

1 Peter 4:7–10 “The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer. ⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰ Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.”

Introduction: June 6th, 1944, marked the beginning of the end of World War II in Europe. It was D-Day, the day when the Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy in France, a day that would be etched into the history books forever. The air was thick with tension as soldiers from the United States, Great Britain, and Canada prepared to storm the beaches and take on the German defenses.¹ The sound of machine guns and explosions could be heard for miles around as the fighting began. The beach was a scene of chaos, with soldiers desperately trying to find cover and avoid being shot by the enemy. It was a bloody battle, with many soldiers losing their lives in the first few minutes of the landing.

Despite the initial resistance, the Allies were able to gain a foothold on the beach, and gradually began to push the Germans back. The battle raged on for hours, with soldiers fighting with all their might to gain ground and defeat the enemy. As the Sun began to set, the Germans were forced to retreat, and the Allies had secured their position on the beach.

But the battle was not over...

In the weeks and months that followed, the Allies continued their advance across France and Germany, facing stiff resistance from the Germans at every turn. The fighting was brutal and intense, with both sides suffering heavy losses. The Allied soldiers were constantly on the move, pushing forward and engaging the enemy in fierce battles that often lasted for days at a time.²

As the months wore on, the tide began to turn in favor of the Allies. The Germans were forced to retreat, and the Allied soldiers began to make steady progress towards Berlin. The fighting was still intense, but, something had changed. Something was different now.

¹ Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day: June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (Simon and Schuster, 2013).

² Barrett Tillman, *D-Day Encyclopedia: Everything You Want to Know About the Normandy Invasion* (Regnery Publishing, 2014).

Finally, on May 7th, 1945, the war in Europe came to an end. The Germans surrendered unconditionally, and the Allied soldiers rejoiced. The streets were filled with cheering crowds, and soldiers embraced each other in celebration. It was a momentous day, a day that marked the end of a long and bloody conflict, and the beginning of a new era of peace and prosperity in Europe.

And many WWII students believe that even though VE-Day, the day of total victory, did not come until May 8, 1945, in a real sense, the war was over on June 6, 1944. The sudden arrival and inbreaking of Allied forces signaled the inevitable, inescapable end of Axis powers and their grip on Europe, despite the many days of dodging bullets, the blood and mud of war, and some setbacks.

And in a similar sense, two-thousand years ago God himself in the incarnate Son invaded our shores—and that sudden inbreaking of his Kingdom has experienced resistance, apparent setbacks, attrition in the ranks, heavy losses, and danger at every corner.

But that arrival of God's Son and his Kingdom has already brought the victory over sin and death and hell. And now we await the time when Christ will return and finish the job. Until then the Christian church marches forward, house-to-house, town-by-town, winning hearts and minds, facing opposition, and proclaiming His victory until he comes.

In our Romans text today, Paul will address two issues—the need for the Christian to live in the knowledge of Christ's return, and the need for the believer to live in light of that final victory and judgment.

1. We must live in the knowledge of Christ's imminent return. Rom 13:11 "Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."

Paul uses several metaphors for "knowledge" here—being awakened from sleep, and the night giving way to the dawn. Let's deal with the first analogy as "knowledge of." And the second analogy is altering and arranging our lives for decency, putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and putting off the old ways. Let's look at that first idea of awakening to the reality of Christ's return.

Background: One aspect of using the "night" and "day" language here, simply refers to ordinary daytime and nighttime. Rome in particular, would have gone mostly dark when the Sun went down—and it is during these hours that the worst criminality in their society would take place. Imagine a city without about 1–3 million people in it, no local police force or law enforcement as we know it today. At night small hovels and domiciles in the Roman slums would be boarded up and fortified, waiting for the dawn to come. Lawbreaking typically abated during the waking hours of full sunlight. So Paul here uses this as an analogy—the believer is to live in stark contrast to the world's system, fully awake and alert.

Christians are to recognize the "time" in which they live—it is a wicked age that has undergone the shock of having the Kingdom of God break in and interrupt this runaway train of depravity. We live in two overlapping ages—this present age of darkness and the inaugurated Kingdom age which began in Christ's cross, resurrection, and ascension.

- **The Kingdom is Promised:** Psalm 2:8 "I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession." Isa 9:7 "The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Armies will accomplish this." The prophets looked forward to a day when David's Son would inherit the nations, the ends of the earth.
- **The Kingdom is Announced:** Matt 4:23 "Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom." The Isaiah passages were surely how the people in Jesus' day viewed his announcement of the gospel of his Kingdom. The sudden arrival of another realm clashing and colonizing this world with the life and power of heaven.
- **The Kingdom is Inaugurated:** Acts 2:33 "Therefore, since he *has been exalted to the right hand of God* and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear... 5:31 "God exalted this man to his *right hand as ruler and Savior*, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Phil 2:8–9 "he humbled himself by

becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.”

- **The Kingdom is Proclaimed to All Nations:** Matt 24:14 “This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matt 28:19 “Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations.” And so the church sets about to proclaim the Lord’s death and salvation until the whole world hears.
- **The Kingdom is Already but Not Yet:** Heb 2:8 “you crowned him with glory and honor ⁸ and subjected everything under his feet. For in subjecting everything to him, he left *nothing that is not subject to him*. As it is, *we do not yet see everything subjected to him*.” At first this may seem like an apparent contradiction. How do we reconcile it?
- **The Kingdom Awaits the 2nd Advent of Christ:** 1 Thess 4:16–17 “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” At Christ’s second coming, he will bring the dead in Christ who are with him in heaven, he will raise the dead in Christ from their graves, and he will transform the living in Christ that we may always be in the presence of the Lord, enjoying the pleasures that are at his right hand ever more.
- **The Kingdom will be Consummated in the Defeat of God’s Enemies:** 1 Cor 15:23–26 “But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he abolishes all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be abolished is death.” All those forces that opposed God’s gospel of the inbreaking Kingdom of His Son will be brought low, defeated and this means that death itself as the punishment for sin is finally defeated and abolished.

