

SUMMER 5 - Waiting for the Son

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[0 : 00] Rain standing, although half of you are just about to sit, why don't we pray? Father, please help us with your word tonight to understand it, to listen to it astutely, and Father, to obey it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, friends, if you're a regular here at Holy Trinity, you'll notice that there is a theme that has been running through nearly all sermons on Sunday and today, and it doesn't give up today, let me tell you. So that's just a clue for those of you who, if you notice some of the similarity between the readings tonight with last Sunday, then you're right. They're similar in many ways.

There's a similar idea, and you'll see that running through things. So there may be opportunity tonight to ask questions again. I'm just, well, there will be, is my intention. And so that may raise some of the issues that arise out of this topic. Well, friends, it had been three momentous years.

The 11 men had been gathered together by Jesus. They'd followed him everywhere. They had seen him inexorably heading towards death. Then death came. It had thrown them into confusion and dismay, and then his body disappeared. But then he began to appear in various locations to various people.

Finally, 40 days after his death, he appeared to them again. And when he did, they questioned him about the kingdom. You remember this from Acts chapter one, and he issued some parting instructions.

[1 : 34] Actually, I like the story really, because it shows that the resurrection hadn't changed Jesus' ability to not always answer the question that you wanted answered when you ask it.

Anyway, he issued some parting instructions instead of answering their question. And their concern, he said, was to not be with the coming of the kingdom or with the timing of the kingdom, but instead they were going to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was going to come upon them, and they were going to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth. And then while they were watching, you remember he was lifted up before them, and a cloud took him out of their sight, and they stood there sort of staring into the heavens, and two men stood beside them and said these words, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus who's been taken from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

Now Jesus is clear. God is clear. The New Testament writers are agreed. The first coming of Jesus is to be succeeded by a second. Jesus is going to return to the earth. And the tenor of what they say throughout the New Testament is that that is going to happen soon. According to Matthew 24 verse 27, that coming will be a universally evident event.

Matthew 24 verse 30 says that it will be that it will be a coming that is in glory and power. And Paul says in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 8, that the coming of Jesus again will be marked by the destruction of all by Jesus of all anti-God and evil forces. Numerous passages scattered through the New Testament say that Jesus will gather his people, both those who are living and those who are dead, and he will draw them to himself. He will judge the world. Matthew 25. Friends, we must listen to what Jesus and the apostles say because they say it over and over and over again. Hear the uniform witness of the New Testament, the imminent coming, second coming of Jesus. It is a fact agreed upon and stated throughout the New Testament. And you and I know that in the two, that within two decades, there will be 2,000 years that will have passed since the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

And he has still not come. And the questions that sit in our minds, at least in my mind, are multiple. But tonight, as we look at Amos 4, I want three particular questions to linger in our minds, and we're going to come and look at them. And the questions are these.

Why is God taking so long to send Jesus again? What can I expect when Jesus finally comes? And what should I do while I wait? Three questions.

[4 : 31] Why is God taking so long to send Jesus again? What can I expect when he does come? And what should I do in this situation I'm in now, that is, while I wait?

Now, you may not think that the Old Testament is really going to help us with what appears to be a distinctively New Testament question or set of questions. But I want to assure you tonight that it can help us. Amos chapter 4 will help us with answering those questions.

So I want to urge you tonight to listen very carefully to this prophet. Watch and listen. He has some marvellous truths for us as we sit on the edge of the Lord's coming.

So let's turn to Amos 4 and follow it with me. Now, you might remember from our first Bible study that Amos was a herdsman. Perhaps he was even a cattle and sheep breeder.

Therefore, he knew about a particular place called Bashan. Now, Bashan was a plain located in the Transjordan. And through it flowed the Yarmouk River.

[5 : 35] Lush grasses grew there. They abounded. And such grass made finely bred cattle. They loved it. And so the cattle of Bashan were renowned throughout all of Israel.

They were well-fed, healthy. You might even say plump. And such well-known, well-fed, healthy, plump cows are therefore a great image for the wealthy upper class women of the northern kingdom.

Cows of Bashan. Look at what Amos has to say to them. It is really very sting, isn't it? Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, bring me something to drink.

