



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 13:11-14

Romans

"Wake Up! Wake Up!"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Romans 13:11-14: Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, what a blessing it is to come together on a Sunday morning and gather with the saints and open your Word, to read it as we have just done, and receive instruction from it. And we do receive good instruction always from your Word. But there are timely messages for us, and we come to one of those this morning. The reminder that time is short. The call to awaken from our sleep, from our slothfulness, our laziness, and to get about the business of doing your work, which is the only work that is of eternal value. Help us to understand that this morning, to take the admonition of the apostle to heart, to respond to it, to be diligent in the service that we have been given in the brief time that we have left.

Father, we look to you to teach us these things. Man can stand in a pulpit and exert great energy in trying to impress the truth on a congregation, can spend long hours in his study trying to formulate

the message in the best way possible, and yet that comes to nothing if the Spirit of God is not moving among your people, if He does not direct the words and give them effectiveness. The Word of God is living and active and it's sharper than any two-edged sword, and it goes forth and never returns void because the Spirit of God is at work in it, and so we pray for His ministry.

We know that His ministry is at work but we pray that it would be effective in our hearts, to open our hearts. Do that, Father, and make us receptive to the things that you would have us to understand and to receive. So we look to you to bless us spiritually. Prepare our hearts. Use your Word in our lives this morning to good effect so that we'll go forth from this place with renewed energy and a desire to serve you faithfully.

We have great spiritual needs. We always will. We are dependent upon you for our spiritual life. We are in Christ as a branch is in the vine, and that's the reason we live. Outside of Christ, we cannot live spiritually. Fortunately, we can never be broken off, but our life spiritually is tied to our triune God, but so is our life physically, Father. We live and move and have our existence in you. You supply us with everything that we have physically, mentally.

We are dependent upon you completely, and so we turn to you for our physical needs as well, and the requests for help in that way are long on our prayer request list. We pray for those, Father, whose names are listed here. We pray for healing. We pray for encouragement. We pray for the others as well, Father, and for many whose names aren't listed who are going through difficulties but have not made it known. We pray that you'd bless them.

Father, we will all face trials in this life. That's part of the path we travel on our way to heaven. It is not always an easy path, it's difficult very often. So we pray that you'd prepare us. Those of us who enjoy a peaceful period in our life, a time where there's not great struggle, we don't face great trials at this very moment, but those trials will come and we pray that you'd prepare us for them. We are

prepared for them through our study of the Word and our fellowship with the saints, and we pray that you would strengthen us in that regard, particularly that you'd strengthen us this morning as we study together.

We pray, Father, for our nation. We pray you'd bless it. We pray for our government. We pray for our president, we pray that you'd give him great wisdom. We are living in days of crisis and we pray that you'd give those in authority over us, the men and the women whom you have placed in positions of authority, wisdom and skill in governing this land and bless military personnel in the conflicts abroad in which they are engaged, and we pray that you'd give them safety and effectiveness.

And bless the land in which we live in a spiritual way. Particularly, Father, may the crisis that we are in alert people to the crisis that they are in spiritually. Time is short, Paul tells us that. Life is short. It ends. People face that, go through life without any thought of the end coming. We pray, Father, that you would bless our land with an awakening to that and a spiritual awakening. May the Spirit of God bring that and may we be instrumental in it.

So, Father, we pray you'd bless us to that end this morning and prepare our hearts for our time of study through the hymn we sing now, and we pray that you would bless us this evening when we gather again in this place to remember our Lord. We look to you for all these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Most of us, I think, have a healthy fear of being late. We want to make our appointments, we don't want to miss meetings, and so we pay close attention to time. We wear wristwatches, we set our alarm clocks. If you're like me, you set two of them on Sunday morning. We are conscientious about our daily affairs. We have to be if we're going to be successful. No one succeeds by ignoring time or sleeping late and living like a door on its hinge. That's how Solomon describes the sluggard. He turns back and forth but doesn't move from

his bed and doesn't succeed. The wise person is afraid of sleeping through.

