

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

Can you see this in your mind's eye? Maybe it happened in your home. A woman wakes up her husband in the middle of night. "I think it's time," she says. He scrambles out of bed, pulls on his clothes, helps his wife finish getting dressed, grabs the pre-packed overnight bag, and off they go to the hospital to have their baby. It was time they leave. Ten hours earlier wouldn't have been right. Next week would be way too late. It was time, high time to leave.

Today we begin another church year. It's Advent, the time of preparation for Christmas, time to get ready to receive the newborn King symbolically as if he were being born this year for the very first time. He's not here yet, but we know he's coming to be our Savior from sin. Of course, getting ready to celebrate Jesus' first coming reminds us that he promised to come back for a second time. In fact, our readings for the first three Sundays in Advent don't even talk about Jesus' birth. Our Gospel for today, you'll remember, says Jesus could come back at any time. So **IT'S TIME, HIGH TIME** that we get ready. Today's Epistle Lesson pictures our getting ready for Jesus as waking up for a new day.

**IT'S TIME, HIGH TIME...I. to wake up** (11-12a) Our text says: *11The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber.* But what does this mean?

Certainly not physical sleep—you wouldn't be able to understand these words if you were physically asleep. Ah, but because physical sleep is something we all have in common, 'sleep' makes a marvelous metaphor. Remember when Jesus' friend Lazarus died? Jesus told his disciples Lazarus was asleep, and he was going to wake Lazarus up (John 11). But that doesn't fit here either. We're not physically dead, and yet these words are addressed to us. Also, this verse can't mean, "Hey, wake up. Come to faith in Jesus," because it is addressed to people who already believe. (Besides, "sleep" is never used in the Bible as a metaphor for "spiritually dead.") | Ooohhh, how about this? 'Asleep' can mean 'inactive toward someone, apathetic.' Although the Lord neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4), the psalmist implores him, "*Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever*" (Psalm 44:23). "We need your help, Lord, but you seem apathetic toward us, so inactive." Hey, that works—except in this case we're the apathetic ones! (See also Mark 13:36, 1 Thess 5:6.) *11The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber.* Satan loves it when we get lulled into spiritual sleepiness, inactive toward anything sinful—like snappy words or snippy attitudes; like when we apologize but don't really mean it; like when we don't care whether someone else is a follower of Jesus or not, as if they can get to heaven without him. So then 'waking up' is the same as daily dealing with our

sinful flesh, like shaving. If you don't want stubble on your face or your legs, keep shaving. If you don't like your sinful flesh coming back again and again, keep cutting it off with the razor of God's law. Call a sin a sin. But sometimes we are slow to recognize that we are letting the stubble of the sinful flesh grow wild. That's when we need a fellow Christian to help us recognize when we have slipped into a conduct or a speech pattern or an attitude which is sinful. We need people to say, "Wake up!"

We need people to help us feel the urgency. *12The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. Which day?* Judgment Day, the day of the Lord. So if 'the day' in this text means Judgment Day, then 'the night,' which we are in right now, is our present age. And it's called 'night' because it is under the dark curse of sin and death. The Lord wants us to sense that it's the last hour before dawn comes, that the night of this sinful world is coming to an end. \*You know what it's like to be up very early, right? Perhaps you got up early to go on vacation, or deer hunting, or just every day for work. Watching the dawn is like seeing a battle: the darkness works vigorously to hold onto the earth, but the fingers of daylight begin to extend up into the sky, and you know that the sun will soon rise, conquering night. The Lord wants us to spend our lives eagerly anticipating this change from night to day. **IT'S TIME, HIGH TIME** to wake up.

Now that you're awake, **IT'S TIME, HIGH TIME... II. to get dressed** (12b-14) *12So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor* (or better 'weapons') *of light.* (Both NIV and KJV say 'armor,' but Greek says "instruments, weapons.") Here's another beautiful picture for our Advent preparation: "getting dressed" means taking off and casting aside the garments we have soiled. 'The deeds of darkness' are what people like to do in the dark or in private because they don't want anyone to see what they are doing. Have they forgotten that the omniscient eye of God sees everything? Acts that cannot bear the light of day are to be shunned by us at all times, but especially now that the Great Day of final redemption is so near.

