

In View of God's Mercy: Wake Up

03.27.2022

Today – we're continuing in our series

Traveling thru the last half of the letter to the Romans

We've titled this series

In view of God's mercy

It's an action-oriented series

In view of God's mercy

Offer your body as a living sacrifice

Holy & pleasing to God

In keeping with the action-oriented feel of these texts

I want to jump right in, ok?

So, Paul starts this week's section

In the back half of chapter 13

With this important sentence

And do this, understanding the present time – Romans 13:11a

“And do this”?

And do what?

Well, he's coming off the previous sections

We've covered them over this last month

He challenged us to:

Live humbly

Barry preached that message

Bless others

Keith taught that week

Submit to leaders

And Rob handled that section last week

So, he's saying – do these things – understanding the present time

So, Paul is telling the Roman church

Live humbly

Bless others

Submit to leaders

Why?

Because we understand the present time

(We) do this, understanding the present time – Romans 13:11a

What's he talking about?

He tells us in the very next verse:

And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already 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. – Romans 13:11-12a

Let me give us some context:

Paul wrote to the Roman church in 54 AD

5 years earlier

In 49 AD

The Roman Emperor Claudius had kicked all of the Jewish Christians out of Rome

The Bible describes this:

Acts 18:1-2a - After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.

Also in Hebrews:

Hebrews 10:32-35 - Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.

You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

Let's pause a second

Let's get our 1st century Christian lens on for a second

It's 54 AD

Jesus was crucified a little over 20 years earlier

So, for us – today – let's picture 9-11

For us – time wise – it would be like if Jesus was crucified on 9-11

It didn't happen yesterday

But the memories are still fresh

After Jesus was crucified

He rose again

He appeared to several of the apostles

Paul met Him on the road to Damascus

And went from being a persecutor of the church

To one of its most outspoken leaders

To stick with the 9-11 theme

Picture Saddam Hussein converting to Christianity a couple months after 9-11

Before he was captured

And then becoming an outspoken Christian leader

Can you imagine Saddam Hussein trying to lead the church?

We'd be skeptical

Just like they were with Paul

And there were lots of people alive

Who had seen Jesus resurrected

Look what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. – 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Let's say you've met a guy

Who was in that crowd of people

That saw Jesus alive

So, 20 years ago

Right around 9-11

Right before Saddam Hussein became a Christian

Persecution broke out in Jerusalem

And the church was scattered

Paul became a Christian

And then a leader

The Gospel comes to Rome

And one of those witnesses

Who had seen a resurrected Jesus

Was traveling to Rome for business

And he tells *you* about Jesus

And your life

These last years
Has been completely changed

I mean, it's been tough

The Emperor Claudius got mad at Christians

And kicked all of you out

He took your businesses

Just confiscated them

He also took your houses

And you had to run to take your kids

And run out like refugees

All of those images of people fleeing to Poland

To get away from Putin's army

That's Claudius

But now he's dead

And you're going home

To the only home you've ever known

And you're trying to start over

And you're working any odd jobs you can find

To feed your kids

And try to rebuild your life

But catch this:

When the church gets together

 This is the weirdest thing

When the church gets together

 They talk about the suffering

 The persecution

 The oppression by the government

They talk about it like a badge of honor

 Not an inconvenience or offense

And now Paul

 One of the leaders you really look up to

Is saying live humbly

 Don't bow up and demand your rights

 Even as they're being taken from you

Choose to bless others

 Like Keith said

 The ones you like

 That's easy

 And even the ones who are taking your stuff

 Not because they deserve it

 But in view of God's mercy

Because they took from Jesus too

He's even telling us

To submit to leaders

Leaders like Claudius

Who kicked you out of the country

Because you were a Christian

Leaders like Nero

Who, they may not realize it yet

But who will be one of the vilest tyrants

The church has ever seen

One of the vilest tyrants

The world *will* ever see

By the way

Whether you like Trump

Or Biden

Or neither

None of the 45 presidents we've had

Have been as bad for the church

As those two

None of the 45 presidents we've had

Have had values – as misaligned from your values

As those two

And Paul is telling the church to submit

Not because they deserve it

But in view of God's mercy

So, Paul says,

And do this, (*live humbly, bless others, submit to leaders*) understanding the present time: The hour has already 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. – Romans 13:11-12a

This is 25 years into the history of the church

If it was true then – that the day is almost here

If it was true then - How much more true is it now

Nearly 2000 years later?