Unfortunately, many Christians are less concerned about sleeping through their spiritual lives. They know their schedules and the present time but ignore future time and God's plan. As a result, many Christians don't live with a sense of urgency. They take their spiritual responsibilities lightly. They don't live earnestly and urgently. Paul recognized that and gives us a wake-up call in Romans 13:11-14. He says know the time. Know God's time. And know that it is late. It is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep. It's time to get up and get going, that's Paul's message, and to motivate us to do that, he refers to the future and the nearness of the coming age.

Time is moving quickly. The end of this present age is close at hand. The night is almost gone and the day is near. Earlier it was the past that was the basis of Paul's exhortations because of the mercies of God, because of Christ's sacrifice for us. We are to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. That's how Paul began this new section of the book of Romans in chapter 12. Gratitude for God's grace should motivate us to do that. And considering God's past acts of mercy will provide gratitude and galvanize us to active service. But now Paul gives a new perspective and encourages us to consider the future so that we will live responsibly in the present.

He begins verse 11 with a reference to our Christian duties. He says, "Do this," meaning, "Do all that I have exhorted you to do from chapters 12 through 13." In those chapters, Paul instructed us to be sacrifices to God. We are to be servants to other Christians, good citizens in society, and good neighbors to all we meet. So we are to follow the law of love in our relationships with God, with the church, and with the world. We are to live selfless lives. That's demanding, and Christians often fail to do that. They become indifferent or sleepy toward their duty to love others, and so Paul says, "Do this, knowing the time." Knowing that time is short.

As he goes on to explain, the present age is ending and the future age – the kingdom age – is about to begin, and he explains that in terms of the night giving way to the day, and so we read of this and we read of his earnest exhortation to us that we need to arouse ourselves from our spiritual sleep, from our indifference, and we need to get active and be ready to meet the new day that is approaching.

This was a particularly relevant way of expressing that truth and that need and that exhortation because Paul lived in an age that was regulated by the sun, not by light bulbs or wristwatches or alarm clocks. People rose at dawn. Only the lazy stayed in bed at sun-up. First light was the sign that a person was already to be awake and active. This is Paul's way of saying to Christians that it is time to stir ourselves from our spiritual laziness, our indifference, to be alert, to be active, and to be earnest and presenting our bodies as living and holy sacrifices to God. It's already the hour for you to awaken from sleep, he says. And the "already" gives his statement a sense of urgency.

There's no time to waste. You're already late, he says. It's like a person I know who's very close to me, as in she lives under my roof when she's home from college, who woke up a few weeks ago 40 minutes after her final exam had already begun. She bolted from her bed, quickly dressed, and dashed out the door after she had brushed her hair – first things first – ran across campus to class and fortunately she was able to take her test and even do well, I hope. But that's something of the picture that we have here only Paul is still shaking some of us, still arousing us from our sleep while we idly watch opportunities slip by.

The devil doesn't do that. Mr. Spurgeon preached a sermon on Romans 13:11 entitled, "Wake Up, Wake Up." That's the inspiration for the title, not some of you who might need to have that exhortation, but he made that point that while Christians sleep, the enemy does not. The enemy is always active and he made his point from one of the parables that the Lord gave in Matthew 13, the parable about the

farmer who was asleep, and while he and his helpers slept, an enemy came in and sowed tares among the wheat. That's what the devil does. He's not all-knowing, he's not all-powerful, he is not everywhere. The devil is not omnipresent but he is always active. We don't read anywhere that the devil sleeps.

There's one thing we can say about Satan and that is he's not lazy. And while we are sleeping and losing opportunities to further God's work, the enemy is at work to keep us sleeping and to frustrate our mission, to sow tares. That's the reason to wake up. That's a reason to get active in the mission that God has given us. But the reason that Paul gives for urgency is found in the statement, "Now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." In fact, every passing minute brings the Lord's coming nearer to us. Paul calls it salvation. Now salvation is nearer to us, and the meaning of that statement "salvation" is the consummation of salvation.

