

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“ALMOST HERE!”

Romans 13:8, 11-14

☑ Do you ever awaken at 2 a.m., only to find that you cannot go back to sleep? Counting sheep doesn't help. Drinking herbal tea doesn't do the trick. Listening to soothing music doesn't lull you into slumber.

The stillness *can* be a gift, *if* you are able to pray or read or journal. But if your brain is very foggy or your body is in a lot of pain, you can pretty much forget about that.

There is nothing on TV except infomercials and reruns. A full-length movie is too much to take in. If you have housemates or close neighbors, you mustn't be noisy.

The seconds drag. The minutes creep. The hours crawl. Dawn cannot come soon enough.

☑ Lately, it seems as if it is 2 a.m. across the globe.

Demagogues push dangerous situations to the limit. Politicians prioritize partisan power over the common good. The strong prey on the vulnerable. Our people look for hope in all kinds of -isms: escapism, hedonism, materialism, secularism, religious extremism, nationalism, racism, gangsterism, you name it.

☑ {"The Second Coming"} To quote W.B. Yeats,

**Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world ...
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.**

Oh, for the night to be over! Oh, for the day to be here!

Enough! We haven't come here for Bad News. There is plenty of it out there, and we cannot afford to ignore it; but Bad News it is not the ultimate reality.

📖 The strongest, truest, last word is the *Good News*, the *Gospel*. (*Gospel* is the Old English terminology for *good news*).

We have gathered to receive and celebrate and share the Good News. We are Gospel people. Amen?!

■ Let's get to it. Romans 13:12: **“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”**

? How is the night **“nearly over”**? Which **“day is almost here”**?

📖 Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The word *advent* literally means **“coming.”** During this season, we prepare to commemorate the nativity of Christ.

{Is 9:2} By his coming, Jesus caused night to wane and day to dawn. Because of that first Christmas,

**The people walking in darkness have seen
a great light;
on those living in the land of deep
darkness a light has dawned.**

{Jn 1:4, 5, 9} The Gospel According to John announces that **“In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness,**

and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”

{Jn 8:12} Jesus himself declared: **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

? And yet, what difference does the bare fact of his coming twenty centuries ago make?

Not that much, in and of itself.

☑ Consider the nation of Japan. By and large, the Japanese have a poor understanding of biblical theology. However, many of them do know that Christmas is when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Son of God.

Christmas has been a major holiday in Japan for several decades. A lot of people host children’s parties, share a special dinner, and exchange gifts.

So, how many Japanese profess Christian belief? The total is around 1% of the population, if you include Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Christmas is true and essential history; still, it is history, *not hope*. Though Christ’s coming 2,000 years ago is Good News, it is *not good enough* to dispel the darkness and bring in the light.

But we haven’t come here for Bad News, have we? We are Gospel people!

■ Romans 13:12: **“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”**

📖 *Advent* means **“coming.”** It is the anglicized form of the Latin *adventus*, which is itself a translation of the Greek

παρουσία [parousia]. Παρουσία denotes bodily *presence*, physical *arrival*, or a royal *visit*.

The word is used twenty-four times in the New Testament. It points back to Christ’s First Advent one time. Two-thirds of the total, fifteen occurrences, refer to his Second Coming. I will read four of them:

{Mt 24:37, 39} **“As it was in the days of Noah,”** when most people **“knew nothing about what would happen,”** **“so it will be at the coming of the Son.”**

{1 Co 15:22-23} **“In Christ all will be made alive. But in this order: Christ Then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”**

{1 Th 3:13} May he **“strengthen your hearts so ... you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes...”**

{James 5:7-9} **“Be patient... brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”**

{Rev 22:5} How does this tie into Romans 13:12? Once Jesus returns **“There will be no more night.”** We **“will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give [us] light.”** All will be light and life.

? And yet, what practical, constructive difference does the bare promise of his future advent make?

Not that much, in and of itself.

☆ In part, this is an issue of distance. To many of us, the *παρουσία* appears to be very far-off.

■ Granted, as verse 11 states, **“our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”** Of course! Time is passing. But will Messiah come back today, or in 1,000 years? Only God knows.

☆ Then there is the issue of scale. The apocalyptic aspect – the final defeat of evil, the decisive passing of the old order, the total renovation of this planet – is so vast, and so alien to our experience, that we cannot grasp how it will intersect with our lives.

The Second Advent is true and essential hope; still, it is an *unrealized hope*. Though the *παρουσία* is Good News, it is *not good enough* to dispel the darkness and bring in the light.

But we haven't come here for Bad News, have we? We are Gospel people!

■ Romans 13:12: **“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”**

{Rev 1:7} We have been speaking of Christ's cosmic Second Coming, the one with an uppercase “S” and an uppercase “C”. On that day he will come **“with the clouds, and every eye will see him.”**

We have not yet considered his localized *παρουσία*. I am speaking of the second coming with a lowercase “s” and “c”.

☑ {Philip Pfatteicher} There isn't one Advent. Actually, there aren't two. **“There are three comings of Christ: ... in Bethlehem in glory at the end of time,”** and to each of us at the moment of death. My passing, and yours, will be a personal, small-scale second coming.

Unlike its cosmic counterpart, this one cannot possibly be delayed for a thousand years. Neither will it be marked by apocalyptic signs.

Yet, for us who are being saved by grace through faith in Jesus, it will resemble his ultimate Return in this most crucial respect: The Son will take us to be with him! We will see him face-to-face and abide in his glorious presence as we await the resurrection of our bodies!

■ Romans 13:12: **“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”** Amen?!

? In light of the Good News what shall we do? Shall we lock the doors, batten down the hatches, and await the dawn, this dark world be damned?

✈ By no means! We shall love our neighbors.

■ Verses 8, 10 and 11:

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law....

¹⁰ ...love is the fulfillment of the law.

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has already come for you to

wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

The command to love others is not a stop-gap measure, much less is it busywork. It is not losing importance as the Second Coming draws closer; if anything, it is gaining significance.

✈ What shall we do? We shall love our neighbors and live holy lives.

■ Verses 12b-13: ¹² **“So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.”**

We pursue holiness, not to earn salvation but because we are children of the day. This is about illuminating the darkness by shining the light our Redeemer has lit inside us.

■ Loving like the Lord loves and walking in holiness like he does is beyond us. Thank God, it is not beyond Christ in us! Verse 14: **“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

{Ps 76:4; Ps 104:2; Jn 8:12} The Son is **“resplendent with light.”** With his Father and the Spirit, **“The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment.”** Jesus is **“the light of the world.”**

{Dan 12:3} By his indwelling presence, we will **“shine like the brightness of the heavens ... like the stars for ever and ever.”**

Hear the great Good News: **“The hour has... come for [us] to wake up from [our] slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”** **“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here”!**

Romans 13:8, 11-14 is the Word of the Lord.