We said it's high time to get dressed. We want to dress our life with pious behaviors. But as you well know, trying to walk upright with God makes for a steady conflict against the forces of darkness. It's like fighting a battle after the enemy surrounds your camp, firing at you from all directions. And, as if that's not bad enough, somewhere in your camp is a traitor, your own sinful flesh. You are fighting the enemy from without and from within. That is why you must wage your spiritual battle without ceasing, particularly in view of the fact that the night of this world will soon end. **Salvation is about to dawn!**

Thankfully the apostle Paul elaborates a little about those deeds we are to put off like a dirty shirt. He mentions three pairs of activities which cannot stand the light of Judgment Day and in which sincere Christians will not indulge. The first is <sup>13</sup>*orgies and drunkenness*. In our day orgies are thought to be sexual. But Paul had in mind what we would call “drinking parties” with way too much food. It isn’t wrong to enjoy the blessings of God in the company of others. But Paul is talking about over-indulging, like when you crave excess, when you purposely go out to “tie one on.” Too much alcohol makes it easier to act loud and foolish and disorderly. We know what this is because we’ve either seen it or done it. But no more. Sincere Christians won’t keep indulging this kind of behavior when they are watching for Jesus.

If we don’t put off dangerous behaviors, they could lead to the next pair of perils Paul mentions: <sup>13</sup>*sexual immorality and debauchery*. The picture here is of a herd of animals running around without restraint. Our society loves unbridled indulgence. And it’s getting worse the more people gain access to all kinds of evil content through gaming, the internet, television. And then they find ways to act out what they’ve seen. *Sexual immorality and debauchery* constitute a real danger for us Christians because they lure us away from our Savior.

This second pair of forbidden activities can lead to the third pair: <sup>13</sup>*dissension and jealousy*. Enjoying fleshly lusts leads to divided households and destroyed relationships—today we call them dysfunctional households. Our Savior warns us about these three pairs of vices, because he knows how susceptible we are to these temptations.

So Paul calls out: <sup>13</sup>*Let us behave decently, as in the daytime*. We used to be able to count on people to behave better during daylight than after dark. But in our day people are so brazen and unashamed of wrongdoing that they gather in studios or establishments, or gather by apps, clapping or hooting or texting approval when someone does something that God puts off limits to us. If you read T-shirts and sweatshirts like I do, you may have noticed how many people are proud of going against what God teaches in the Bible. But this is nothing new. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah (3:9) complained about his own people: “*The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sins like Sodom; they do not hide it.*” Paul and Isaiah urge us not to behave like them because they are bringing disaster on themselves.

Paul suggests one way to behave decently: <sup>14</sup>*don’t think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful flesh*. You’ve done this, haven’t you? You plan how you can be alone at just the

right time, so no one will see you eat something you know you shouldn't eat, take something that isn't expressly yours, look at something that the Lord couldn't look at with you. All these cannot bear the light of the Great Day, they cannot stand in the sight of the holy God. That is why our loving Savior teaches us: "Forgiven people of God, don't be like that. Put off such dirty laundry."

But God isn't about just forbidding us. He also encourages. In our text he says, <sup>14</sup>"*Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.*" When you clothe yourself with Christ, you know you are fully forgiven, and you wear what he stands for. Put a pair of Jesus shoes on your feet, and you'll go only to places where Jesus would be. Slip into your Jesus jeans, and you'll remember to keep your lower half for your spouse only. A nice Jesus shirt will cover your top half, helping you recall that your heart belongs to the Lord. A Jesus shirt gives women something extra: a measure of modesty. What a fine virtue in this world which likes clothes to be tighter than they should be. Dear sisters, when you dress modestly, you are helping men not to think about how to gratify the desires of their sinful nature. Thank you. Men, put on your Jesus shades, not to conceal your line of vision, but to direct your eyes at only what Jesus wants you to focus on. Jesus shades can also help us all resist the urge to buy what we can't afford or won't use.

Now that we are awake and dressed, **IT'S TIME, HIGH TIME... III. to look forward to a new day** <sup>11</sup>*because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.* "Wait a minute. Don't we have salvation already?" Well, technically, all we have is a promise of salvation. But we're dealing with the one true God here. When he makes a promise, he keeps it. It's good to see salvation as something we already have. But some day we won't need the eyes of faith to see salvation. When Jesus returns, we will see our salvation (eternal life) with these very same eyes that we are seeing each other with today. That day is nearer now than the day when the Holy Spirit first gave us the eyes of faith. Let's never regard the Lord's second coming as "sometime in the dim and distant future." It could come at any moment. So **IT'S TIME, HIGH TIME** that we wake up from any backsliding, that we be wide-awake in spiritual matters, that we be alert and attentive in our fight against temptation, so that we don't get snared by our former sins or by new desires. Soon the dawn of eternity will break and we will see our glorious Savior.

Isn't it great to start a new church year? **IT'S TIME, HIGH TIME** we wake up, get dressed, and look forward to the new day of Christ.