

How Long Have You Got?

Romans 13:11

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Time goes so fast, doesn't it? It's about 17 years ago that God guided me to start expounding the book of Romans, verse by verse, on the university campus. So even though a few of us, here, have been together for 17 years, studying this each Sunday morning, there are teenagers here who were not born when we started the book of Romans.

One of the amazing things is that last Sunday a hundred million Americans watched the nuclear war movie "The Day After". And this past week, if you noticed it, the Time magazine cover was on Orwell's "1984". And of course only God could foresee all that 17 years ago, because I certainly didn't -- I simply come to the next verse. Maybe you'd look at it, it's Romans 13:11. "Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." "Besides this you know what hour it is." A coincidence, and yet enough of us have been here together long enough to realize that our lives together have been filled with those coincidences.

We have come together Sunday after Sunday and found God speaking to us directly about the very questions and the very burdens that we've had during the week and we know that it isn't man's doing; we are involved in something that is beyond ourselves, here, when we meet together on Sunday mornings, and certainly only God would know that it would be appropriate to preach on that verse, "you know what hour it is", in such a week as this.

Now, what does this verse mean? Well, loved ones, do you see the English translation there, as we have it in our Bible? Romans 13:11, "Besides this you know what hour it is." The Greek, for those of you who know Greek, is "kai touto", which we translate "besides this", just means "as well as this." "Eidotes ton kairon" is "knowing the time". It really hasn't the word "are" -- it has "knowing the time". So it means, "besides this you know what time it is". And the interesting thing is, "kairos" is just one of three Greek words for "time". Another word is "chronos", you know, "chronology", and we get it in the name of our watches, "chronometers". And the other word is "eion", which is an age, which becomes our English word "eon". So those are two other words for time, in Greek.

This word "kairos" has a special meaning that is different from the meaning of "chronos" or "eion". It means "a set period of time"; a time that is distinguished clearly, and marked clearly, to distinguish it from other stretches of time. It's a set, determined, period of time -- that's what "kairos" means, and so it's become identified, almost technically, with the time that is set that precedes Jesus' second coming. And it's the same word that is used by Paul, in a letter to the Corinthians; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, "I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those of us who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away."

That's the same word: "the appointed time has grown very short" that Jesus used about 50 years earlier in Mark 1:15 and you get the continuity if you look at Mark 1:14, "Now after John was

arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." So it's the same word Jesus had used about 50 years earlier, and those people were right to ignore them both, weren't they? I mean, there Jesus was, saying, "The time is at hand, the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of heaven is right here", and then here is Paul saying, "Brother, I want you to know the appointed time has grown short." Well, actually, they were both wrong -- I mean, there was plenty of time -- here we are, we're all here, and Jesus isn't here -- at least in his physical return to earth that has been prophesied as ending the "kairos" time. So those people were right, actually, to ignore Paul when he said, "Brethren, I want you to know the appointed time has grown short", weren't they? I mean ask them, weren't they right?

You say, "Well, I can't ask them." Well, why can't you ask them? "Well, I know he wrote that about 2000 years ago, but probably about 1900 years ago, all of them had died." Oh, then he was kind of right with them, was he? "Well, within 30 or 40 years." Okay, so that wasn't too bad then; he was actually right in saying that to them, wasn't he? He was saying to them, "Look, the appointed time has grown short", and in 30 or 40 years time, they were all dead. So he was right that way. But you say, "Yes that may be so, but, I mean, Paul was still wrong about the end times, wasn't he? He said the appointed time has grown very short -- he was still wrong about the end times." Okay, but he was right about those people, wasn't he? You'll agree with that -- he was right about them -- that was the right thing to say to them, "The appointed time has grown short", because in 30 or 40 years time they were all dead, and they had all met Jesus or they had all rejected him." But you say, "Yeah, but they were wrong about the end times, weren't they?"

I know this is hard for many of us to accept, because we are so overwhelmed with the publicity that has been thrown at us by the church, by preachers, and now by the media -- but they weren't talking about the end times. They weren't talking about the end times; and if you say to me, "But of course they were -- when Paul says the appointed time has grown short, we've all interpreted that as him talking about the end times. 'The world's going to end', that's what he is saying, that's what we all facing. Now, why do you say that he wouldn't try to identify the end times so that everybody could get ready for it? Why do you say that?"