What does it mean for us to live in the knowledge of Jesus’ imminent or inevitable return? It means that God’s Kingdom—the Kingdom of Heaven that was promised in the prophets, announced at Jesus’ birth and on display in Jesus’ ministry, inaugurated at his death and resurrection, installed as God’s rightful King on David’s throne—this gospel of the Kingdom of heaven must be proclaimed in all the earth before Jesus returns—but at his return, he will complete and fully accomplish his reign over all the earth. And we await the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There is nothing in this world, nothing it has to offer, nothing it could entice or seduce you with that can diminish your hope in this assured reality—nothing in this world can take the place of Jesus’ heavenly Kingdom of which you are now a citizen, a member, a co-heir with Christ, and an evangelist of.

As believers, we are to *know the time*—understand the days we are living in. Be informed about the inaugurated and soon-coming Kingdom of Jesus because we are nearer now, Paul says, than we have ever been to receiving our salvation when he comes.

2. We must conduct our lives in light of Christ’s imminent return.

Rom 13:12–14 “The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.”

He uses the illustration of the “night and the day” here to contrast this present age of darkness and the Kingdom of God which has been both established and is awaiting final fulfillment—but in light of this we are to cast off the deeds of darkness, put on the armor of light (the truth in Christ). This translates very practically now into walking in decency and he gives us just a handful of examples of actions to avoid:

- Sensual drunkenness—be sober and self-controlled.
- Sexual promiscuity—deviant sexual behavior: the sexual revolution and its failure to liberate anyone.
- Quarreling and Jealousy—rancor, dissension, driven by the fires of jealousy and envy, greed, thanklessness.

Now, we didn’t cover the progression of the Kingdom a few minutes earlier for nothing. Understand that the believer whose heart and conscience has been cleansed, experiencing the forgiveness and salvation that is only in Christ—that believer should live in the knowledge of and the resolute assurance that we will be with Christ when he comes, or we will go to Christ when we die.

But the Scripture also teaches us that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. We mentioned a few weeks ago Galatians 5 where Paul mentioned the “works of the flesh”—in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit “envy, drunkenness, partying and carousing anything similar...I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such

things ***will not inherit the kingdom of God***" (Gal 5:21). That is, those whose lives are characterized and driven by this behavior—which is the evidence of unbelief—will have no inheritance in God's Kingdom when it arrives.

Elsewhere, Paul says to the Corinthians,

1 Cor 6:9–10 "Or do you not know that ***the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God***? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

Again, to the Ephesians he insists,

Eph 5:5 "For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, ***does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ*** and of God." What is the evidence that we have been truly saved by grace? And if there is no appreciable difference between those who name Christ as Savior of Lord—and those who reject him and refuse his offer of salvation—then how or in what sense could we even claim to be His? To have an expectation of being His forever when he returns for us?

Paul says to the Romans "The Christian must know the times in which they live—expecting the imminent and inevitable consummation of God's Kingdom when Jesus returns. And our lives in the meantime must be lived in light of His return. Will we be the people who show evidence of Christ's grace and his truth or will there just be no evidence in support of such a claim?"

Conclusion: In Victor Hugo's novel "Les Misérables" the character Jean Valjean is transformed from a hardened criminal to a compassionate and noble man. After spending 19 years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his starving family, Valjean is released on parole and wanders the countryside, destitute, desperate, filled with resentment and rage. He is taken in by the Bishop Bienvenu, but while staying with the Bishop, in a moment of weakness, Valjean steals the Bishop's silverware and runs. He is quickly caught by the police and dragged back to the Bishop's home, where he expects to experience severe punishment.

And in that moment when the Bishop could crush him and send him away forever, he experiences something quite surprising.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed Bienvenu, looking directly at Valjean. "I'm so glad to see you. I can't believe you forgot the candlesticks! They're made of pure silver as well. Surely you could sell them for more than 200 francs. Please take them with the forks and spoons I gave you also." Dismissing the officers and leaning in, he whispers to Valjean as he hands him the silver candlesticks from the mantel, "Do not forget. Never forget that you have promised to use this silver to become an honest man.

Jean Valjean my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. I have bought your soul from you. I take it back from evil thoughts and deeds and the Spirit of Hell, and I give it now to God.”

The Bishop’s grace utterly transforms him. Not only does Valjean discard the clothing of his prison, exchanging it for a tailored business suit—but he uses the money to open a factory and adopt an orphan, risking his life to save others. In the end, he is transformed by saving grace, living in the gratitude of salvation. He even saves and forgives the man who pursues him to the death—showing the same mercy that was shown to him.

And this is what the Christian life is supposed to look like. Standing condemned, deserving the punishment—and yet we instead receive amazing grace. And that grace inspires us to put off the old life and put on the new.

Verse 14, here it is again, “ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.” This is what believers who live in the knowledge of Christ’s return and whose lives are conformed in light of that imminent return.