

97-05-11b

We're ready now to resume our study of the principle of watchfulness that Paul introduces in Romans chapter 13. He has been, of course, throughout the letter, emphasizing righteousness by faith. He has moved in this application section of his exhortation to talk about the obligation that we have for love.

And he is now directly addressing the issue of our hope, the motivation that compels us to think about these things and to prioritize these things. And he says in verse 11 of Romans 13, Do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. And we see the use of this language that deals with darkness and light.

And he says that the night is far spent and the day is at hand. It's another one of the classic, already, not yet, tensions that we find in Scripture. We are sons of God, we have the right to be called sons of God, and yet we are exhorted to become sons of God.

We have eternal life, we've been granted eternal life at the point of salvation, and yet we are encouraged and exhorted to take hold of eternal life, to receive eternal life. We have been qualified for an inheritance with the saints in light, and yet we are constantly exhorted and warned and encouraged to take hold of that inheritance and not lose it. There are things that we have by right, that we have by position, that we take hold of and experience.

The kingdom of light is coming. Jesus Christ is going to return, he's going to sit on the throne of his father David, he's going to rule for a thousand years, and there are wonderful blessings up to and including the personal presence of Jesus Christ that attach to that phase of God's plan. We can sort of get a preview of coming attractions, we can start to enjoy the benefits and the blessings of the kingdom now.

We can partake of that light, we can enjoy the presence of Jesus Christ now. We don't have to wait for the historic fulfillment. And so, as the day of our ultimate deliverance draws nearer and nearer, we can live as though we are already in the light.

We can put on the armor of light. He says the night is far spent and the day is at hand, but he says go ahead and start living as a child of light. Put on the armor of light.

Don't wait for the coming of the kingdom to start figuring out what the light is all about and how to live in it. That's our goal and our task now. We've seen in the words of the Lord to the Old Testament saints that they have been called as servants of the Master to work the Master's will, to pursue the Master's goals.

And blessed is that servant who, when his Master comes, is found so doing. The Master will put him in charge of all of his goods. So, there is a coming day when there's going to be something that needs to be administered, that needs to be fulfilled by way of service for the Master, but we start learning that ahead of time.

He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much. And those principles that Jesus taught to saints living in the Old Testament economy under the Old Testament covenants and promises, those principles apply equally well to us. And so, there is a sense in which... Well, we see this applied all the time.

When Paul writes to Corinthians and he says, haven't you learned to judge issues and matters that come up between believers? Don't you know that you're going to judge angels? Don't you know that you're going to have discerning and deciding authority and responsibility in the future? So, start exercising and learning how to do that now. If you can't settle disputes amongst yourselves and you're going to go take that before unbelievers, how do you expect to fulfill those functions in the coming kingdom? So, we live with one eye on the present and also being aware of the future. We know that our treasure is laid up in heaven.

We know that things are going to be revealed in the day of judgment. We know that we should seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and the things that pertain to this life will be added to us. So, we are heavenly minded, but we are also of some earthly good because being heavenly minded makes us good and equips us and prepares us to practice in this life the things that will find their ultimate fulfillment in the next.

So, Paul says, be constantly aware. It's time to wake up. All of us start out in a sleeping state, kind of like the ten virgins.

But there is a time when a call is issued. We become aware of the call and we want to be prepared. We want to have oil in our lamps, as it were.

We want to wake up out of sleep and be aware our deliverance is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, for that reason, in the light of those truths, let's cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Let us walk properly as in the day, as in the day. He doesn't say that we are in the day yet, does he? He says the night is far spent and the day is at hand, but he says let's walk as though we are in the day. Not in these six things, these three pairs of vices that he presents here that describe believers who prioritize their own interests and their own selfish desires instead of recognizing the time and being aware of the coming of the day.

He says in verse 14, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. It's very interesting to me. He doesn't say don't have lusts.

He doesn't say don't feel the pull of lusts. Don't be tempted by lusts. He says don't make provision for them to fulfill them.

