

# Live for the day that is dawning

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## **Live for the day that is dawning**

*A sermon preached at Poplar Baptist Church in the morning service by Henry Dixon on 16th September 2007*

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 armour 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. (Romans 13.11 – 14)

## **Introduction**

In this passage the apostle Paul is saying to the people to whom he was writing that they need to be aware of the age in which they are living. Christ is just about to come back. They need to realise what the time is, wake up from their spiritual sleep, take off their spiritual “night clothes”, put on their spiritual armour, and live in a way which is appropriate for the new day which is about to dawn.

There are four things he tells his readers to do:

### **1. To know what the time is**

Verse 11 says “Do this, understanding the time.” We need to understand what the present time is. He says, “Do this.” What is “this”? He has just been speaking about living a life of love. He said in verse 8, “Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another”. We have an ongoing obligation as believers to love one another and to love all mankind. As we do so we will fulfil the law of God. We must do this, living this life of love, understanding the present time. We need to appreciate what is the age we are living in. What is this

age? The answer is that we are living in the last days of this world just prior to the second coming of Christ. It is helpful to turn to Acts 2. 15 which makes this very clear. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost and all the believers were enabled to declare the word of God. A great crowd of people gathered, wondering what was going on. Peter said,

These men are not drunk, as you suppose. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.'

Peter was quoting from Joel who said that in the last days God was going to pour out the Holy Spirit. Peter said that what was happening now was the fulfilment of this prophecy from Joel.

We see from this that the period of time from the Day of Pentecost right up to the present time is "the last days". We are living in the era of the fulfilment of prophecy. Events to which the Old Testament times were pointing forward to are now happening and have now largely already happened. Think of the things the Old Testament said had to happen. A Messiah, God's anointed king, was to come. He has indeed come. The Old Testament promised the forgiveness of sins which was to be made available to all of the people of God, that God would remember their sins no more. That time has now come following the death of Christ upon the Cross. The Old Testament said, as we just read in the book of Joel, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon all of God's people. That has now happened. The Old Testament, and the Lord Jesus himself also said, that the nation of Israel and Jerusalem would be destroyed and that this would be a portent of the end of the world. Matthew 24 is largely about the destruction of Jerusalem. That has now happened. It happened in A.D.70. Jesus said that the Gospel had to go out to the ends of the world. That has happened. In 2 Thessalonians the apostle Paul spoke about the Man of Lawlessness, the Antichrist, had to come, who would set himself up in God's temple and proclaim himself to be God. I would suggest to you that the Antichrist has already come. The opinion of many Christians through the centuries, and my own opinion, is that the Papacy is the Antichrist. The Papacy has set itself up in God's temple, the church, and proclaimed itself to be God. The Pope is called the "Holy Father". People bow down to him and kiss his ring. He declares himself to be infallible which is an attribute which belongs to God alone.

So everything which has to be in place before the Second Coming of Christ is in place. Everything is right ready. All the Scriptures have been fulfilled. The Lord could come back at any moment. He said that he would come as a thief in the night. The Lord Jesus is just about to come. He is standing at the door. Just waiting! It is as if we could see the sun of the coming dawn starting to make the sky in the east glow. You can see the signs that the Lord is about to come.

Before moving on, let me ask you two questions. Firstly, are you ready for Jesus' return? Are you a true Christian? He is going to come back at any moment. He could come back today. If Jesus was to come back today, would you be saying, "Oh, *why* did I not trust Jesus as my Saviour? *Why* did I not get right with the Lord?" Or, would you be saying, "Hallelujah! I am so glad that Jesus has saved me and that he has come back"? You cannot afford to chance this. You cannot afford to think, "Oh well, I'll worry about that problem when I come to it. If the Lord will have me in, I'll get into heaven. If he sends me to hell, that's where I'll land up." No – it is *your responsibility* to make sure you are right with the Lord. You need to do that now, before it is too late.

Secondly, for those who are Christians, have you forgotten the age in which you are living? Have you forgotten that the Lord is just about to come? Are you living as if this world is going to carry on turning for ever, as if you have many years definitely stretching out before you in the future so you are making firm plans for things you want to do? Have you forgotten that *at any moment* Jesus could return? Are you living as if this world were all there is to live for?

