

## **Let Us Adore Him**

### ***HOPE***

**Romans 13:11-14**

1. Know the now.

2. The now and the not yet.

3. Live the not yet, now.

love.learn.live.

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## **Let Us Adore Him:** *Hope*

Years ago, Shelly and I were vacationing on Maui in Hawaii with my parents and my brother and his wife. There is a volcano on that island that is called Haleakala. It rises over 10,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean. Each year over a million and a half people watch the sunrise from its summit. The name means "The House of the Sun" because of its view of the sunrise from the top.

All six of us got up in the deep dark of night – about 1:30 in the morning – in order to leave by 2:30am and make it to the summit in time to see the sunrise. Of course it was very dark. The drive up takes you through six of the world's 14 different climate zones. We got in the car at a balmy 78 degrees and stepped out of the car to a frigid 30 degrees. (The gift shop sells sweatshirts and jackets at more than twice the normal price for tourists who didn't plan ahead. Isn't that nice of them? So thoughtful).

We went through all of that to see the sunrise. The sky turns pink, then brighter orange, then yellow, and then blue. It is stunning!

The frustration of climbing the steep ascent of nearly 10,000 feet in a couple hours, going through dark night and cold weather and no sleep, all of that melted away with the warm rays of sun reaching across the expanse and touching our faces.

Advent is the season of the dawn. The light is coming, we can see glimpses of pink and orange along the horizon, but the sun isn't up yet. There are still long stretches of shadow and places of darkness. Advent is the season of the dawn, where we live in the space between the darkness of a world without Christ and the light of a world with Christ; where we see the light coming, yet it hasn't fully come.

While we observe this season of Christ's birth, the coming of light, we are also reminded that we are Advent people, living in the glow of the dawn. We no longer are people of the darkness, we are people of the light, even while Christ's return is still before us. Romans 13 reminds us, "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here." We are called and reminded that we are Advent people—people of the dawn. We live in the reality that the kingdom of God is now, yet is still to come in its fulfillment.

On the first Sunday of Advent we lit the candle of hope, as a reminder of the hope we have in Christ coming in a stable so long ago, but also a reminder of the hope we have that Christ will come again. It's a reminder that we are people of light in a world that is still so often cloaked in darkness. And we are called to live, to love, to serve, to celebrate, to mourn, and to grieve and to give—all in the light of hope. The light has come, and the light is coming.

Let me read our Scripture passage for today from our Advent Devotional called, "Let Us Adore Him." I hope you've been able to pick up a copy. You can get one at the Welcome

Center or at the church office if you haven't already, for \$7 each. We have a Spanish Advent devotional as well for \$5. If you can't afford them, don't worry about it – we don't want that to be a reason for you not to have one.

But here is the Scripture for today's reading, from Paul's letter to the Christians at the Church in Rome, the thirteenth chapter:

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. 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 carousing 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 flesh. (Romans 13:11-14, niv)

This is an interesting passage, especially when you consider the context in which we find it. Right before this passage, Paul has been teaching about the importance of Christians as citizens of Rome to be obedient and respectful of governing authorities. If Paul were to read the horrible things that people post these days about presidents and those in government, he would have pulled his hair and torn his shirt and put on sackcloth and ashes (traditional signs of deep mourning and repentance)!

Then, Paul writes about the importance, above ALL things, to love others. Paul said we should never owe anyone anything, except love – we will never pay off the debt to love all people. That's because Christ has loved us so much, so our debt to Him is to love others and do no harm to anyone.

Love sets up this passage. We'll take this passage apart, but I want to make sure you understand that this teaching is a direct outflowing and logically follows the command to love others.

So to begin with, Paul tells us to...

## **1. Know the *now*.**

Notice Paul starts out saying, "And do this..." He's saying, "As you fulfill the law of love, you need to understand the present time. As you love others, be aware of the current condition of things in this world and in your society."

If we were to truly understand how things are in the world today, with all of the sin, the evil, the lying and stealing and gossiping and selfishness and dysfunction, the suffering, the death, and mourning, the grief, and all of the pain – if we would truly know the now, the present time that we are living in, we would realize how desperately the people around us need our love. Not our condemnation, not our blame, not our pity – our love.

All of these things are still happening in the world, so obviously when Jesus came, these things weren't eradicated. Suffering and sin still exist in the world, and the early church was as familiar with them as we are. In fact, as bad as things seem to us now, think of what it was like for the early church; Romans is a letter to the early church in Rome – the land of

the Colosseum – a place where people were mauled by wild animals and where people killed each other – and where Christians were defenselessly slaughtered – all for entertainment. The Roman Christians were well acquainted with the pain and suffering of the time.

The phrase “the present time” is a timeless phrase; in other words, it is instructive to us in *our* time, too; we need to know the now we are in.