It's time for the church to wake up

Our salvation will not come from bowing up

So, humble yourself

Our salvation will not come from boycotts or Facebook or being rude

So, bless others

Our help and our hope will not come from the government

The church has been trying those solutions for 2000 years

And here we are

It's time for us to wake up, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

So, if these things aren't the answer

What's the answer?

So how does he tell us to respond?

He says –

**So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. –
Romans 13:12b**

There're two metaphors there

Do you see them?

First of all – light & darkness

We need to choose

Are we going to live

Like the world lives

Or are we going to offer our bodies

As living sacrifices

Holy & pleasing to God?

Live in the light

Or live in the darkness

The second metaphor

Is armor
This is a battle

You know

It hit me the other day
We, in our culture, are dismissive
Of that kind of language
Not dismissive like disrespectful
But dismissive like it's hyperbole
So, we dismiss it

Let me explain

You hear people use battle metaphors all the time in sports

It's March madness
And you'll hear people talk about David & Goliath
You'll hear coaches say
We were in a tough fight tonight
We went to war in the paint
We battled for that rebound
But no one really expects anyone to die for the rebound
It's a game – not war

I mean, for Heaven sake

We have singing competitions on television

Reality shows

That have “battle rounds”

I’m sorry

But I ain’t followin’ none of those folks into battle {Pic}

But look how Jesus describes the battle

That we *really are* in:

John 10:10a - The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy

Describe

Just to make sure you don’t think Jesus was using hyperbole

Look how He continues:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. – John 10:10-11

And a few months later

Jesus was beaten senselessly

Not metaphorically

Jesus took literal nails

In His literal hands

And literally shed His literal blood for us

Because the Good Shepherd

Really did lay down His life for us – the sheep

Just two chapters earlier

He said this:

John 8:40a, 44 - As it is, you are looking for a way to kill Me... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Is that metaphor?

Is that hyperbole?

But look at how Paul describes our life:

Ephesians 6:12-13a - For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the Heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God

While this is an accurate translation

I think it would more accurately be read

Like this

We do have a struggle

But we get confused about who it's against

We think it's against the government

Or on Facebook

Or with Hollywood

Romans 13:11b-12 - The hour has already 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

How do you do that?

A couple of quick commands:

**Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness –
Romans 13:13a**

The Bible never says its wrong to drink

Jesus' first miracle turned water to wine

Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach

The Bible never says it's wrong to drink

But the Bible consistently says it's wrong to get drunk

Ever

So, if you struggle with alcohol

This is not judgment

Just get it together

It's time to wake up

If you need help

Get help

Let us help

We're here to help

But it's time

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery – Romans 13:13

The Word of God says that

Sex is reserved for one man

And one woman

Inside the covenant of marriage

If you're engaging in sex outside of those boundaries

It's time to stop

It's time to wake up

Closer to home – far too many of us

Are viewing sexual things that we have no business viewing

Pornography on the internet

Content on streaming services

We think it's fine

Because it's on Netflix or Hulu

Not pornography

But its content that our grandparents

Would have called pornography

Just a few years ago

It's time to stop

It's time to wake up

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. – Romans 13:13

It's time for Christians

To stop the fighting and the pettiness

Look at this verse:

If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. – Galatians 5:15

Marriages

Social media

Political nonsense

It's time to stop

It's time to wake up

We're in a battle

But we're fighting each other

It's time to wake up

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. – Romans 13:14

Rather

Instead

Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ

Do things

His way

The Bible says that He was tempted by all of this

Tempted in every way just as we are {Show Hebrews 4:15-16}

Hebrews 4 says

But He did not sin

So that means that Jesus overcame the temptations we face:

