

Spiritual Readiness

by Stephen Olford

Stephen Olford's sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual readiness through awakening, rising to righteousness, and dressing in Christ's character as believers prepare for His return.

Duration: 39:44

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 13:10-14, Ephesians 2:10

Topics: "Readiness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the need for believers to wake up from spiritual slumber and be ready for the challenges and responsibilities that God may bring their way. He highlights the prevalence of immorality and sexual perversions in society and urges Christians to live lives of purity and set an example. The speaker also emphasizes the relevance of Christianity to all aspects of life, including civic, social, and personal spheres. He concludes by urging believers to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and the armor of light, indicating the need for spiritual readiness.

Transcript

And had we time to treat it from first verse through to 14th, we'd be able to demonstrate that. But having shown the whole spectrum of Christian relevance, as touching civil life and social life and personal life, Paul adds this final word of challenge. Seeing the relevance of Christianity to contemporary life in any age, at the level of civic life or social life or personal life, he says, be ready, be ready.

And I can't help feeling that this is a word to my heart. The beginning of this year, for we're not gone very far yet, this 1966 upon which we've entered, Lord Jesus, am I ready for any eventuality? Am I ready for any responsibility that thou shalt bring across my path? Am I ready for thy coming, Lord Jesus? Shouldst thou choose in thy sovereign grace to break through from heaven to catch up thy church? Am I ready, spiritually ready? And to point up what Paul has to say, I want to speak tonight on four little exhortations, which I'm going to put in this special form in order that we may remember it, take it home, or take it to our dormitories, our rooms tonight, and pray through on our knees. For in this spiritual readiness, God is calling us, first of all, to wake up.

Will you notice that, please? To wake up. Verse 11, And knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

God is calling us to wake up, to wake up. Paul is reminding these Roman believers and those to whom he was addressing this letter that it was no longer, no longer time for them to slumber in sleep like the days of their unregenerate experience. Now they must wake up.

They were of a day and not of a night. They must wake up, and that's for two reasons. First, because of the opposing, approaching day of destiny, and secondly because of the approaching day of deliverance.

The approaching day of destiny, yes, the day is at hand. The day is at hand. Paul said that the Christian attitude in every age must be just this, that any moment, any day, any week, any month, may well be the day of destiny.

Beloved young friend here and older one, I want to say this, that when you stand one day before the judgment seat of Christ, whether Christ comes in your decade or not, in your time or not, you will be judged in relation to the way you've lived in the attitude of expectancy concerning that day of destiny. Don't write eschatology off as something irrelevant. Don't be a scoffer and say, yes, our father said he'd come, and he hasn't come.

What right have I to believe that he's going to come in my time? You're going to be judged in relation to your attitude to the imminence of the Lord's return, the day of destiny for you, the day of destiny for me. The day is at hand. But my dear friends, as I look around me today and as I try to evaluate the contemporary world in which I find myself as a Christian minister, as a believer, as a husband, as a father, I am being impressed more and more with the fact that the day of destiny is at hand.

Scientifically, the day of destiny is at hand. We thank God for the amazing advances of the last forty years, equal to nearly four thousand years previously, as someone has pointed out recently. But I'm asking myself almost every day I live, how high is the Tower of Babel going to be built before God looks down from heaven and says, very well, there is nothing inherently wrong in scientific advance, for after all, you're only thinking my thoughts after me and discovering laws that were ever there for your discovery.

But how high are you going to build your Tower of Babel saying, let us build, let us build, or as one scientist has put it today, man at last has arrived, he is the master of his fate. How far are we going to build that Tower of Babel before God looks down from heaven and says, I'm going to confound this people. It's the day of destiny.

I know we're told with excitement that we're living in the day when on our drawing boards at this very moment there is a plane that will rise from the tarmac, not a helicopter, but a jet plane that will rise from the tarmac perfectly and shoot through the air faster than sound. I know we're being told that on our drawing boards at this very hour there's a plane that will carry one thousand persons. I know we've already been around the world in the space, ships, and the shot to the moon is on its way.

I know that we're being told that right now there is in design and practically production a kind of submarine that can be perfectly owned for weekend visits to the bottom of the ocean. A submarine that can rise from the water and fly through the air. I know we're being told that we're living in an hour when, as the medical scientists tell us, we can have new eyes, we can have new ears, we can actually have a new heart, we can have new bones, and that presently all our medical history is going to be summed up and evaluated by computers that will defy any doctor's analysis hitherto.