## **2. To wake up**

The apostle says, in verse 11, "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber." He gives the reason, "because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

We need to understand that when the Bible talks about being saved, it does so in two ways. First, if you are a Christian, you are already saved. Paul says in Titus 3. 4 "...when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he *saved us*, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." That is something which has already happened. If you are a believer you have already been saved from the guilt of your sin. The minute you trusted in Jesus, God justified you. You are now not guilty. You have definitely been saved from going to hell.

But there is a sense in which we are not yet saved. This is the way that we are not yet saved from the physical consequences of sin in our lives. Sin has got a hold of our bodies. It has mortally and irreversibly infected our bodies, so our bodies are under the sentence of death. We are going to be saved from the consequences of sin in our bodies only when Jesus comes again. We are saved from guilt, but not yet from the consequence of sin in our bodies. It is to this that the apostle Paul is referring when he says that “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” The time is coming when Jesus is coming again. We will receive resurrection bodies. That day is daily getting closer. Every day that passes is a day closer to your physical salvation. That is a wonderful thing. As we grow older and start to see the grey hairs and wrinkles and to feel increased weakness, we do not need to feel pessimistic and miserable, thinking getting daily nearer the grave! We can feel glad because each day we are one day nearer to glory and to the salvation of the Lord.

Given the case that, in this sense, our salvation is nearer than when we first believed, Paul says that therefore we should wake up, spiritually. The very fact that Paul says this shows that it is possible to be spiritually asleep, to go through the motions of Christian living, church attendance, reading your Bible, prayer, outwardly serving the Lord, living a moral life, whilst at the same time being spiritually asleep. Other Scriptures speak about this. Revelation 3.1 – 2 recounts Jesus’ words to the church in Sardis:

“These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.”

This is a church which had the reputation of being alive. You would have said “What a busy and active church!” But actually it was dead, or certainly spiritually asleep. Let me ask *you* this question. Are *you* asleep spiritually? Are you going through the motions like a sleepwalker? Do you appear alive although you are actually spiritually dead?

What are the signs of being spiritually asleep? Here are some: the lack of desire to pray; daydreaming when you are praying; materialism, finding this world more attractive than God; sins coming back into your life which you had previously conquered as a Christian; loss of joy; gossip and backbiting; dropping off in attendance at church; inattention to God’s Word during the meeting; singing praises to God on “autopilot”, mouthing the words but without your

heart being engaged; lack of concern for the lost; feeling as though serving God is just one big effort.

The great danger is that we can be self-deceived. We can think that we are awake and on the ball spiritually even though we are sound asleep.

You might ask, "What can I do if I think I might be asleep?" One of the first things is to realise your condition. When you are asleep in your bed you are totally unaware of your condition and of the things you should be doing. Become aware of where you are as a Christian!

When you wake in the morning, you need stimulation! You need to sit up, make a cup of tea, anything to get yourself moving. Similarly, to stimulate yourself as a Christian, open your Bible, get to church, get yourself back on the ball as a believer.

### **3. To get dressed**

The third thing we see in Romans 13 is in verse 12. We need to put our clothes on, to get dressed spiritually. The progression here is clear. We need to realise it is time to wake up. We need to stimulate ourselves to wakefulness. Then we need to actually get dressed! "The night is nearly over, the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light." Paul is again referring to the fact that the Lord is on the brink of returning. The period of darkness which the world has experienced is almost over. The day is almost here. In the light of that truth, Paul says "Let us put aside the deeds of darkness" – the spiritual clothing which belongs to this dark world. Instead, put on the armour of light. This spiritual armour will make you ready to serve God and to live according to the light that is about to break out. We need to live in anticipation of the coming dawn, of the new world that the Lord Jesus Christ is about to bring in. So we need to aim to live now as we will be when the day dawns. Our aim should be to live as the Lord Jesus Christ. Our spiritual armour needs to be on so that we can fight against the devil, and be the sort of people that the Lord would have us to be.

The phrase "put on the armour of light" is reminiscent of Ephesians 6. 12 – 18:

Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with

the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

So the apostle is saying that as believers we *must* put on our spiritual armour because there is a battle to be fought. The devil is out there, wanting to trip us up, to bring ruin to our spiritual lives, to make us useless and ineffective in our service of Christ. We need our armour to be strong against the devil and live the lives God would have us to live. So put off your “pyjamas”, the old deeds of your old way of life, and put on your “day-clothes”, your spiritual armour given to you in Christ.

