

## **The Day Is at Hand**

Romans 13:11-14

I seldom make the effort to make all the points of my sermon begin the same letter, called alliteration. I know some pastors that do that every week, every sermon, with the intention of helping those who hear them preach remember the points of the sermon. Perhaps because I'm just not clever enough to do that well, or perhaps because I really don't think that is very helpful in the long run, I don't make a practice of that. Though I might do it occasionally, as I have chosen to do this morning.

Our text in Romans 13 is very practical, it is very plain, and it is in the context of this whole chapter, an exhortation of application to the lives of God's people. How, then shall we live? That is the question before us. Paul had already declared the truth of the gospel, and the first 11 chapters of this book focus on that gospel. For example,

Rom. 5:1 "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Or all the way back to,

Rom. 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Knowing that to be true, believing that to be true, living by that faith, the question becomes, what is it that should characterize our lives as Christians? Not, how are you saved. But rather, how, then, being saved, shall you live? And from our text, I would thus

suggest to you the proper perspective on life, the proper practice of life, and the proper goal of life. The proper perspective, the proper practice, and the proper goal. Beginning with perspective. The big picture. The meta-narrative, for you millennials or those who understand the use of that word today. Your outlook on life, as it might have been framed a generation or two ago.

### **I. THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE.**

There are a lot of ways to describe or define that meta-narrative, and I am not claiming that my definition today is the only right answer or accurate description. But it is helpful to think in these terms, with this perspective always at the front of your mind. It is always beneficial to view life with...

#### **A. An awareness of the approaching end of the age.**

There are a lot of immediate, practical implications of that, solving a lot of the questions and giving encouragement in the midst of lot of the angst of life. This perspective certainly helps confront the evils of materialism, the love of money, the pursuit of pleasure, and any number of other characteristic sins of modern mankind.

So it is no surprise that this is Paul's emphasis after the exhortation to love one another which we studied last week.

v.8 "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law...10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

And here is the perspective on life with which you are to keep that law of love,

v.11-12

A fuller description of that same idea is found in,

1 Thes. 5:1 "But concerning the times and the seasons,

brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

The point is not to bemoan the current state of the world, or our country, as if the very significant struggles within our own country means the end of the world. The focus is not upon the particular dangers our country faces now in terms of its future, as if the ongoing existence of our nation is now threatened. The idea isn’t simply that things are just getting worse, a gloom and doom depression that might be easy to understand in the context of any number of current events. The application is not to withdraw from the modern culture like many people did before Y2K 23 years ago. That’s not Paul’s point, here in Romans nor in 1 Thessalonians. It’s not a depressing perspective at all.

Rather, the point is that this world, this age, is passing away. It is temporary. And we are not citizens of this world, but merely passing through, we are aliens, strangers. This is not our home, and we have something far better to look forward to. Peter makes that pretty clear in,

1 Peter 2:11 “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works

which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

That’s the perspective. We are sojourners. Pilgrims. Travelers. We are not permanent residents. And this is not our permanent home. That’s the perspective of verse 11, “knowing the time.” That’s the perspective of verse 12, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” In Galatians 1:4, Paul identifies it as “this evil age.” In Ephesians 5, we are instructed to,

Eph. 5:15 “...walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

And in our text this morning, as well as in each of those other passages I have read, that perspective on life brings a very practical application into focus,

### **B. An awareness of the need to be alert.**

v.11 “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.”

Time to wake up! Time to be ready, to be on guard. Peter adds that element of surprise to this exhortation as well, for the end will come like a thief in the night. There will be no warning, no announcement, no time to get ready, if you aren’t ready already.

Jesus certainly makes the same point, doesn’t he?

Mark 13:32 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 34 It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 35 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at

midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— 36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

Being alert means something very specific, which brings me to the second point,

## **II. THE PROPER PRACTICE OF LIFE.**

In other words, how you live. The focus on knowing that the time is at hand is a focus on the importance of how you live... now. That’s obvious in our text, as well as all the cross-references I read. Keeping the big perspective on the end of this age means that you focus on living in the meantime in a way that pleases the Lord. As we read in,

v.12

Paul is really mixing metaphors here, referring to the end of this age as waking from sleep. Then he uses the idea of darkness, the darkness of nighttime when people sleep, as the symbol of all that which is evil. “The night is far spent,” almost over. “The day is at hand.” So live in the day, live in the light. “Cast off the works of darkness.” The idea is simple. It is our duty as God’s people to be those who are,

### **A. Casting off the works of evil.**

The darkness is a familiar biblical picture of evil, even with the reminder that so much actual sin is associated with the darkness of night. That’s what we are to put off, to put away, the sins so often characteristic of nighttime. Thus the references in verse 13 to live,

v.13 “...not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”

Those are the things that characterize the night, the darkness.

