

Knowing the time - Sunday 29th November, 2015

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. ¹² The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. ¹³ Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.(Romans 13:11-14)

Beloved in The Lord,

Paul begins this passage exhorting us "Do this knowing the time." This immediately raises the question "Do what?" In order to answer this we need to look at the preceding verses. There we find that Paul encourages us to offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice and to not think and live in a worldly manner. (Romans 12) He then teaches us to submit to governmental authorities, to pay our taxes and dues where and when required. He also teaches that we are to pay respect where respect is due. He then reminds us of the greatest Commandment to love God with all of our heart and to love our neighbour as ourselves. If we do this then we will keep God's Commandments.

Then he writes: Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to waken from sleep. For as much as these words were needed in Paul's time, they are so accurate for today. These words are not written to unbelievers but believers.

So many Christian are asleep. They have rested their hands in their laps and are dozing in the warmth of God's grace. God weeps and Satan rejoices. The late songwriter Keith Green wrote a powerful lyric: "Jesus rose from the dead, and you, you can't even get out of your bed."

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. We begin a brand new Church year. We are preparing to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As we enter a new year, I encourage you to take on board Paul's letter. Let us make it our aim to know the time we are living in and to be clear about what we need to do.

This time we are living in has been labelled by some as the post-Christian era. This is a very sad description of this current time, yet accurate. We do not need look any further than our own community and Church to see how accurately this description fits.

How many children are being baptised and raised in Christian homes. How many youth are undergoing confirmation lessons? How many couples are getting married in a Christian ceremony seeking God's blessing? How many people regularly attend Church? How many regularly read the Bible and pray? How many take the Ten Commandments seriously? There are many young people growing up today who don't even know the Ten Commandments.

With every day that passes, we are sliding into greater darkness, because we are leaving God's truth. There are Churches that no longer preach God's Word Alone, but add all sorts

of human wisdoms and philosophies and even set up false gods and idols. There are Churches that have removed the crosses so as not to offend anyone. I could go on but I have no desire to do so. It is better to look at the solution than to keep on describing the problem. The solution is The Lord Jesus Christ.

Our mission is to understand the problem, and then to lift up the answer – Jesus Christ. Paul says that we are to put on the armour of light. Martin Luther said that we have to daily put off the old man and put on Christ.

Remember what Jesus said about light in His sermon on the mount? We read:
“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Mt.5:14-16)

Today we lit the first candle on our Advent wreath. It is burning brightly and it tells us that Christmas is near. It is in a prominent place where we can all see it. Our duty is to be like that candle. God does not want us to hide our faith, to keep it to ourselves, but He wants and needs us to shine brightly for Him.

This time of the year is a great time for Christians to remind people what this season is all about. Let us pray that God would give us boldness to proclaim the truth in love. Let us do a stock take of our own life and check what our testimony is like.

Last month I bought a beautiful candle to take with me to Perth as a house warming gift for some friends. The candle came with a sheet that had instructions on how best to care for it to ensure that the light would always shine well.

God has left us an instruction manual. He has given us His written Word – the Bible. This manual is alive and powerful. It contains all we need to ensure that our light burns brightly. It is important that we regularly read the manual and do as it says.

We also need to understand that there are powerful forces that blow against us, trying to extinguish our light. Satan does not rest, he labours day and night trying to spoil our witness, mar our testimony. He does everything he can to lull us to sleep so that we do not even know that he is working us over.

James tells us:

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:7-8)

and Peter writes:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in your faith..” (1.Peter 5:8-9a)

We need to understand that our enemy is real. He is not just a fable, he is a very powerful being, but we need not fear because if we are in Jesus, victory is ours. He that abides in us (The Holy Spirit) is greater than he that is in the world (Satan).

We need to understand the times we are living in and we need to understand that it is vital that we have strong faith. We are in a war with the rulers of darkness. A half-hearted, lukewarm, Sunday only faith will not cut it. It is of no use to either God or us. God needs us to be totally committed. We need to surrender all to Him, withholding nothing.

God did not withhold anything from us. He gave us His only begotten Son – Jesus. Jesus shed His blood for us, every last drop, because He loved us.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

God so loved and loves each one of us. How much do we love Him? We can answer this by the degree that we are happy to surrender to Him.

It is only when we totally surrender all to Him that we are able to stand firm and shine brightly for Him. If and when we surrender to Him completely, the eyes of our understanding are opened and we do begin to understand the times we are living in. This in turn motivates us to stay close to God.

The majority of people in the world do not understand the times and therefore they have little or no time for God. So many are living blindly, not even thinking about the fact that one day very soon they will stand before Almighty God in His judgement.

Let us understand the times. Let us understand the urgency with which we must spread the Gospel. Today more than any other time we can reach the whole world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have internet, satellite, radio, TV and many other exciting forms of media. We can reach places that we almost impossible to reach before.

Let us ask God to reveal to each one of us, what our role is. We all stand under the Great Commission. Not all of us are preachers, but we can all support God’s work. We all have money. We need to ask God when and where to sow into His Kingdom.

May we understand that the night is almost past, and the day is dawning. We need to put off all the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light. We need to live and shine for Jesus and His glory. May our lives be a beautiful testimony to His love and grace. Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.