

What If God Would Take His Word Away From Us?

Text: Amos 8:11-12

Suggested Hymns:

264, 267, 262, 290, 515

- 1) What If God Would Take His Word Away From Us?
- 2) Israel Lost The Word Of God
- 3) Now Is The Day Of Your Salvation
- 4) Cherish The Word Of God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Amos 8:11-12, ¹¹ *“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord GOD, “That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD.* ¹² *They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find it.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We have now arrived at the second of the three pre-lent Sundays. Today is Sexagesima Sunday which means that this Sunday falls within sixty days of Easter.

Our text is taken from the book of Amos. The name “Amos” is derived from the Hebrew terms meaning “lift a burden.” Thus, the name means “Burden” or “Burden-bearer.” Amos lived up to the meaning of his name by bearing up under his divinely given burden of declaring judgement to rebellious Israel.

Amos is known as the shepherd prophet. His home was a little town about 8 Km south of Bethlehem. Amos had no special training. He had never attended a school for prophets, nor did he come from a prophet’s family.¹ God took him away from his flock and sent him to the children of Israel with a special message.

Jeroboam II was king of the Northern Kingdom. He was one of the greatest kings that ever occupied the throne of that kingdom. Politically and economically things looked good enough.

But morally things were in a bad way. Religion had degraded into sham and hypocrisy. Bethel, about 19 Km north of Jerusalem, the centre of the religious

life of Israel, was the scene of pagan idolatry. The whole thing smelled unto heaven.

It was under such conditions that God sent Amos to Bethel with a warning. Amos spoke of the impending judgement of God, but Israel would not heed the warning voice of Amos. The high priest, Amaziah, tried to silence him. Finally, he told him to go back home and preach, if preach he must.² But Amos was unmoved, and he drove his message home once more.

Our text is taken from the final warning addressed to the house of Israel, ***Behold, the days are coming,*** says the Lord GOD, ***“That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD.***

Because Israel will not heed the Word of God, God will take His Word away and cause a great spiritual famine. That is the essence of our text.

The experience of Israel has often been repeated in the history of mankind. Who will dare to say that it will not be repeated again? *What if God would take His Word away from us?* Let us consider this question. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. What If God Would Take His Word Away From Us?

The Word of God is a very great blessing indeed. We have our Bibles, which we can read and study. It is preached to us in our congregations. It is taught to our children in our Sunday School and in our Confirmation classes.

The centre, the heart, of God’s Word is the revelation of His love and mercy in Christ Jesus. That solves for us the great problem of sin and fixes our relationship with God.

What a blessing! If you had just one more day to live, what would you do on this last day? If you knew that tomorrow morning at this hour you would have to die and leave behind all the things that are near and dear to you, and go into eternity to meet your God, what would occupy your minds today?

The story is told of a king who on his death-bed called his jester and tried to put off the thought of death by telling the jester that he was about to take a far journey into a distant land from which he would never return. When the jester asked what preparations the king had made, the reply was that no preparations

had been made for the journey. *“Then you are a bigger fool than I am,”* said the jester.

How many of us are like this king! We all realise that we must make this last journey, and not one of us knows how soon we shall have to make it. What preparations are we making? Who can tell us something about the land of eternity into which we must journey? Who can tell us something about a possible passport? Who can tell us something about the requirements of citizenship in order that we may live happily in that land of eternity?

If we are indeed at all serious, immediately the question of sin, of judgement, and of retribution, will force itself upon us. God says in Leviticus 19:2, ² *“Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’”*

That is the entrance requirement for the life in the world to come. Nothing less will do. *‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’* And we poor, damnable sinners are so far from being holy. We do not even dare to hope that we might meet this requirement.

There is no school in this world that can prepare us for these entrance examinations. There is no philosophy of men that can solve this problem for us.

God Himself, that same God who said, *“You shall be holy,”* has come to our rescue. He has revealed to us a plan of salvation which alone can save the children of night from eternal death. In His great love He gave His only-begotten Son to be made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, to take our place that we might take His place, to become accursed in our stead that we might become the adopted sons and daughters of God.

In order that you and I might know of this one possibility for a blessed hereafter, God has revealed His love to us in His Word. The Bible in which you learn of God’s plan of salvation, is not given by any human interpretation, *but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*³ *“Thus says the Lord”* was the message of Amos to the people of his day.

What a blessing, then, this Word of God is! Where is there anything that can measure up to the importance of this revelation? Suppose you would have to give up all but one thing, what would be your choice? Henry Stanley, on his trip

through Africa, had to throw away all his books, one after another, but he kept his Bible. Which book would you keep?

2. Israel Lost The Word Of God

We are so accustomed to having God's Word in our home, in our church, that we can hardly imagine that the day could ever come when all this could be taken away.

And yet, that has happened in the history of mankind again and again. The most appalling example is probably Israel. Israel had God's Word in full measure. From among all the nations of the then known world this one people had been singled out to receive the revelation from on high.

Think of the Temple in Jerusalem. The sacrifices. The priesthood. The preaching of the great prophets. Then think of Egypt, of Assyria, of Phenicia, of Babylon, of Rome, of Greece, and all the pagan idolatry with its debasing influence. What a singular blessing Israel enjoyed!