Similarly, we read in,

Eph. 5:11 “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.”

This exhortation is so needed, so necessary, for we live in a world where there is no difference between light and darkness, that is to say, no distinction between night and day, no reference to what is right and wrong, good and evil. But God gives us that reference, and makes that distinction an absolutely essential part of our lives.

Beloved, there are things we must cast off! Things we must put away, in order to be ready for Jesus to return at the end of the age. More from,

Eph. 5:3 “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them. 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

More generally,

Eph. 4:20 “But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed

you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”

Beloved, cast off the works of evil. And put on righteousness instead. Paul speaks in our text of,

### **B. Putting on the practice of righteousness.**

He calls it putting on the armor of light. Take off those old clothes of all that is wicked and evil, and put on armor, clothing that will truly protect you. The armor of light, verse 12. Walking properly, according to verse 13. Living your life being fully alert, fully prepared for the return of Jesus in triumph and glory. Fully awake. You’ve had your morning coffee, if that’s what it takes to get you to wake up in the morning. You are ready for the day at hand, ready for the tasks at hand. Ready to live today, putting off all that is evil and putting on all that God has defined to be righteous.

John has a very simple way of putting it.

1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Not loving those things of the world means not being attached to them, not overly attached. The things of this world are not the focus of life, not the highest goal and objective for the accomplishments of life. They are not the things which ought to

receive our highest focus.

Jesus had a way of cutting through all these ideas with such penetrating wisdom.

Mat. 6:33 “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

He’s speaking about food and clothing and shelter, the very basic necessities of life. And he says, don’t worry about those things.

Mat. 6:32 “For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

So we come to the goal of life.

### **III. THE PROPER GOAL OF LIFE.**

It is not just a series of ethical commandments, but something bigger. More broad. Not just the straightforward prohibition of those things we ought not to do. But even greater than that, deeper than that.

#### **A. The goal of putting to death the desires of the flesh.**

So again, very much related to my last point, and built upon it, the proper goal of life is putting to death the very desire for sin that resides and exists within your own soul, within our hearts. The goal is to be transformed, in your heart. In your soul. Not merely to behave well—that’s only the outward evidence of it. But to be changed. From the inside out.

The goal is not simply good behavior. The goal is to put to

death the desires of the flesh. Those words refer to the remnants of that old man, the remnants of that sinful nature we inherited from Adam. So Paul writes to the Romans,  
v.14 "...make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

That is a deeply spiritual experience. As Paul writes much more fully to the Galatians,  
Gal. 5:16 "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

So how to you put to death the desires of the flesh? In the broadest terms, by the contrast made so plain here, it means to avail yourself of the person and power of the Holy Spirit. Putting to death the desires of the flesh is only something that the Holy Spirit can do, only his power at work in you can accomplish it. This transformation is the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in you. So walk in the spirit, in the conscious, deliberate, intentional awareness of God's own presence at work within you.

It's a hard task, to be sure. Even Paul would say this of

himself,

Rom. 6:21 "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

It is a war, to be sure. A war inside of you. Your flesh against your spirit. And proper goal of life is not only to fight that war, but to win it. And there is only one way in which you will win, and that is by the personal experience of union with Jesus Christ, what Paul calls "putting on Jesus."

When he asks that painful question in Romans 6, he answers it immediately.

Rom. 6:24 "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

Here in our text we read this,

v.14 "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the goal.

### **B. The goal of putting on Jesus.**

The image again is of clothing. Take off those old clothes, and put on something new. So your relationship with Jesus is illustrated by this image of putting on new clothes. Living by faith, walking by faith, means that you are now wearing new clothes, covered with Jesus. And so when God looks upon you, he sees

Jesus. He sees your new clothes. And they are, indeed, beautiful.

This is how Paul describes true believers in Galatians 3, those who have by faith come to believe in Jesus,

Gal. 3:26 “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

To put on the new man is to put on Jesus. The goal of life is not simply to live in a certain way, but to put on Jesus. To live, to walk, day by day, in union and in fellowship with Jesus. Now, obviously that means that do certain things and don’t do other things. “Cast off the works of darkness.” “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” “Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” “Do not be drunk with wine.” “Abstain from sexual immorality.” “Love one another.” I’ve read all of those verses today, and they give definition to what all of this means. But don’t miss the broader context, the overarching goal in it all, the proper goal of life.

Put on Jesus. By the exercise of your faith to believe what God has written, by availing yourself of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in all of God’s people, put on Jesus. Like a heavy winter coat on the coldest day in January, like a good raincoat on a rainy spring day, put on Jesus. So,

Heb. 12:1 “...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”