

Romans 13:11-14

Wake Up!

Main idea: We need to live as if we're alive, because we are alive, and we look forward to what God's going to be doing both today and in the days to come.

In Max Lucado's book, "Life Lessons from the Book of Romans," he wrote this:

At the moment I don't feel too smart. I just got off the wrong plane that took me to the wrong city and left me at the wrong airport. I went east instead of west and ended up in Houston instead of Denver. It didn't look like the wrong plane, but it was. I walked through the wrong gate, dozed off on the wrong flight, and ended up in the wrong place. Paul says we've all done the same thing. Not with airplanes and airports, but with our lives and God. He tells the Roman readers, 'There is no one who always does what is right, not even one' (3:10). 'All have sinned and are not good enough for God's glory...' (3:23). We are all on the wrong plane, he says. All of us. Gentile and Jew. Every person has taken the wrong turn. And we need help."
-Max Lucado, *Life Lessons from the Book of Romans*

It should be obvious to all of us at this point that we're all sinners. Paul has made that clear throughout the book of Romans many times now as we've been working our way through it,¹ and we also all know it from our own experiences. We can't even live up to our

¹ Romans 2:1, Romans 3:10, Romans 5:12

own expectations for ourselves, much less God's perfect standard.² And it should also be obvious that no matter how hard we've tried or continue to try, we can't stop being sinners.³ Saved by grace, yes,⁴ but still sinners who fall short time and time again.⁵ So we trust not in ourselves, but in Jesus, who saves us.⁶

And yet, this reality might cause us to stop striving after righteousness.⁷ There have definitely been times, even recently, when I've thought that I wouldn't ever be able to live in a way that glorifies God.

But this is a lie. While we're certainly always going to battle with sin, sin will not always win.⁸ The very fact that we, as Christians, have the Holy Spirit with us wherever we go ought to remind us that we do have the ability now to conquer sin with God's help.⁹ Because Jesus conquered our sin on the cross, and because His sacrifice for us brings us from death to life, we can now rise up to live a new life in Christ.¹⁰

So as we continue to talk about the practical living out of the gospel, Paul encourages us to do just that.

Romans 13:11-14.

² Matthew 5:48

³ Romans 7:24-25, 1 John 1:8

⁴ Ephesians 2:8-9

⁵ Romans 3:23

⁶ Acts 16:31

⁷ Romans 6:1

⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:13

⁹ John 14:16, John 15:26, Acts 2:38, Romans 8:26

¹⁰ Romans 6:4, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 4:22-24

Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:11-14)

Father, thank You for the salvation that we have in Your Son, Jesus. And since we have salvation in Jesus, help us to live like it. Help us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and glorify You. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Since the beginning of Romans 12, Paul has been talking about how we live in light of the gospel, and it basically comes down to love. Romans 5:8:

God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Which is, of course, another way of saying John 3:16.

For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

That's the gospel. And in response to the gospel, we love because God first loved us.¹¹ If you trust in Jesus, then you'll begin to love others like Jesus loves you.¹²

So I'm surprised that so many Christians today seem to be living not out of love, but out of fear.¹³ Even if they're sure that they will eventually conquer, it seems that many Christians fear that the opposing side, whether demons or political parties, will win short-term battles, so their thoughts are completely consumed with these battles, worried about what might happen.¹⁴

But the Bible says that there's no fear in love, because perfect love casts out fear.¹⁵

And then there are others of us who seem to be content to continue to live the same way we did before we received Jesus.¹⁶ We love that Jesus is our Savior, but we don't really seem to care to have Him as our Lord. I think many of us know that Jesus is THE Lord, but we just don't always treat Him as OUR Lord.¹⁷

I recently heard it explained like this. If we've been in church awhile, we've probably heard that Jesus is our Lord and Savior so much that these titles have begun to lose their significance to many of us. But really what the Bible is getting at when it calls Jesus our Savior and Lord is to say that Jesus is our Life. As Christians,

¹¹ 1 John 4:19

¹² John 13:34

¹³ 2 Timothy 1:7

¹⁴ Matthew 6:25-34, Philippians 4:6-7

¹⁵ 1 John 4:18

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:11, 1 Thessalonians 4:3

¹⁷ James 2:14-26

Jesus isn't just part of our lives, but He Himself is our Life. And the life that we now live, we live in Him.¹⁸

That's what Paul talked about in our passage today. Verse 11.

Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. (Romans 13:11)

Sometimes it's hard to get up and out of bed in the morning, isn't it? Sometimes when you just didn't get enough sleep, or even if you did get enough sleep, but you really don't want to go to work, it's hard to get up and get going.

But sometimes it's really easy to get up in the morning, right? Like a kid on Christmas. Or like when you're really looking forward to what you'll be doing that day, and you just can't wait to begin, whether it's a vacation, or even a project that you finally have all the materials for, and you're eager to get started. When you have a purpose for the day that you're excited about, it makes all the difference.

Church, we have something to be excited about!¹⁹ Paul says that it's the hour to wake from sleep. It's not time to be groggy about how we live. It's time to get up and get moving because we live for a purpose, and we have great reasons to be excited about what God's doing today.²⁰

¹⁸ Galatians 2:20

¹⁹ Philippians 4:4

²⁰ Psalm 118:24, Matthew 28:18-20

Of course, Paul isn't really talking about sleeping or waking up. It's a metaphor for how we're living. God doesn't want us to go through life as if we're asleep, or even dead.²¹ Rather, we need to live as if we're alive, because we are alive.²² Jesus is our Life, and we ought to be excited about what God's going to be doing in us both today and in the days to come.²³

In other words, it's important to live a life consistent with what we believe, because we're very close to seeing the culmination of all that we believe. We're nearing the finish line!

I was on the cross country running team when I was in high school. I wasn't very fast, but I was consistent. After the initial sprint at the beginning of the race, I'd jog pretty much the whole 3 miles until the very end. And every runner knows that when you near the end of the race, you don't slow down because you're almost done, you speed up. You start sprinting! You give it all you've got because you don't want a doubt in your mind that you gave it your all.

It's the same way with our faith. Jesus is coming soon!²⁴ That's the testimony of all the New Testament,²⁵ and we need to remember this truth and let it influence how we live. It's not time to slow down in the way that we live out our faith, but to give it our all, because Jesus gave us His all,²⁶ and He's coming back soon.

Now, brace yourself, because this might come as a shock to some of you. Jesus might not return in our lifetimes. If you listen to some

²¹ Ephesians 2:1-5

²² 1 Corinthians 15:22

²³ Colossians 3:4

²⁴ Revelation 22:7

²⁵ Matthew 24:30, John 14:3, Hebrews 9:28, Titus 2:13, Revelation 1:7

²⁶ John 3:16, Galatians 1:4

pastors and churches, you might get the impression that Jesus is almost certainly coming back tonight, or even before I finish this sermon, or even this sentence. And certainly Jesus could. We don't know the day or the hour.²⁷ But it also might not be for another 100 years, or 1,000 years. We don't know. I mean, it's been almost 2,000 years since Paul wrote these words, and it still hasn't happened.

But even if Jesus doesn't return during our lifetimes, we should live with this sense of urgency, just as the New Testament authors lived as if He would, because we don't know the day or the hour, so we ought to keep watch.²⁸ Because we truly are living in the End Times. As it says in Titus 2:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

Salvation doesn't mean a free pass to live lives as if we haven't been saved. Salvation means denying worldly lusts and living in a godly way, eager to do good works. Salvation means having Jesus as your Life so that to live is Christ.²⁹

²⁷ Matthew 24:36

²⁸ Matthew 25:13

²⁹ Philippians 1:21

And especially as we get nearer to seeing all of God's plan for the end take place, we ought to want to live godly, righteous lives. I mean, if we look forward to heaven, and in eternity, we'll have no desire to sin,³⁰ why do we often seem to cling to sin so fiercely here?

