

## Understand the Present Time

✧ **Salvation is nearer now.** (vv. 11,12)

✧ **Put on the armor of light.** (vv. 12-14)

In the name of Jesus Christ, our coming Savior and King, dear Advent Christians:

What do “Star Wars,” spies and full parking lots have in common? All can get lost in a crowd. Satellite pictures of crowded parking spaces all look the same unless your car is hiding in there somewhere. Spies can quickly disappear into crowds. And the “Star Wars” technology with which President Ronald Reagan threatened the former Soviet Union, was an advanced way to send up space junk to confuse intercontinental ballistic missiles into exploding harmlessly in space before they hit the U.S.

It’s the same tactic the devil uses to lull our souls to sleep. If he gets everyone crying, “Wolf!” no one pays attention to the real alarm. To turn eyes and hearts away from God’s warnings about Judgment Day, Satan worries people about polar bears and penguins on melting ice caps. Then God’s far more serious “inconvenient truth” about global burning get lost in crowded parking lots of rusty humanism.

We desperately need the Holy Spirit’s guided missile to zero in on our foolish hearts if we’re ever going get ready and well prepared for the coming of Christ our King. It’s high time to wake up from slumber and **Understand the Present Time**. Simple as it seems, even Christians forget that...

✧ **Salvation is nearer now.** (vv. 11,12)

Did you know that falling asleep in a sermon can be deadly? A young man named Eutychus was nodding off in an upstairs window while Paul preached on and on until midnight. Some people worry they might start snoring or drooling. Eutychus fell down and died. (Acts 20:7-12) Jesus allowed Paul to raise him. And right now Jesus is sending His dear Holy Spirit to raise our sin-dead souls to life.

*“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”* The Lord compares the dark sufferings of this sin-cursed life to the night which hides the glories of heaven. We are to live and love as those who already have one foot in eternity. We’re stepping out of a sinking boat onto the shore of paradise. Get set to spring ashore and be done with death forever.

*“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”* Listen! The Master blacksmith is pounding down the rusty iron of life’s little day. He keeps heating the metal red hot, then hammering away as it cools. God’s skillful care keeps us heating in adversity as wave on wave of anguish sweeps over our families and relationships, over our nation. Between disasters it sometimes seems that life just plods along in dimwitted boredom – especially if you think it’s been billions of years since the “Big Bang” and an overheated planet will eventually slime away the human race. If first there was nothing, then nothing blew up and became everything, then how can life be worth living? But our Lord Jesus, Friend of sinners and Judge appointed by God, wants us to see with the eyes of faith that His energy is moving this life along to the Last Day as rapidly as possible. God patiently bears with all the suffering caused by sin in order to give all of us sinners every opportunity to repent before it’s too late. (2 Peter 3)

But **Understand the Present Time**. There is an end to all this. *“Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”* “The Day” will dawn when God’s work of sanctifying sinners is as finished as His soul-saving work on the cross. In the meantime, soldiers of the cross need to shed their dirty civilian clothes and let the dear Holy Spirit equip us through Word and sacrament. Time is of the essence. Eternity dawns. So...

☆ **Put on the armor of light. (vv. 12-14)**

Walking through the muddy fields of life, we can't help picking up "*the works of darkness*" that cling to our souls like Dakota gumbo. When the prairie is awash in a summer downpour, gumbo gets too slippery for tractors. It clumps up on boots and implements in a gooey mess that won't come off by itself. Our Christian life is like that. We need to be determined and purposeful in preparing for Christ's return in order to clean off these gummed up works of man. If you can stand to watch a soap opera, notice how these *Days of our Lives* "like sands through the hour glass" never really get resolved no matter how long and hard the tears keep falling. Casting off the deeds of darkness needs godlike desire and His gracious energy. God's Word alone can prepare us for that Day and help us now to **Put on the armor of light**.

Light by itself isn't always helpful. Our neighbor has a motion detector that turns off and on all night long. A blade of grass blows; the light goes on. Lights didn't help Eutychus. He fell asleep in Paul's sermon with many lamps blazing all over that upper room. The bright sunshine can't keep my eyes open on a Sunday afternoon after preaching. A burglar once left a note for the homeowner: "Thanks for leaving the lights on! It was easier for us to see." Lights don't scare a burglar unless someone is looking in the light. **Put on God's armor of light** in this dark night of sin and keep watching for Christ's return.

Whether you're seeing *Mardi Gras*, or *Matrix Reloaded*, these eyes behold all around us "*orgies and drunkenness,...sexual immorality and debauchery.*" Some Christians think they've escaped these sins. But not only does technology enable sinning by substitution while we watch, but we're never free from "*dissension and jealousy.*" Church members sometimes get offended if they don't get their way. They may even begin to feel no one values their opinion and hard work. But **Put on the armor of light** and you notice that your feelings focus on glorifying yourself instead of God. When our hearts are disturbed with envy and bitterness, we need to pull them off like dirty clothes and throw them all away.

But if you try this by yourself, it's like tearing tattered threads off burned skin. We need the great Physician to give us a bath. Just as cool waters sooth burned flesh and help with healing, so the pure, clean waters of our baptism cleanse away the filth of our sin and heal us deep inside. "*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.*" (Galatians 3:27) When we feed our souls a steady diet of God's Word and sacrament, we keep reliving our Baptism every day by daily contrition and repentance. It's as natural as putting on our clothes. God's Word keeps us trusting in Christ's full and free forgiveness, living in the gratitude of faith-born love. "*Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ...*" to live in holy fear, respecting Jesus as your **Lord** and Master; to walk about in holy joy with **Jesus** as your shining Savior; to face ridicule and death with the solid confidence that **Christ** gives by His powerful Holy Spirit to all who follow Him. Every day of this **Present Time** on earth is another opportunity to glory in God's praise.

Our Christian life is like climbing a mountain too steep to stop. Keep growing and climbing into the things of the Spirit, or you will be falling backwards. Some disciples of Jesus tried to rest and fell backwards into their old lives of sin and unbelief. There is no stopping on the steep climb to heaven. The prince of darkness is fighting to keep people asleep in ignorance, but Jesus says, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" (John 8:12)

This Advent as we get ready for the coming of Christ, "*Let us behave decently, as in the daytime,...and...not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*" God's wants a new "schematic drawing" of your life to show the basic form and layout of His work in you. This is how early believers talked about Advent Christians like Barnabas: "*He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith....*" God used Barnabas in word and deed to prepare many others, so that "*a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*" (Acts 11:24 NIV) You might say that the missile of God's grace hit its mark. Help your loved ones get ready and waiting in eager anticipation for the really big bang, the eternal *Mardi Gras* in paradise with God. No one is excluded. "*Christ died for all.*" (2 Corinthians 5:15) So believe! May God graciously make us all ready for the Advent of our King. Amen.

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