There are three aspects of salvation or we could perhaps call it three tenses to salvation, past, present, and future. Salvation is spoken of as accomplished in the past with our justification, as continuing in the present with our sanctification, and as completed in the future with our glorification. We have been saved from the guilt of sin. We are presently being saved from the power of sin. And we shall be saved in the future from the very presence of sin. Now, it's this third aspect of salvation that Paul is referring to here, the consummation of all of it, the time when it will be completed, and he says this is near.

The future is near, our hope of redemption, the redemption of our body is what Paul referred to back in chapter 8 verses 21 through 24. That which we are anticipating, which the whole universe is anticipating, that is about to be realized. It is nearer today than it was when we were converted. We are living at the dawn, so to speak. It's still dark, it's still night, as Paul describes this age in verse 12, but the light is beginning to appear. Now, that's not a lot of time, that period between night and first light. At the end of darkness and the

beginning of dawn. But that's how Paul describes the age in which we live. It's a brief period. It's coming to a close.

The end is approaching, and so we're to be busy redeeming the time. Every minute wasted is a minute lost, and when Christ comes, the opportunities for service will be gone. So we need to be active and using our time wisely. The devil and his demons are. They work night and day. They don't sleep. And the work they do is not a work for good, it is a work for evil, they spread darkness. How much more should we be working since we have the light? Our mission is for eternal good. We have the words of life and the hope of salvation and we're to be telling others about it, engaged in that work.

The men of this world work. They work hard. They labor hard for things that don't last, to build kingdoms that perish, to acquire possessions that they can't keep. How much more should we be working for the things that never perish? For things that have eternal reward?

But time is short. The night is almost gone and the day is near, Paul says. That adds urgency to Paul's plea but it also means that glory is near, that blessing is near. The day is near and the day is the time of light, and light speaks of truth, it speaks of splendor. All of that which Christ will bring. In the age to come, the world will be filled with God's truth and His glory. That's why Paul speaks of it as the day. The world of this present age has its glory; it's very impressive.

All of us, I think, must confess we're impressed with the world around us and the splendor of this age, but the greatest glory of this age pales in contrast to the age Christ will introduce. Its splendor is so great that everything that preceded it, the world and all of its glory, is like darkness in comparison. And so Paul calls this present age the night and the future age, the day. We are part of the day. We are members of Christ's kingdom if we have trusted in Him. We have a share in that future kingdom in glory and presently we have the

opportunity to work for it, to labor for it. Our labors won't make it happen.

God's program for the world does not depend upon us, it doesn't hang upon our efforts. It is coming, according to God's plan, and Christ's return and His kingdom are certain, but our labors contribute to it and contribute to our place in it and the joy we will have in it, and that is something worth waking up for. But it's also worth waking up for because that is the only way that we can progress in the faith, the only way that we can have real fulfillment and joy in this present world, this present life that we have.

There's an illustration of the danger of sleeping, of not heeding Paul's warning, in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Remember the story? Remember how Christian begins as he leaves the city of Destruction with this great burden of sin on his back, until he comes to the cross, and when he arrives at the cross, the burden falls from his shoulders, it tumbles down a hill into a sepulcher and is seen no more. And then Christian is stripped of his rags, he's dressed in clothes that are new and clean, and he's given a scroll with a seal on it. Bunyan calls it a roll. The clothes representative the righteousness of Christ and the roll, the scroll that he has, is the assurance of his salvation.

Christian then sets off for the Celestial City, he's full of joy, he's full of energy, and all along the way, he looks at his roll. He's reminded of his salvation, the assurance that he has of it. But it wasn't long before he came to the Hill of Difficulty and he began to climb it. It is the circumstances of life that are challenging to the Christian, the events in our life that require from us diligence, sacrifice, self-denial, exertion. The events in life, the circumstances of life that test our faith, and so Christian approaches it and he approaches it earnestly.

