

*All Roads Lead Here: The Night Is Nearly Over*  
*By Jason Huff*  
*November 19, 2017*  
*Proverbs 1:20-33; Luke 11:33-36; Romans 13:11-14*

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Romans 13:11-14. May God bless the reading of His holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. “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. 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. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

Remember simile and metaphor from our English grammar classes? Simile is when something is said to be like something else. Metaphor is when something is said to *be* something else. If you ask Bob Dylan about becoming a wanderer, he’ll use a simile to describe you – you’re “like a rolling stone.” But if you ask Tom Petty about love, he’ll use a metaphor to describe it – “love is a long, long road.”

We use similes and metaphors to give our concepts weight and meaning, to broaden our understanding. But we have to be careful because when we use a lot of metaphors, we might drown in the meaning. See, even there I did it – you can’t literally drown from using English the wrong way, but metaphorically, we all understand that it means that when you use too many similes and metaphors, everything becomes confusing rather than clear.

In today’s passage, Paul uses a ton of metaphors. He talks about waking from sleep, the night being over, the day almost coming. There’s armor of light and deeds of darkness. There’s clothing ourselves with a person – namely, Jesus. It’s not straightforward. So this week, we’re going to dive into Paul’s words and see if we can’t fully understand his meanings, which not only drive us closer to Jesus but also challenge us to grow to be more like Him.

The first phrase, “and do this,” refers to what we’ve read in Paul the last three weeks. He’s given us many ways for us to express our love and thankfulness to Jesus for His great love and sacrifice for us – things like being living sacrifices for one another, giving to one another, praying for our enemies, doing right in the eyes of all people, showing respect to those in authority over us. All of them Paul summed up last week as loving our neighbor. We do all of those things with Paul’s admonition to us today in mind.

Why should we love our neighbors, rejoice in hope, give of ourselves sacrificially, all of that? Because we understand the present time, Paul says. Paul is using a special word here for time – the word *kairos*. The Romans used the word *chronos* for ordinary time, for seconds and minutes and days. It’s the root of our word *chronicle*, which is a record of events in time, *chronology*, which is the listing of events in order, and *chronic*, which means something habitual or regular over time.

But *kairos* is different. *Kairos* refers to an occasion, an appointed time, a proper time. Each of our seasons lasts three months and comes at a particular interval – that’s *kairos* time. Special events like Christmas and Easter and Thanksgiving – those are *kairos* time. *Kairos* time is the right time, the perfect time.

And that’s the time we live in. We live in the time transformed by the love of Jesus. We live in the time where the Kingdom of God has broken into our world and appeared in the flesh. We live in the time where God’s purposes are advancing across the whole globe. Ever since Christ’s resurrection, we are in the appointed season, the special time of God’s favor. And in this special season, we have the Holy Spirit, who gives us the ability and power to actually follow God faithfully in all that we do.

Paul uses another metaphor to explain how time has changed. He writes, “The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.” What is Paul talking about here? Some have read this alongside other books in the New Testament and thought that Paul was teaching that Jesus’ second coming was immanent, that it could be any day. Paul actually fights this in his other letters, telling the churches to live life normally and not to quit their jobs and livelihoods to sit around waiting for Jesus to return.

While no one knows exactly when Romans was written, it was well before the fall of Jerusalem and the persecution of Jews, and the slaughter of Christians as enemies of the state was even further in the future. While Paul may have been predicting those things, he seems to have other things in mind. That’s actually going to be my first take-home point for us to think about this week: *because the future is always uncertain, live as if Christ is returning today.*

Sometimes people have read this passage and thought that Paul is talking about literal sleep. There’s no time for sleep because there’s too much to do for Jesus! I once saw a cartoon that illustrated this idea. There are two people who were obviously chit-chatting in the church kitchen and someone says, “Jesus is coming back soon.” And one gal says to other, “Quick! Look busy!”

But that’s not what Paul is saying. He’s using a metaphor. Wake up from your spiritual sleep. Wake up from your spiritual stupor. The time is short until our salvation is at hand. The night of sin and death and pain and sorrow and heartache and violence is nearly gone and the day of joy and peace and hope and salvation and our final homecoming to be with the Lord is coming fast. If loving your neighbor and showing kindness to the stranger and laying your life down for the sake of others are signs of your faith, now’s the time to do them because it’s the *kairos* hour.