He acknowledges that they're going to exist. He recognizes that we're not yet in the day. We are still living in a time of night, but we are to live as children of the day.

We are to walk with the armor of light. And so we are going to face these pulls. We're going to face the desires of our nature and pressures from the outside, and we are called to live as though we are past that.

And we have the power to do so because we have God's word and we have God's spirit. We have that armor that Paul describes in greater detail in other passages. But this is a consistent theme.

Old Testament saints were called to live in the light of that evaluation, live in the light of the return of the Master. We saw Jesus point this out in Matthew chapter 24 and Matthew chapter 25. Turn with me to Mark chapter 13.

Mark chapter 13 beginning at verse 33. Once again, Jesus introduces this section in verse 32 the way that He did in Matthew. Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.

Take heed, He says in Mark 13, 33. Take heed, watch and pray, for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country who left his house and gave authority to his servants and to each his work.

Notice all the servants don't have the same work. Each has been assigned his own work. And each has been given authority.

And He commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the Master of the house is coming, in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning. Lest, coming suddenly, He find you what? Sleeping.

And what I say to you, I say to all. Watch. Gregoreo is the verb here.

I find this very fascinating because who was sitting and listening to these words? Among others, Jesus' disciples are there. These are going to be the apostles in the church age. But this particular exhortation is addressed to them in the present.

He says, watch, you don't know when the Master of the house is coming. In the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning. And as we talked about in the first session, the literal idea here is that Christ is going to return bodily for them at the second coming.

We know that for us Christ is going to return in the air at the rapture. And we don't know the day

or the hour of either one of those events. But we are to live in the light of it.

We also recognize that there is a sense in which that imminency applies to us because most believers are going to be dead at the point that Christ returns. Most church age believers have already passed away. And so there is not an issue of alertness for them.

Their life was or should have been lived in the light of the end of their life, which corresponds with the return of Christ. That's when they are going to be raised and meet the Lord in the air. That's for them the conclusion of their life.

They live their life and the next thing they see is Christ returning and they meet him in the air. So for all intents and purposes, the rapture for us is as close as the end of our life. And we don't know the day or the hour when our life will end.

I was made acutely aware of this when I was a midshipman. And as a plebe, as a 17-year-old, one of my classmates seized up and dropped dead running laps over in McDonough Hall or running laps around the athletic building. It was a bad day outside and they were having people run laps indoors.

And a 17, 18-year-old classmate of mine seized up and fell over dead as a stone. And we just don't know what the allocated span of our life will be. There's nothing like getting the alumni magazine ship made and looking in the back and finding that classmates and people from classes that graduated long after I did are dying.

They're dying in plane crashes. They're dying in accidents. They're dying of maladies that afflict them.

And you just don't know how much time God has allocated. And so we have to live in the light of the fact that there is a sense of urgency. That the return of the Lord is as near as the end of our life.

And we just don't know. I came into, as you know, I've been digging around and finding albums by the Statesman Quartet. I really love to hear them sing.

The bass singer for them for the vast majority of their time was a man named Jim Wetherington. He wrote many very wonderful gospel songs. He had a beautiful, rich bass voice.

And from the earliest recordings, he is distinctive. And he sings with his heart. And he enjoyed what he did.

And he exercised his gift faithfully and well all through his life. In 1973 at the National Quartet Convention, the Statesman were not scheduled to appear. But they were present.

And in sort of an ad hoc fashion, they were just quickly asked, well, would you all stand up and

sing something? They had recently released an album. So Hovey Lister and the Statesman, including Jim Wetherington, stood up and sang four or five songs that night. And there was a man out in the audience that just happened to catch this on tape.

Nobody knew it was going to take place. But he had one of the early models of a cassette recorder with him. And he just turned it on and captured this.

Well, it is one of the greatest performances. You can hear Jim Wetherington singing. And he sounds as good as he ever did.

He sings a song called The Lighthouse. And he sings Why Me, Lord. And it's beautiful.