He climbs the hill with determination until he comes to what Bunyan calls a Pleasant Arbor, a shaded area, a place that the Lord of the Hill had made for tired travelers to give them a place to rest and be refreshed. So Christian sat down to rest and that was good and



proper. The Lord knows that we need rest and He provides us with seasons of rest. But wasn't long before Christian fell asleep and he continued to sleep. In fact, he overslept, when suddenly he awoke and realized what he'd done and he began to hurry on his way, not realizing that the scroll had fallen out of his hand during his sleep.

Later, when he discovered that it was missing, he had to retrace his steps to the Hill of Difficulty. He had to climb it all over again. All the way back, he regretted his sleep. It had caused him to lose his assurance and to lose progress along the way. "Oh, that I had not slept," he lamented. Now, Christian recovered and we can recover from our sleep – but at a loss. It frustrates progress in the Christian life. It causes fear, that uncertainty that we will have about our salvation. It robs us of joy and fruitfulness. Joy, fruitfulness, fulfillment are all worth waking up for, and time is short. The time that we have in this life from beginning to end, whether it be 60, 70, or 80 years, it's short.

It's but a moment, Moses tells us in Psalm 90, but a sigh and it's over. So it's short in and of itself, but Paul indicates here that the time before the Lord's return is getting shorter. Wake up, he says, the day is near. Now, that statement, the day is near, should not be interpreted as meaning that Paul was teaching that Christ's return would occur in his lifetime. You often hear that, that Paul believed that Christ would return in a relatively short time and was alerting the early church to that idea and the early church and the apostles were expecting Him and felt convinced that He was coming back in their time and were in fact teaching that to the people, that Christ would come in their generation and, of course, He did not and so Paul was wrong.

Well, that interpretation is false. Paul was not making any predictions about the Lord's return. No one knows the day or the hour of Christ's coming. Paul knew that, but he knew that He would come and that His coming is imminent, meaning it could happen at any moment. Nothing stands in its way, and he was saying to his

generation, "Know that that is true, that Christ can come, He can come in our lifetime, and be ready for that, be alert." We are to prepare for that, and that is a blessing to us, the knowledge, the conviction, the hope that He will come and may come soon. In fact, Paul in Titus 2:13 calls that the blessed hope. It's the next event in God's plan.

So Henry Alford, the 19th century Anglican, put it this way, explained what Paul was teaching here in this way: "On the certainty of the event, our faith is grounded. By the uncertainty of the time, our hope is stimulated and our watchfulness aroused." And our watchfulness will not be in vain because our hope is genuine. It's not empty, it is certain. It is certain we know because God's Word has revealed it to us. God's Word is true and God has told us these things, so we do have a blessed hope and that distinguishes us from the world, which has none.

Paul said that in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 where he spoke of unbelievers as the rest who have no hope. Their hopelessness has been seen and expressed in various ways from the old myths that men believed to the scientific theories that they have given. Norsemen, for example, the Vikings who lived in the harsh climate of northern Europe, had a very pessimistic view of the future. They believed that ultimately the frost giants, the brutal powers of earth, would eventually conquer all, so the future was one of ice, darkness, and doom.

And I mention that because it's not unlike some of the predictions of modern scientists on the fate of the universe. Everything comes to an end and someday the cosmos will come to an end. It'll either burn itself out or it will stop expanding and retract and collapse in on itself. But ultimately, the lights will go out and there will be eternal night. Well, if that's really the future, why act? Why care about anything? Why even get out of bed? Ultimately, everything is coming to nothing. Life is meaningless and hopeless. But we know that's not true. We know that's a speculation of unbelief.

We know the future. We know the future because God has revealed it to us. We could know it in no other way.

