

Sermon Nov. 13, 2011 Oscar Lied  
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The day of the Lord is a wake-up call

Today's texts are about the end times. In Matthew, the slaves are held accountable when the master finally comes back. Zephaniah and 1 Thessalonians both talk about the Day of the Lord, when Jesus will come back, the world will be judged, and everything will be made new. The Day of the Lord will bring about healing and justice, and it is a wake-up call for us right now. A wake-up call.

The day of the Lord was a wake-up call for me.

Some of you may remember that I have partially grown up in Ecuador, and have had some formative experiences there. Well, not all of them are good. When I was a teenager in Ecuador, I struggled with depression. Because of various things that happened, I retreated into my own world and didn't trust anyone. I also became very depressed.

If any of you struggle with or have struggled with depression, you know how difficult it is. Everything is dark. There seems to be no hope. I didn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. The light is there, but I didn't see it. All I saw was darkness. I was not able to pull myself out of this.

One of the reasons I believe in God, is that he healed me of depression. This healing did not happen instantly, and is actually still going on today. One important moment important moment happened during a summer when I was 18. I was at a charismatic Lutheran youth camp. At one of the meetings, we were asked to come up to prayed for individually if we felt we had something we needed prayer for. So I went up and got prayed for by a guy probably in his mid-20s. After he had prayed a little bit, he got silent, and then said: "Oscar, God just spoke to me, but I think spoke to you. He said: 'Do not worry, my son. I am always with you.'" For some reason, that made all my emotions well up from inside. I cried that whole evening. If any of you have had conversion experiences or healing experiences like this, know that they are very emotional. The dirt has to go out. And it did. But afterwards I felt a new peace that I had not felt for a long time. I felt at rest.

How does this relate to the Day of the Lord? Well, I think that the healing I experienced, and the healings some of you may have experienced, is a taste of the healing we will all experience on the Day of the Lord. Not everyone experience healing in this world, and even the healings that we do experience are incomplete. There cannot be complete healing in this world, because this world is imperfect, full of sin. There will always be something lacking. Not so on the Day of the Lord. On that day, God's healing will be complete.

That does not mean that we should just sit around and wait. No. God wants to heal now, and God wants us to participate in his healing of the world. In Jesus's parable, the servants who are rewarded are those who go out and do something with the gifts that they have been given. God wants us to use our talents for healing. And in the end, there will be complete healing. The Day of the Lord is a wake-up call. A wake-up call for healing.

The Day of the Lord is also a wake-up call for justice. My parents were missionaries in Ecuador. My mom, especially, worked with the indigenous church. There are several indigenous groups in Ecuador, and all have been oppressed pretty consistently since the Spanish conquest until recently. My mom worked with an indigenous group called the Cañari, from an area called Cañar. They have a really messy history, looked down upon both by other indigenous groups and the mestizo majority. Their original language was actually made extinct from the Inca empire, so they adopted Quichua – the Inca language. Later they were forced to speak Spanish and adopt a sort of Spanish-mestizo culture. The mission my parents were in worked for affirmation and support of the Cañari indigenous culture, by founding an indigenous school, building a health clinic in a place nobody else wanted to go, promoting the Bible in Quichua and training of indigenous leaders.

We all long for it, don't we? I believe God has put down a deep longing for justice in our hearts. We hate it when things are unfair. And they are unfair. This is not a just world. There is plenty of evidence for this, but I just want to cite two statistics:

1. The U.S. Census Bureau just released a new poverty measure on Monday, that puts America's poverty rate at 16 %, a measure that includes food stamps and other programs aimed at helping families survive. 16%, that's about 49 million people.
2. Rise of income level. Between 1979 and 2007, the income level of the richest 1% increased by 275%. More than tripled. For the bottom 25%, it increased 18%.

We live in an unjust world. This should not be so hard for us to acknowledge. Sin is real. Just look at history, just look at the world today.

We long for justice, and I think one reason for this is that we are created in God's image. We long for justice because God longs for justice. Just like God wants us to participate in his healing now, God also wants us to work for justice. That is in large parts what my parents did as missionaries in Ecuador. In Jesus' parable, the servants who are rewarded are those who did something with the gifts they had. The Day of the Lord is a wake-up call for justice now.

But just like healing will not be complete in this world, neither will justice. But on the day of the Lord, God will bring justice. Jesus says that "there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open." (Lk 8:17). There will be justice.

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It is a **wake-up call**, and one place we see this in the Old Testament passage for today, the passage from Zephaniah. Zephaniah is one of the really old prophets in the Old Testaments. He was around in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, in Judah, during the time of King Josiah. This was a while after Saul, David and Solomon's united Israel. Israel had already split and been split for many years, into the Northern Kingdom – Israel – and the Southern Kingdom – Judah. By the time of King Josiah, the Northern Kingdom had already been wiped out by the Assyrians, and only Judah was left as an independent kingdom. It was unsafe times, a lot of war, and constant threats from larger and more powerful nations like Assyria and Egypt.

In the middle of all this, Zephaniah talks about the Day of the Lord. What is the Day of the Lord? According to some Biblical scholars, in early Israelite tradition, the Day of the Lord referred to festival days, where God was worshipped. In our context, Christmas and Easter would be Days of the Lord. It was a happy occasion. Something to look forward to.

Zephaniah changes this, and makes the Day of the Lord something to be feared. Why does he do this? At the time of Zephaniah, other religions were competing with the worship of the one God. Other gods were being worshipped in Jerusalem. The Jewish festivals were no longer taken seriously. They were no longer about God. The people needed to hear Zephaniah's message to turn back to the Lord.

We can take something out of this for ourselves, for there are times when we need to be reminded that only God is to be worshiped. In our time, we may not worship the Assyrian gods, but instead worship things like money, success, achievement. Human beings are easily distracted. We need to be reminded that we really only need to worship God. Other "gods" will not help us very much.

Let's look at verse 12 again: "I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm.'"

This is a wake-up call. God is active, and so should you be. Zephaniah wants to wake people up. He preaches about the Day of the Lord because he cares about faithfulness to God. He wants to wake people up.

The gospel text for today is also a wake-up call. God gives different people different gifts. What do we do with the gifts that we are given? God has given them to us to be used. On the Day of the Lord, we will be held accountable for the way we have used the gifts that God has given us. The point is not future judgment, though but what we do right now.

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