

## Romans 13:11-14 - The Day is Near <sup>1</sup>

**Before the Lesson:** Make copies of the handout, “Romans 13:11-14, First Nations Version” for the Transformational Exercise. An optional exercise is to make copies of the handout, “The Conversion of Augustine” to be used in the Information session.

**Fellowship question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

When did you last travel through a tunnel?

How often do you think about the second coming of Jesus? (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Very Often)

### Information

- Write on the board the word Advent.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. For four weeks, we relive the anticipation of the coming of Christ. For this year, we will use four passages from the Epistles - three passages from Romans and one passage from James. These are not “Christmas story” passages such as traditional Advent passages read from the synoptic gospels. They give us an opportunity to put ourselves in the time of the early Church a generation or two after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. They are still under Rome’s dominion, the Temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed by Rome, and many Christians face persecution from Jewish religious leaders and from political leaders.

Before his ascension, Jesus informed his disciples that he would return. We call the season before Christmas, Advent, a Latin word meaning “coming” or “arrival.” It refers to the first arrival of Jesus. Believers anticipated the return of Jesus almost immediately. The Greek word for this second advent is *parousia* [*paa-rou-SEE-uh*].<sup>2</sup>

- Write the word Parousia on the board.

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2024. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

<sup>2</sup> “The time when Jesus Christ will return to judge humanity at the end of the world...Greek, literally, presence, from *paront-*, *parōn*.” Source: “Parousia.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parousia>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2024.

Theologically, the study of the end times is called *eschatology*. [*es·kuh-TAA-luh-jee*]<sup>3</sup>

- Write the word Eschatology on the board.

During this year's Advent, we will look at the anticipated second advent, the parousia, and learn from scriptures and interpreters of scripture that explain eschatology.

Paul refers to this hope and expectation of Jesus' return in his letter to the church in Rome.

- Have a class member read Romans 13:11-14.

“These verses make clear that Paul's ardor for the future and for Christ's return did not cool in the course of his ministry. The almost casual mention ( v. 11b) that the final consummation was now closer at hand than when he and his Roman readers set out on their course of Christian faith shows that he remained convinced that it was close at hand.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet, “Paul elsewhere entertained the possibility that he might pass away prior to Christ's *parousia* (see 2 Cor 5:1-10; Phil 1:20-24), so his belief about the proximity of Christ's return was not immanent, but more like an intense notion of nearness.”<sup>5</sup>

Let's listen to two passages from other letters written by Paul. Listen for how Paul thinks he and/or his readers may not be alive when Jesus returns.

- Have a class member read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.
- Have a class member read Philippians 1:20-24.

If Jesus could return at any moment, the believers must “wake up.” What do you think Paul means by that?

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<sup>3</sup> “1. A branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind. 2. a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind. *Specifically* : any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment.” Source: “Eschatology.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eschatology>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1985), 211.

<sup>5</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Romans*, The Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 454.

[Optional exercise: Distribute the handout, “The Conversion of Augustine.” Here is the story of a young man who “woke up” based on his reading of Romans 13:13-14.]

Here is the truth. Jesus did not return in Paul’s lifetime. Jesus has not yet returned in our lifetime. So, what does this mean for this area of our theology? What does it mean as a stimulus for the right behavior?

“If Paul did think that [Jesus would return in his lifetime], and it is clear that he did, then he was wrong. Christ still has not returned, almost two millennia later. Of what good then are Paul’s reflections based on a timetable that was clearly in error? Does the value of his ethical reflections, tied to that return of Christ, not diminish in value in proportion to the additional delay of that return?”<sup>6</sup>

Then, the end of time—whether of the world or of our individual lives—forces us to focus on the future. For now, we are in a time tunnel. We can see the light behind us and the light ahead of us. We long to live in the light again.

“Christians, in Paul’s view, are creatures of the future, not the past. To it they are to look, and by it they are to act. The centrality of that forward-oriented stance of Paul is made clear when we see that verse 13, with its call to live now in conformity with God’s future (the dawning day) and not in conformity with the evil past (the night), recapitulates the basic theme Paul laid down in ...12:2: Do not be conformed to this age, with its evils, but be transformed into the newness which the future will bring.”<sup>7</sup>

“Paul felt the need to add some further exhortation to remind his readers of the eschatological restraints upon their daily conduct...With the step of faith/commitment, his readers had entered upon a completely new phase of historical existence. It was not that the new had completely left the old behind; on the contrary, the conditions of the old still held sway. The point was rather that even though they lived still within the old they had resources from the new which enabled them to live by its power.”<sup>8</sup>

“If it is true that the new age had dawned, that new life was bursting through the frost of a new world in winter, then, he insists, it’s time to wake up.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Achtemeier, 211.

<sup>7</sup> Achtemeier, 212.

<sup>8</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8, 9-16* Word Biblical Commentary, 2 volumes (Dallas: Word, 1988), 2:792.

<sup>9</sup> Bird, 454.

“Paul writes with the urgency of someone waking people in a burning building, telling them that it's time to flee down a ladder that is about to be put up against their window. In a world of moral darkness, Paul tells his audience to wake up, get up, and run to safety.”<sup>10</sup>

The urgency that surrounds the belief of the imminent return of Jesus has come and gone in the Church's 21 centuries. Some groups of believers have latched on to this conviction so that it is their main focus. Other groups of believers don't seem to give the second coming a second thought. What has been your experience in churches and in your personal life?

