

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part fifty-one
Sunday, January 19th, 2020 - 5:30 p.m. - Teaching #2187
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KNOWING THE URGENCY OF EACH DAY

Romans 13:11-14 - “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.”

We’ve been looking at the manifestation of the “*renewed mind*” as it expresses itself in this present world. In that sense, Romans 12:1-2 really presents the summary of all the practical instruction of Romans 12 through 16. The *motive* of the renewed mind is the “*mercies of God*” (12:1). The *method* of the renewed mind is the *Spirit and the Word* . The *acts* of the renewed mind take place in our *physical bodies* .

But spiritual truths and concepts, even when embraced initially with determination and passion, have a tendency to turn vague and numb over time. And note those words, “*over time*,” because that’s exactly the issue Paul wants to address in today’s text. He *knows* what time does. Time isn’t just something that passes silently, with no effect on our lives. Time *is* our lives. To know about *time* is to know about *life* - spiritual life included.

These verses describe the *changing* of the times. They describe the passing of time all right, but on a much grander scale than we usually measure with clocks and calendars. They talk of the winding down of one *age* and the dawning of another. And, to Paul’s mind, this needs to be kept before the Church because, of course, there are no clocks and no calendars *marking* the change of these ages. No alarms sound. No digital read-outs light up. These changes aren’t marked on the pages of any calendars.

Because of that, we can *think* nothing is happening. We can easily miss the changing of the times that Paul describes. We watched the massive crowds in Time Square on New Year’s eve and, for one brief moment, we take note of the *shift* of time. We trace its movement. But if what Paul’s saying is true, the biggest change in your entire life took place between *last* Sunday and *this* Sunday. The gap between you and God’s fully manifested kingdom grew significantly *smaller* .

And that sums up the number one job of the Christian. Renewed minds *stay alert to rapidly diminishing distance between the night of this age and the racing dawn of God’s kingdom* . Christians with renewed minds refuse to grow *dull* to a reality the whole world never considers. We mark each day of our lives by approaching morning sun of the new age.

We will spend a few weeks unpacking the importance of this text. We’re going to study what it means to live as renewed *time* people. All sorts of people - Christians, Jews, Muslims, and atheists - *all sorts* of people live with an appreciation of ethics and morality. Almost everyone believes in the superiority of love to hate and goodness to evil. But *Christian* people mandate their lives by God’s view of history and time. They direct their lives by God’s *end of the story* .

We can easily see how important all this is to Paul by the way he shapes his words. He’s going to tell these Christians how they should be living in this world. You can see all that in **verses 13-14** - “**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.**”

But *why* are they to live so? What *motivates* and *propels* such a life-style? Christians know the *times* . They see one age, with all its wickedness, pain - and pleasures and thrills - *coming to a close* . The curtain is coming down on it. No one else notices this at all. But *Christians* do. And they also hear something stirring in the breeze. They don’t see the full strength of sunrise yet, but they see the sky turning red with the dawn. And they *aim their lives* at the dawn, because where *dawn* is, *sunrise* is absolutely certain - “**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....**”(Romans 13:11-12a).

If those words are *true* words, there is nothing more beautiful to know. And God’s Word says they are true. Today we will look at the first two verses (11-12). Then we will probably spend two Sundays studying the last two verses (13-14).

1) **WE NEED TO KNOW THE NATURE OF THE TIMES IN WHICH WE’RE LIVING**

I say we need to know the “*times*” (plural) because there are two things happening at once. Paul draws together *two ages* that both press in on the Christian. And then he tells us something important about each of them. We’ll

look at that in the second point.

The first age is one of **darkness** and **night**. Some of Paul's most famous words imply the nature and force of this age - **Romans 12:1-2** - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Christians are to be renewed in their minds. Then Paul tells us why this is so **necessary** and also so **difficult** - "**Do not be conformed to this world....**"(2:12). There it is. When Paul says "**Do not be conformed to this world....**" he clearly means there is **another** world that should shape us. There is **this** present world and there is **another** that isn't fully manifested yet. That future age is the one that should shape us and drive us. This one is dark and warped and futile. Very few people in **this** age **see** their world like that. It all seems so normal. It's all they've ever known. That's why it takes **renewed minds** to assess the times properly.

But that's really all Paul tells us about the times in Romans 12. He simply tells us this age is dark and evil and needs to be **shunned** rather than **conformed** to. In our text from Romans 13 he tells something else - not something **negative**, but something very **positive**. He tells us there is another age that is **dawning** - that is already here, though not in its fullest, final form - "**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.....**"

This, right now, is a time to "**wake from sleep.**" He tells us the "**day is at hand**"(12). That's why we must wake up. You don't sleep in the day. You sleep in the night. So there is something **dangerous** about this present time. We still live in a world of **night** and **darkness** and **spiritual threat**. But there is also something very **positive** to assert as well. There is the opening burst of the **morning light**.

And here's the important, driving thought. The **main reality** for the Christian isn't the **night**, but the **dawn**. We **know** about the night, all right. But we are shaping our lives by the coming **dawn**. There is something dark in the night, but also something incredibly bright and hopeful in the dawn.

So this places all of us in an awkward situation. We are really the **only** people who experience it in the whole world. We live in the **overlap** of two ages. We live between the **first** coming of Christ and the **second** coming of Christ. This is the key. We live after the coming of God's kingdom has manifested itself in Christ Jesus. Yet, the presence of sin and darkness and pain hasn't ceased.