Jesus overcame the temptation of alcohol

He overcame the temptation of sex

And the temptation of dissension and jealousy

He faced all of it

He empathizes with us when we face it

But He overcame

So, talk to Him and ask Him how He did it

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. – Romans 13:14

So, I'm going to grad school

And last semester, I had a class on historical theology

Jokes on me

I always said I didn't want to go to seminary

Because I didn't care what a 4th century monk thought

So last semester

I took a class about what 4th century monks thought

But I was shocked

We covered from the time of Jesus till now in one semester

And I was shocked

At how much violence the church endured

We read about that in the book of Acts

That covers the first 30 or 35 years of church history

But it doesn't let up

To give us perspective

Emperor Constantine decriminalized Christianity

283 years after Jesus' crucifixion

Let's compare that to American history

If Christianity became illegal

And we began to get persecuted in 1776

We would still be facing violence today

In fact, we would still have 37 more years of violence ahead of us

Until Christianity became legal in 2059

But that didn't finish it

There was violence against Christians through the middle ages

Violence against Christians through the Reformation

We're living in America in one of the only times

Where you don't face violence for being a Christian

Much of the rest of the world is facing violence today

So, it got me thinking

Because I don't want to get to Heaven

And talk to people who literally had their head chopped off for the Gospel

Or who literally were thrown to lions

Or covered in pitch and set on fire

To ask me what price I paid for the Gospel

And me to say, well... the church kind of got grumpy about masks in 2020

Some thought we should require more

Some thought we should require less

I mean, you have no idea how hard that was

"Yeah," they'll say... "I can't imagine"

So, it got me thinking

What all lead to the violent opposition

That the early church faced?

I think there were three items:

First – there was a spiritual enemy

We read a moment ago about

Satan coming to kill, steal, and destroy

We read about him being a murderer

Revelation 12 says:

The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down... Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short. – Revelation 12:10b, 12b

Satan, the accuser, is full of rage

And Heaven – observing this

Says, woe to you

Cause he's ticked off

He's comin'

And he's not happy

There's a spiritual enemy {Show "Rev. 12"}

There's also a sinful nature

People are willing to be lead to violence

They're willing to be used against the church

People inside the church

Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders

People outside the church

The Romans

Herod, Pilate, others

There's a spiritual enemy

There's a sinful nature

There's also a special focus

Jerusalem in the 1st Century

Was hugely consequential

Rome during that time

Was hugely consequential

So, if you're Satan

And you can't have your forces

Everywhere

At every time

Which he can't

If you've got to pick & choose

You're going to focus on Jerusalem

You're going to focus on Rome

During the first years after Jesus

Right?

All of that leads to violent opposition for the people of God

Spiritual enemy
Sinful nature
Special focus

But let me ask you a question

And if you'll let it

This question will be a game changer for your life

It'll change the way you pray

It'll change the way you see

It'll change the way you "wake up"

The question:

What's changed?

Do we still have a spiritual enemy?

Is his time any longer than it was 2000 years ago?

If he was filled with fury and rage 2000 years ago

Do you think he's in a better mood now?

I think it anything

He's more of a factor today

Because his time is growing even shorter

What about sinful nature?

Do we still have that?

Is it still inside the church?

Outside the church?

Pretty much

What about special focus?

You know, you read in the Gospels

About Jesus casting out demons

Everywhere He goes

You read about missionaries in Africa and other parts of the world

Dealing with witch doctors

And possessed people all the time

But we don't see it here

And yet

America is the center of the political world

America is the center of technology

The center economically

The center militarily

The center educationally

Throughout history

Outside of maybe Jerusalem & Rome in the first century

Has there ever been a time and place

That deserves more focus

Than America today?

Do you think our furious enemy is unaware?

We don't have violent opposition

He knows that would lead to revival

It would lead to us waking up

So, we don't have the witch doctors and the seances and the voodoo

But how many of us struggle with addiction

How many in America can't get off pain medicine

Or alcohol

Or porn

How many struggle with debilitating anxiety

Or depression

Or suicidal ideations

How many marriages

Are riddled with affairs

Or discontent

Or constant friction

It's time for us to wake up {Show Romans 13:11b-12}

Our battle is not against flesh and blood

So, don't expect Washington DC to solve it

We shouldn't expect our economy or our military or our technology

To solve it

The crisis of our time is spiritual

And it's time for us – the church - to lead the way

And it's time for us – the church - to wake up