Some of you, including Shelly and I, are experiencing difficult times or seasons of our lives. And for everyone, the Covid season was difficult for all of us. The reality of suffering, pain, and grief have been very real and present to all of us. And even if you somehow missed all that, we only need to watch any news source and know quickly that suffering and sin still exist in our world.

But Paul’s point is that “the present time” is different for the people of Christ. Our present reality is to be different. We need to know the now that we live in, so we know how much love is needed, but to love this way we have a *different* reality. While the church is well acquainted with the sin and suffering of the world, at the very same time they are aware of the power of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection of Christ in their lives. So because of that, the present age is a thin veil that divides the world of suffering and sin from the glory that is coming. The early church lives in the midst of this thin veil, within the dawn of the coming rule and reign of Christ at his return. We are at the summit of the volcano of the suffering and sin of this world, but we can see at the horizon is the sunrise.

It was true for them and is true for us today, when we put our faith in Jesus. Although a couple thousand years and cultural differences divide us, we are still a church well acquainted with the sin and suffering of the world, and yet at the same time we are aware of the power of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection of Christ in our own lives and in our church. We are still living in the midst of this thin veil, the dawn of the coming reign of Christ.

So because of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, those who follow Christ already live in a different reality today. We live in...

## **2. The *now* and the *not yet*.**

Paul is telling the Christians that it’s time to wake up, to shake off their sleep and become alert.

I don’t know about you, but I love my hot shower in the morning. After I’ve exercised in my cold garage, near freezing and it’s still dark outside, I’m ready to get clean, and that hot shower is so soothing. But I heard recently that it is good for you to shock your system, so lately for the last 30 seconds or minute of my shower, I turn it to pure cold. Let me tell you, it takes your breath away, but it REALLY wakes you up too! In an entirely different way than any cup of coffee can!

When Paul uses the image of waking up, it is a term used throughout the New Testament, often to point to those following Christ (because those who are *not* following Christ are

asleep), or to the idea of resurrection (those who are dead in sin are “asleep” – they don’t even know they are dead).

So for the original readers, Paul was using a familiar image to remind the church that they are awake in Christ. This is something they were already living in, even as the world is asleep. It is also a reminder of their baptism into the cold water and rising out of death. Finally, it’s a reminder that when they participated in communion, or what they called the “Love Feast,” it pointed them to, and reminds them of, participation in the banquet yet to come when Jesus would return.

In other words, here they were in the *now*, but they were also experiencing and living expectantly for the *not yet*, because in Christ, God had invaded the *old* age to bring about the *new* age. God had invaded the present time to usher in the new time.

That means, then, that the people of Christ are living in the new time while they wait for Christ’s return. Even though the present time is night and people are asleep in the dark of sin, people who follow Christ live as people of the light.

Think about what this kind of imagery meant to the folks who heard it. In that geographical location and at that time, dawn was a very busy time. It got hot during the day, so dawn was filled with the most activity.

Years ago, I was a part of a group of youth pastors in Oregon, and we planned and every other year we took over 200 high school youth down to our Nazarene campground in Tecate, Mexico during the summer to do work, building bunkhouses and offices and showers and more. We slept in tents on the desert floor, among the tarantulas and scorpions. The good thing was when we went to bed in our tents, it was extremely cold at night, so the bugs slowed down. But in the daytime, it was the desert, so it got very, very hot. The teens didn’t like getting up before dawn to get ready to begin working, but when they realized how hot it got in the afternoon, they were glad to be working when it was so much cooler. They learned quickly that they looked forward to “siesta de la tarde” – the afternoon nap!

The same thing was true in the world that Paul’s letter to the Romans was written. It got hot during the day, so they did a lot of their work and activity at dawn.

The implication in this was that you did not want to move slowly; you had a limited amount of time to get your work done, so you needed to work quickly.

That’s what Paul was telling the believers; we’ve got to be aware of the present time, and we’ve got to make the most of it.

The same is true for us. We don’t know when Jesus will return, but there are so many people who need to be loved and need to be introduced to Jesus. We’ve got to keep paying down that debt of love and we’ve got a limited amount of time to do it in!

So Paul is telling believers in Jesus that we need to know the now, for us to understand the now and the not yet, and we need to...

### **3. Live the *not yet, now*.**

Paul describes the moral darkness of the present time as night time. Remember what Jesus said in John's Gospel, chapter three:

“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.” (John 3:19-21, niv)

Darkness often in the Bible, and for sure in the context of this passage in Romans, was seen as a time when anything was permissible; when you could do anything you wanted, and you could get away with it. But the church is called to live as people of light. Even though in this present age we are in the dawn – we've become awake, and we are not living as people of the dark, but we are not yet fully in the light because Jesus has not come back yet to make all things new. Of course, when Jesus does, the Bible tells us that in the new earth there won't be need for the sun in the sky in the day or the moon at night, because Jesus himself will be the light that illuminates everything.

