



September 10, 2017

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“You Know What Time It Is” *Romans 13:8-14*

– What difference does it make that Jesus may return tomorrow? Does it impact our motivation to live for Jesus?

How many of you have ever seen a picture of a man standing on the sidewalk with a sandwich board that says, “The End is Near?” Maybe some of you have seen someone do this in real life. Some of the Christian board wearers might write “Repent, The End is Near” on their sandwich boards. I have heard many people say these doom forecasters are crazy. I have even thought they were nuts myself. However, today’s scripture passage from Romans reminds me that Paul said the very same thing. So did Jesus for that matter. In Matthew 4:17, we read that, ‘Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”’

So, as scary as some of the sandwich board wearers may look, I don’t think we should be too quick to dismiss the message, “Repent, The end is Near.” Paul, believed that the end of the world was right around the corner. According to Paul, if we believed that the end of the world was imminent, we might be nicer to one another. Do you believe it too?

I think if we really believe Jesus is coming back soon, we might be more inclined to live the way God wants us to. I agree with Paul.. Folks, we don’t have much time left. Even if Jesus does not return for another couple hundred years, how long does a person live? 70, 80, 90, 100 years? We have not been given a lot of time to live on this earth.

I know that no one really wants to think about death. Especially if it seems far off. Our culture tries its best to ignore one of the only certain things in this life. That is that one day, we will die. I can understand a non-believer being afraid to face death. However, we who believe in Christ, believe that death is not permanent. We believe in resurrection and eternal life because of our faith in Jesus. And we blessed individuals who accept this truth, and make our peace with it, receive a blessing. The blessing of a heavenly perspective. That is, the will to live the way God wants us to.

There is an older Tim McGraw song that came out in 2004 that speaks to this point well. It is called "Live like you were dying." You might remember it. The song is about a man who gets diagnosed with terminal cancer in his early 40's. Suddenly faced with his imminent death, he finally begins to live the way he ought to. He is a better friend, a better family man, oh and he finally reads the bible too. In the song he sings, "Someday I hope you get the chance to live like you were dying."

Unfortunately, many Christians spend a good part of their lives ignoring the clock of life, as if our ignorance of the time will somehow extend the years we have. On the other hand, God instructs us through Paul's letter to keep an eye on the clock so we know what time it is. And that is our motivation to keep making the hard calls to live for Jesus.

Speaking of living for Jesus, The past few weeks, I have been preaching from Paul's letter to the Romans. The sections that have been coming up in the lectionary are Paul's instructions telling the Roman Christians how to live life in Christ. The section that we read this morning, is the end of a section that Paul writes on doing good, and not evil. Paul urges the Romans, writing, "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." Paul is talking about putting our love into action by putting others before ourselves.

And how can we do this in a radical, life changing way? By our faith that Jesus will return soon. Paul writes, "Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. 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."

I seems as though Paul expected Jesus to return within his lifetime. That is a powerful motivating force! No wonder Paul was so busy trying to spread the news about Jesus. Paul wanted to make sure people knew that God's Savior had come, so that they would be saved on the day Jesus returned! Paul did not have a lot of time... every day could be the last day.

Most of us here have been Christians for a long time. Over the years, I suspect that a sense of urgency to tell people about Jesus has faded. After all, who hasn't already heard of Jesus? All you have to do is ride down the turnpike and you will see several large billboards telling about Jesus. All the information is already out there on the internet. Plus, it has been so long since Jesus said, "I'll be back." Why should we think that Jesus will return on our watch?

Even if you don't believe that Jesus will return in the next 100 years, for you, Jesus will return the moment you take your last breath. That's right, Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, that the when Jesus comes back, those who have died will come with rise from death, and, "we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." What this means is that for almost all of us, Jesus is returning within the next 90 years. That is not a lot of time folks! So let us use that as motivation to keep working hard for the Kingdom of God.

Paul reminds us, "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." None of those things are easy to do. Especially the not in dissension and jealousy part! Keeping your eye on the clock, knowing that your days on this earth are limited will help you stay in the light of Christ.

If you have trouble staying focused on the self-sacrificial Jesus lifestyle like I do, I have some reminders. You might want to write these points down. These points are practical suggestions that might be helpful to remind yourself to "understand the present time" as Paul puts it.

The first suggestion is to do some simple math. Take 100 years and subtract your current age from that number. If you are gifted long life, this might be how many years you have left to make a difference for Christ on this earth. This is not intended to terrify you, because the number might also be how many years you have left until you get to party with Jesus and other believers for all eternity in Heaven. This math exercise is designed to help you obtain the motivation to sacrifice your own desires and serve God like there is no tomorrow.

A second suggestion that might help you remind yourself that time is critical is to think about how many people do not make it to old age. It is a lot of people. Only God knows the day and the hour when we will be called home. As some are fond of saying, "Tomorrow isn't promised." That being said, God has goals for us in life. We read these goals in Matthew 22: Love God and Love your neighbor as yourselves.

That brings us to my third and final reminder that might help you to understand that we are closing in on our salvation. That is to remember that what we do in this life matters. God rewards us for living faithfully in this life. Sometimes we get so focused on our free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, that we forget the value of our choices.

We read in scripture that God rewards us for making good choices. In 2 Timothy, James, Revelation, and first Peter we read about the crowns that God will reward us with for choosing to faithfully serve God at our own expense. In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches us to forget about money, and instead follow Jesus in the way of self sacrifice. Jesus tells us that if we do this, we are actually storing treasures in Heaven that will never go away. And most directly, Jesus says in Matthew 16:27, "the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."

Salvation from death is a free gift we receive by faith in Jesus. But the salvation of our eternal soul is just the beginning. Every action and choice we make will stay with us in eternity. That is good motivation for me when I am tempted to choose myself first in this life.

To summarize the points, we don't have much time on this earth, and God rewards us when we choose God's way to live, loving God and others before ourselves. These are points that I remind myself daily, because I am tempted everyday to choose what benefits ME instead of what benefits God and others. I hope that these points might help you in your walk to remember the urgency and intentionality we are called to

have in life. That is the same motivation that Paul gives in his letter to the Romans. Paul reminds us that because of Jesus Christ, we are called to walk in the light, to be righteous, do no harm to anyone, and fulfill God's law by sacrificially choosing others over ourselves. And we are to do so "knowing the present time" because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Amen.