And you feel like here is a guy in his prime. Well, Jim Wetherington died that night at the National Quartet Convention in his hotel room. And he wasn't near old enough to be passing away.

He still looked great, sounded great, and was faithful in the exercise of his calling. And, in essence, died with his boots on. I mean, he just, the very last song that he sang that night was with Rosie Rozelle, Oh, What a Savior.

And you can hear that deep bass voice in that song. And it's just great because you know that they sung that with all their heart. That should be the way that we live our lives.

Not fearing the end of it, but anticipating that the coming of the Lord is as near as the end of our life. That's what Paul is talking about here. And that's what Jesus is talking about when you get to Mark chapter 13.

And he says, we don't know the day or the hour. The angels in heaven, the Son, only the Father knows when these things are all going to come to culmination historically. But he says there is a task that's been assigned.

It's not just a matter of wondering when something's going to take place. It's a matter of fulfilling a task in the light of the fact that that return is imminent. And that's the way that Jesus pictures it and characterizes it in all of these parables.

The virgins have a responsibility to have their lamps ready. The servants have a responsibility to fulfill their task that's been assigned them by the Master. He doesn't just talk about the fact, well, isn't it a mystery that nobody knows when I'm coming back.

He says, you've been assigned a task. You've been given a function to perform, a mission to fulfill. And the fact that the timing of the return is uncertain ought to make a difference in the way you fulfill that task.

Down at Buckner, it's recently been decided that we're going to move. Buckner Baptist Benevolence's, the administration portion of that has coexisted with the Children's Home here in

Dallas for decades. It's always been co-located.

In fact, it grew out of the Children's Home that was established by R.C. Buckner back in the last century. Well, they decided recently that the Children's Home needs to have its own identity and the administrative portion, which oversees all of the Buckner ministries in the state of Texas, needs to move away. And we've got a lot of computer equipment.

We have a lot of office equipment. We have a lot of things that happen in that building on the grounds of the Children's Home. And once that decision was announced that we're going to be moving, that has changed some of our priorities.

I'm not as concerned about cleaning up and organizing some of the spare equipment and the old equipment that we have in the computer room. I had initially had a plan that we would find ways to store and to sort and to do things with that. But now, in the light of the fact that we're going to be moving, that's not so important because that's going to take place anyway at the move.

I'm going to be organizing it into a new place. So the knowledge that something is going to take place, and I don't know exactly when it's going to happen. I just know it's going to be soon.

But it has changed my priorities. I'm much more concerned with things that are going to survive that transition, the communication links that we have and so forth, and the integrity of the machines that we have that are going to stay with us when we go than I am about the physical building itself and some of the things that pertain to that building. That knowledge that we're going to move makes a change in how I do my job and how I view my priorities.

Some things just aren't as important because they're going to pass away when I move out of that building. And it reminds me of this principle, that in the light of where we're going, in the light of the Lord's return, and in the light of what the Master has assigned us by way of calling and by way of task, certain things ought not to be so important to us, accomplishments in this life, things that are going to stay here when we leave. And that's what Jesus is pointing out, and he says, when this man goes to the far country and leaves his house and gives authority to his servants and to each his work and commands the doorkeeper to keep watch, he says, Watch therefore, in verse 35, for you do not know when the Master of the house is coming, in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning.

And there's a sense in which this applies not only to the actual coming of the Lord, but also to the coming of the test of whether or not we're living in that light. And I find it fascinating that these four times of day are mentioned here in Mark 13, 35, because the disciples are listening to this. Peter and James and John and the others of the twelve hear this, and this principle is going to be put to the test in their lives immediately.

If you look here, Jesus says, you don't know when the Master of the house is coming, at evening. Well, look at Mark 14, verse 17. Shortly after Jesus teaches this principle, in the evening, he

came with the twelve.

It was evening when they celebrated the Passover in the upper room. And there's a test at this time in the evening. There's a test to see are they living in the light of what Jesus taught.

