

You Know What Time It Is

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Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

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I will be preaching mostly from the letter of Paul to the Romans, paying particular attention to verse 11: "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;"

I'm a bit of a nerd. I like to look at things, specifically scripture, with a broad view first. In the passages today, the writers were speaking about use of time.

So I got to thinking about our use of time today, especially since we've had months to slow down our time due to the lockdown.

I came across the Bureau of Labor Statistics pre-pandemic survey on the time spent on an average work day. Americans work an average of 8 hours and 50 minutes a day. And for those working at home (pre-pandemic) that's 8 hours and 28 minutes a day. The lockdown statistics are just coming in and it turns out, while at home the lines get blurred between work and home life. We are working 48 minutes longer. Americans spend an average of 6-7 hours sleeping and over 8 hours working.

The rest of the time is spent on leisure sports, household activities, eating and drinking and other things. 1.1 hours are spent on caring for others, on an average day.

If we define our lives by how we spend each day, then it would have to be a life of work and sleep with little time in between to share with others because we are busy with household chores, sports activities or preparing meals.

Christians also get caught up in this concept of time at the church. Churches follow time through a church calendar. Today, we are in our 14th Sunday after Pentecost and on November 29th we begin a new time, a new year which begins with advent and continues until we reach Pentecost again at the end of next year. So we have days, months and years and this is how we live according to time.

And this day, we gather again at the same church place (or virtually) on a long, hot summer day to continue to do the work of Christ, to continue to get fed and hopefully to continue to carry out the mission that our foremothers and forefathers did in this church since its establishment, to bring the gospel to all peoples at all times. In the concept of time, this is how we relate to the stories in the bible.

In the book of Romans, Paul was speaking to a community of believers about the same thing we talk about today, about the love of God and fellowship among us during our time together.

Like those before us, the people of the Bible were aware of the passage of time.

They were not as detailed as we are today with clock-watching and tight schedules. They used to mark time by the duration of the seasons.

Time was more holistic for them. It's like they felt time, it was a part of their inner clock. All their time units were based on observation and experiences. So, the day was divided up into *watches* measured by the position of the sun in the sky.

If you read in Gen. 14 it says, "*During the last **watch** of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud.*" Time was measured by watches.

Years were counted by the cycle of the season, and months were counted from one moon to the next, not necessarily 30 days. By far the most important unit of time was the day and the most basic unit was intuitive experience. And early on, the Israelites counted the day from morning till evening or, counted the night in between from one morning to the next. And because they used the rising of the moon for festival observances, they later came to count the day starting from the evening, which is still the Jewish custom for today, sundown to sundown.

What is important for understanding the biblical view of time is the fact that days were not just counted, but were identified by their most significant events. Throughout scripture we hear phrases like, “the day of rejoicing,” “the day of salvation” and expressions that commemorate the quality of experiences for that day. Again, if we return to our time, the quality of experience of our days are spent binge watching, on the internet, tik-toking, and in traffic jams. Our experience of time is not joyful.

And lately we use phrase like, “the days of the pandemic” or “the days of lockdown.” We measure our time by events.

As time passed in the bible (no pun intended), time began to mean different things to different people. Understand that not many people in biblical times rebelled against God and Godly ways. This means all events and moon festivals and watches of the night and day were spent less on God. For instance, the Babylonians believed time to be a heavenly decree, fixed so firmly that even the gods were forced to submit to it.

They watched the constellations and like clock-work knew when good or evil will appear. When the moon is in the seventh house and Jupiter aligns with Mars... The stars were aligned and people had no connection to them or to their past, just submission. So people resigned to

fate, according to the stars, and they saw no ultimate purpose in human striving.

Why live to be good, the stars will determine our time.

However, the Egyptians, neighbors of the Israelites, didn't go for this cosmic notion. Time to the Egyptians was endless, a meaningless cycle of death and rebirth. The Egyptians also saw no connection to their past, everything was just a reincarnation. Their lives were meaningless in the eternal order of things.

So why am I giving you a history lesson on time? What does this have to do with us in church today? I'm telling you this because you need to know what time it is on your watch. You need to know what you believe about time before you get to know the time of Christ and how important it really is in our lives. You see, Paul was speaking to a group of Romans, the biggest empire with the most active and busiest of individuals.