Sometimes here in the East End you sometimes see a strange sight: people out on the streets, going to the shops at 4:00 p.m. – in their pyjamas and bedroom slippers! As Christians, we should not be in our pyjamas in the spiritual day which is about to dawn. We should have our armour on in readiness for the battle which we have to fight. Let us get rid of the old habits, life-style and thinking which belong to the dark days of our non-Christian past and, in our shining new armour be ready to serve the Lord.

Have you got your armour on? Are you still in your night clothes? Are you still wearing the life style that belonged to your non-Christian past? You know the sort of things you used to do as a non-Christian. Those things should be history! Do not let your armour lie rusting on the floor but have it on in readiness for the coming day of Christ.

#### **4. To get on with day-time activities**

The apostle now makes the fourth point, the need to get on with day time activities. Again, the progression is clear. You need to know what the time is. You need to wake up. You need to get dressed in appropriate day clothes. Then you need to start day-time activities. We need to be involved with activities which belong to the day of Christ rather than continuing with those which belong to the night of our non-Christian past.

Romans 13.13 reads "Let us behave decently, as in the day time, 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."

The sorts of things we used to do we should not be doing now. The apostle gives some specific examples. We might think we have personally never been to an orgy. But the word means "carousing". Many of us might well have been to all night parties where the alcohol flows too freely, people behave stupidly and play extremely loud music which blows your brains out. There is crazy dancing and maybe drug using. That is essentially the sort of thing Paul means. You could translate it "raves". Do not get involved in that type of thing. It belongs to the past and is not the sort of thing which a Christian should be involved in. Your task is to serve the Lord, not to blow your Saturday night away so that you are totally useless on a Sunday and might not even make it to church. Get rid of it.

Get rid of drunkenness. People of the world boast about getting "plastered" and "smashed" and think it a great joke to get drunk. Actually drunkenness is the most terrible thing because you lose control, do and say the most awful things and behave in a shameful way. The sad part is that you do not even realise what you were like. Only your friends tell you afterwards what happened. Christians will bring shame and dishonour on Christ if they get involved in drunkenness. If a Christian drinks any alcohol at all, he needs to do it in such a way that he will not enter a drunken state. If he cannot be sure that he might not be able to avoid drunkenness he should cut it out of his life altogether. Better to not drink at all than to run the risk of drunkenness.

Sexual immorality, of having sex with someone to whom you are not married, should be completely absent from our lives. Engaged couples, be especially careful in this area! When you are engaged is when you will be most tempted to fall into sexual immorality. You will be tempted to justify it by thinking that you will be married anyway in only a few weeks or months anyway. No! Keep yourselves pure right up to the wedding day. This rule applies also to all other forms of immorality; looking at pornography, fantasizing. Get rid of these things because they belong to the darkness.

Debauchery is where you indulge yourself too much. This could be eating too much, spending too much on clothes, watching too much television, playing too many computer games. It is any area where you have no control over your

desires. Instead of enjoying pleasure within tight confines, that particular pleasure dominates your life, runs out of control and itself controls everything else.

Dissension is where you are having arguments with people. As a Christian you should not quarrel. If you have had a disagreement with someone your responsibility is to do everything you can to resolve the argument. See if you need to apologise, if you can change something or meet them halfway. Do not make the situation worse by doing anything inflammatory, adding insult to injury, or by speaking evil of the person.

Jealousy is where you are miserable because someone else has been blessed. Get rid of jealousy which grows from the root of greed. Learn contentment!

All these states belong to the night-time and have no place in a Christian's life. Do not think how to gratify the desires of your sinful nature. Literally make no provision for the lusts of your flesh. Do not think in advance how you are going to satisfy your flesh.

"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." (Romans 13.14) Your life should be clothed with the meekness, the gentleness, the truthfulness, the kindness, the patience, the self-control, the goodness, the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Be as Jesus would be. Why? Because the day is coming. Jesus is coming back soon. We need to live for the day that is coming rather than for the night that is passing away.

All this is, of course, only possible if you are a real Christian. Perhaps some of the sins I have mentioned are present sins in your life. Perhaps this is because you have never truly been converted and you have never received the saving knowledge of Christ. The first thing you should do if this is the case is to come to Christ and to be saved. Then, having been saved, you can live for the day that is coming.

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