But you know where all this is leading us? To the statement that one of our greatest scientists made in Los Angeles three weeks ago when he said we've arrived. We're masters of our own fate. I can't hear men talking like this and glorifying the creature more than the creator without hearing God saying, let's go down and confound.

Anthropologically speaking, I believe we're meeting the day of destiny. One of our anthropologists has pointed out that there are two tremendous issues that we're facing today. One of them you know about already.

Population explosion. What's going to happen in the year 2000? Unless new discoveries are made to feed people, we're not going to be blown out of existence by bombs, perhaps, but we're going to be, listen, starved out or stifled out of existence, so we're being told. But the interesting one to me is this.

The same man pointed out just a little while ago that we've reached the point when the white man descends and the colored races ascend. There's nothing intrinsically wrong in that in and of itself. The day of the white man is over forever.

But the question I'm asking myself is this. What's happening in Rhodesia? What's happening in Alabama? What's happening in the seething city of New York where the black Muslim is an issue that our president and every thinking person is worried about to death today? There's going to be a revolution of blood one of these days. It came from one of our greatest men.

Unless God in his grace rises in power through his church to bring about such a sweeping revival as to quieten the hearts of men, are we not very quickly facing the day of destiny? Ideologically speaking, we're locked with the ideologies and the religions of the world, and supreme amongst them is advancing communism. And don't you believe that Vietnam is just a plaything. This is one of the escalating world wars.

As someone has pointed out, even our president, the distraction, the resources that are being drained in terms of man and money is only to take eyes off of the infiltrations that are taking place in our own country here. And unless some of our great prophets are mistaken, it could well be that this is moving right on to weaken this country until China has the power of delivery for a bomb she already possesses and committed to world domination. And it isn't a secret.

Dr. Billy Graham was telling us only the other day, and then it publicly was announced, that the president of the United States of America has every evidence to state this fact, that in five years' time, it only needs a trigger-happy Peking to blow our beloved United States of America to smithereens. What's going to stop that? God alone knows, but to me, the day of destiny is at hand. And any obscurantist, any man who shears away and says that's just terrorism, anyone who says that's warmongering, is a fool.

God is saying, wake up! Theologically speaking, I believe, we face the day of destiny. I'd like all you young people to make a note of a book I'd like you to read one of these days, God Hath Spoken, by Dr. James Packer. God Hath Spoken, by Dr. James Packer.

He points out that not since the Reformation has there been such a starvation of expository preaching, such a need for the preaching of the word of God. And he analyzes our century as follows. He points out that in twenty-five years of the beginning of this century, we had the undermining of liberalism by Harnack and all his confederates, making out the Lord Jesus to be nothing more than just an example who went to

Calgary to show us how a life can be sacrificed for a good cause with no atoning value in his death.

And liberalism evacuated the Bible of its supernaturalism, of its infallibility, of its inerrancy, and of its authority. Then followed twenty-five years of dialecticism with Bath and Brunner and Niebuhr, who, as you know, went even further by taking away from the meaning of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, or even the significance of his resurrection, if there were a resurrection of his body, literally. We've moved now into the era of so-called existentialism, with the apostle of existentialism, Paul Tillich, just dead, I shall speak about tomorrow morning, Rudolf Bultmann, who by their own statements, as I shall point out tomorrow, do not hold in the eternal pre-existence of our Lord Jesus Christ, nor his virgin birth, nor his miraculous life, nor his atoning death, nor his resurrection, nor his coming age.

And what are we moving into? Your guess is as good as mine, but some of you have heard of such men as Altizer and Hamilton, and the God is Dead movement. How long, how long is our God going to look with complacency upon a theological world of today? And when I say complacency, I mean it in that other sense, grace, patience, long-suffering, before he says the day of destiny has come. Morally, I believe we're facing one of the worst periods of this nation's history, and I'm not evaluating it myself.

I can give you the facts and the documentation for it, but never in the history of this nation since it was born has crime reached such terrifying heights as this very hour. Ten percent of our total national budget is being spent entirely on crime, more money on crime than all the money spent on entire education in this country, from boys and girls, students, to university life and beyond, more money spent on crime than any other big item in this country. It's a bigger business, a bigger syndicated business than the entire business of the government.

