

**Sermon preached by Pastor Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, March 25, 2007**

WAKE-UP CALL

Romans 13:8-14

A strange thing happened to me about two weeks ago, just as I was getting ready for the defense of my Doctor of Ministry thesis on revival methods. What happened is that God hit me right between the eyes with the need for revival in my own life. The Lord showed me that I had become spiritually complacent in some areas of my life, and He convicted me about some things in my life that need to change if I am to be the man, the husband, the father, the pastor, the follower of Christ God wants me to be.

In the movie *Amazing Grace*, which chronicles the life and work of British politician and Christian statesman William Wilberforce, there is a scene in which John Newton, the author of the song “Amazing Grace,” says: “I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior.”

In these last two weeks the Lord has been showing me just how true – both painfully and gloriously true – that is. He has been showing me both how great a sinner I am – how ugly my sin is, how deeply-rooted within me it is – and what an amazing, incomparably great Savior Christ is. Without Him I would be in complete and total despair.

I feel as though in these past two weeks God has given me a wake-up call, rousing me from my spiritual lethargy, from my own spiritual complacency, causing me to confront some uncomfortable truths about the state of my soul and to get on my knees before God.

God knows I needed that wake-up call, as uncomfortable and unpleasant as it is when God exposes our disobedience, or our compromise with sin in some area of our lives. Maybe you need a wake-up call, too.

Next Sunday, you know, is Palm Sunday. Do you recall that as Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and saw it from the Mount of Olives, He wept over the city and said: “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” (Luke 19:42-44).

If you had only known. If only you had been awake spiritually. What Jesus was saying to Jerusalem is this: Disaster and destruction will come upon you. They will, in effect, sneak up on you and catch you unawares, because you were asleep spiritually when the moment of opportunity came. You were asleep in the day of God’s visitation. You missed it, because you were in a state of spiritual slumber or complacency.

Disaster and destruction did come upon Jerusalem, just as Jesus said it would, in A.D. 70. And the truth is that you and I can court disaster, too, if we are in a state of spiritual slumber or complacency and our senses are dulled to what God wants to do in our lives and to the life He calls us to live.

Notice what Paul says in today's Scripture reading in Romans 13:11: "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." The time for sleep, Paul says, is over. It's time to wake up. It's time to rouse ourselves from a state of spiritual lethargy or apathy or complacency. It's time to wake up and be fully alert to what God is doing in the world, and to what He desires to do in us.

What is the urgency in all this? It is "because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." This "salvation," as John Stott points out, embraces our justification in the past, our ongoing sanctification in the present, and our glorification in the future. What Paul is anticipating here is the day of Christ's promised return. Though Paul did not know when it would be, he knew that it could be anytime. And though the day of Christ's return has not yet come, regardless of when it does come, whether it is in our lifetime or not, it is still true, as Paul says in verse 12, that "the night is nearly over" and the time for each of us is short. For we live every moment of our lives on the edge of eternity, and none of us has a guarantee of tomorrow. Or even the next hour.

So consider this a wake-up call.

It is time to wake up, dear brothers and sisters, to the insidious nature and corrupting power of sin. You cannot "manage sin" in your life. Take it from me. I know from experience. I've tried it. It doesn't work. You may think you can manage some particular sin. You may think you can keep it under control. But when you try to manage your sin, your sin ends up managing you. When you try to control your sin, your sin ends up controlling you.

Politics, it is said, is the art of compromise. Compromise may work in politics. But you cannot reach an acceptable compromise with sin in your life.

In Ephesians 5:10 Paul says: "Find out what pleases the Lord." *The Message* paraphrase says: "Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it." If you and I are remotely serious about pleasing God, if we really desire to please God, then we must be ruthless in rooting out the sin in our lives – the big sins, the little sins, the sins we hate, and the sins we enjoy. We've got to root them out and renounce them. We've got to repent of them, which means to turn away from them. We've got to confess our sins to God and, when appropriate, to one another. And we've got to run into the grace-filled arms of Jesus.

Ruthlessness is required. Do not think for a moment that you can play around with sin and not get entangled in it. Do not think that you can flirt with sin and not be affected by it. Do not think that you can get involved in just a little sin without getting tripped up by it.

Dear friends, if any of you are engaged in any kind of willful sin, any kind of disobedience or rebellion against God and His revealed will for our lives, I implore you in the name of Jesus to turn from it today and to run to Jesus in humble, heartfelt repentance.

Do it today. Do not put it off until tomorrow, because you have no guarantee of tomorrow. The Bible says (in Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3):

Today if you hear God's voice
do not harden your heart (against Him)
as Israel did when they rebelled,
when they tested God's patience in the wilderness.

Today. God promises none of us tomorrow. That is why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6 that now is the time of God's favor. Now – today is the day of salvation. So, as it says in Hebrews 3:13, as long as it is today, make sure that you are not led astray and hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

If you need to get right with God, don't put it off until tomorrow. Today is the day to do it.

If you need to get rid of some sin in your life and start fresh with God, don't put it off until tomorrow. You have no guarantee of tomorrow. Today is the day to do it. Today while God is speaking to your heart.

Some of us, I fear, have become too cozy with sin – perhaps without even realizing how cozy we have become. The trouble with living in this world, as Stuart Briscoe has pointed out, is that the things of this world which constantly clamor for our attention can become totally absorbing. The problem is not that we are in the world. The problem is that the world is too often and too much in us. And some of us, I fear, have become way too familiar and way too comfortable with what popular culture is trying to sell us.

