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A Warning for the Present Times

Sermon preached by Mr. H. Dawson (Pastor)
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A WARNING FOR THE PRESENT TIMES

ROMANS 13 : 11.—And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

This is a word which has a depth of solemnity in it, and a word that, if it is opened up, as grace is given, will be very searching in its nature to the living amongst us. None but the living will ever realise the searching nature of the Word of God, but such characters do, and as they realise it, they are oftentimes brought in guilty before God, and have to stand again where they so often stand: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." This word was penned, as you are all aware, to the godly Romans, and there was a "needs be" for such a word in that far-off day when the epistle to the Romans was written; but the needs be nowadays is increased a thousandfold to what it was in the day when the Apostle Paul was inspired to pen it. The time when these godly Romans made up the Church of Christ at Rome was a solemn time, and the godly were being persecuted for righteousness' sake; but the time in which you and I are living is the most wicked time in the world's long sinful history. The Word of God describes the times as "**perilous times**," and from whichever viewpoint you think on the times in which we live, as you look round the world with all its wickedness, and at the Church of Christ professing in such a low estate, as it really is, the times are indeed perilous beyond word to describe. The text speaks about people knowing the time, and not just living their lives with that feeling as the phrase goes — a very unhappy phrase it is — "I couldn't care less;" but people taught of God, by grace given, are made to be careful in their lives, and they are enjoined in the Word of God: "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." I want as the Lord shall help me to look at this subject from two or three viewpoints. Much could be said about the setting of the subject, as it brings before us a very practical line of things. John Bunyan says in one of his pithy sayings: "The principle part of religion is the practicable part;" and I would like every one of you who is a sinner born again to do what the hymnwriter enjoins:

"Hoard up the sacred Word,
And feed thereon and grow;
Go on to seek to know the Lord,
And practise what you know."

You will remember that in some sermons recently I have had to dwell on what the Word of God has brought before us "That ye be not slothful;" and you have also been enjoined to "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure;" and, on the week-even, there was the injunction: "Let not thine hands be

slack." These words in the sacred pages are written for our learning, and we need grace to reduce them to practice. Now the word before us at this time, still running along in my mind with the same line of thought, is: "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to wake out of sleep." The suggestion is that many people in the Church of Christ are sleepy. Does that refer to you, or me? It will be well if you examine yourselves, but this is the beginning in considering the subject — "Knowing the time." Do you know the time in which we are living? Are you concerned to discern the signs of the times, that you might be warned thereby, and being warned, flee to that blessed and only shelter the Word of God proclaims, "The Rock of Ages," and that you might prove

"They that in the Lord confide
And shelter in His wounded side;
Shall see all dangers overpast,
Stand every storm, and live at last?"

I need not take up sermon time to say much about the perilous time in which we live, but you are all aware if you are observant, (I leave the 'if' with you) that it is an evil time, a dark time, a very solemn time, and every day there seems to be more portents that the times will be yet more perilous than they already are. The great thing is to know the time, and therefore be prepared to dwell therein how the Word of God shows people taught of God should dwell: "That ye be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." Is that a concern to you? Are you awake to that is what you should be, having a name on the church roll? "Ye are my witnesses." I want you to think these things over, dear friends, and follow them along; I am seeking your good for time and eternity too; I want you to be well grounded in things divine, and I want you to be found among them of whom the Word of God says: "Stand fast in the evil day, and having done all, still stand." "Knowing the time." When you look round the world it is terribly true: "The whole world lieth in wickedness." Every day there seems yet more and more evidence of the terrible aftermath of the Adam Fall, and when you look round England as a nation how great is our guiltiness before God. When you think how God has been England's God and made known His favour towards us, and granted us many a deliverance, when our enemies have threatened to overwhelm us, given us wondrous manifestations of His favour in our past history, and then to think that England should be where she is in departing from God, Who has been her God, and that godliness should be at such a low ebb as it really is! Do you think on these things, dear friends, and ponder them in your heart, and seek grace to "Sigh and cry for the iniquities done in the land?" "It is high time to awake out of sleep" regarding it. I do like to read about Abraham, where he stood before God; — Abraham was a most outstanding man for godliness; — and you will remember that,