But that time hasn't come yet. So here we are in the twilight of the dawn, but we are to live *now* as people of the light; as if the *not yet* has already arrived. We are to live the not yet now, not waiting until the full light of Jesus' return.

Now it's beginning to make sense, isn't it, that Jesus told us that we are the light of the world, a city on a hill that can't be hidden, or like the light of a lampstand that we don't want to keep covered up – we want to shine light into the entire household! (Matthew 5:14-16). We want to live in such a way that the people of the dark can see the light of Jesus in us, by our actions – by our good deeds and good works – by the way we love the people of the world around us.

Don't get that wrong; this isn't some kind of command or works-based religion; this is a faith in Jesus resulting in a life that has been transformed by the Holy Spirit, and living out that life in ways that always loves others and seeks their greatest good, often at our own expense. It's not about works; it's about people who live in the light – who follow Jesus – people who live differently. So those who live in the light do not participate in the acts of the night (where people think they can get away with everything).

Many of us have been to or through Las Vegas. Years ago when we lived in Idaho and our boys were very little, we saved and scrounged up enough money to drive to Los Angeles and take them to Disneyland. We managed to find a casino hotel in Las Vegas for very cheap that we could stay the night in on the way. The hotels were cheap because they made their money off gamblers, but they lost money on us because we didn't gamble. But one thing that I noticed and maybe you have too: there are no windows in casinos. Why is that? Because at night people are more apt to do things that in the daytime their common sense would tell them to not to do. And without windows, the times of the day pass by and are not noticed at all – it's like perpetual night. This takes away the sense of time and tries to keep the players gambling in the casinos for as long as possible. It's the same kind of principal that Paul is talking about, except Paul points out that people who live in the night do all kinds of unspeakably sinful things.

Paul lists several acts that are associated with the darkness (carousing and drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension, and jealousy). Let's take a quick look at that list.

The terms "carousing" and "drunkenness" are plural in the Greek; they refer to the banquets honoring Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, who is always associated with drunkenness and wild parties. "Drunken revelry" would be another appropriate translation for these words.

"Sexual immorality" is also plural in Greek. It could be defined as "sexual excesses." We might define that today as sexual promiscuity of all kinds.

"Debauchery" is a combination of the prior words, indicating promiscuous, violent, and licentious indulgence.

"Dissension" and "jealousy" seem to mean jealous infighting.

All of these acts are things that go on in the darkness, and Paul lists them in order to show the contrast between them and how those who live in the light are to act.

On the contrary, those who have been baptized, those who follow Christ, have been transformed. They are clothed not in the garments of Dionysus but in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are not focused on satisfying urges but on love, grace, truth, hope—the things of Christ.

"Believers today should find the immoral behaviors Paul describes as equally despicable and repulsive to the life of faith. But we must always be alert to the fact that the world of darkness that surrounds *us* is not that different from the corrupt Rome of Paul's time. We can be tempted, as easily as any recipient of Paul's letter, to gratify desires that often lurk in the shadows of our own spirits.

The solution then and now is a proactive stance. Faith requires a deliberate choice of spiritual wardrobe. We must put on the armor of light (13:12). But, even prior to putting on the armor, we must clothe [ourselves] with the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 14) and His righteousness.<sup>1</sup> Cast off the darkness, put on the light of Christ!

Essentially, the people of Christ live as though the light already rules the world. They live as though Christ has returned and made things right. They are a glimpse of the kingdom to come, already in the present world. They live in the not yet, right now, as if it were already present.

This is not a call only for the early church of Rome but for *us* too. We are people of the dawn. We are people of Advent. We live in hope, even while we still see the shadows of darkness. We live as people of the light.

Advent is the season of the dawn. Christ came, and our lives are radically transformed because of it. We are no longer people of darkness; we no longer behave as people of the night; we are people of the day. We cast off the ways of the world to live as people of the light. The kingdom of God hasn't fully come, all things aren't made right yet, and to deny the reality of suffering and sin in our world would be a heartbreaking mistake. But for those who live the reality of suffering, we are to be a glimpse of the world to come. Even now, in

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<sup>1</sup> Clarence L. Bence, [Romans: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1996), 218.

the rubble of decay, in the heartbreak of sin, we are to be a glimpse of the light. We are a community of hope, of grace, of goodness, of righteousness, and of love.

We are to live as people who exist in a different kingdom that is actively breaking into our world, just like the morning breaks into the night. So we light a candle of hope today. May it be a reminder to us that we are people of the light and that we carry the hope that Christ has come, and that Christ will come again. Let's live as people of the dawn.

*Prayer*