sight, we could never use that word cooperate. God declares us righteous because Jesus lived and died and rose in our place. But now that we are forgiven, now that we have faith, we can and must cooperate in living for Christ. Jesus gets all the credit, because the gospel that gives us a new life, it makes us want to live that new life and it fuels that new life. But we have the gospel. We have a new nature. We want to live for God and we need to apply ourselves to that life. We need to wake up and hear the gospel regularly. We need to wake up and avoid temptation and sin. All that Paul calls putting on the armor of light. Dig deep into the message of God's love and live for Jesus as this world's time runs out.

## II.

So when that alarm goes off early in the morning, before the sun even comes up, what do you do? Do you shut it off and roll over and go back to sleep? Most of us would like to do that, but we can't. We have to get our kids up and get to work and school. We have to be alert almost from the moment that alarm rings because we have work to do. Spiritually speaking, it's the same. The work we have to do for Christ is to live for him. **Understand the present time. It's time to live for Jesus.**

Paul says, **“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.”** Paul is telling us to live lives that we wouldn't be ashamed to have people see. But when you hear this list of sins that Paul warns us about, do they sound like threats we face? When's the last time any of us went to an orgy? Never I hope. Yet, sexual sins and substance abuse are a very real part of our society. Maybe we don't go to the kinds of parties that some Hollywood types might throw, but the internet, movies, TV all offer windows into lust. And sadly, our society tells our young people that it's OK to sleep with someone as long as you're two consenting adults. That's not what God says, and we know that. But we also have to recognize that we are bombarded by those messages and on some level, they can affect the way we think. Getting drunk is an acceptable thing in America today. The night before Thanksgiving has become one of the biggest nights of the year to go out and get plastered. And so, local governments make it easy by providing free taxi service so you can get drunk and not have to drive. Do we ever plan to do that?

And the other two things Paul mentions may strike even closer to home. Dissension and jealousy. Dissension means stupid arguments. Did that happen on your Thanksgiving? Does that happen in your family, in your marriage, in our congregation? Is it ever your fault? We always want to blame the other person, but like my mom always told my brother and me, it takes two to fight. And jealousy – isn't that almost a way of life in America today? The next three or four weeks will make or break merchants because we're going to go out and spend on Christmas. How many of us will be jealous of what other people can spend on this holiday? How many of us will overspend because we're jealous? How much more strife will result?

All that is part of the darkness that covers this world until Christ returns. It's all sin. And it would be easy for us to plunge right in because we're part of this society. We have all kinds of unconscious and conscious links to the attitudes and thinking of the world around us. More than that, we're all born sinners. But God calls us to put all that aside and behave decently, as in the light. What does that mean? First of all it means repentance. It means recognizing that jealousy and strife, drunkenness and lust are sins. Those sins

deserve God's punishment in hell, which means that I deserve God's punishment in hell. But that's not what you and I are going to get, because Jesus came to set us free. He lived the perfect life that we can never live. He never lusted or engaged in sex outside of marriage. He never got drunk. He never was jealous of how God blessed other people or engaged in stupid, selfish arguments. Jesus lived a life of perfect love and humility and he did it in our place. His life counts as our life today. And Jesus went to the cross and he paid for our sin – the actions and the attitudes. He paid for our lust and our sinful desires. He paid all that we owe for every sin that we will ever be guilty of. He suffered hell itself and then he died. On the third day, he rose. When he rose, God said that our sin is gone. When he rose, he took our place in God's records and he erased all our sin. Now, we will rise and live with him forever.

The first part of waking up is trusting in what Christ did to take all our sin away. Then we commit ourselves to living as if we were already in heaven. How do we do that? Paul says, **“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”** We clothe ourselves with Christ when we trust in his forgiveness. When we do that, it changes who we are and what we think and do. That makes us want to live as Christ lived, as Christ calls us to live. But note the warning: do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. We often think that as long as we don't do anything, thinking about it is OK. But Paul tells we can do one or the other. We can focus on Christ or we can focus on sin. When we think about sin – when we dream about getting even with that person who insulted us, when we fantasize about that person who isn't our spouse, when we daydream about sinning, we are strengthening the old man, the sinful nature. But when we focus on Christ and his love for us we are strengthening the new man, the believer in our hearts. And when we learn the life God calls us to live, we are laying out the path that new man will follow.

Live that life. Wake up from spiritual slumber and live for Jesus. Why? Because the night is almost over. The day is almost here. What would you do if you knew this was the last day you would spend on earth? Some people who choose to go to Vegas and have the wildest party of their lives. But that's not a Christian's instinct. We are going to see Jesus soon. Live today like you already see him, not because you don't want to be embarrassed when he comes. But because you rejoice in the life that he is going to give you. Amen.