

Sacred Time
Romans 13:8-14
Parker Evangelical Presbyterian Church
July 10, 2011
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Prayer. I have to tell you that one of the great blessings God has given PEPC is the abundance of amazing leaders – both young and old – in our community...Bud, Connect, Gary...

Okay. Let's get to work. Open your Bibles to Romans 13, verse 8. We are nearing the finish line on this series and you will remember that Paul has spent the first eleven chapters describing God's amazing love and grace for sinners. How He sent His only Son to die for each one of us. How desperate we are without him since all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and because of that shortfall, we deserve death and the wrath of God. However, the reach of God's grace goes farther than the reach of our sin. The depth of God's love is deeper by far than the depth of our self-centered ways. The sheer breadth of God's magnificent faithfulness is beyond comprehension and extends to both Jews and Gentiles. It's so incredible that Paul concludes that section with this beautiful declaration of praise, "Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and inscrutable his ways! For from him and to him and through him are all things. To him be glory forever, amen!"

Our God is truly awesome, friends! Do you know that, this morning? Do you know this awesome God? Do you know this Jesus? This Christ who emptied himself of all his glory to come and save lost sinners like you and me? Do you know him? This King of kings? This Lord of lords? This is no petty god we serve. This is what struck Paul when he looked out on the city of Athens in Greece one morning. The story's recorded in Acts 17. He looked all over that city and saw shrines and temples to all sorts of different gods, each with their own little kingdom to

rule. Some ruled the sky. Some the earth. Some the ocean. Some the rivers. Some the trees. Some the cities. Some the home. He looked and he looked and he looked and his heart broke because of what those folks were missing. They were missing out on the God of the universe! At best they had caught glimpses of him, pale reflections that had nothing to do with him. But they were meticulous, these folks, very detailed, very religious. So just in case they were forgetting someone, they set up a shrine to the unknown god. And when Paul saw that, he pointed his finger and said, let me tell you about this god you do not know! Do you know this God? You see, we're just like those Athenians. We too have our shrines. Our little temples. Oh, they aren't as obvious but when you sit down and really examine your life, one can easily see what we worship. It's where we spend our time, our money, it's what demands our attention. These are the shrines of our lives and we worship at them just as surely as the ancients did. Sure we make sure we come to church...have to appease this god as well, right? Wrong. Like Paul, I want to make sure before we go any further that you know this God! This God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ! This God who suffered and died and rose again from the dead to redeem us, to save us, to deliver us from sin and death and evil. If you don't know this God, you need to come to talk to me. You need to grab an elder this morning – just look for the nametag. Talk to them. Share with them. Tell them you want to get to know this God and they will tell you how. Don't leave without taking advantage of this opportunity.

Now why am I so hyped up on this today? Look at 13:11-12. Let's read it together.

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Over the last few weeks, we've talked about Living the Sacred Life. We looked at what sacred living

entailed, it's outlined in part in chapter twelve. There Paul talks about being living sacrifices and offering our lives as acts of spiritual worship. And remember the word "Worship" means work. It means when we come together, whether it's here or some other sanctuary or auditorium or home, we come to work. We come to be participants. We aren't spectators. We don't sit as critics. This isn't Roger Ebert at the movies. This is an active time that demands all our attention, all our focus, all our dedication so that we might give praise to God in a way that glorifies Him. That's what living a sacred life is all about. And that involves transforming the mind. Transforming how we relate to one another and the world. Pastor Bud talked last week about how it changes how we view governments and authority, particularly in uncertain times like ours where the future isn't so bright and cheery. And now Paul is going to continue to press his point and I want you to understand there's an urgency to all this. Time is growing short so every moment counts. Every second counts. The night is passing, dawn is approaching and every day brings the return of our Lord one step closer. So how are you living?

Look at verses 13-14. **Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.**

You see, as Christians, we are called, we are expected to live in light of the coming reality of the return of Jesus Christ. God expects us to live as if the new day has already dawned, the Kingdom has come, and the new world is here. We aren't supposed to live in the broken, messed up reality of this world. We aren't supposed to live by its rules. We aren't supposed to take our cue from this culture of death, rather we are called to live as a colony of life! True life! And so we leave behind the compromised morals of this world. We leave behind the ways of this world because we know they ultimately lead to destruction. Sexual immorality.

Drunkenness. Fighting. Jealousy. These are the values of this broken world, this present darkness, but we are children of light. We are the family of God Himself and so we put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We literally cover ourselves in Him like a garment. Like a coat. To put Him on so fully, so completely, that we are literally draped in Jesus.