when the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha was foretold, Abraham pleaded with God that if there could be found so many righteous God would defer the judgment, and not send it forth to the cities' doom; and God told Abraham that if ten righteous could be found in Sodom, then Sodom should still live. It is that great truth alone that maintains England as a nation at the present time. There is no doubt whatever, and, blessed be God, you and I can thank God and take courage remembering it, there is still to be found in this godless England as you view the nation as she is, many tens of the righteous who find it in their hearts to wait on God that He will still be England's God, and that is why the judgments of God are not poured out on us in a more terrible fullness than they have been as yet. Everything hinges as regards the future on whether you and I know the time in which we are living, and that we awake out of sleep regarding what we are, what we profess to be, and seek by grace divine to be lively in our profession, and, as every opportunity is afforded us, to show Whose we are and Whom we serve. When you look round our nation and think on what England used to be as regards moral righteousness, alas, to what a low ebb is the moral standard fallen nowadays. The Word of God says; "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." I was thinking, since I have been in the pulpit, of a word that came to my mind in Isaiah concerning England, and our solemn departures from God and godliness: "For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity, by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains." If you and I are helped by the teaching of God to know the time you will see that word fulfilled in every branch of it in England as a nation. Beyond all questioning it is a day of trouble, and it says "Treading down;" it is the things of God which are trodden under foot; the Word of God as to its Divine authority is trodden down as though it was just a book which man can do as he likes about, whether he reads it or no, whether he puts into practice what it teaches or no. Oh, but it is otherwise:

" God in the Scriptures, to reveal
His will has condescended,
What He has said there, He'll fulfill
Though man should be offended,

Alas! it is a day of treading down; where, where is the moral standard I have already hinted at? To what a low ebb that has fallen, so that we find much iniquity in this guilty England of ours. It says in this verse "Perplexity;" a very significant word. The Saviour said that in the last times one evidence of it would be "Perplexity amongst nations." The statesmen of various kingdoms beneath the sun seek to get together, and they purpose to do this, and they plan that, and it fails. Many of them are men well-intentioned in what they would do if they could, but they leave God out

of what they set out to do, and the issue is failure, so that the statesmen in the earth have been in such perplexity as to how to carry on the government of the countries with which they have to do. Perplexity, and it flows from turning the back upon God. It says also in this word: "Breaking down the walls;" how the wonderful wall of Protestantism built up around this land in the glorious reformation, to a great degree has been broken down. When I was a lad I remember godly people used to think that our national church, the established church as it was called, was to be regarded as a bulwark of Protestant truth because of the Articles of faith which were the foundation on which that church was established. But, what you and I have lived to see! The great majority of pulpits in our national church would have one therein not at all friendly to Protestant truth, but seeking to undermine it, and journey back again toward priestcraft and error, and toward Rome, and he, who is supposed to be the head of the national church, even the Archbishop, has actually been to see the pope, and set a very evil example, and broken down a wall that God allowed in His mercy to be built up to be a protection to England as a nation. It is a very solemn consideration, dear friends, and you should know the time; not just read about it, and shrug your shoulders, and then let it go; there is a matter therein of very great importance: "Ye should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." To be slack therein, is allowing a breaking down the walls. It also says "Crying to the mountains;" what are the United Nations, so-called, but a mountain to which the nations are crying; what is a so-called "Summit" conference, when two or three of the most important heads of states get together to devise what they should do regarding the world's future, but "crying to the mountains?" It cannot avail, God is not regarded, His Divine aid is not sought, His wisdom is not wanted, therefore the Word of God will be fulfilled: "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." "They have rejected Me" the Word of God says, and it was said concerning Israel as a nation, "They have rejected Me, and what wisdom is in them." Alas! that God should be rejected in England as a nation. If you know the time you will see these are the portents of it, the dark clouds that hang over our national horizon, and they may empty themselves yet, and, if they do, it will be the judgments of God which will be abroad in the earth. How will it be with you when those clouds shall open what they contain and the judgments of God shall fall? When that word has got a semblance of fulfilment before its final fulfilment: "For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand." Who shall be able to stand? There is a word here which it will be well for you to heed: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." That is all I must say as regards "Knowing the times."