They had no time to listen to what was coming, they only focused on the here and now. And some of them came from the Babylonian or Egyptian viewpoint on how meaningless time was so talking about God and what God was going to do in the distant future, was not something they had no time to hear. They may have even been tired of hearing the same old story. God gave them the

law from Sinai and he was their God and they were God's people and they were to keep his Law. Yea, yea, I get it.

The people vacillated between the promise and the fulfillment of law. You get tired of waiting sometimes for people who promise you something and don't pull through. Don't get it twisted. God was ever present with them. Every time they started to backslide, God sent a warning but also renewed the promise of grace for the future.

So, the past is a mirror of the future, showing the troubles and the opportunities that are yet to come.

This pattern makes us commit once again to God. God loves us so much that he sent Jesus, in His time. After a long age of waiting and despair, the people began to see the fulfillment of God's promise in the Messiah.

Finally, the time had come. And people were rejoicing. And then Jesus died. But, the resurrection brought about everlasting life. That promise still stands. At the time Paul was preaching, Christ was not long gone from his earthly presence and they believed he was coming back real soon.

So, Paul, in the letter to the Romans was telling people, "*you know what time it is*" No, it's not lockdown time. Paul was saying to the Romans, and reminds

us today, that the age to come is of goodness. It is the fulfillment of the law. What you are going through is a fulfillment of God's plan. We must be transformed in this process. We must put on the lifestyle of the age to come as we put on our own clothes. You know that phrase, all dressed up and nowhere to go? Well, we know where to go. But, are we dressed and ready?

Are we spending our time wisely? Paul tells us it is high time for us to wake up. It is gospel time. It is time to work and not hide. It is time when more is expected of us than in the times of our ignorance. It is time to wake up for the sun has been up a great while and shines in our faces. It is time to be a beacon of light in these times of darkness. Paul tells us it is a busy time. We have a great deal of work to do and God is calling us to it again and again. Know that the time is a perilous time.

We are in the midst of enemies and snares. It is high time to wake up. I know what time it is.

Paul tells us also to put on new clothes for the day. Take off those pajamas you've been wearing for the past five months and cast off the works of darkness. If you are undressed you are unarmed for the day. The graces of the spirit should be your armor to secure the soul from the temptations of the day. I know what time it is because

we wake up with new temptations every day. It is time to put on the spirit and grace of Christ. Jesus is the best clothing you can wear. It is decent, distinguishing, dignifying, and defending. I know what time it is, so take off those hopeless rags, for God has provided you with a new coat that is large, strong, warm and durable.

To prepare for the time of this new day, Paul tells us how to walk. I know what time it is when Paul says to live honorably. When we get all dressed up, we are not to stay at home in our own privacy. What have we good clothes for, but to go outside with them? Walk so as to please God honorably, not in quarreling and jealousy, so that we represent who we are in all we do. I know what time it is when we have to care for our souls and not our bodies.

And to do this Paul says, we must do it in love. We must owe no debt but the debt of love. The word love is often used to sum up the whole gospel, the whole meaning of life, suffering and death of Christ, the whole content of the Christian message is summed up in love. We even sing hymns that say, *“For they know we are Christians by our love.”*

The famous passage in Corinthians tells us that without love, no deeds-not even the greatest deed of giving oneself as a sacrifice-would count for anything. Without love we are nothing. The beauty about love is that one

cannot love by willpower alone. No one can tell herself, “Now I will love” and then proceed to love (believe me, I tried it). Love is beyond our control. Love is simply there.

I want to sum up this message this way: the more we wake up, dressed and ready for a new day, with love in our hearts, ready to go out there and work for God, the more we achieve freedom FROM our daily routines and stresses and give the freedom TO love others. I don’t know if you know this but, there is a divided world out there.

This is what Jesus was talking about in the Gospel of Matthew. He said whatever problems you are having with your spouse, your kids, your neighbors, your community, your church, go and fix it. And if you can’t fix it, find others who can help you along the way. Set aside your differences this new day and learn to love. Jesus says starting in verse 19, *“Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”* ²⁰*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”*

Notice he doesn’t say “I will be there.” His time is here and now. He says, “I am there among them.” He is here right now!

We have a new day in this church. I know what time is it when we wake up to the realities of this congregation and this community. It hasn’t been easy. God

knows this. We simply have to be prepared and glad that God chose us at this time to be a part of His calling in spite of the circumstance. Yes, it is time to wake up, dress up, walk out there, and begin to love one another as we all work in this time facing forward for the time to come, the day of the Lord.