

The Time is at Hand

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Preacher: Rev Calum M Smith

[0 : 0 0] Well, we can turn back to our reading in the book of Romans, chapter 13. We're going to look at the end of this chapter, verse 11. Besides this, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake up from sleep.

For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone, the day is at hand, and so on.

We are reminded this morning in this service that we're checking out of 2025 and checking in to 2026, God willing, in this coming week ahead.

And the year seems to go past quicker. Each year that passes, time just goes past so quickly. But as we think about coming to the end of a year and as we think about our lives in general, how much of our time is taken up with the consideration that we find in these verses that we've just read.

The consideration being the Lord could come today. The Lord could come today. The word here is in verse 12.

[1 : 1 6] The night is far gone, the day is at hand. The reminder here is that the Lord could come at any time. And yet the reality for us, for many of us, I'm sure, is that we're going on in our lives busy with so many different things.

All we want to do is get through our to-do list to get things done. And we go on like this day by day, week by week, month by month. And it can even go into year by year where we're just living our lives in this busy way, trying to get through different things.

But as the year draws to a close, and as we look back over it, even as you think of this time last year, coming to the end of 2024, going into 2025, think how quickly that time has gone past.

Going through the winter months of January and February as the gales were coming. Coming into the springtime when there's always that element of newness and freshness.

And looking forward to the summer months, which then pass by so quickly. Before you know it, you're into the autumn and you're seeing the leaves falling off the trees.

[2 : 3 0] And then here we are on this last Lord's Day of the year. Looking back just a few days where the shortest day has just come and gone.

And that's the cycle that we live in, this time that keeps going past so quickly. But how much of what we did or how we were living was motivated by that thought, well, the Lord could come at any moment.

Are you ready? Are you ready for that moment when the Lord comes? That's the warning that we have so much through Scripture.

Jesus himself gave this warning on a number of occasions. For example, in Matthew 24, verse 42 to 44, he says there, There's the stark warning that Jesus, Jesus himself says, Therefore you also must be ready, For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

You don't know, but are you ready? Are we ready for the Lord's return? He says there, Jesus, stay awake.

[4 : 1 1] And it's the same kind of phrase that we have here with Paul in verse 11. And besides this, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from your sleep, to wake up.

That's what we see here as well. But we go on, we make plans in our life, and I'm sure many of us are looking ahead and already making our plans for 2026, and even some, maybe even looking further ahead than that.

We'll have Easter and summer holidays to think about, getting them booked up. We'll have maybe if you're at the stage of life, you're in school, but you're starting to think about what's next.

Maybe after you finish fourth year or sixth year, you're thinking, what college, what university, what career am I going to follow? We're all always making plans.

We're always looking ahead. We need to make plans. We need to plan ahead in our lives, but do our plans reflect God and his will for us?

[5 : 13] Are your plans, are our plans, are they in light of the fact of the Lord's coming and being ready for that day? James, in the letter of James in chapter 4, it says this, Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make profit.

Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

Again, James gives that warning to us. We're making our plans, but we do not know what tomorrow will bring. So there's warnings for us all the way through Scripture.

And as we turn to Romans chapter 13 here, and as we ask that question, Are we ready for the Lord's return? Romans chapter 12 begins in verse 1 and 2 with, again, it's instructions in living in our lives, but it's living in the present, thinking of the past mercies of God, if you like.

Chapter 12 begins with that. And at the end of chapter 13, it's coming to the point in verse 11 to 14, where it's living in the present in light of the Lord's return.

[6 : 42] So chapter 12 begins kind of looking back, living in the present. Chapter 13 ends with living in the present, but looking always ahead to the Lord's return, without that knowledge of just when it will be.

And so there's an urgency here. There's a great need here presented by Paul to us this evening, to ourselves, looking back in our lives, living in light of God's past mercies, all that he has done for us, and especially all that he has done for us in Christ.

But living in the present, looking ahead, reminded that the day is coming when the Lord will come again. And so we are warned in these verses.

There's three warnings for us this evening that I want to take from these verses together. Three warnings as we come to the end of this year, and God willing, as we go into a new year, are we doing so in light of the Lord and the light that he could come at any moment?

And so the first warning for us is those words, wake up. Wake up in verse 11. Besides this, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from your sleep.

[8 : 07] Time to wake up. Those words that we love to hear in the morning. It's time to get up. But it's not just about getting up in the morning. It's much more than that.

It's time to wake from the slumber that we are in in life, when we are just sleeping our way through life, unaware of eternity, unaware that the Lord could come at any time.

You see, this is not just a gentle coming round after a good night's sleep. This is not just slowly opening your eyes and thinking, well, I had a good 8, 10, 12 hours sleep there.

This is a wake-up call. This is just a shaking awake in the middle of the night almost when you're just sound asleep. We're not paying attention.