And that test comes in the evening. They began to be sorrowful when Jesus said, one of you who eats with me will betray me. And in verse 19, they began to be sorrowful and to say to him one by one, is it I? And another said, is it I? There's a question.

Are they faithful? Are they in tune with the plan of the Master, the tasks of the Master? And there's uncertainty about that. You look down in verse 29. Jesus tells him in verse 27, all of you will be made to stumble because of me this night.

For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter said to him in verse 29, even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.

Peter had confidence that he would not fall, he would not fail, that he was in tune with these things. But notice, he's already completely missed what Jesus said, that after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee. All the disciples seemed to forget the constant reminders that Jesus gave them that he would be raised and that he would meet them in Galilee.

After Jesus' death, they didn't know where to go. They didn't know what to do. They didn't go back and think about what Jesus had revealed to them.

He says, I will meet you in Galilee. And that's where he does eventually meet them. But here's Peter in the evening, failing the test.

Here's the sense in which the Master has come. The Master has presented the test and Peter's failing it. He has false confidence.

He has an idealistic view of himself that doesn't hold up. Jesus says, assuredly I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times. Peter spoke more vehemently, if I have to die with you, I will not deny you.

And they all said likewise. So here's the test in the evening and this is the result. You look in chapter 14, verse 32.

After the meal, after the upper room. This is at midnight. What did Jesus say? You don't know when he's coming.

In the evening, at midnight. Here they are at midnight in the garden of Gethsemane. And he says to his disciples, sit here while I pray.

And he takes Peter, James, and John with him. And you know the story in the garden when

Jesus is praying and preparing himself spiritually for this greatest of all possible tests. The disciples fall asleep.

They fail the test at midnight. And Jesus comes and says, could you not watch with me one hour? Verse 38. Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And it's our job, even though we have a willing spirit, to work on the flesh. That's why we're here after salvation.

To not just have great ambitions, to not just have high goals, but to work that out. To learn to bring the flesh into submission, to not fulfill its lust. That's like Paul is talking about in Romans 13.

But here the test comes at midnight, and they fail it. Jesus said, you do not know when the Master comes. It may be at evening, it may be at midnight.

What's the third one? It may be when the rooster crows. What happens this night when the rooster crows? We know that from Mark chapter 14, verses 66 through 72. This is Peter's threefold denial.

If he had been alert, if he had been paying attention to what Jesus said, this would already have rung a bell in his mind. We failed at evening. We failed at midnight.

Here I am failing when the cock crows. And what was the fourth thing that Jesus mentioned? Or in the morning. And what's going to happen that following morning? Jesus is going to be led up the hill and crucified.

And where are the disciples? They're not there. At some point John shows up beneath the cross with the ladies. But the other eleven disciples are nowhere to be seen.

All of these that spoke more urgently and said in verse 31, if I have to die with you, I will not deny you. They're not there when Jesus is dying in the morning, at the third hour, nine o'clock in the morning, when he's led up and nailed to the cross. So, it's a reminder to us that it's not just the coming of the Lord, and by and by, when the Lord appears, I hope I'm ready.

The test is now. The test is every evening, every midnight, every cock crowing, every morning, when our priorities are tested, when our true goals and true heart is revealed under pressure, in the fire of trial that Peter talks about in his epistles, which he knew about firsthand. We can measure ourselves.

We don't have to wait and say, well, where did I stand when the Lord returned? We can measure ourselves every day. Where did I stand today when the pressure hit? Where did I stand today when the fire came on? Did I live up to my high words and my noble ambitions, or did I stumble and fall? And if we fail, it's a great comfort to know that the Lord has not come back yet, and we still have some time. We still have an opportunity.

Look at what Peter did after this great failure. He is one of the greatest of the apostles. He's written inspired scripture.

He's founded churches and led countless believers down that narrow road and through the narrow gate that leads to life because he didn't let his failures discourage him. You can't think of anybody that had a greater failure in his life than Peter, and yet look at the recovery that he makes. He picks himself up and moves on forward, and God does incredible things through Peter.

