

Romans 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.

Well, we have made it through the election cycle, we enjoyed Thanksgiving, we survived Black Friday and the days after Thanksgiving, and now what? Christmas is still a few weeks away, and so while some of our attention and perhaps a bit of our preparation is turned toward Christmas our main attention is simply to go back to work, back to school, or back to the daily routine. The alarm will sound Monday morning and we will simply get back to it. We will go about our individual callings. And as we go about that daily routine we go about it as Christians, which means that we will live in a way that distinctively highlights what God has done for us in Christ; how he has clothed us with Christ in our baptisms and has called us to be his children and to be his light in this world.

That imagery of waking up and going to work in service to the LORD is a key component in these words that Paul writes to the Romans. As Paul encourages these Roman Christians to live out their faith, he uses this imagery of readiness, of getting ready to go out and serve the LORD, in a world that wants you to remain in spiritual slumber. This was a useful encouragement for Christians living in the worldly environment of ancient Rome and it remains a useful encouragement for us as well, so that we may too may be encouraged to avoid spiritual apathy and instead to meet each day, each moment, as an opportunity to serve the LORD. As Paul speaks to the Romans, he speaks to us as well.

The hour has come for you to wake up and go to work for the LORD.

He encourages us to:

- 1. Understand the present time**
- 2. Clothe Yourself with Christ**
- 3. Go out and Serve the LORD and Your Neighbor**

It is interesting to follow Paul's train of thought here in Romans chapter 13. This chapter is probably best known for its first seven verses in which Paul describes God's role in establishing the ruling authorities and then quickly outlines the responsibilities that Christian citizens owe to the established government. After Paul encourages his fellow believers to submit to the governing authorities and to give everyone what you owe him, if taxes then pay taxes, if revenues, then revenue, if respect, if honor, then give them honor. From there he skillfully transitions to speaking about the debt of love that we owe each one of our fellow man. From fulfilling our duty to the governing authorities, he goes on to say this about fulfilling our duty to of fellow man. ***Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing***

debt to love one another. This is the Christians calling to serve and show love to our neighbor. Paul summarizes this portion of the Christian life by saying, ***“Love your neighbor as yourself.”***¹⁰ ***Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.***

That brings us to the “do this”, that begins our particular portion of Scripture for this morning. Going back to the previous section, “do this”, therefore means, Love your neighbor as yourself. It means that we are to carry out this Christian calling and to heed God’s command to fulfill that continuing call to be decent to each other and to love one another. If that wasn’t enough Paul immediately adds weight to this command by saying, ***“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber...”*** In other words, the alarm clock has sounded. By faith the Christian knows the Love of Christ and how we are to show that love to each other. That is the good work that God has prepared for us to do, and that is also the good work that God has equips us and gets us ready to do.

This is the good work that he wakes us up to do until he comes again: to demonstrate his love to each other. Martin Franzman in his commentary on the book of Romans puts it this way: *To know God’s hour is to be roused from sleep. A sleeper does not know where he is or what he or what hour has struck; he is dead to his duties and his opportunities... To know God’s hour therefore means to {wake} to walk and work in love.* God calls us from spiritual darkness and he gives us a wonderful thing: he gives us purpose. He calls us from a meaningless way of life that involves an unending and unsatisfying cycle of trying to serve ourselves in the darkness of unbelief, and God instead calls us to light. He calls us to the joy of knowing him of knowing his love. He calls us to eternal joy of living with him and the daily satisfaction of living according to the purpose of serving God and neighbor. The apostle Peter puts it this way, ***“Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:17-19).*** God has called us from a way of life that was nothing more than empty darkness and by his grace he has called us and brought us into his kingdom of light where we get the honor of being called his children and living as his light in this world of darkness.

But, there is a part of us that wants to stay sleeping in the darkness, isn’t there? The sinful flesh that lives in us buries itself in the covers and cozies up to the sinful ways that keeps the flesh warm and snug. The alarm of faith rings, we have been called to faith, we have been united to Christ, and united to his will and his command to love. By faith we know what it is time to do. We know that we ought to get up and serve the LORD and fulfill his calling to love and serve our neighbor, but while the spirit is willing, the flesh, well the flesh, is often weak. The flesh is easily convinced that it is okay to spend a little bit more time doing selfish things. The flesh is easily tricked into thinking that a few more minutes, a few more days, a few more weeks living for yourself, giving into a sin, neglecting your Christian responsibilities will be just fine. After all it’s still dark outside. Plenty of other people are still sleeping, still doing whatever they want to do, why should you have to get up, why should you have to get up and serve others and serve your God when so many others just keep serving themselves.