As Paul wrote, it's time to wake from sleep, because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Church, we've got to wake up! We get far too comfortable with this world as if it's our home, but we need to remember that we're just passing through!³¹ Far too often, the most important things take the back seat in our lives.³² We prioritize things like entertainment and comfort, when we ought to be prioritizing serving the Lord in the church and sharing Jesus with the lost!³³

Verse 12.

The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:12)

So Paul is using this analogy of night versus day and darkness versus light. It's like all of history has been during the night of the sixth day of creation, and the morning of the seventh day, the day of God's rest, is about to break.³⁴ And God invites us to enter His rest,³⁵ which isn't characterized by laziness and sleep, how we

³⁰ Revelation 21:27

³¹ Hebrews 13:14

³² Matthew 6:21

³³ Colossians 3:23-24, Matthew 28:19-20

³⁴ Genesis 1:31-2:3

³⁵ Hebrews 4:3, Hebrew 4:9-10

often think of rest, but rather by discarding the deeds of darkness and putting on the armor of light.

So how do we do that? What are the deeds of darkness, and what is the armor of light? Paul names some of these things in verses 13 and 14.

Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:13-14)

So the deeds of darkness are things like carousing, drunkenness, sexual impurity, promiscuity, quarreling, and jealousy. And certainly we could go on. Things like hating your brother.³⁶ Things like greed.³⁷ Things like gossip³⁸ and slander, even if we think the people we slander deserve it.³⁹ When we continue to do these things, we're walking in darkness.

How many Christians continue to walk in darkness? Or maybe a more pointed way to ask that would be to ask: how many of us continue to walk in darkness? Because far too often, I see myself in some of this list. I often struggle with quarreling and jealousy. And maybe you don't have the same struggles as me, but you struggle with something else that you know is sin, and yet you can't seem to shake it. None of us are perfect, and we all continue to struggle

³⁶ 1 John 3:15-17

³⁷ 1 Timothy 6:10

³⁸ Ephesians 4:29

³⁹ Matthew 12:36

with sin. We all continue to struggle against walking in darkness.

Which is kind of weird, right? Because as Christians, we're supposed to be walking in the light. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (Ephesians 5:8)

1 John 1:6 even says:

If we say, "We have fellowship with him," [talking about God] and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. (1 John 1:6)

Now, I'm not trying to make anyone doubt their salvation, because salvation doesn't depend on you, but on God. Jesus died on the cross for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, precisely because there's nothing we could do to earn salvation.⁴⁰ So I don't want you to doubt your salvation, I'm simply pointing out that if we're content to continue living like unbelievers, that's a major inconsistency.

And the point also isn't that you feel condemned, because Paul already established in Romans 8:1 that there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Rather, being

⁴⁰ 1 Peter 3:18

made aware of the darkness we're still so apt to walk in, we're encouraged to walk with decency, as in the daytime.

In other words, remember the time.⁴¹ We don't have time for all that old junk! Jesus is coming soon! So rather than walking according to our old life of darkness, put on the Lord Jesus, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

You see, the Lord Jesus Himself is the armor of light.

I don't know about you, but I've often thought that in order to live in a way that's more glorifying to God, I need to organize my life so that I take every moment captive. I think I need to set up safeguards that prevent me from sinning, and almost force me to do what's right. And there's a certain wisdom in doing these things, and maybe that's even what some of us need to do sometimes, but I've also found that living that way can lead to living less like a Christian, and more like a Pharisee.

You see, the way we make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires has less to do with our safeguards, and more to do with our identity in Jesus Christ. When we put on the Lord Jesus, God wants us to see Jesus as our Life, because He is our Life. And a life lived in Jesus doesn't have room to gratify the desires of our flesh.

⁴¹ Ephesians 5:16

Now, will we get that perfect? No. At least not yet. But we will get it perfect in the life to come. When we are fully clothed with Christ, we will have no desire to sin, and will always do righteousness forever.

But for now, we're called to wake up to the reality of what we will be forever. Wake up to the reality of how God sees us and loves us, so that we would walk not as people still wandering in darkness, but as those who have stepped into the light of God's love.