We're not aware of what's going on around us. There's a danger around us that we're unaware of, and we are being woken up. That's the cry of Paul here, to wake up.

[9 : 11] This week, God willing, we'll be counting down to a time that we can see coming. On New Year's Eve, it's always the case that you have the countdown to midnight, countdown to the new year coming in.

And we know it's coming. We can see it coming. We've had it in the past. God willing, we'll have it this week. We live in light of that. A new year is coming in.

But we also live in light of so much uncertainty, so much that we're unsure of, so much that we don't know. Because there are other things that alarm us and wake us up at different times.

You think of being off just now. If you're off for a few days, or even if you're lucky enough to be off for a fortnight, and the alarm gets switched off. It's not going off every morning to go to school or to go to work.

And each morning, it's probably maybe getting a little bit later each morning. You're getting used to sleeping in more and more. But when you go back to work or when you go back to school and when the alarm is set for that first day back, it comes as a shock.

[10 : 22] It comes as something that startles you awake because you got so used to it not being there, but now it's there again and it just wakes you up with a startle. It's the same with other things that we see.

So many things now that have alarms that can startle us. For example, your car, your dashboard, it'll light up with a warning light unexpectedly and make a noise or even slow down to a stop. And you don't see it coming, but it just comes out of the blue. There's no warning. So many pieces of machinery or things that we're working with these days, there's so many warnings that'll just come out of the blue that startle us.

And all of these things, it's a question of, well, what do we do with them? What do we do with the alarm going off in the morning when we don't want to hear it? Well, there's three things. We can just ignore it. We can hit the snooze button or we can listen to it and actually do something about it. And that's the warning that Paul is giving us here in this wake up from your sleep.

[11 : 34] Wake up from where you are just now. What are you going to do? Are you going to choose to just ignore this word? Come to the end of another year and just choose another time.

Are you going to choose to snooze it, to pause it and say, we'll come back to that. Or are you going to listen to it? That's the warning of the gospel, to be aware of the danger that we are in.

That if we do not have Christ, if we are not trusting in him fully, then we are in danger. Because you see, the second half of this verse says, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

Time is moving on. Time is fast moving on. Are you awake? Are you looking to Jesus? Jesus, as he says himself, stay awake for you do not know the day your Lord is coming. That's the warning that's ringing in our ears.

[12 : 40] It's time to wake up. Are you awake? Do you hear this alarm going off?

Do you hear this warning sound of the gospel as we're ringing in your ear? Has it registered? Who is the warning for?

Well, it's for us all. Even if you're a Christian sitting in here tonight, it's not to sit comfortably and think, well, I'm all right. It's for every one of us, for the Christian and for those who are seeking the Lord, for those who have no interest in the Lord, the warning is for us all.

Because you see, it uses the word there, salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The wake-up call is to the Christian as well as the non-Christian.

It's for everyone to wake up from the slumber that we are in. That's the warning that Paul is giving us here. Salvation is nearer than when you first believed.

[13 : 51] So the warning is here in light of time and seasons and the time that goes on so quickly. And the idea here is that every one of us should be looking around us and seeing the changing world in which we live.

When we see the way the Scripture teaches, the way it goes through from the Old Testament to the New Testament, every warning that the Lord is giving, as you think of the Old Testament, he's warning of things that are to come.

You see it fulfilled. You see the prophets' warning of invasions coming. You see the prophets' warning of a people turning away from God and there's going to be consequences.

And you see them fulfilled. You see nations coming and taking God's people captive. You see a Redeemer being prophesied.

You see the coming of the Lord Jesus fulfilled in the Scripture, what we've been remembering in this past week. The Lord Jesus born into this world as a man.

[15 : 00] You see that foretold. You see it fulfilled. And so it goes on. You see the warnings in the New Testament of a world that will go into decline and turning away from God.

We see that being fulfilled in our own day. But behind all of these warnings now is the Lord will come. The Lord will come again.

And so he's saying it is time to wake up. Every one of us needs to wake up. Too many people are just sleeping their way through life.

Christians included. We are not aware of living in light of the Lord's return. I'm sure as you've been enjoying meals in this past week and maybe just having a bit more time to rest and relax.

After a meal you go and sit down and you say I'm going to watch something on the television. I'm going to watch maybe the football. I'm going to watch a soap. I'm going to watch a movie.

[16 : 07] So you sit down to relax and watch it. How long has it taken until you're asleep? You've had a big meal. You're sitting maybe in a warm room and within 5, 10, 15 minutes you're away with it.

You're sleeping in that chair. We're out of touch because when you're sleeping you're not aware of things that are going on round about you. And there's times where you can just doze off like that. And it's good for us to get a rest, to get a sleep. But there's other times when there's no excuse for sleeping. And especially as we think of what Paul is saying to us here is not to sleep our way through life unaware of God, ignoring the warning of the gospel, ignoring all that he is saying to us. It is time to wake up because we're living in light of the return of the Lord. Have we been awake this last year or have we been sleeping our way through it?