But take note. Just to be very clear, we live in **two ages** but we **don't** share **two kingdoms**. We can only have **one** king. Christ's rule is always a **monarchy**. That's what Lordship means. That's why Paul will tell us in **verses 13 and 14** that while we live in this age of darkness we must "**put on the armor of light**"(13), and "**put on the Lord Jesus Christ**"(14). There is going to be **trouble** for us. Paul tells us what the tele-evangelists won't. This isn't going to be easy. We live in the overlap of two **ages**, but we can't plant our feet in both **kingdoms**. Hence, this is an age of both **conflict** and **hope**, a strange mix of sweet and sour.

But all of this is really not Paul's main point. This just sets the stage for what Paul wants to drive home for deeper Christian meditation.

2) WHAT IS IT ABOUT THESE TWO TIMES OR AGES THAT SHOULD MOTIVATE AND INSPIRE AND FORTIFY THE CHRISTIAN?

Now we come to the real nub of the text:

Romans 13:11-12 - "**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.**"

Working backwards, we see what we're supposed to **do** in that last phrase - "**Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.**" That's where Paul wants to end up. But how does he get there? Specifically, what is it about these two ages - these two times - that would **lead** us to live the way Paul challenges?

I want to leave you with **three truths** about these times that inspire us all to "**put on Christ**" in deeper and fuller measure:

- a) ***“The night is far gone; the day is at hand....”(12a)*** - It’s not repeated over and over in the Scriptures, but just hearing these words breathed once by the Holy Spirit is enough. Satan is powerful. He is still called the ruler of this world. But the secret is now out. He isn’t just **active**. He is **spending** himself. He is **using his time up**.

It’s no secret that the days are dark and the night is long. Watch the news. See the violence. Look at the shriveled, starving faces. See the pornography. Look deeply at all the hatred and abuse. That the night is **dark** is no secret. But what we need to hear from God’s Word is that ***“the night is far gone”(13:12a)***.

Please hear the Word of the Lord with deep joy today. I don’t know how long the night will last. I don’t know why it takes so long - except that our loving Father awaits repentance from the stubborn. But we need to whisper into each other’s ears, ***“The age of sin and misery and death is spending itself. It is far gone. The ice is melting. You can see the glow of the Almighty, Risen Christ on the horizon of history. It is time to lift up your heads!”***

This kind of encouragement is exactly what we are urged to in the New Testament - **Hebrews 10:23-25** - ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”***

To all who know the strain that comes with pain, suffering, and persecution - to all who have felt the sting of bereavement - who have stood by the grave of a loved one gone too soon, and who long for that day when death itself is bound and cast into the lake of fire - this is the word of hope - ***“the night is far gone - the day is at hand!”***

Of **course** we all know the Bible says things will get worse before they get better. But even here the news comes with hope because we’re also told **why** things get worse before they get better - **Revelation 12:12** - ***“Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”***

He **knows** the night is far gone. He **knows** the sky grows red with the mighty power of Christ’s dawn. That’s what **causes** his fury. And his greatest misery and frustration is our greatest hope and joy. Once you see the dawn - as we saw it in Christ’s incarnation, His death, and His glorious resurrection - then, no matter how dark the night still seems, you can’t stop the brightness of day from following the dawn. The promise of His second coming will shine in full strength and end all trace of night!

But there’s still more:

- b) ***“Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed”(11b)*** - It’s obvious these words are addressed to **believers**, not **unbelievers**. So there’s something we’re all still **waiting for** in terms of our salvation. And, says Paul, this too is closer now than ever before.

What is it? What part of our salvation is still ahead, but nearer than it ever was before? We are as justified now as we ever will be - ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”(Romans 5:1)***.

We are as sure of eternal life as we ever will be. In measure, we already possess it. We are as free from condemnation now as we ever will be - ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”(Romans 8:1)***. Wonderful words!

So, no, we aren’t waiting for any of those things. But we still wrestle with **sin**. I’m so tired of ever being **drawn** from my blessed Lord. I’m so weary of my own spiritual **sloth** and **carelessness**. More than anything, I’m tired of seeing Jesus ***“through a glass dimly.”*** I long to do more than just **sing** about Jesus. I long to be **face to face** with my ascended Lord. I long to be **done with sin**. I long to be spiritually **complete** and spiritually **home**.

That’s the hope of these words, ***“For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed”(13:11)***. There has never been a time in the history of the universe when a living Christian had **less** time to wait for that glorious reality than now. God forgive us for not stirring up our minds around this

truth!

I said there were **three truths** under this second point. Here is the final one in closing:

- c) **“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep”(11a)** - The contrast between being **asleep** and **awake** isn't quite the same as it is between being **dead** and **alive**. The one sleeping isn't **dead**. But there is a kind of **limited consciousness** in sleep. You may **dream**. Your dreams may even be very vivid and exciting. But the one who is sleeping doesn't have a grasp on **reality**. Even if he's entertained in his own mind, he's out of touch with the real and the important.

Paul is saying the way you and I **perceive** what he's saying about the ages of night and day - the way this **registers** with our understanding - shows whether we're sleeping or awake. People who don't light up their thoughts with this - who don't think about it **all the time** - who don't know what it is to have these truths the **central feature** of their lives - are just **sleepwalkers** in this world.

So Paul sees the clock ticking - he sees the sky growing red in the east. And he says, **“There - look! If there was ever a time to wake up, it's now!”** There are different ways to sleep in church. You can do it while you listen to God's Word. But I urge you not to do it this tonight. There is such great news in this text. Don't sleep through it. More on this text for a few weeks.