We aren’t putting off living godly lives until we have more time, until the kids are grown, until retire, until we have the money. Because no one knows if those things are happening for us or not. And what you don’t do now, you probably won’t do later. Some studies have shown that our beliefs and habit patterns are typically defined no later than our 40s. It takes something really traumatic or life-altering to change them. You volunteer young, you’ll volunteer later. You’re self-centered now, you’ll be self-centered later. So get busy living what you believe. There is no better time. There is no other hour. Now is the time to be about the Lord’s business.

*Live as though Christ was returning today.* That's not a scare tactic; it's not as if Jesus' salvation comes and goes whether we're doing something brilliantly noble or making a big mistake. But it makes us think – would we be comfortable doing what we were doing if Jesus was in the room? What would we rather Jesus catch us doing? If we live as though Christ is returning today, then we will order our days based on His priorities rather than our own. We will be less inclined to say, “What do I want to do?” and more, “What would Jesus have me do?”

The time is short. Some of us here are younger, others older. But the older I get, the more quickly I notice time passing. You can't get it back. It's gone and suddenly kids are grown and bodies are wearing out and we're old and where did the time go? The most we get, 70, 80, 90 years, and then Jesus is coming for us. He may not be coming for everybody then, but He'll be coming for us. Don't put off getting to know Him, taking the time to know His love for you and then sharing that love. Christ's Kingdom has been breaking through the darkness of this world for 2000 years, and it's just a foretaste of what's to come. Don't miss it because you thought you'd have more time to decide and more time to act.

Paul gives us a command that's couched in more metaphors: “So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” Paul is going to describe some of those deeds of darkness for us in a moment, but for now we can take this one a little more literally. These are deeds literally done in darkness, done undercover and secretly so that no one else will know about them. They are things that we would be embarrassed to have others see us do.

But the armor of light is a little different. In the Greek, the language is to take off the deeds of darkness, so what we're seeing is a change of clothes. We're taking one off for the other. We're told later to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, so He is in fact central to this armor of light. Paul doesn't go into a deep explanation of the armor of light here, so we know that it's being dressed not with sin but with the person and work and forgiveness of Jesus. Jesus is our armor – He is what protects us.

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul describes the armor of God in metaphors – the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes readied by the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. When we are clothed with Christ, those things are part of our spiritual dress code – they show up regularly in our lives.

What does this mean for us? It means *we must be ready for spiritual battle*. Military metaphors have gone out of favor in the church. A lot of hymnals have removed the song “Onward Christian Soldiers” in the past twenty years. If Jesus is the Prince of Peace, then why should we be singing war songs?

But Jesus Himself said that He came not to bring peace but a sword. He described how the gospel would pit son against father and daughter against mother. And this happened a lot in the early church, where family members would disown those who became Christ-followers. Jesus didn't talk about physical warfare as much as He did spiritual warfare. He talked in the same kind of terms that the military does. In the military, you learn to fall on a grenade if it saves all your buddies. Christ said, “Anyone who would follow me must take up His cross daily.” He knew this was life and death, and that it's war.

That's why we have these metaphors about waking up. We have to wake up to the spiritual realities around us. We are in a fight over our souls and the souls of those around us. God will win; God will bring His chosen home. But it doesn't mean there isn't an incredible battle being waged. And the last thing we want is for the enemy to attack while we're napping. We must be prepared. Otherwise, the agents of darkness in this world will achieve damaging temporary victories over us when we skirmish.

A couple of times each week, Cameron goes to karate practice. He wears his gi, the uniform that virtually all karate students wear. And he has help from me or Catha each week to get his belt on that signifies his rank. You don't get in without the uniform.

And friends, we need to be dressing ourselves in our spiritual uniform, our spiritual armor. The only way that we're going to be prepared to face each day is with time with God and His Word. That's how you build faith and righteousness and truth and confidence in our salvation. And just like Cam with his belt, we need each other's help. We were not made to do this alone. A man alone is target practice. A squad gives us safety. Always plan to be in church, even when you're traveling, even when you don't feel like it, so you know that the squad God has given you in the church has your back.