And yet the prophet says in our text, *Behold, the days are coming,*” says the Lord GOD, *“That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the Lord.* Israel lost its blessing. Why?

Israel lost the Word of God because it did not cherish it. It turned a deaf ear to the Word of God. When Amos was sent to Israel to preach the Word of God, he was told by the Priest Amaziah, *“Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, And there prophesy. ¹³ But never again prophesy at Bethel, For it is the king's sanctuary, And it is the royal residence.”*

Amos finally went. And the Word of God went with him. And shortly afterwards the land was overrun by the Assyrians. Israel was led away and has disappeared from the history of mankind. Today we speak of the ten lost tribes of the house of Israel.

3. Now Is The Day Of Your Salvation

No other nation enjoyed the privileges of the Israelites. Israel was “entrusted with the very words of God.”⁴ Yet the time will come for this people, the Lord says, when they will be totally deprived of His Word. Like thirst-crazed, dying

men they will stagger from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea and from Galilee to Gilead looking for a message from the Lord, but they will not hear it.

The strong young men and women seem to be best equipped to survive famine and thirst, but they too will become faint for a lack of the Word and will finally fall.

The reason for the famine of the Word is plain. Instead of fearing the Lord their God, serving Him only and taking their oaths by His name, the people have followed other gods, the gods of the people around them.⁵ They now swear their oaths by the idol god of Samaria— or by the golden calf image that Jeroboam I set up at Dan, or by the god they worship with their pilgrimages to Beersheba.⁶ When God raises up prophets from among their sons, they command them not to prophesy.⁷

People who refuse to hear the Word of the Lord finally *cannot* hear it, because God takes His Word away. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 6:2, ***Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation***, Luther said, *“The preaching of the gospel is not an eternal, lasting, continual teaching, but it is like a passing shower which travels on. Some ground is watered and another place stays dry. It does not return and also does not stand still. Then the hot sun comes and licks up the moisture that remains.”*

If we neglect the Word and refuse to follow our Saviour’s leading, the Gospel will pass on to others like a summer shower, and will not return to us and our children. The time to hear, believe, and follow the Word is *now*, while we live in the day of God’s grace!

4. Cherish The Word Of God

What if God would take His Word away from us? Do we appreciate God’s Word, or are we like Israel of old? As we look into the Christian churches by and large, must we not confess to our shame that we do not appreciate the blessings of God’s Word as we ought?

To be sure, there are left also today the seven thousand who have not bowed their knees before Baal. There are left also today in our churches men and women and children who truly love and highly cherish God’s Word, who, if need be, would give up everything in life, but never God’s Word. Thank God for them!

But what of the great masses in the churches of today? It is estimated that fewer than 16 per cent, of the people who are outwardly connected with a Church in Australia regularly attend Divine Services.⁸ In the 1950's it was 44 percent. Today it is simply taken for granted that they will not come.

No, we do not in mind the exceptional cases, the old and the sick. We do not have in mind the weather conditions, which sometimes make it impossible for some to go to church. Rather we have in mind the most favourable conditions. Sadly, many people who have been baptised no longer attend church.

Or think of the blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Luther once said that, if a person does not receive the holy Sacrament some four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises it and is not a Christian. Four times a year Luther calls a minimum. Something is fundamentally wrong, he says, if this minimum is not reached. By that standard, how many church people are still to be counted as Christians?

We know that we cannot figure out Christianity by mathematics. But we also know that, if a person no longer hungers and thirsts for the blessed Sacrament, it is high time for them to examine themselves and see whether Jesus still counts for anything at all in their lives or whether their religion has deteriorated into such a watery solution that they may as well pour it away altogether.

Amaziah told Amos to go back home and do his preaching there, if preach he must, and that the people of Bethel were tired of it. In the end God sent a famine of His Word, and they wandered from sea to sea and from the North to the East and sought the Word of the Lord, but no longer found it.

Is the day coming in which our country and our churches will no longer have the Word of God? Is the day coming when our land will sink back into paganism? Is the day coming when other nations and other people who are today grovelling in the night of pagan ignorance will have the light of God's Word? Is the day coming when these people from other lands will send missionaries to Australia in order to establish Christianity again?

Oh, let us cherish God's Word! Let us consider it the greatest blessing we are enjoying. Let us say from our heart as the psalmist once said, ***LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house, And the place where Your glory dwells.***⁹

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,¹⁰

Precious Word from God in heaven.
Full of blessedness to me,
All my trust to Thee is given,
My salvation rests on Thee:
I in Thee find all I need
That my soul to God can lead.

Let Thy grace sustain, protect me,
That my ways ne'er from Thee part;
Thy enlight'ning Word direct me:
Seal this treasure in my heart,
That in faith I steadfast prove
Till I walk by sight above. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Amos 7:14

² Amos 7:12-13

³ 2 Peter 1:21

⁴ [Romans 3:2](#)

⁵ [Deuteronomy 6:13-14](#)

⁶ Amos 5:5

⁷ Amos 2:11-12

⁸ Eternity News, 2017

⁹ Psalm 26:8

¹⁰ Hymn 262 v 1 & 5