There's an urgency in these words that as a people we have to take heed of. One person put it like this. In the midst of a generation screaming for answers, Christians are stuttering.

[17 : 33] Christians are sleeping. What a warning there is in these words for us. Because we get so complacent, so comfortable in life that we're not living in light of the imminent return of the Lord that it could be at any moment.

And when we lose that sight we lose that urgency in it all. So we are being called to wake up as a people.

The second thing we're being told here is to watch out. We see this in verse 12. The night is far gone, the day is at hand.

So let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. What are we doing with our lives?

That's the question being asked in this verse. And again, it's in light of the day being at hand. But you see here that there is the works of darkness and the armour!

[18 : 40] of light. the difference is there. And so how are we living our lives as we wake up of our slumber? What are we seeing around us?

What are we seeing in our people? What are we seeing in our communities? What are we seeing in our church? If it's time to wake up what are we watching out for?

Well, what are our works? Paul here is saying it is time then to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

It's about making sure that we are doing right with the Lord. Light and darkness are opposite. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says it as well.

He says it in chapter 5 verse 13, but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible. For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead and Christ will shine in you.

[19 : 46] Again, it's that warning of wake up. Wake up. See the light of Christ and let the light of Christ shine in you.

But he says arise from the dead. We are dead in darkness. That is the place that darkness so often represents in the word of God. it's our place of being lost.

Whether it's in this life or whether it's in eternity. It's a place of darkness eternally where there's wailing and gnashing of teeth. It's a place of darkness in this life when we are ignorant and ignore the warnings of the gospel, turn away from God, we are in darkness.

And so Paul is writing here to the Christians in Rome saying in the midst of this time that you are living, which was a time of crisis in so many ways, when they were being persecuted and all that was happening in the Christian church at this time, it was making so many turn away.

Or the danger was that they would turn back to the darkness. darkness. But he's warning them here, it is not a time to turn back. He's saying cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

[21 : 07] The armour of light, so it's this defence that you're putting on. It's this protection that you're putting on. The armour of light, the same as Paul speaks of in Ephesians chapter 6, the armour of God.

what we have available for us in the gospel. All the powers that we have when we see the powers of darkness that are spoken of so often in the scriptures, you also have the power of the light of the gospel.

The armour of light is what we have available to us here. And what he's saying is now is the time to trust in the Lord.

Watch out for what you are doing. Watch out for what is going on around you. Because every day there are people dying without the Lord who are going to a lost eternity.

Darkness and light are the opposite. And where do you want to spend eternity? Where do you want to be but with the Lord surely for all eternity?

[22 : 28] The forces of evil are all around us. It's a time of year when we can maybe watch many of these movies that portray good and evil fighting against each other.

James Bond was always a Christmas film back in the day. The forces of evil trying to gain the power of the world, control of the world, and the superhero coming in.

The same with any kind of superhero, like Superman or Batman or any of these things. It's always these two forces coming against each other. And it's far-fetched in so many ways.

But when you look at the scriptures it reminds us of the reality of this battle that is going on between the forces of evil and the power of God.

There is this darkness that seeks to overcome. But Paul is saying watch out for this. Put on the armour of light. And so we are to wake up of our slumber and recognise the seriousness of the day that we live in and to see that we are to be about the Lord's business.

[23 : 45] We are reminded of that this morning from Callum as well. And somebody who was reading this week put it like this, we have a duty in this life.

The kind of things that we are to watch out for in our lives. We have a duty first to the Saviour. That is what this word of Paul is bringing the people back to, to the Saviour who they are to see and know and love with all their hearts.

The Saviour who is the light of the world and to put on this armour of light to serve him faithfully who served his people, who gave his life for his people.

But they also said you have a duty to the saints, that is the people of God. The duty is to carry out your responsibilities to the church.

That's what we are being called to here as well, as we are to watch out for what is going on around us. When we come to the church, when we come to be part of the people of God, we make our vows, we make our promises to each other that we will look out for one another, that we will pray for one another, that we will encourage one another.

[25 : 04] That is what we are to be as the people of God to watch out for these things. We don't let the power of darkness come in to destroy these things, but that we put on the armour of light to guard us with one another.

They also went on to say you have a duty to sinners. You have a duty to the saviour, you have a duty to the saints, but you also have a duty to the sinners.

And that is the duty of the church, to let Christ shine in us and through us, to let that light of the gospel shine in to those around us, because our duty to sinners is to tell them that they are lost and perishing in the darkness of this world, but that there is a saviour who is able to save.

We are called to be a witness to those around us. So we are to watch out. We are to watch out in all of these relationships with our saviour, with one another, and with those who are lost around us. We are in that crisis of the hour because the day is at hand. But are we living in the light of the Lord's return?