I would look at the subject from a second viewpoint: "And that,

knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep." Does it not seem very solemn that this word was addressed to people called to be saints, (and they were), and they had their names on a church-roll. Remember what the Saviour said in that parable of the Kingdom of God being likened unto ten virgins "Which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom," and it says: "Five of them were wise, and five were foolish, and they that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept." A very solemn picture, but then, as I judge this parable is specially referring to the perilous times in which we are living, it is just a picture of what the Church of Christ is like nowadays to a degree. It is one thing to have a name on a church-roll, it is another thing altogether to have oil in our vessels, and our lamps burning. It says: "Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps." What are you going to do about that? I am not preaching legal things, I am just telling you what is truth, and you must be doing something about it; otherwise, if you do not know what it is to arise, and trim your lamp when, eventually, the judgments of God are poured forth, as they will be, you will be without a shelter, and the storm will come down on you. Meanwhile:

"A Refuge for sinners the gospel makes known,
'Tis found in the merits of Jesus alone."

If you know the times you will see what is happening in the world at large; it is the final clash between evil and good, it is the final warfare between what is right and what is wrong; the ultimate victory, — the triumph of good over evil, and right over wrong — is guaranteed, but the warfare is on. There is a word I have looked at sometimes in the book of Judges, it is a very striking word written when it was a time of testing and trial with Israel as a nation. In the song of Deborah and Barak there is this: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." (Judges 5. 23). It shows what our position should be if we reduce to practice what we profess in these perilous time. If we know the time we should use every opportunity afforded us to go to the help of the Lord in the battle of the Almighty, which is to say, to be more than ever concerned to:

"Let our lives and acts express,
The holy gospel we profess."

Much might be said along that line of thought. It says regarding this time in which you and I are living, and it is so evident if you know the time, you can see it as your eyes are opened:— These shall make the war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them; He is Lord of Lords, and King of kings, and they that are with Him are called and chosen and faithful;" and there is another word:

"Behold, I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." I just remind you what the illustration is; it is the sentinel on duty at night time, when his superior officer comes round; if he is sleeping at his post he just sets his robes alight, and that awakens him. When he goes off duty and returns home, everyone can see by his scorched garments that, when he was on duty as sentry, he was asleep at his post, and he must have a shamed countenance in looking his fellow-creatures in the face. As regards your profession, can you look your fellow-creatures in the face concerning it? Preacher and people alike must all weigh it up. Have you lived in the light of this scripture: "As ye have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially they that be of the household of faith." "And that, knowing the time;" what a solemn time it is! "And that, knowing the time, to awake out of sleep;" — what is it to awake? I would look at that as grace is given. I judge it to mean that if you and I are right at heart, and that is a mercy to prize if you have good evidence of it; if you and I are indeed taught of God, and we are indeed on the Lord's side, then it is high time to awake to all that is in connection with being a follower of Jesus Christ. What does that mean? If the times are what they are, so perilous — beyond words to describe — and as this year, 1961, unfolds, it may be that there will be much more evidence of how perilous the times are. There are already signs in the commercial world of great upheavals, and that people will not be able to see their nests so well lined with the things of this life, as their earnings have been so great. Lawless things are happening in the world at large, and if the commercial world cannot do the business, then they that earn the bread which perisheth can only earn less than they have earned before, and that will need something more than what you are by nature to behave aright in going down, down, down in your standard of living. People who are taught of God will know how to behave, as grace is given, but you must expect in the world at large to see further outbreaks of the enmity of man and lawlessness, and that will be the outcome of it. "It is high time to awake out of sleep." I look at it now as it affects you and me, especially those of us who have our names on the church roll, and those of you who ought to have your names on, — who love the truth that you listen to, and want to participate in it; and some of you dear young people who, I do believe, are "Asking your way to Zion with your faces thitherward;" I address you all. It says "It is high time to awake out of sleep." I judge first of all it is high time to awake as to whether we have a real interest in eternal realities. Some of us are now in life's eveningtime, our names have been long on a church roll, much have we had to do with the things of God, but where do we stand? What is our real attitude to eternal realities?