Left to ourselves, without the Word of God, we would speculate in the same way. But God's Word is clear and it tells us we have a future and that future is glorious. Paul tells us that it is near, the day is near, and that should, as Alford said, arouse within us watchfulness. Doctrine is practical. We've said that many times, said that through our studies of the book of Romans. Doctrine is practical and the practical effect of eschatology, the study of last things, of future events, is that it gives us hope and it gives us incentive for action. We see that in the second half of verse 12.

It begins, "Therefore," so Paul draws conclusions from what he's said and here he introduces the proper response to knowing that the time in which we live is short and knowing that our salvation is near. We are to, therefore, "lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." So not only are we to wake up and get up but we're to get dressed. First we are to take off our nightclothes, the deeds of darkness. Darkness, of course, is the natural environment of evil. People who are up to no good do it under the cover of night, so deeds of darkness are wicked deeds. It's bad behavior, sinful habits. Things that are done in secret. We are to put them off, we are to stop doing them.

We've been saved from all of that. Paul says that elsewhere in Colossians 1:13, he says that we have been rescued, we've been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's Son. That's a kingdom of light, and so we are to dress differently from the way we dressed in the past. We're to dress appropriately. Paul says we are to put on the armor of light, that's the appropriate clothing for us to wear because as James Denney wrote, "The Christian life is not sleep but battle." Paul certainly agreed. That's clear from the fact that he often speaks of armor.

In 2 Corinthians 6:7, he speaks of the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left. And of course in Ephesians 6, he

writes of the full armor of God and he tells us to take it up. He does the same in 1 Thessalonians 5:8. He describes the pieces of armor in different ways in different passages but he tells us of the helmet of hope and the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of faith and the sword of the Word. All of these are Christian graces. They are the virtues that we are to live by. They indicate how we are to live. Our dress, our armor, is our behavior. We are to live by faith. We are to pursue righteousness. We are to be sure of our future hope, be motivated by that hope.

We are to know the Scriptures and be able to use them on ourselves and use them on others. We're to be actively involved in a godly life of service. But Paul doesn't put it in terms of service here. He gives us instruction in terms of military might or in a military way because he knew that whatever else life may be, it is first of all a spiritual war. So we need to be armed for conflict because the enemy is all around us with the world and the flesh and the devil, and the enemy doesn't sleep. The battle really never lets up.

Paul gives the same counsel in verse 13, but he gives it in a different way with a different description. He says, "Let us behave properly as in the day." "Behave" is literally "walk," so Paul's description moves from getting dressed to walking, from clothing to behavior, which is what walking illustrates. It describes the course of a person's life, and Paul tells us that we are to live the way that people do when they walk around in the daylight. Well, how do they behave in the daylight? In open view? Well, they behave properly because they're in the light and they're seen, and we are to do that. Our conduct is to be decent. It is to be appropriate. It's to be the kind of conduct that one exhibits in the day.

It's to correspond to that kind of conduct, conduct in the light, and not to behavior that occurs in the night, "not in carousing and drunkenness," Paul says, "not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy." Six vices that he lists there and all of them are the product of self-will and self-interest in the areas of

drink, sex, and social relationships. Each is a failure in the area of loving one's neighbor, which is the "do this" of verse 11.

Now, we shouldn't forget that this instruction is written to Christians. He's not writing to unbelievers, he's writing to the Christians in Rome. He began this epistle chapter 1 by addressing all who are loved of God in Rome, called as saints. So these are saints that Paul is instructing not to be drunk and promiscuous. Commenting on this, Leon Morris wrote: "We should not think that 1st century Christians came from the most upright and honorable sections of society. Rather, the gospel took up and transformed many who were the dregs of society. Paul is mindful of this and warns against relapse."