Now let me be clear here. I am not talking about being super-cheezy, schmaltzy, make me want to gag, happy clappy Jesus guy. Don't be that guy! Or that gal! I am talking about being the kind of person that has so taken on Christ that your life just exudes his love like a fragrance. That everything from the words you speak to the things you do show forth the transformation Christ has wrought in your life. I read a book recently called UnChristian. Great book written by a couple of Christian authors who interviewed hundreds of non-Christians. What did they find? These folks loved Jesus. Loved the way he lived. Loved what he said. Loved how he treated people. Loved everything about him. But what held them back from fully embracing him as Lord and Savior? Christians. As much as they loved Christ, they were incredibly suspicious of Christians. Know anyone like that? I sure do. Friends, we have to put on Christ in such a way that is authentic, real, and down to earth. We must put on Christ, live our faith, offer our bodies as living sacrifices in a way that makes his love – his nitty-gritty, not afraid to get your hands dirty kind of love – concrete.

And how do we do that? Go back up to verses 8-10. **Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.** You see, friends, this life isn't just about what you don't do.

It's about what you do do. Did I just say "do-do" in church? My kids are laughing right about now. Anyway, the commandments are clear, right? Don't commit adultery. Don't commit murder. Don't steal or covet. But Paul points out that love takes us even further to the fulfillment of the law. What does that mean? Well, take adultery for instance. It's not just about not cheating on your spouse. It's about cultivating a love so deep for your husband or wife that you pour all of our energy, all of your attention, all that you are into this other person. You focus on them. They become the most special person in your entire world. They become so special, so much the object of your affections that adultery isn't even an option anymore. And let me be clear here with the guys especially. Adultery isn't just physically being with someone. If you're looking at pornography, you are committing adultery in your heart. So put it away and invest in your wife.

The same is true with murder. It isn't just about not killing someone. It means cultivating a way of life where no unwholesome talk comes out of your mouth. It means when you stand by the water cooler at work or you gather with other moms in the neighborhood or you are on the phone with a friend, you don't talk bad about people who aren't in the conversation. You put away gossip. You don't tear people down. My wife has a great rule of thumb for this. If anything she shares is going to impact someone's perception of that other person negatively, then you shut your mouth. Again, if I can be frank, I think our society and probably a lot of us need to think long and hard about how we talk about elected officials. How many times do we "kill" Democrats or Republicans? Verbally with friends? Via email forwards? Man, it is so tempting isn't it? To get in a bull session with folks and the next thing you know you are just killing someone's reputation. Put on Christ. Choose the better way. Pray for them. Love them the way Christ loves them.

What about stealing? How many of us have taken longer lunch breaks at work than is allowed? Clocked out a little early? Or when we got home just sat on the couch and vegged out in front of the television while our children or our roommates or our friends may have needed us? Again, stealing isn't just about robbing a bank. It's about robbing time. Robbing relationships. Withholding from others your presence, your attention, your love, your devotion. We do it to God as well, don't we?

I've said it before and I will say it again. This life, this Christian life, is not easy. Others may tell you it is or let you be content with simply accessorizing your life with a little Jesus. Not me. I am bound by the Word of God to give you the truth. And the truth is that this life, this call is the most demanding, most strenuous, most difficult journey you will ever undertake. It will demand more from you than you ever could imagine you could give. It will take you to the end of yourself and beyond. It will reveal fault lines and secret sins in your life that you thought were forever buried or maybe you didn't even know were there. It will force you to dig in. To hold fast. To stay tough. To persevere. And it's a marathon, not a sprint. But for those who do preserve to the end, for those who see this journey through to its completion, what joys await. What an adventure you will have! What glories you will see revealed! It is worth every effort you put in. I've been walking with Christ for almost twenty years and never have been let down. Never have been disappointed. Yes, life has thrown me some curves and some of you know those curves as well. But it's worth it. Worth every dollar you give, every commitment you make, every second you dedicate to it. Now you may be thinking to yourself, but you don't know me pastor. My life's not all that important. My life's not all that significant. Or I'm in a tough place right now and I'll get back to God when things start looking up. Friends, that won't wash and you know it. There is no life too small for God not to notice. There is no valley in life

too deep or struggle in life too hard for God not to use in some incredible way. Don't believe me? Consider this story. January 1943, an older African-American man passed away. For years, he would get up every morning at four a.m. to kneel by his bed to ask God for his marching orders for the day. When he was younger, he asked God to help him understand the heart of a man. But God told him that was way too big. So then he began asking God about the mysteries of life and again God told him it was too big. Finally, because he was involved in farming, he asked God about the secrets of the peanut and sweet potato. And God said that while he couldn't give him all the secrets, they were definitely more his size. His mother had been a slave. His father as well. He himself had been born into slavery at the end of the Civil War in Missouri. It would have been tempting to for him to believe his life held no significance in the economy of the Kingdom of God. But nothing could be farther from the truth and thanks be to God that George Washington Carver – brilliant scientist, botanist, and inventor of peanut butter among many other things - offered his body, his mind, his soul as a living sacrifice to His Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May we do the same today! Let's pray.