"How stands the case, my soul, with thee,
For heaven are thy credentials clear?"

It is time to awake as to whether you are down on that bedrock foundation God has laid in Zion, or whether all your life long you have been just a chapel-goer, and lived your life amongst people taught of God, but you are asleep. A very solemn consideration. Now the Holy Spirit says "It is high time to awake out of sleep;" our dying day is not so far off; time is short, eternity is long, what then? Everything hinges on having a lively interest in the things of God. It is high time to awake to our responsibility in the profession of Jesus' name that have made. In my ministerial life, I am not fitting caps on, as I have gone about among the churches I have often been troubled, disquieted in mind, not to say saddened, as I have observed that many people seem to be pretty much at a standstill in the things of God after they have got the right side of the baptismal pool, and their name is on a church roll. There seems to be a tendency to settle down on the lees of a profession of the name of Jesus, and become sleepy therein. "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep," because it is possible to have a name on a church roll, and not to have it recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life; it is high time to awake to that possibility, and to be urgent before God:

"In Thy fair Book of Life and grace,
O may I find my name,
Recorded in some humble place,
Beneath my Lord the Lamb;"—

Not to be left to have a name to live, and be dead. Not only so, "It is high time to awake" that in our everyday life there should be a proper witness for God, and that other folks should know "Whose we are, and Whom we serve." Do folks roundabout where you live see that your religion is that which is of God by the fruits produced in your lips and life? Is it the truth "And they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus?" It is high time to awake out of sleep regarding it, because the Word of God says, it is a beautiful word, "Ye are My witnesses." Strictly speaking everyone who is taught of God in their life should evidence a missionary spirit, and that is to speak well of Him Whose Name they profess, and to do what they can to advance the Kingdom of God. Remember that. That means, sometimes, that it is a time for you to speak. I am not referring now to speaking one to another, as those who fear God; I mean even to speak to the world at large as opportunity is afforded. I know there is also a time to keep silence, — "keep your mouth with a bit and bridle while the wicked is before you," the Word of God says, — but it is high time to awake that we should be witnesses for God where we are. What do you find recorded? Andrew is made a disciple: "Then cometh Andrew, and findeth his brother Simon, and he brought him to Jesus." It is high time to awake to such a line of things. I do want you to weigh it up, dear friends; if we are going to have a revival in our denominational life it will not come while we are asleep, there must be an awaking in regard

to it; "I will be enquired of by you, O house of Israel, to do these things." "It is high time to awake out of sleep."

It is high time to awake, as I judge, to the certainty of the things that we believe, the blessedness, the reality, of our most holy faith. The things of God everywhere are being assailed by earth and hell alike, but you and I should be awake to the fact that:

"These are truths, and happy he
Who can well receive them;
Brethren, though we cannot see,
Yet we should believe them."