With this theory of relativism, this new morality, when the absolutes have given over to my opinion as how I ought to live, I'm telling you we're living in an hour of destiny, an hour of destiny. And I could go on and I could go on and I could go on and I could go on, but I have read my newspaper, I've watched my television, or I've studied my radio broadcast alongside of my Bible, and I can't watch contemporary events today without hearing God saying to me, Stephen Alford, wake up! And Paul says, not only because of the approaching day of destiny, but also because the approaching day of deliverance. For now is your salvation, your deliverance, nearer than when you first believed.

And anyone here knows that Paul is speaking here of the final phase of that mighty work of God in Christ, the initial salvation, when I had bent Lord the cross and repented, acknowledged my sin and turned in faith to the Christ crucified and the Christ crowned and made him my Savior. Paul is speaking beyond that moment by moment salvation, whereby we're saved by his life, having been reconciled to God by his death. He's speaking here of that final aspect of salvation.

He's speaking here of that final deliverance, when the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet them where the clouds. It's that salvation he's talking about in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last thought, we shall be saved.

That's the salvation he's talking about. And he says your salvation is nearer than when you first believed, the day of deliverance. And in the context of that day of destiny, in its approaching shadows, yes, that day of deliverance, with its glorious, glorious promise and prospect for the believer.

Paul says, wake up, wake up. But in this spiritual readiness, Paul goes farther and he tells us not only to wake up, but would you notice, he says something else, rise up, rise up, knowing the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep. For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

The night is past and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, cast off the works of darkness. He carries his metaphor in logical sequence.

I wake up and then I rise up. There are so many Christians who eventually wake up after the preachers made it hard enough for them to get them to get up. My father once spent a night in a little town in Devonshire in England.

Just before he blew the candle out, the cloisters rise in sleep. He lifted the candle holder and there was a little motto inscribed upon it. Many are called, but you get up.

The next day you wake up and say, oh no, get up. And what does a person do when they get up? I'll tell you what they do. They fling back the blankets, they fling back the keys, they fling back the knifepoints, they cast off the darkness.

I can't go back with 40 others connected with such and such a school, 20 girls and 20 fellows who all live together in the same dormitory. Premarital unchastity amongst young people today is taken for granted. It's a way of life.

It's a way of life. Homosexuality is a way of life. Sexual perversions are a way of life.

We're to live with them, we're to just ourselves to them, they're telling us. God have mercy upon us. We're to cut off the works of darkness and we're to set an example by the power of the indwelling master and savior to lives of purity in a generation that's gone absolutely mad.

And unfortunately, my friend, it goes hand in hand. We have here chambering and we have here wantonness. The word wantonness is simply the old English word for shamelessness.

What tragedies I have come across myself as I look into the faces of young people who sin the most hideous sins and have no blush upon their faces. Their eyes don't drop. They're hard, they're arrogant, so what? I couldn't care less.

Oh, Christian people, listen. Very, very easily this thing can infiltrate our very lives. We're living in the very midst of it.

It's advertised, it's glamorized, it's organized before our very faces and before we know where we are, we're being carried up in the vortex of this very thing. God give us the grace not only to wake up but to rise up and cast off by the power of that indwelling spirit the works of darkness. Look again, not in strife and envying, not in strife and envying.

These are the spiritual sins and perhaps the worst of all, strife and envying. That word strife is a word which means unholy competition. It's the spirit which wants to get ahead as anybody else.

It's the spirit that does not fit in with what we were reading earlier about taking second place if necessary. It's that spirit of wanting to get ahead. I don't care how I do it or who I harm in the process.

And alongside of it, of course, is that word envying which is another word for jealousy. And when I hear, my brethren on radio, when I hear what's happening in Christian circles today, the competition, the fighting one with the other, the jealousies, the criticizing, the destructive words that are being shot across the ether at one another, I just wonder what God is going to do with us. God's going to do with this church.

Cast it off, says the apostle Paul. And I want to point out that no man ever lived yet who could cast this off by himself or in his own strength. My only secret for this text is something Paul has already said to us in Romans 8 and 13.

If we, through the spirit, demortify the deeds of the body, the works of the flesh, the garments of darkness, if we, through the spirit, demortify them, we shall live. And God, only the Holy Spirit, can release enough the resurrection life of Jesus in order that counting upon him we can just take those blankets, those sheets, those nightclothes that would cling to us and blind us, yes, and bind us and hold us to the kind of life which is contemporary. And in the power of that mighty spirit we tear them from us and cast them off.

Wake up. Rise up. And following in sequence he says, dress up.