I'll show you why, loved ones, if you'll look at it -- it's because of Jesus' own words, in Mark 13. This is what governed the disciples' preaching, and the apostolic preaching; these solid words of Jesus. This is what governed what Paul and Peter and James preached. Mark 13:32, "But of that day" that is, the day when I will come back to earth in my second coming, "of that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father", that's why. They listened to their Lord say that, and they obeyed him. They knew that they couldn't know the day or the hour, and there was no point in guessing about it, and there was no point in spending all this precious time trying to prophecy or forecast it, because even Jesus himself didn't know it, and the angels in heaven didn't know it so they knew they would be only trying to break scripture if they started to identify it.

Loved ones, that's the situation we get ourselves into when we do that. We try to out-god God. We try to do something that even Jesus couldn't do, that even the angels don't know; we try to find that out and we try to talk about it, and we try to interpret it. And instead of producing a same, sober, responsible desire to get to know God and to do his will, because we are unscriptural in our emphasis on this "end time" business, we produce insurance policy -- a panic-stricken survival, "run to the hills" attitude towards conversion that does not forward the kingdom of God. The apostles didn't do it. They believed Jesus' words. They believed his words, "of that day or that hour, no one

knows, not even the angels in heaven." So Jesus is saying, "Look, I don't know when I'll return. The angels in heaven don't know when I'll return, only my Father knows. Now you have plenty to do in your preaching besides trying to find out the things that I tell you, that you yourself do not know."

That's what he says in Mark 13:33, "Take heed, watch, for you do not know when the time will come." That's what the Savior says, "You do not know when the time will come", so all us busy little bees start getting preoccupied with trying to prove that we do know when the time will come, and we end up creating a panic-stricken, survival mentality, that does not produce a sober, responsible, repentance, but produces the kind of emotional panic that makes people more the slaves of other people than that makes them free from other people.

In fact, loved ones, Jesus described, and identified clearly, the kinds of people who would spend their time trying to identify the end times. He did. He described the kind of people who would major on this sensationalism, and this kind of crowd-drawing, cheap-thrill approach, to salvation in Mark 13:21.

"And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it." Then he describes them, "False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand." Jesus says such people are false prophets.

Now, if you say to me, "What attitude does he say we should take to these things?" He describes it there, at the end of the chapter, in Mark 13:34, "It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning -- lest he comes suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch." That's it.

Have a sober, sane, consistent attitude of awareness, and consciousness that you're living in a determined span of time that is a precious opportunity for you, and live that way day-by-day. Indeed, in a strange way, if you're looking out trying to find out when he's coming, why are you doing that? Why? Is it so that you can enjoy yourselves up to the last minute? "He is a mile away; okay -- cut it out -- put the whisky away?" Is it that? Or is it really because you're looking, and you're anxious for the Savior to come?

Well, loved ones, Jesus knows human nature better than we do, and you may say in all goodness, "Oh no, I am doing it from an honest motive", but the Savior knows what the bulk of mankind will do it for. The reason we put a guy on watch at the classroom door, when the teacher was out of the room, was not because we wanted him back, and wanted to welcome him, it was so that we could get ready for his return with as little trouble as possible, and as little inconvenience to ourselves, and the Savior knows that.

The Savior knows that those who love him, and want him to return, don't need to be encouraged to watch for his return; they have it in their hearts. And they will live every day so that, any moment when he comes, they'll be glad to be found doing whatever they're doing, and that's what Jesus says about this.

In fact, he actually tells us why we should not misinterpret the word "kairos" to mean the end times, and he shows us through Paul in 2 Thessalonians. You'll see it there, and it'll come home to your own hearts, even in direct connection with the day after. Here Paul is speaking to a problem

that the early church had and here we are, of course, creating it for ourselves. He didn't have to create the problem; he had it, but he was trying to get rid of it. We aren't so wise; we're trying to create it.

2 Thessalonians 2:1, "Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him", because that's what they got themselves to, going up into the mountains and assembling to meet him, giving up their ordinary everyday lives. "Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come." That's the reason: that that kind of sensationalism produces excitement and panic, but it does not produce real change in life. It does not produce real repentance; it does not produce a sober assessment of your life.

If you say to me, "Oh yes it does, I mean that's the exciting thing about that movie "The Day After" -- it gets everybody thinking about it", yes, but they're thinking in panic, they're thinking in chaos, they're thinking in fear, they fear only for themselves. They're not preoccupied with how to save other people; they're preoccupied with how to save themselves. They're not preoccupied with what God wants to do in their lives; they're preoccupied with what they're going to do to get out of this holocaust that is coming upon them.

Loved ones, if you say it produces a change in life, I ask you, has any generation been more preoccupied than our own with the end times? Has any generation since the invention of the mushroom cloud, been more preoccupied with the end of the world than our own? Has it changed our society? Has it taken the crime off the streets? Has it made us a moral people? You know it hasn't.