Relapse was possible for those Christians in Rome, and it's the same today. The fact is Christians bring old baggage into the new life. God doesn't say clean up your life first and then I'll save you, He saves us in the midst of our old life and continues saving us. That's the work of sanctification, that second tense of salvation. God's presently working to save us from the power of sin. He's presently sanctifying us, cleaning up our life, transforming us, and one means that God uses in our sanctification, in our transformation, is admonitions, warnings, such as the ones that Paul is giving here, and the Christian, child of God who has a new nature, a new heart, and the Spirit of God within him or her, responds. He hears the voice of his Savior and responds to it.

So to prevent relapse into the sinful behavior of the past or perhaps to draw people out of relapse into sin, Paul gives this instruction to dress decently and walk appropriately. He's not finished. Verse 14, he returns to the image of dress: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." How does the Christian put on Christ? We're already in Christ. We were joined to Him and to His life at the moment of faith.

We put Him on by exhibiting His character, by exhibiting His virtues, and we do that by doing what Paul instructed us to do back in

chapter 6 and verse 11: "Consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Consider the old man that you once were to be dead because he is dead if you're a Christian. He was crucified with Christ. And consider that your new person is alive in Christ. Believe that. Understand that, appropriate Christ's life, walk daily by faith in the power of that new life that is in you. Know who you are and live according to it. That's the key to living the life that Paul is exhorting us to live.

And that life takes very practical steps. "Make no provision for the flesh." As we think the thoughts of Christ and we will think the thoughts of Christ as we take them in through the study of the Word of God, as we study the person of Christ and His words. Our minds are transformed, our minds are governed by the principles of God's Word, and we live then like Christ lived, with His wisdom. We obtain His desires and His perspective. Christ is our Lord and He is our law. We follow His leading by following His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and as we follow the Holy Spirit, we go to the right places. We do the right things.

We don't go to places that would dishonor Christ, which means we avoid places and circumstances that are inappropriate for a Christian and would present temptations to the flesh. Instead, we manifest the virtues of Christ, humility, obedience, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, mercy, truth, and we speak the love, we speak the truth in love. This is what we do. That's how we carry on the warfare that we are in, and we're to do it continually. We are to be diligent in it. We are not to sleep and if we are asleep, then we are to wake up, get dressed, and get on with the Christian life. Time is short. The day is near. That's Paul's exhortation.

He's not addressing unbelievers here. He's addressing Christians, those who are justified, and so he doesn't threaten us with hellfire. That's for the unbeliever. Christians can fall into sin and slothfulness, they can fall asleep, but they can never fall away from Christ and lose their salvation. Paul's warning is one of missed

opportunity. What a terribly disappointing thing it will be to meet Christ in that day and have little to show for our lives. So Paul urges us to get active.

Yet while this text is for Christians, it has been marvelously used in the conversion of unbelievers. The book of Romans has such texts. Romans 1:17, the just shall live by faith, was instrumental in the conversion of Luther, and this text, Romans 13 through 14, was used in Augustine's conversion. He wrote about it in his *Confessions*, which is his spiritual autobiography that was written in the form of a prayer to God. One of the opening statements is that famous statement, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." That was Augustine's experience. Restless until, like Christian, he came to the cross. But until then, all of his early life was spent seeking rest.

As a youth, he looked for it in sensual pleasure. He lived an immoral life. His mother, Monica, was a Christian woman, a very devout Christian, and so Augustine heard the gospel from her and he heard the gospel from others, but as a young man, he prayed, "Give me chastity – but not yet." He was afraid that God would hear him quickly and heal him quickly of his lust, which he said, "I wish to have satisfied rather than extinguished." How typical that is. "Save me but not yet. I have some things to do first. I have some things to enjoy." He believed that for him the road to happiness would be found in sex, which young people often do.

But it is not the way to happiness and Augustine discovered that it wasn't, so he sought intellectual pursuits. He was a brilliant student, and he pursued philosophy but wasn't satisfied. His life reminds one of the preacher of Ecclesiastes. He pursued all of these things and then he pursued a career, a career in rhetoric, which in that day was a very important field, a very important discipline because it involved speaking well

[Prayer]