But I want you to see what we've got to put on. Look at verse 14, put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. Glorious, glorious concept.

Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 12, last part, put on the armor of night. We'll take them in this order just for this very reason.

Two glorious concepts. We're to dress up, having cast off those works of darkness, those clothes of night, slothfulness and sinfulness, whether they be sensual sins or sexual sins or spiritual sins, by the power of the risen Savior casting them off, we put on, we put on. First of all the garment of salvation, put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and then the armor of protection, the armor of light.

The garment of salvation, put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, of course has this threefold tense about it. I put on that garment the day I noticed the cross and repentance, as I pointed out a moment or two ago, and turned to the Lord Jesus and took the garments of salvation and put them on. But there's something more, there's not just that initial putting on, it's the day by day wearing the Lord Jesus, wearing the Lord Jesus, putting him on, putting him on.

Thou Savior my life, I take thee to be my life today, just as thou didst indwell me, so cover me, cover me with thy very self, cover me with thy glory, cause that my body shall be just that wonderful magnifying glass that magnifies thee to other. Savior, be thou my garment today. But not only the garment of salvation, there's the armor of protection, and I'm particularly intrigued with that word, the armor of light, the armor of light.

The Lord Jesus is not only our garment of salvation, he is in fact our armor of protection. The armor of light, the armor of light. We're told that Roman soldiers wore shining armor, and they fought in such a way that very often as the sun came up across the horizon, they fought in such a way, I repeat, that they caught the reflection, the reflection of that sun from their armor, and they blinded the enemy, blinded the enemy.

The enemy couldn't attack. Why? Because he's just like an armor of light. And I believe with all my heart, and I've held it, and I've proved it, and I trust the Savior for it in my life day by day, God help me, in a city like New York or anywhere else without it, that it's possible to know the Lord Jesus not only as my garment

of salvation, but as my armor of light.

The angel of the Lord encompassed round them that fear him, because they trusteth in him. And I believe that where the Savior indwells the life in conscious fullness by the Spirit, in that moment-by-moment faith relationship, it's as if the Lord Jesus covers me with an armor of light, and the enemy can never penetrate it. He can't get through.

And sensual sins won't touch me, and sexual sins won't touch me, and spiritual sins won't touch me. Why? I'm covered with an armor of light. I'm sure you've heard the story of the lion tamer, the famous lion tamer, who could do anything with this monarch of the forest.

Crack a whip, and he'll jump up onto some ladder or other, whistle, and the lion would lie down just like a pussycat. Do anything with him. One memorable day in the great cage was enveloped in darkness, and in that one moment of midnight, midnight, that lion who'd do anything for his tamer suddenly became a savage enemy and tore him limb from limb.

And anybody who knows the forests of Africa, or who knows anything about animals, will know that the lion, the lion won't touch a man who's covered with an armor of light, who holds a torch, who sits by a fireside. That's why the African goes to sleep by his fire. The angel of the Lord encompasses around them that fear him.

He's my flaming light. He's my light. He that walketh in the light, yes, shall have fellowship.

And the blood of Jesus Christ, the released life of Jesus in death, taken up in resurrection, keeps him clean, keeps him pure, moment by moment. Jesus said, I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life, the armor of light.

Yes, my young friends, my older friends here tonight, if you mean business in this matter of spiritual readiness, you must wake up. You must rise up, casting off those nightclothes. You must dress up, putting on the Lord Jesus, putting on the armor of light.

But Paul isn't through. Paul has a final word to say to us, and it's concerning that little phrase in verse 13. Walk honestly.

We're to wake up for God. We're to rise up for God. Soldiers of Christ, arise and put your armor on.

We're to dress up for God. And then, listen, we're to show up for God. That's what that word, walk honestly, actually means.

Notice the margin says decently. The original means decorously or shining. Demonstrate by your walk, demonstrate by your walk that you're ready for God.

Demonstrate by your walk that you're ready for God. Paul uses the phrase walk in conjunction with some other word 33 times in his epistles. And if you were to analyze all the mentions, especially in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, you'll find that that phrase walk has to do either with conduct or with service, with conduct or with service.

And to show up for God actually means, first of all, to walk for the Lord Jesus and with the Lord Jesus in such a way that your conduct is worthy of Him. Your conduct is worthy of Him. Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. And my beloved friend, whoever you are, a pastor here tonight, a student here tonight, a housewife here tonight, God has His purpose in the world today in this fashion, that the only way in which He can make Jesus wheel to the dark world in which we live is by the manner in which we walk. The manner in which we walk.