You know that the sensational, fearful, terrified, preoccupation that has filled us with panic about the end of the world co-exists with more crime, and more immorality, than most of us can ever remember reading about. The fact is, the Savior knew that that kind of preoccupation with the end times, and with his second coming, and with when the world was going to end, does not produce a sober, honest change of wills. All it produces is emotion and chaos.

In Belfast during the war we experienced exciting things -- exciting is an understatement for it -- because, of course, we were a shipyard city. Many of the ships were built in Belfast, so the German bombers ended up in Belfast. So we had a little experience of the bombs falling, and, of course, we couldn't do much; we didn't have shelters and that kind of thing. Our mothers, like many mothers, would put us in a little place under the stairs, which was probably more dangerous than the rest of the house -- but it looked safe! So she would get me and my brother there and we would spend the air raids there.

So, one of the funny things you would do is, in the midst of the chaos -- because we couldn't get out of the house, we couldn't get away you see -- we had to just hold on there and wait. And one of the things she would always do when that panic hit, and the air raid sirens would go on, and you'd hear the planes going over she would immediately rush for her bag and grab the life insurance policies! Why she grabbed the life insurance policies -- because if we were gone, we were gone and there was nobody going to benefit! But that's what happens in fear; that's what happens when you panic; that's what happens when your life is going to end. You don't act rationally. You don't act logically. You act in panic-stricken chaos. And loved ones, that's what comes about when we misinterpret this word "kairos" as meaning the end times, when Jesus himself gave us good, solid, advice.

He said, "Listen, nobody knows when that hour will come. Nobody knows when that time will come, not even the angels in the heaven. I don't know it. My Father alone knows it. Now, stop being preoccupied with it." So you ask, "What does "kairos" means? "Kairos" means a set, determined, period of time during which God has given to you an opportunity to either trust in him as your loving Father, or to sink more and more into trusting yourself only. It is a set, determined, period of time during which God has given you an opportunity to believe that what he has done in Jesus on Calvary is real and can be made real in your life, or to ignore him and live as if he doesn't exist. That's what "kairos" is.

How long is it? From Jesus' birth to when he comes again, that's the time. It's being preceded by the period of the law when all God was able to do in our world was to show us how far we had disappeared from his will; how far we had parted company from him; how far we had gone our own way. And now this is the "kairos" of the Gospel. This is a period of the Gospel. This is a window of mercy that God has opened in time -- just a short window of mercy because time is vast -- but this is a little window of mercy that God has opened for every one of us. And he has given us an opportunity to look in and see that he has forgiven us our sins, that he has changed us in his Son Jesus, that every obstacle; be it financial or personal that is in our lives, he has destroyed and changed in his Son. And he is giving us a little window of mercy time to believe that, and allow that all to become real in our lives.

Is it really as long as from Jesus' birth to when he comes again? No. No, it isn't. For most of us it's from when we were about 13 till we're about 70, that's it. It's about 60 years at the most, for most of us. Is it as long as 60 years? Theoretically it is; in actual fact, no. How long -- today. Can you remember tomorrow? Can you remember yesterday? Can you remember two days ago? Can you remember three years ago? 20 years ago? You know fine well, that the only thing you and I can really remember very vividly is today. In fact the song is right, we know it's right "Tomorrow never comes", it doesn't, and it really doesn't. Tomorrow actually never comes. In no way can you and I live in tomorrow. No way. And yet we say, "Tomorrow and tomorrow". It's a lie. It's bluff. Tomorrow we will do nothing. We cannot make any promises for tomorrow. We cannot live tomorrow -- we've got today, that's what we've got; today. Yet, not really; not today, not even this afternoon but now -- this second.

Why do I say that? Oh because of a short phrase that is ruthlessly true, "As now so then." As you think now, so you will think then, when Jesus comes. Even more than that; as you think now, so you will think this afternoon. As you think now, so you will think in ten minute's time. As you are now, so you will be only more so, that's right. As you are deciding this moment, so you will be deciding in two minute's time. "Kairos", the time, "you know the time." That is, you know you have this second, and you're making decisions, this second, that ensure the decision that you'll make the next second. How long is the time? Carry on sleeping, if you want, and carry on dreaming, and carry on pretending, that it's from now to your death. It's not.

