

There's something about darkness that provides a level of mystery and protection. While the occasional bank is robbed in broad daylight, most criminals like to work at night. It's the dark of night that allows armies to invade and destroy. The cover of darkness provides just the right circumstances for people to feel free to do pretty much whatever they want.

But just as sure as the night brings darkness the daytime brings light. And then the darkness has to give way. While it's light criminals largely plan. Armies and soldiers plot but don't strike. And the light forces people to rethink their actions. Darkness provides a layer of invisibility that many people feel allows them to do many things they would never feel comfortable doing during the daytime.

Paul used this picture of darkness and light in the second lesson for this Sunday. Today is the first Sunday in Advent. You see the banner changed. Take note of the first candle, 'come'. As the light comes and takes over the darkness so too we are preparing for the light of Christ's second coming to take over the darkness of now. It's not a matter of if it will happen. The only unknown is when. Paul says that's just as sure as...

Darkness gives way to light
Time to get up
Time to get dressed

The sun rise is something so predictable people can tell exactly when it will happen. That moment is like a giant alarm clock for the world signaling a new day. The sun gets us up, energizes us, and keeps us going throughout the day. But as bright as the sun is, the spiritual side of us sees things differently. Spiritually speaking this world is in pitch blackness. Sin completely surrounds us. All that darkness can make us spiritually sleepy. It lulls us into a false sense of security about ourselves. I go to church, I give to church, and I volunteer. That means I'm not like those other people. Sin is their problem, not mine. I've got Satan beat because I didn't fall into too many really bad temptations today.

If it isn't the false sense of security of what we've done it's the false sense of security based on how long it's been. Paul wrote these words approximately 1,950 years ago. What's one more day to enjoy ourselves before we get serious about God? The sun will come up tomorrow? I'll deal with it all then. Right now I'm focusing on Christmas and the shopping lists I've got, the parties to attend, and how swamped I am at work. I'll get to it in January.

It's time to get up from sleep to the reality of the times we live in. Paul warns us, **"The night is nearly over, the day is almost here."** Jesus has promised he's coming. He's bringing the finality of what he accomplished on Calvary. He's going to bring to conclusion the salvation of us all. A great and final deliverance awaits those that believe in Christ as their Savior. Their darkness will be permanently gone and they'll live in his light forever.

Right before these verses Paul explained what living after Christ saved you was going to be, a life of debt. Not a debt owed to God to pay him back for saving you. **"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another."** It's time to get up from your spiritual sleep and love as long as you live. Love God and love neighbor. Live recognizing what Christ said about his coming is true and the need of others to know. We must constantly speak as if Christ could return literally at any moment. But we must also speak as though he might delay for a considerable length of time. Because both are true we have work to do in sharing the gospel and we've got time to do it. But time is not indefinite. Now is the time to get up because as Paul says, **our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."**

Getting up for school always was a little challenging for me. I had to set the alarm across the room so I wouldn't turn it off and go back to sleep. I suppose mornings are that way for a lot of people. Kids who got to bed too late the night before are a handful to get up. Maybe you have to call from the bedroom door a couple of times. Slowly they stir, not anxious to open their sleepy eyes. But eventually you see they're up, they're awake. Of course that's half the battle. They're up, but now it's time to get dressed.

I laid out my clothes the night before so I could just grab them on my way to the shower. Didn't matter if it was dark or light I was just grabbing what I had set out beforehand. One thing I never had to set out was my sinful nature. That always is with me no matter what I'm wearing. I can try to cover it or wash it off, but I can't. And you can't either. Your sinful nature is with you just as surely as clothes cover your body. The list of sins Paul assembles are things your sinful nature just loves to get involved in. Some you've done, some you've maybe only thought about doing, and some you've stayed away from so far.

Probably no other holiday emphasizes excess better than Thanksgiving. How many of you thought sometime on Thursday that you had eaten more than you should? People crave excess. Eating turkey isn't wrong. Just like enjoying a few drinks with your friends isn't wrong. But it's easy to go too far, to eat or drink too much. Indulging to excess is sin. And it leads to more, especially drinking too much. Have too many drinks and your defenses are lowered, senses are dulled. Suddenly your impulses take over and things happen. You go too far. Temptation is all around. Something will drag you into a sexual sin of some kind. From there it's not too far to jealousy and dissension as Paul describes. Relationships suffer, marriages can be ruined, and families might not speak. Sin affects every single person from the strongest believer to the worst unbeliever.

Paul offers the solution. It's time to get dressed. **"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."** It's a world of sin but we remember who we are and what we are. We are children of God clothed in Christ Jesus' rightness. This first happens for many at baptism. **"All of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ."** There the robe of Christ's righteousness is applied. It brings all the blessings of Christ's life. Your baptism buried you with Jesus so you would be raised to life with him. He's your Lord. He's your Savior. He works redemption and reconciliation for you with the heavenly Father.

Wearing the robe of righteousness also means something for your everyday life beyond being saved by Christ alone. It means a holy life is no longer an option for you. Because the day is almost here it's time to **"put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."** You need this armor to live right now while it's dark, to go into battle against the evil of darkness. To fight the battle once the light comes is too late because that's the arrival of Christ. Now is the time God has promised you energy and power to fight. We live our lives awake and prepped for battle. We're wearing the armor of light, the armor God himself gives to us, the armor of Christ. With that we're ready to do battle and share the gospel with those who need to hear it.

Tonight when your head rests on the pillow there will be no doubt in your mind the light will come. It's not if, but really only when. Today let there also be no doubt that Christ will come again in glory. It's not a matter of if, but when. Darkness will certainly give way to the light. Even though it's hard to see through the darkness, Jesus will surely return with full love. So it's time to wake up and love your God and love your neighbor. And it's time to get dressed so that you can go out and love clothed in the righteousness of Christ your Savior.