Paul gives some examples from the common culture of how people in his day were serving themselves and living in sinful ways that demonstrated the darkness and the

emptiness in which they were living. The list is unsettling in its immorality, and how current the list still could be. Sexual sins and drunkenness, self-abasement and revelry, hatred and jealousy still abound in our culture and in our own hearts. Such sins grow naturally in the darkness of our own hearts and reach up to pull us back into spiritual slumber. And on some level these kinds of things are socially agreed upon on as just part of the culture. Just as long, as you do such things in the privacy of your own home, or at night, not during the day. As Christians we ought to recognize the faulty and sinful logic behind such thinking. As children of light we are to have nothing to do with such deeds of darkness no matter the time of day or our location. As children of the light we are to live in the light to walk with Jesus during the day, out in public and at home as well.

Dear Christian friends, we therefore ought to be ready, to be prepared. We ought to be ready for a struggle. We ought to be ready to fight against the world and our flesh and our old evil foe, 24/7. We live surrounded by the darkness and we can easily become accustomed to and then ensnared in a darkness that is out to keep us from living for our God now and with him for eternity. As one commentator put it, *the far-gone night is still a power that seeks to make us sons of darkness and of night, doomed to perish with the dying night.*

And so for those who have been so graciously spared from this darkness, who have been honored and blessed to live in the light of Christ, there will be a struggle. Christ lives in us, but the sinful flesh in us is strong. The darkness of this sinful world is pervasive, it surrounds us, it entangles us, but Christ sets us free. The darkness of our flesh remains, apathy grows, such darkness will never go away until the day of our final salvation, but Christ has promised that he is with us and that he will guard and keep us until he comes again to bring us to that eternal day. He promises that he will come to deliver us from this world of sin and darkness to our eternal home in heaven where we will do what we were created to do, and serve him and each other in perfection and in the light of paradise. And that sure hope of a final salvation, that certainty of being set free from the darkness and living in the light for which we were made new, is a compelling factor for us to resist the darkness of the flesh right now and to live as the child of light that God created you and me to be. Christ has purified us by his blood. He has cleansed us from this filth this darkness. In his goodness and grace, he reaches out to sinners like us and he sets us apart to live with him forever and he sets us apart to serve him now.

The darkness of this sinful world is not meant to last, it therefore, does not, it cannot, satisfy. And knowing that we live a life that acknowledges the wonderful light and the awesome purpose to which we have been called, let us heed Paul's call to, ***do this***. Let us love each other, love God, be good and decent and righteous in how you live. Let us, ***“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.”***

Like a person who kicks off the covers and gets up and gets dressed for a job they love, God calls us to rise each day to serve him and serve each other. God's word tells us that Christ will return at any time and he will come and he will establish an eternal day. By faith we know that Christ has saved us for this very purpose, so that we will be with him and dwell with him for all eternity. But, of course, the Christian does not simply sit and dream about that glorious day while living his or her life like the rest of the unbelieving world around us, instead knowing that Christ has come to redeem us, knowing that Christ will come to set us free

forever, and knowing that he can come at any time therefore defines our present time. Each day is an opportunity to get up and serve our God. Each morning we get up and it could be the day that we are to present ourselves to our God and Father for service in his eternal kingdom. And so, the ongoing encouragement is this, ***“So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”***

To put on the armor of light is to clothe ourselves with Christ by making use of his means of grace. Through his Word and Sacraments he equips us and prepares us for battle against the desires of the flesh, through his word he gives us the tools to fight against the pressures of this world, through his Sacraments he reminds of us our how we have died to the ways of this world and how we are raised and strengthened to live in newness of life.

And so this is the plan and purpose to which we awake each morning. We don't wake up to aimlessness, we don't wake to make provisions and arrangements to serve ourselves and find ways to gratify our desires, but our purpose each morning is defined by the fact that Christ has called us to get up, go out, and work for him. An old prayer of the church, that is based on a prayer that Moses composed says it this way, “Teach us to number our days aright so that we may gain a heart of wisdom and finally be saved.” Through God's gift of faith, the alarm sounds, and the LORD teaches us to number our days aright. He gives a heart of wisdom. Knowing what Christ has done for us we live each day with a purpose, with a job to do, until the day of our final salvation. Christ has saved us, he has redeemed us, he washes us clean and calls us to himself. He sets us aside for his good purpose. We are to live for him, to serve him, to love God and love our neighbor. We are to be his light in this world so darkened by sin. And when by faith we understand this high calling, when we understand this purpose for which Christ has purified us for, when we understand how precious each day and each moment is, and how this sinful world is coming to end, and Jesus is coming to bring us to eternal day, when we know this and understand then the LORD will equip us more and more to serve him as we prepare for the time when the night is truly over, and the day of God surrounds us. Come, LORD Jesus, strengthen us for this daily task until you come to take us home. Come, Lord Jesus, and bring us to that eternal day. Amen.