We were blessed to have Marc Santom, our National Director for Student and Young Adult Ministries, with us here at Faith last weekend. Some of you benefited personally, as I did, from the seminars Marc led last weekend. A lot of parents, I'm sorry to say, missed a terrific seminar Marc led for parents on "10 Things Every Kid Should Know About Sex" last Sunday.

Near the end of Marc's book *Shadow-dwellers* he talks about what Paul says in Ephesians 5:3 about sexual immorality. Here is what Paul says: "Among you (among God's people) there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality."

Actually, that's not all Paul talks about there. If you look at verses 3 and 4 in their totality, this is what you find:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality,

or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? "Not even a hint." In his book Marc writes that a hint may be something small and practically unnoticeable. So when Paul gave this instruction to the Ephesians, what he was saying was essentially this: "Listen, I don't care if your sin is so small that you can hide it in the tiniest pocket on your backpack. You can't keep it. I don't care if you can fit it like a gold ring in the pocket of your pants. It has to go. When it comes to sexual sin, there is a 'zero tolerance' policy."

There is no place for even a hint of sexual immorality – or any of these other sins Paul pinpoints – in your life or mine. Such sins, as it says in the New Living Translation (NLT), have no place among God's people.

The Lord has convicted me in these last two weeks that some of the stuff I was watching on TV contained hints – and sometimes more than just a hint – of sexual immorality that was dulling my spiritual senses. Could that be true for some of you as well?

The Lord has prompted me to make some changes in my TV viewing. There are some shows I used to watch that I've stopped watching. Maybe God wants you to do the same. This is not about legalism. It is about obedience born of a desire to please God.

It is time to wake up to the insidious nature, to the corrupting power and deceitfulness of sin. If there is a pattern of sin in your life, if there is some sin you've been holding onto, some sin that perhaps you've kept hidden and no one knows about it but you and God, let go of it today. Turn away from it today. Be done with it today. Renounce it today. Repent of it today. Run from it and run straight to Jesus.

It is time to wake up, as well, to the disease of spiritual complacency. In Romans 12:11 Paul says: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." *The Message* paraphrase says: "Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master."

But over in Amos 6:1 the prophet says: "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion." God is not pleased with those who lose their spiritual fervor and become lethargic or indifferent to the things of God.

Spiritual complacency is obviously not a new disease. In Revelation 2, after commending the church in Ephesus for their hard work, their perseverance in the faith and their orthodoxy in the face of false teachers, the Lord Jesus had these hard words for the believers there:

Yet this I hold against you. You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first.

What had happened to the passion for Christ they once had? What had happened to the white hot fire of their faith? What had happened to their spiritual fervor and their zeal for the Lord? It had cooled. They had gotten into a comfortable spiritual rut. They hadn't dropped out of church, but a lot of them weren't as active or involved or committed to the life and ministry of the church as they had once been. They still came to worship, but it wasn't quite the priority it used to be and some of them weren't as regular in their attendance as they had been in the past. Spending time with God had become more of a duty than a delight.

Spiritual complacency. It can happen to anyone. It can happen in any church. Has it happened to you? What does Jesus have to say to you this morning about your spiritual fervor? About your passion for the things of God? About the fire of your love for Him and your devotion to Him?

Have you gotten into a comfortable spiritual rut? Have you become complacent spiritually?

It can happen to anyone. It has happened to me.

Have you forsaken – or simply drifted away from – the love for Christ you had when you first came alive in Him spiritually?

If you have, now is the time and today is the day to wake up and repent of your complacency and spiritual lethargy. Now is the time and today is the day to renew your heart commitment in trusting faith to follow hard after Jesus, to begin again to serve Him with your whole self – with energy, intelligence, passion and love.

Jesus doesn't want half-hearted followers who just go through the motions. He doesn't want just part of you. He wants all of you. He wants all of me. I'm still learning what that means as I continue on the wild, wonderful adventure of living as a follower of Christ. I know this much: I know you can't honor Christ the way He desires to be honored and the way He deserves to be honored if you don't give Him all of you.

It's time to wake up from your slumber and shake off your complacency. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul says: "Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine." In *The Message* it says: "Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourself regular checkups."

In order to examine yourself, in order to check your spiritual temperature and your vital signs, you've got to be awake and alert. You've got to be in tune with the Lord Jesus. You've got to keep your eyes fixed on Him.

It is time to wake up to the curse of spiritual complacency, get out of that spiritual rut if you're in one, and rekindle the passion of your love for the Lord Jesus.

There is one more thing. It is time, too, to wake up to the greatness and the wonder of the grace of God. This message has been pretty heavily weighted with warnings about sin and spiritual complacency. It is a message I believe we need to hear and take to heart.

But as we confront the reality and seriousness of sin in our lives, as we examine the state of our souls, we must never lose sight of the priceless gift and transforming power of God's amazing grace. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He showers us with gifts of His love. Totally undeserved. He gave His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die in our place and to take the punishment for all our sins upon Himself in His death on the cross. He didn't have to do that. But He chose to. Out of love.

John Newton was right. We are great sinners, every one of us. But Christ is a great Savior. And His grace is greater than all our sin.

Dear friends, 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. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, let us clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the sinful nature.

- Romans 13:11-14

Lord, let it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.