The honest way, the manifest way, the evident way, the demonstrative way in which we walk. And Jesus has no feet but your feet to walk in. He has no hands but your hands to work with.

He has no brain but your brain to think through, your eyes to look through, your lips to speak through, your ears to hear through, that light of yours to shine through. Are you walking in order to show off your Savior? Show up for God! But with that conduct which is worthy of the Lord Jesus, there is the service which is worthy of the Lord Jesus, and of course that's Ephesians 2.10. We are His workmanship, His craftsmanship, His thing of duty, far greater than original creation. Yes, it's this new creation, this poem, or this thing of duty, we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God before hath ordained that we should walk in them.

Young man, young woman, I want to tell you this, if you're really going to be spiritually ready, then you're not going to be satisfied with anything less than finding, following and finishing the plan that He has for your life, because before the worlds were thrown into orbit and sustained by the outgoing of His power, before the Savior ever came to Bethlehem or died on the cross, in the purpose of God, you, you were seized by the foreknowledge of God, and God's redemptive movement has come to the very door of your heart, and you've been created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before prepared that you should walk in them. And I know nothing more beautiful in all God's creation than to see a young woman, or a young man, or an older one for that matter, moving in the plan of God, demonstrating by doing the work God has called him to do, what Jesus is in terms of Christian service. And I know nothing that shows off my wonderful Savior like service done in the will of God.

This is what Jesus meant when He said in the Sermon on the Mount, let your light so shine that men shall see your good works and glorify my Father which is in heaven. They see the works, they don't look at you, they look beyond you to the Father. Why? Because the manner of your life demands a supernatural explanation, and that supernatural explanation cannot find a final answer in you, it's beyond you, it's the Father which is in heaven.

Show up for God. Show up by Christian conduct, show up by Christian service that you're ready for God. And I can't imagine anything more wonderful in all God's purpose for us than to be on the tiptoe of expectation.

What is God going to do today? I fling the clothes off my bed as I rise and I say, Lord, this day is an adventure with thee. This day may be the day of destiny, this day may be the day of deliverance. Lord, I'm awake, I've risen, I've dressed up, I'm ready to show up for you.

What is it today, Lord? I'm ready. You all know this passage well enough in the history of great men to know that this was the transforming word to Augustine, the great formulator of theology, the man of deep, deep devotion and piety and confession, the man who saved from a life of debauchery and sin, yes, it was this very word, demented almost with the sense of guilt and his sinnership before God, not knowing the complete answer, he walked in that garden, you remember, leaving his friend yonder and asking, what shall I do, what shall I do, what shall I do? And over the wall came a little voice saying, take the book and read it, take the book and read it, take the book and read it. He went back to his friend and he said, give

me the book.

There was only one book. It fell open at this very passage. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, make no provision to fulfill the lusts thereof.

And that word, put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, my wretched, debauched, perverted life, said Augustine, in exchange for his life, Lord Jesus, I take thy life for my life. Or as we heard in that opening prayer, for me he died, for me he lives. He lives in my place.

Ye God, my life, as against my own life. And he took that life and he became the Saint Augustine who's left his stamp on history. Wake up! Rise up! Press up! Show up for God! This is spiritual readiness.

Let us pray. We're going to have just a quiet moment of heart-searching reflection and prayer. I want to confess to you as we just bow quietly here in prayer, that I personally, as a simple Christian, as a husband, as a father, as a pastor, have never in all my life felt quite the pressure of the urgency of the days in which we live.

I can't help feeling that we do not have many more years. But whether that be a fair evaluation or not, I know this, that behind it, the whole emphasis on eschatology in the New Testament is addressed to my heart in order that I might live in the light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. And that the crown of righteousness is going to be given only to those who love his appearing.

Those who love his appearing. There are many people who preach the second coming of Jesus Christ and would fight to the death for the so-called orthodox doctrine of the second advent, but who don't love his appearing. And I'll tell you the only people who love his appearing, people who are ready, people who are ready, people who are wide awake, who've thrown off the clothes of darkness, who are dressed in the garment of the Lord Jesus, who are walking honestly, showing off the Savior by conduct and service, coming suddenly, coming soon, coming certainly, night or noon.

Jesus, I humbly pray, wash all my sin away and keep me till that day when thou shalt come. Spiritual readiness.

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