Moving on: "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy." Now Paul is not describing every sin. Instead, he's describing idolatry played out in Roman culture. The Bacchanalia was a regular pagan feast that involved much of what Paul was talking about. It was an all-night drunken party to the gods that devolved from there. It's proof that you act like the gods you worship. That's why Paul continues to insist on Christ-like behavior from Christians.

When we see this list, we probably think, "that's not me." And maybe it's not. But the bar culture looks an awful lot like it. Millennials don't go to bars, they tell me; they go to breweries. But it's still there. And if that's not our thing? Well, what is it you spend your time engaged doing? Does it grow you in Christ's likeness, where you get to act like Jesus as you participate? Or does it call you away from Jesus? Does it draw your focus to other things?

DirectTV recently released series called "Religion of Sports." And while the show looks at all aspects of the idea, when you Google a search on sport as a religion, there are over 2.5 million hits. And think about it. We indoctrinate our kids early. They attend more regularly than they do church. They are punished when they don't attend practice regularly by not being able to participate in the main event of the sport, the match or the game. And despite the overwhelming odds, since over 99.5% of sports participants never earn a cent from their sport, many parents put their faith in the idea that their kid is the one who will earn the scholarship or go on to the top levels of athletes. Fans buy jerseys, buy wildly overpriced tickets to attend, and even participate in fantasy leagues where they can manage everything from the sidelines.

But let's not pretend that sports are our only god. In my realm of geek culture, the person with the most knowledge of the Dungeons and Dragons rulebook is revered. Having seen the widest number of science fiction and fantasy and anime films is something praised. People buy T-shirts and figurines and spend tons of money on DVDs, books, and pricey memorabilia.

When those things play a bigger part in our lives than God does, we have an idol. And when we don't get what we want, whether that's in our relationships or our families or in our desires, we descend into jealousy and dissention. Paul is calling us out to live differently now. We belong to Christ; we have been saved by Christ; now we act like Christ.

And that's why Paul finishes with, "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Being clothed with Jesus is being clothed with our spiritual armor – being prepared for what the world throws at us because we belong to God. We've talked about that. So let's look at that last phrase.

It's a little hard to translate. Many versions say, "Make no provision for the flesh and its lusts." Others say, "Don't make plans to indulge your evil desires." The concept here, our final takeaway point, is, *do nothing and plan nothing that would lead you into sin*. I like that phrase "no provision" a lot. Because when I think of making a provision, I think of making a sack lunch for a hike or a day away from home. Making provision is to prepare for an upcoming event. You don't make your sack lunch, you have no lunch when you're out on the trail.

If you don't make provision for sin, if you don't think about how to make sin happen, if you don't make plans for sin, it will rarely happen. If your sins happen most when you get inebriated and make stupid choices, don't schedule to meet up for drinks at the bar after work on Friday night. If what gets you started down the sin path is trashy novels, don't make plans to go to the bookstore; if it's explicit websites, don't be thinking how you can find time alone with an Internet connection. If all you can do with your friend Sally is to gossip and complain and find out reasons to dislike other people, don't set up a lunch date with her. If anger is your chief vice, don't clear your schedule to watch CNN or Sports Tonight or whatever topic launches your rage. Make no provision for it.

Now let's be super clear about this – when we make no provision for the flesh, it's going to hurt. Because if you forget to make one sack lunch, you'll go hungry a meal, but you'll eat again. But when we cut sin off entirely, it's going to fight back. If you've been feeding fleshy desires, desires that are not from God, and you cut them off, they're first going to growl, then yell, then go into revolt.

That's why we need other people. We need people to hold us up when we are fighting our sinful instincts. We need others in the church, solid believers, to hold us accountable. And we will need that support because those outside won't get it. They don't, they can't, they don't even understand it because they make provision for sin all the time, like we once did.

The Puritan preacher John Owen in the 1600s summed it up this way: "be killing sin, or sin will be killing you." That's all there is to it. And the way to be killing sin is found in our three takeaway points: live as though Christ were coming back today. Be ready for spiritual battle by dressing in the armor of God that is faith, hope, truth, and love. And do nothing and plan nothing that would lead you into sin. When we do those things, God applies a special simile to us: we will be like Christ. That's the goal. That's what will fulfill us and make us whole.