So this is the principle of watchfulness. This is the principle of alertness. We don't know when the Lord is coming back.

We don't know when the test is going to come. Many times we get blindsided. We're going along thinking all is well and we're making progress, and all of a sudden we realize that we have just committed a colossal blunder or have had a terrible failure.

And were we alert? Were we ready? It shouldn't sneak up on us. It shouldn't happen. But that's why we're in this life.

We're learning how to not be taken unawares. We're learning through our own failures how to pick ourselves up and move forward by God's grace and by God's power. We saw in our scripture reading this morning, Acts chapter 20, verse 25 and following, when Paul is talking to the Ephesian elders and he says, Watch, be alert.

There's going to be tests after I'm gone. People are going to come in. People from your own number are going to rise up and teach false things and will lead away the flock of God.

And he says, You've got to be faithful. You've got to be alert. You've got to watch.

And in the same way that Paul says, This is my last conversation with you and I want to stir you up by way of reminder. I want to emphasize to you that this has been my constant message to you all along for the three years that I spent with you. I harped on this day and night by my example, by my teaching, by my ministry to you to be alert, be watchful, be ready.

Think about why you're here. What God has tasked you with. Peter says the same thing.

We saw this Friday night in 2 Peter chapter 1, verses 12 through 15, where Peter says, I know that my time is short. I know that the Lord is calling me home. And he says, I wanted one more time to stir you up by way of reminder.

He says, For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, even though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Paul says the same thing in Acts 20.

The Holy Spirit has revealed to me that I'm not going to see your face again. And I want to remind you one more time to be alert. Be aware.

Don't be caught sleeping. Don't be the servant who didn't consider the possibility of the return of the Master. Turn over to Ephesians chapter 1. Another letter of Paul.

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 1. Paul once again in the exhortation phase of a letter to believers. The imitators of God as dear children walk in love, put away fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness. Let it not be named among you as is fitting for saints.

Other vices in verse 4. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, or covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. He's talking to believers in the fifth chapter of this letter. And he says your inheritance is on the line.

If you're not alert, if you're not awake, if you're not aware, there is something to be lost. Just like Jesus said about that servant. His portion is going to be appointed with the hypocrites.

What's his portion? That's his allotment. That's his inheritance. What inheritance does a hypocrite have? None.

Revelation says you inherit the smoke of the fire into which Satan and his angels and the beast and the false prophet and the unbelievers have gone. That's where the inheritance is. That's the portion.

The person himself doesn't go into that fire. It's not loss of salvation, but you forfeit inheritance just like Esau did by not valuing it, by not being aware of what it means and what its opportunities are. No people who succumb to these things.

And what does it mean? This tells us that if we find ourselves as a fornicator, an unclean person, a covetous person, if we are enslaved to the pursuit and the satisfaction of our own desires, we have not taken advantage of what God has given us. It's our fault. We're not enslaved.

We're not entrapped by those things. We choose them. It's our choice.

And when we choose that, we choose against what God has for us in terms of fulfilling his purpose and reflecting his glory. And therefore, we choose against what he has for us by way of future opportunity and future reward. He says, Let no one deceive you, in Ephesians 5, 6, with empty words.

For because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. It's a very interesting phrase there at the conclusion of verse 6, the sons of disobedience. This is a string of genitives here.

Epi plus the genitive, this wrath of God comes upon the sons, and then you have of

disobedience, which is also genitive. A common way to translate this type of phrase in Greek is the disobedient sons. It's very commonly translated that way.

And yet we don't find it here because a lot of people don't realize that Paul is talking about believers here. And it's common to associate the wrath of God with those who are not saved. And so these people are phrased as being the progeny of disobedience rather than sons who are disobedient, who are characterized by disobedience.

But it's equally legitimate to translate that. He says, Let no one deceive you. Why does he say, Let no one deceive you? Because we are sons, and we don't want to be deceived and wind up being one of these disobedient sons upon whom the wrath of God descends.