[26 : 29] Are we witnessing in the light that the Lord could come at any moment? Are we looking out for one another in light that the Lord could come at any time?

So we are to watch out in all of these things. The night is far gone, the day is at hand, so let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

The final thing we see here is that we are to walk in a particular way. in verse 13, let us walk properly as in the daytime.

Let us walk properly as in the daytime. So here Paul is saying that our behaviour, the way we live, the way we walk, should be in light of being in the day, of being in the light.

I'm sure many of us know what it is to walk around in the dark. Maybe you're in your house and you get up and it's dark but you don't want to wake up anybody else so you leave the lights off.

[27 : 38] But as you're walking around, you forget that you've left something on the floor or you forget where a certain piece of furniture is and without recognising where you're going, you knock into it or you kick it, even worse if you're not wearing anything on your feet and you get a scream of ouch when that happens.

We're trying to do things in the dark we're not seeing. And that's the very thing the gospel speaks about. We're trying to live our lives apart from God, thinking we know where we're going and what we're doing, but all the time we're just groping around in the dark.

Because apart from him, we are in that darkness. And so we need to walk in this light, walk in the daytime, getting away from the things of the darkness, getting away from the things of this world and putting on that armour of light and walking in that way.

The Bible describes the sinful world in which we live in as darkness. And there's a contrast when we think of the Christian life as living in the light.

Paul asks that question, a rhetorical question in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 14. What fellowship has light with darkness?

[29 : 04] The two just don't go together. And so for us, it's important that we keep walking in the light and walking in the light of the Lord's return.

We think this world, or so many think this world, is progressive. progressive. It's found its way out of the darkness of Christianity, out of the dark ages which Christianity is.

But it's so not true. To go away from that is to go back into the darkness, to go back into the world, and to go back into the very things that the Word of God condemns.

darkness. The darkness that we see around us in this world is maybe becoming more and more prevalent, but we still have the light of the Gospel.

We still have the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because this world is in darkness. This world is in darkness concerning what mankind is like.

[30 : 16] We live in a world where so many will say, but I'm a good person. And yet the Bible says there is none who is good. We are ignorant.

The world is in darkness as to our purpose in this life. Where so many people will have their own goals, their own targets, living for self.

Whereas the Scriptures teach us our great purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. there is this darkness and there is this light.

The world is in darkness concerning death and eternity. Where the world says, well, death is either the end and that's it. Or you see so many saying, well, when there's death, then we all go to heaven.

And we'll all enjoy being together there. But the reality is so different. Where death usher's in eternity. And eternity in heaven is for those who believe, for those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 23] Because if you don't, it's darkness. darkness. And so the contrast is there for us. And which way are we walking as we come to the end of this year?

Are we walking in darkness? Or are we walking in light of the gospel? Are we walking in light of the Lord's return at any moment?

Martin Lloyd Jones in one of his books on Romans said this, the world would not go on living as it does for a second if it knew something about the judgment to come.

The world would not go on living as it does for a second if it knew something of the judgment to come. The Lord will come to judge.

We don't know when. We look forward to days and we live for days. We plan for days. We plan for things that are going to happen in the future.

[32 : 30] And there's nothing wrong with that until we leave God out of it. Until we put him away. Because then we're just planning for darkness.

But as we come to the end of this year, let us make sure whatever we have behind us, that before us we have the Lord. And that we are looking to him.

That we are trusting in him. Faith is living in light of what is to come. And what is to come is that the day of the Lord is before us.

we might not even get to Wednesday night's bells. Because the Lord could come. But are we living in that way?

The day is at hand. It is time to wake up. It is time to watch where we are and what's going on around us.

[33 : 38] and it is time to walk in the light. To put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. To walk with him that the darkness will not overwhelm us.

Let us pray. Lord our gracious God, we do thank you for the light of the gospel. We thank you for the light that shines into our hearts through Jesus Christ.

And we pray for even that light of armour of light to be ours in each and every day. That we would know your protection, your grace, your peace, your mercy with us.

Guide us Lord through your spirit. Guide us by your light and by your truth. Let them shine before us today and in all the days that may be ahead of us.

That we would know your presence and your peace upon us. As we ask all in Jesus name. Amen.

We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 25, the Scottish Psalter version.

[34 : 54] Psalm 25 you'll find on page 231, the first version of the psalm. We're going to sing from verse 4 to verse 6, the tune is Dennis.

A psalm that reminds us of just looking to the Lord, praying to the Lord, seeking his mercy upon us. Show me thy ways, O Lord, thy paths, O teach thou me, and do thou lead me in night through that in my teacher be.

For thou art God that does to me salvation send, and I upon thee all the day expecting to attend.

We'll sing from verse 4 to 6 to God's praise.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[37 : 05] Amen. After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my left.

We'll close with the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.