You're becoming less and less able to make different decisions every second you live. The decision, or the lack of decision, that you make now is preventing you making another decision in another second's time. That's why the verse goes on, "This is the hour", and then it gives us the Greek word for "hour". "This is the hour when you must awake from your sleep." This is the hour to be aroused from your sleep. "Your sleep" is all of us; our indolence, our sluggishness, our forever saying, "manana, manana". Our forever believing Satan's lie that we will do it tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow I will change. Tomorrow, I will receive Jesus. Tomorrow, I will believe all

this stuff.

You'll never believe it. You'll never believe it. You won't. You're lying to yourself. You're lying in your teeth. Satan is deceiving you. If you don't change today, you won't change tomorrow; that's a lie. You've no control over tomorrow -- you know you haven't. You know tomorrow will come and you'll be filled with all kinds of other things. Why do I say that? Because I know Me, too and you're the same. We're all the same -- we're all the same under the skin. We're all the same.

This is "today", at this moment, in this second. And if you can listen to the fact that God has changed you, and destroyed you in Jesus and you're free, and you can get up and live free from yourselves, and free from your anger, and free from your impatience, and free from your irritability, and all your financial problems, and your personal problems have been destroyed and changed in Jesus -- you both believe that now and get up in joy or you don't believe it. And what you don't do now, you won't do tomorrow, and you won't do the next day, and you won't do the next day and it'll be harder to do the next day.

"Look out -- that fluorescent light's falling!" You say to me, "You're kidding" and it's too late; it's fallen. See; it's not the right reaction. If I tell you the fluorescent light is falling on you and you respond, "You're kidding," it's fallen. The thing is past. You haven't read the message right.

If you respond today and say, "That was a powerful message" you've missed the message. You've missed the message. There's only one right reaction to this window of mercy that God has given each one of us. God has put all of us in his son, Jesus. He has destroyed all the evil in us, and all the selfishness, and changed us. Now believe that and live it; go out of here changed and different, that's the only right response; any response but that, ensures that the next second your response will be more along the lines of this response, and the response after that will be even more along the lines of this response until you'll get to the point where you are so mental, and so emotional, in this game that you are incapable of responding. See, that's it.

Have you ever been in the situation with your dad, or your mom, or your husband, or your wife, when you couldn't get through to each other? Have you? When you couldn't get through to each other any more? When this dear father that you've known for years, or this dear mom, or this dear husband, or this dear wife, or this dear child, or this dear son, or this dear daughter, no longer seem to be able to speak to you or you're no longer able to speak to them? That's what happens: you get used to hearing the Gospel. You get used to looking at it. You get used to analyzing it. You get used to turning it around and looking at it from a different angle. You get used to appreciating it. You get used to agreeing with it, until you become incapable of responding to it -- that's what happens, loved ones.

That's why God says to us, "You know what time it is, and it's already past the hour when you need to be awakened from your sleep." That's what God is saying, loved ones. If you say to me, "Tell me again, tell me again, if God has changed us all in Jesus. If that is true then you and I can start living differently now." That's it -- we can start living differently now. We can stop worrying this moment. We can stop sinning this moment, if he has done it, we can. If we set our wills, and he has really done this, we'll find our wills able to achieve what they were not able to achieve before. If God has really changed us all in his Son, if he has really taken all the obstacles, and all the difficulties, that you're going to meet in your life, and has destroyed them in Jesus, then "Yippee" -- not another worry, not another care -- there's nothing else to be worried about.

Then you go out with a light heart, that's what it is. That's all, you see. That's the right response, and we are doing ourselves more and more damage each time we go out of this door saying, "Oh I really agree with that. I really think that's right, and I am going to respond to that some Sunday." You don't have that kind of time, see?

We don't have that kind of time. I do, and you do, as far as time goes, but in here (in our hearts) you don't have that kind of time. See, in there (in your heart) you don't have that kind of time. Here (in time and space) we do, but this is meaningless. In here (in your heart) you don't because "as now so then". Today is the day of salvation. So believe, repent and believe the Gospel. Please do it now. Do it now. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we do thank you for your goodness to us. And Lord, we know that much has been given to us here. You have given us each other, given us this room that we could share these things in. You've given us all kinds of advantages, but Lord, we do see that those to whom much is given, much will be required. And we see that we are in a moment of decision, and that we are deciding, even when we are not deciding.

So, Lord God, we do not want to respond in a way that is inappropriate or irrelevant. We know you are not asking us to think about this. We know you are not asking us to make promises about this. You're saying to us, "Look, I have remade you in my son, Jesus. You might not understand it all, but I have done that. You're a changed person: all that you have been up to this moment has passed away, and you're a new person now, this moment. Believe that, and go out of here in that faith and be that." Lord, thank you that that's what you're saying to us and that we can be, and do, that this very day. Thank you Lord. Amen.