And he says, Don't be a partaker with them. Don't get your inheritance where they're going to get their inheritance. Have an inheritance that belongs to the saints of God in the light.

Don't lose your inheritance because you chose against it, because you weren't alert, because you were asleep. These are powerful incentives. They're powerful reminders to us throughout Scripture.

You can see this same thing. Remember what Paul said in Acts 20, 32, that the Word of God is able to give us an inheritance. He holds that out as a potential to the Ephesian elders, as a motivation.

You see the same thing in 2 Peter 1, 10, and 11. And we saw this passage also on Friday night. In 2 Peter 1, when Peter is stirring them up by way of reminder, he says, Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.

For if you do these things, you will never stumble. And so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. That abundant entrance is supplied to those who are diligent.

We're not saved by diligence, are we? We don't escape the lake of fire and claim the redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation that comes to us through Christ by diligence. Diligence is the call to believers. Diligence is the call to the servants who await the Master's return.

Be diligent. Be faithful. Don't be caught napping.

Don't be found beating one's fellow servants. Don't be found pursuing one's own interests in drunkenness and revelry. He who lacks these things is short-sighted, has been blinded, and has forgotten that he's cleansed from his old sins.

He's forgotten that he's been redeemed for a purpose. So all of these passages remind us that there's a lot on the line. Looking ahead and being aware that the night is almost over and the day is at hand ought to be a powerful incentive to us every day.

It ought to remind us that there are some things not worth pursuing. We don't need to build sandcastles while the tide is out. We don't need to be investing a lot in some of the things that pertain to this life.

We need to be primarily concerned with the things that please our Heavenly Father, with the things that reflect our relationship with our Savior, Jesus Christ, whose return is imminent. Paul reminds us of this in 1 Corinthians 16, verses 13 and following. In 1 Corinthians, he's in the middle.

It's kind of an odd place in the letter to say this. He's in the closing where he's mentioning different individuals and so forth. And yet he says right in the middle of this, in 1 Corinthians 16, 13, he's been talking about Apollos and whether or not he's going to come and see the brethren and so on.

But he says in verse 13, watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love. Same type of emphasis we've seen in so many of these other passages.

I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas that is the firstfruits of Achaia and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints. He says, I urge you that you also submit to such and to everyone who works and labors with us in the light of what's coming. Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

Be aware of what the true labors are, what the true goals are. That's what we find in verse 16. The work and the labor that Paul pursues is the business of the Master.

1 Thessalonians 5, verses 1-11. We know in the Thessalonian letters that we have a lot of direct references to the rapture of the church and so forth. And in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul says, Concerning the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves know perfectly about the day of the Lord, that it's coming.

And he says in verse 4, You, brethren, are not in darkness so that this day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness.

Therefore let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober. Be clear-headed, be clear-minded. For those who sleep, sleep at night.

And those who get drunk, are drunk at night. That's self-fulfillment, self-centeredness, pursuit of things that are our own agenda. Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

This is the armor of light that Paul talks about in Romans 13, isn't it? He talks about faith and love and hope right here in verse 8 of 1 Thessalonians 5. That's the triad of Christian virtues, and each

of those interacts with the other. There's not great faith that doesn't express itself in love and that isn't motivated by hope. And faith is the key to fulfilling our call to being declared righteous, to being declared worthy, to having that declaration, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

All of these things work together. And if we're not expressing love, our faith is not genuine. Read James.

Those works that he's talking about that are an expression of faith are works of love. It's a labor of love. It's putting ourselves out in the light of our faith and in the light of our hope and recognizing that it is to this that we have been called.

Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation, for God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain deliverance through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. This is fascinating because we tend to think, well, wake or sleep, that means, well, am I in the rapture generation or did I die before the Lord came? But look at the context. What is sleep in this context? You are not in the darkness so that this day should overtake you as a thief.