“The note of immanent expectation is strong...Even in the nineteenth century, before infant mortality was so dramatically reduced and life expectancy so dramatically increased, a passage like this could readily be interpreted in the light of the ever-present threat of a life cut short in its prime...Ironically, in a modern nuclear age, it becomes possible to believe more realistically in the imminence of the end, without the passing of the decades reducing the foreboding or expectation, but rather intensifying it for each new generation.”<sup>11</sup>

Facing the imminent end of one's life drives some persons to reconsider their beliefs, priorities, and behaviors. How have you experienced this or seen this in others?

Paul insists that the belief that the return of Jesus was imminent should affect the believers' behaviors today.

“Since they belong to the old unredeemed age, in both their natural appetites and their social context, they must remain on guard lest they find themselves enticed to embrace the darkness.”<sup>12</sup>

“Paul wants fleshly desires to be interdicted at the cognitive root. Do not give them forethought or the prospect for provision lest one darkly reasons one's way toward them. As a wise pastor once told me, it's always easier to sin the second time, so don't think about how to do it the first time!”<sup>13</sup>

“You can tell a lot about a person by learning not just what they are willing to fight for, but what they are eager to flee from! ... Everyone has to be wary of the addictiveness of feelings of power and influence over others and how it can distort our character. One should not just avoid these like avoiding dog poo on the sidewalk; you should flee from them like a great white shark chasing after you in your swimming pool.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bird, 458.

<sup>11</sup> Dunn, 2:792, 793.

<sup>12</sup> Bird, 455.

<sup>13</sup> Bird, 456.

<sup>14</sup> Bird, 459.

“With the final words of v. 14, ‘make no plans’ that cater to the desires of the flesh, Paul lumps together the vices itemized in v. 13b. Such behavior offers evidence of a mindset oriented toward ‘the flesh.’ ... In the ‘now time’ of the Christ event, to engage in such behavior is to live as if the ‘now time’ had not begun.”<sup>15</sup>

“In v. 14 Paul again calls on the Romans to ‘put on’, but this time the object is not weapons (as in v. 12), but ‘the Lord Jesus Christ.’ This is a striking image because ‘put on’ appears regularly with clothing (e.g., Mark 1:6; 15:20), with weapons (as above), and with attributes or virtues (e.g., 1 Cor 15:53; Luke 24:49). But reference to ‘putting on’ an individual is unusual... In a remarkable exposition of this statement, Chrysostom<sup>16</sup> compares it with a saying of his own time about being ‘wrapped up’ in another person, connoting love and constant devotion.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Transformational Exercise**

- Distribute the handout, “Romans 13:11-14, First Nations Version.”

Let’s read our passage together as translated by Indigenous Americans.

Close in a prayer something like this: *The Day is near. Clothe us with Jesus. Blanket us with your love. Help us to walk the way of love as Jesus did. Set us free. Make us whole. Amen.*

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<sup>15</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Romans: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2024), 379.

<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom was an ancient church father, 347-407 AD.

<sup>17</sup> Gaventa, 379.

**Romans 13:11-14**  
**First Nations Version**

So keep walking the road of love. This is what is needed for the times we live in. The night is almost over. The first rays of the new day are already shining!

For the day when the Creator will finish setting us free and making us whole is now closer than when we first began walking this road.

We must turn away from the path of darkness and put on the war garments of light.

Let the light of this new day guide you into a path of honor.

We must walk away from wild drinking parties, from sexual impurity and improper desires, and from arguing and jealousy.

Instead, wrap our Honored Chief “Creator Sets Free” [Jesus] the Chosen One around you like a blanket, and do not let your broken human desires control you.

**Romans 13:11-14**  
**First Nations Version**

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## The Conversion of Augustine<sup>18</sup>

Augustine's life as a young man was characterized by loose living and a search for answers to life's basic questions.

He would follow various philosophers, only to become disillusioned with their teachings. For nine years he was associated with the Manichean sect. But he gradually became aware that Manicheism was unable to provide satisfactory answers to his probing questions.

At this time, Augustine was teaching rhetoric in Milan. He went to hear the preaching of Saint Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. At first he went only to hear Ambrose's eloquent style of speaking. But the Bishop's preaching led Augustine to a new understanding of the Bible and the Christian Faith.

Some time in the year 386, Augustine and his friend Alypius were spending time in Milan. While outdoors, Augustine heard the voice of a child singing a song, the words of which were, "Pick it up and read it. Pick it up and read it." He thought at first that the song was related to some kind of children's game, but could not remember ever having heard such a song before.

Then, realizing that this song might be a command from God to open and read the Scriptures, he located a Bible, picked it up, opened it and read the first passage he saw. It was from the Letter of Paul to the Romans. Augustine read:

*Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarreling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.* --Romans 13:13-14

Reading this scripture, Augustine felt as if his heart were flooded with light. He turned totally from his life of sin. He was Baptized by Ambrose during the Easter Vigil April 24, 387. His friend Alypius and his son Adeodatus were Baptized at the same time.

Later, reflecting on this experience, Augustine wrote his famous prayer: *You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.* He went on to become a powerful influence on the spirituality and theology of the Christian Church.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.midwestaugustinians.org/conversion-of-st-augustine> Accessed 11-28-2024