

SERMON – PASTOR GREG

27.12.2022

ADVENT. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The sermon is based on the Romans reading: *The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.* Let us pray.

I grew up in SA playing Aussie Rules but then I went to Alice Springs and started to play League. I asked the question: “What do I have to do?” I joined Rural Youth and asked, “What do I have to do?” I joined Elders Pastoral and asked, “What do I have to do?” I became a Christian and I could have asked the same question, “What do I have to do?” But from the very beginning I knew what I had to do- NOTHING, because I knew that Christ Jesus had done it all for me. I also knew that being a Christian meant that my life would change and that I was called to a new way of living.

Romans is a letter written to first generation Christians, who had formerly been of the Jewish and Roman and Greek and pagan religions. All those religions had clearly defined ways of worship and of living. So when they became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, the question was often asked, “What do I have to do?” So God inspired His servant Paul to write them a letter.

Martin Luther thought so highly of this letter that 1500 years after Paul, Luther wrote: This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.

The first eleven chapters focus upon sin, grace, forgiveness and of course the Lord Jesus Christ. Chapters 12, 13 and 14 speak of the new way of living as the fruit of faith in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 12 begins with: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers (and sisters) in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* The call to holy living is always done on the basis of what the Eternal Son of God has done for us- it is always a response.

So what does it mean to offer our bodies as living sacrifices? Two thousand years ago the Jewish and Roman and Greek and Pagan people all knew what sacrifices meant. Animals and birds, blood and death. But not now for the Christian Church because as we hear in Hebrews 9:26: *(Christ) has appeared once for all at the end of the age to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself...We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb 10:1-0).*

So again, what does it mean it offer our bodies as living sacrifices?

Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. The deeds of darkness are those things we do because of our sinful nature- our selfish nature- our sinful nature. You know them very well. But what about putting on the armour of light?

John 1: *In him (the Word made flesh) was life, and that life was the light of all people.*

John 9: *I AM the Light of the world.*

Ephesians 5:8: Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the world. Live as children of the light.

Eph 6:11: Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes...belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit- the word of God.

Paul continues with his call to live the holy life: *Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

I am reminded of other such words: Colossians 3:12: *Therefore, as God's chosen people and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive...And over all these virtues put on love.*

And this clothing, this armour was given to each one of us when we were baptised, when we believed that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour. We are called to live the holy life even as Christ has made us holy and all the more as our last day approaches. The Son of Man will return or we will die- but as we continue the battle, as continue to fight the good fight and to run the race- heaven is our future.

To finish. I have a little book first published in 1953 for men and women in the outback. A story from it: In a humble home alongside the Murray River...a man of middle age was lying very weak and ill. In response to a question about the Christian life, he replied, "I could not keep it." The missionary responded by saying, "You don't have to keep it, the Lord is your keeper." ...A feather may be blown about by the lightest breeze, but if I enclose it in my hand, no wind or cyclone can blow it away. You and I are like that feather. The winds of temptation and trouble and sin blow us about, first one way and then another. But (as we trust in Christ) he holds us safe in the hollow of his hand and neither man nor devil can pluck us out.

"What do I have to do?"

The LORD (Jesus Christ) is your shepherd and he will lead you through the valley of the shadow of darkness he will anoint your head with oil and he will give you a cup that is overflowing and you will dwell in the house He has prepared for you. Because He loves you. Amen.