"It is high time to awake out of sleep," as to what the Gospel really is: "Good tidings of great joy." "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God, for our gospel came unto you in word only, but also in power." You may say: "I have lived long in a cause of truth, as it were, I have been year in, year out, but as yet, although I hope I have an ear to hear it, I have not known it in that fulness of its power that I know people of God are favoured to enjoy." What do you do about it, if that is how you feel? Are you asleep, viewing the matter with a fatalistic eye? or do you realise it is high time to awake, and:

"Urge thy claim through all unfitness,
Sue it out, spurning doubt,
The Holy Ghost thy witness,"

Remember Jacob: "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me;" remember Jabez: "O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." It is high time to awake that there is such an exercise unto godliness, that blessed be God, bears fruit in our souls, our experience. Did not the Saviour say: Ask, and ye shall receive; Seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Did He not guarantee: "Everyone that asketh receiveth; he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened?" It is high time to awake out of sleep to the blessed fact:

"Oh what amazing words of grace,
Are in the Gospel found,
Suited to every sinner's case
Who knows his soul's deep wounds."

Not only so, if you look at the church of Christ as she is, at such a low ebb, nowadays, as regards vital godliness, yet there is that word in Isaiah: "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God." When the captives returned from Babylon they were cast down when they observed the ruined state of all the cities, but the word of the Lord was "Look not on the ruins;" "Behold your God;" "Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask, or even think." It is high time to awake out of sleep, and enquire "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" Much might be said along this line of thought. It is high time to awake to the

righteousness of Christ, that it is imputed to poor sinners who are solemnly aware that they have none of their own wherein to appear before God. It is high time to awake as to whether you are clothed in it, because, without that robe spread around you, you cannot be made "Meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Wonderful is what the hymnwriter was favoured to feel:

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
Are all my ornament and dress;
Fearless with these pure garments on,
I'll view the splendour of thy throne."

"I bring near my righteousness," the dear Saviour said. Has He brought it near to you? It is high time to awake out of sleep regarding a matter of such supreme importance. Again, it is high time to awake to that Scripture so often quoted, but little known, I fear, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Have you known and proved the efficacy of it? Has that never-to-be-forgotten experience been granted you:

"We're clean, just God, we're clean?"
"Jesus blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, eternal mercy, cries."

It is high time to awake out of sleep regarding it: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." I must come to the Amen, but I must add this: It is high time to awake as to our hope in God, a "good hope through grace;" how it was wrought in our souls; in whom does it centre; is it in Jesus Christ as the God of hope? "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." It is high time to awake out of sleep, and be able to declare:

"On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

One more thought is this: It is high time to awake out of sleep regarding the providence of God, though the times become, and will become, more perilous than they already are; and there may be many difficulties to face as you journey on through life, and even find:

"Every day new straits attend."

Maybe you will have to learn to scrape the bottom of the barrel and find a handful of meal, and hold up the cruse, and see just a drop of oil, and learn to live more than ever before a day at a time. It will be good to awake out of sleep, and remember Him, Whose you are, and Whom you serve, Who is Jehovah Jireh; — the Lord will provide. Regarding His dear people: it is a great truth.

"In every state secure,
Kept as Jehovah's eye;
'Tis well with them while life endure;
And well when called to die."

Much might be said under that heading. It is high time to awake out of sleep regarding the Word of God, and what it has to say about the future, as these perilous times come upon us, and it does tell us: "It shall be well with them that fear God;" and it does draw a beautiful, blessed picture that when these perilous times have passed over us, then this word will be fulfilled: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven;" and I can assure you It is high time to awake out of sleep, and plead with God:

"Great God, Thy Kingdom come;
With reverence we would pray;
May the eternal Three in One,
His sovereign sceptre sway."

Though the times be more perilous yet, there is one word in our text to cheer us still, and that is: "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." If we are indeed the characters referred to, if we are indeed sinners taught of God, and the good work begun in us is being carried on, then we are journeying on to the end of life's journey,—Yes,

"And nightly pitch our moving camp,
A day's march nearer home."

Every day that adds to our years only brings us nearer to our salvation than when we first of all believed:

"Though in a foreign land,
We are not far from home;
And nearer to our house above,
We every moment come,

Dear Friends, do prayerfully think over these things; I have tried to bring before you; and the Lord bless you; and help you to know the time, and reduce to practice what you know of the things of God that you and I, as pastor and people, may by His grace live right, and at the last die right.

Amen.