

11/9/08

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Amos 5:18-24

(God calls the Israelites, through Amos, to *let justice roll down like water.*)

18 Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. 19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. 20 Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light-- pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

21 "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. 22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. 23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

24 But **let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!**

THE EPISTLE LESSON 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (*Paul gives words of encouragement about God's love at the end of our lives, and at the end of all things.*)

13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 25:1-13 (*In the parable of the Parable of the Ten Virgins Jesus calls His followers to be prepared when He will come again as Judge.*)

1 "At that time **the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.** 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.

5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' 7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the

door was shut. 11 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' 12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

13 "Therefore **keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**

THE SERMON

"Always Ready"

Matthew 25

INTRO - In 1986 my wife and I tried to fulfill a dream I had since a small child. We traveled to visit relatives in Massachusetts. Having been born there I have always been a Red Sox fan. I've actually had opportunities to go to a game since being a child. When I was a child, though, I wasn't chosen to go with the Little Leagues. When I went to Boston with my Aunt, the Sox weren't in town. When I visited as an adult, the game was rained out. But finally we bought tickets over the phone and were going to a game.

We ate lunch at a favorite restaurant, and then we left for the game with an hour and a half to spare. However, I did not know Boston traffic, and had not prepared for it. We got in a traffic jam, but I was sure we would make the game. We listened to the pregame show on the radio, and we waited, and waited. We were still in the traffic jam when the game started. We finally arrived an hour after the game started in the 3rd inning. Even though this was an event I had dreamed about my whole life, because I did not check on traffic before a game, we missed much of the game.

I. Jesus warns the people of His day about missing the most important event of anyone's life, the coming again of Jesus to take His people to be in heaven.

A. By God's grace, people are ready for the coming of Jesus when they are living in faith, when they live believing in Jesus as their Savior.

1. When Jesus comes again as Judge He will take those who believe that He is their savior from sin to heaven.
2. So, being ready, believing, is very important, so that people do not miss heaven.

B. In Jesus' parable it is important to know that both the wise and unwise ladies, virgins, brides to be were expecting the bridegroom.

1. In other words, both the wise and unwise were people who knew Jesus was coming,
2. But the wise had oil for their lamps, and the unwise did not.
3. The wise were prepared, and the unwise were unprepared.

C. Since both knew the bridegroom was coming, what made the unwise unprepared.

1. What can distract a person from faith?
 - A. Activities that keep us from worshiping and serving God, can distract us.
 - B. Interests that encourage us to put other desires in front of God, can distract us.
 - C. Thought patterns that cause us to doubt God and trust ourselves, or trust science, or trust modern thinking, are ways that people can be distracted from God.
2. We want to be ready when God comes. We don't want to be distracted, or doubting, not believing.

II. So, what causes us to turn to God?

A. As a youth, retreats and gatherings were very important. Time studying God's word with others, and rejoicing in God's love, helped me to find joy in God, when the world around me was often finding happiness in other place.

B. As an adult, challenges that are bigger than my wisdom, cause me to turn to God.

1. Being a parent I have often felt that I as in over my head.
2. I've gone to God in prayer because I did not have the answer.
3. When I've turned to God, my trust has grown. When I've seen God work, my trust has grown.

C. As a Christian, being part of a Church has caused me to turn to God.

1. Both as a pastor, but also as a member of God's church there are times I hear God's call, but obstacles get in the way.
2. I know God's work needs to be done, but all my efforts seem in vain.
3. I have no choice but to turn to God. And, time and again I have seen Him act.

III. During worship today I asked you to fill out a form that listed 5 opportunities or challenges in life that were reason to thank God.

A. What did you list?

1. Did you list your family?
2. Did you list your job?
3. Did you list the church?
4. Are there other challenges you listed?

B. Do you see, these challenges and opportunities that turn us to God, can help us to be ready when He comes again, because we find that our real hope in life is in God, and only in God.

CONCLUSION - In 1992 St. John became interested in doing work in Russia. In 1993 The Koss's and my son went to Provideniya, across from Nome, and started making contacts. For the next 4 summers teams went from Alaska to share the Gospel with others. But, it got tougher to get in. There was a financial crisis in Russia, and the people we knew faced possible starvation. How could we feed that many people. How could we even help when we were having trouble getting in to Russia.

We knew this was over our heads, but in prayer we decided to try to help. Our goal was to try to raise \$20,000.00 to help those in Russia with some food staples. After much effort, and much prayer, and asking others to help, and trusting God, we actually raised over \$100,000.00. Where it costs about \$1.00 a pound to ship food to the bush of Alaska, through much effort, through much prayer, that money purchased and shipped over 115,000 pound of food staples into Russia. This opportunity, this challenge was above our ability. But God worked through us, and this challenge strengthened my faith. Seeing God work in this way helped me to trust God. Seeing God work in this way is one challenge that will help me to be trusting God when Jesus comes again.

What challenges are you facing with God's help?