Let us not sleep as others do. Let us watch and be sober. Paul's not saying, let us not be dead as others are, is he? He's saying, let us not be unaware of the time and of the call.

But it's a comfort to know that whether we wake or sleep, we all as believers are going to live together with him. The challenge is not whether or not to seize that life with him in the future. The challenge is to be awake, to not be asleep when we enter into that next phase of God's plan.

He says in verse 11, therefore comfort each other and edify one another just as you are also doing. And he goes on with other exhortations that very closely parallel what we find in Romans 13. But this is our great opportunity and we have to... Have you ever been laying there having been asleep and you need to wake up and you can't get yourself awake? Sometimes you realize that you're dreaming and you can't get out of the dream.

You say, I've got to wake up and it's like you're under water and being held down and you can't seem to get free. Well, you don't make that struggle until you recognize that you're asleep and that you need to wake up. Maybe you hear an alarm or you hear a noise and you know you've got to get up and react to that.

The first thing is to recognize that you're asleep. You don't struggle to wake up until you realize that you're asleep. Then it isn't always an immediate thing where snap, you're now wide awake, fully conscious, 100% of your faculties.

It doesn't typically happen that way. We have a process of waking up and coming back to full consciousness. Sometimes you wake up from a dream and it takes you a few seconds to realize that things that occurred in the dream are not reality.

You wake up and for the first few seconds you think in terms of that being real and it takes a process to wake up. Well, Paul gives us the wake up call. He says we have to realize that we start out asleep and that it's high time to wake up and function as a child of light.

That's the first step, is to recognize that we need to wake up and to start bending our efforts in that direction. Then by pursuing the Word of God to realize what is real and what is not, what's important and what's not, what's a part of our calling and what is not, what is something that's an investment in the future and a fulfillment of our eternal purpose in God's plan and what is a selfish goal, what is a personal goal that doesn't reflect the eternal, doesn't reflect the business of the Master for a worthy servant. We wake up every time we evaluate and set aside some of these things and let them go and concentrate on the things that last, on the things that will be approved when the Lord returns, will be approved on that last day of our life when we sing our last song.

Hopefully we sang it just as well as we ever have, that we finish the race at the highest speed that we ever attained. We don't slack, we don't see the tape in sight and say, well, I'm almost there, I can coast, but that we are diligent and think about the day being at hand. That's what Paul is calling us to at the end of this chapter of Romans 13.

That's what the Lord Jesus Christ calls all believers to in His teaching and in His parables. It is the message of Scripture throughout that we are not our own, we are bought with a price and our purpose is to glorify God in what we do and in the way we live our lives. It's a powerful call, it's a wonderful opportunity.

Hopefully we are motivated by the possibilities like that soldier in combat. It's not the threat of wrath that motivates us, it's the opportunity to serve, it's the opportunity to fulfill that highest and greatest call to express love, to reflect the glory of Christ. It's the positive side of motivation that should encourage and strengthen and motivate us every day to evaluate and be sure that when the Master comes He will find us so doing.

Let's close in prayer. Father, thank You for the wonderful way that You have provided for us. You've granted us the presence of the Holy Spirit.

You've granted us the opportunity to have fellowship and communion with Yourself and with Your Son through the learning and the building up that takes place in our souls through Your Word. We pray that the things we've seen this morning will motivate us, that they will be used by the Holy Spirit as a sharp sword to reveal the thoughts and intents of our hearts, to show us where we can shift our priorities and can be more awake and more alert and live more and more as children of the day. We pray that we will be equipped with the armor of light that You have graciously provided for us and that with the resources that You have placed at our disposal with Your divine power at work in us, we will fulfill our calling and we will be found without spot, without blemish, fulfilling the calling that we have been given in whatever specific area it may have come and that as we move out of this phase of Your plan and into the next, we will be equipped, we will be

prepared, we will know who we are, why we're here, and we'll be able and ready to reflect Your glory and accomplish Your purpose in all of these things.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.