Now, the word that's used in this verse for husbands is literally lords. So hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their lords, bring me something to drink.

Now, the image is striking and clear. Here are these women. They have sat there in their summer and winter houses, grown fat by oppressing the poor, by crushing the needy, by lording it over their husbands.

[6 : 54] And here they sit in all their wealth, demanding that their pleasures are met. Presumably, it's such demands that result in their husbands having to extort and oppress the poor even more so that they can feed their growingly plump wives.

Here is a horrifying image, isn't it, of self-satisfied, self-assured, self-gratifying indulgence. That's what Amos wants to convey. That is just feeding on things so much that that's all you do.

And in verse two, Amos tells us what God thinks about it. For he says, the Lord has sworn by his holiness. The time is surely coming when they shall take away you away with hooks, even the last of you with fish hooks.

Through breaches in the wall, you shall leave each one straight ahead and you shall be flung into harm and says the Lord. Now, let me tell you, this verse is unusual in a number of ways. It is unusual because it talks about God swearing an oath.

You'd think with God, just his word would be enough. But here he swears an oath. It is. So that is unusual in itself. But even more unusual is that this is one of the few times in the Old Testament where God swears by an attribute of his very own being.

[8 : 10] In this case, his own holiness. If you want another example, Psalm 89 verse 36. So when God swears an oath by an attribute of his character, then he's putting his very own character at stake.

He's saying, by my holiness, I swear this is going to happen. There can be no stronger way of saying that something is going to happen than by God doing this.

God is clear. What is going to happen is irrevocable and irrefutable. It is the unalterable will of God. It will surely happen as surely as God is holy.

And what will happen is clear. In the days that will come, a very different scenario will emerge for these fat cows of Bashan. Instead of making demands upon their lords, the real Lord will act.

And he will act in destruction and exile. Although the exact details of the Hebrew are a bit unclear here, the thrust of verses 2 and 3 is overwhelmingly clear.

[9 : 19] God is surely going to act in judgment in these coming days. And the judgment will be strong and severe and deserved.

It is coming upon these people and will not be turned back. So with that, we read verses 4 and 5. Now let me tell you a little bit about Bethel and Gilgal. Both were ancient sacred sites and places of worship.

You know, that's where the people of God went in order to worship and sacrifice. And Amos uses words and phrases that almost sound like an ancient call to worship. He says, come to Bethel.

Now come to the Lord. Come to where sacrifice happens. Come to these places of worship. Come to Gilgal. A call to worship. And then he puts this really surprising little twist in the end.

Do you notice it there? Come to Bethel and transgress. Come to Gilgal and multiply transgression. These places should have been, you see, places of sacrifice and places of thanksgiving and forgiveness.

[10 : 24] But they have been perverted. And instead of being places of forgiveness, they've become places of sin. The people of God are sacrificing repeatedly and more often than required.

The verses go on to say they're tithing more than is required. But their lives and their attitudes are lies. Here are people very religious. Their religious practices, though, appear to be just an opportunity for displaying their arrogance.

There's a very deep irony and sarcasm in the prophet. I've used an alternative translation. I just want you to listen to it, which highlights the deep irony and sarcasm.

Go to Bethel and sin. Go to Gilgal and sin yet more.

Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your free will offerings.

[11:26] I'm using an alternative translation, as I said. Boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do, declares the Sovereign Lord. Can you hear what God is saying?

He's saying, look, your religious practices, the religious practices of you, the people of God, have little to do with me and my glory. They are about you and your glory and you boast in it.

You declare it publicly. You say how religious you are. They are filled with the same self-centeredness that characterizes so much of Israelite life. It may be what you love to do, but it's not what I love.

This is not what I want. This is not what I desire. Such emptiness is something I hate. Can you hear what God is saying? He's saying, this is an abomination to me, what you are doing.

Now take a look at verses 6 to 11. Now, just to keep your finger in Amos, and I want you to flip back to Leviticus chapter 26.

[12:26] There are two passages in the Pentateuch, first five books of the Old Testament, that talk about covenant blessings and curses. And Leviticus 26 is one of them, and the other one is in Deuteronomy.

But let's take a look at Leviticus chapter 26. So just find it there in your Bibles, and I'll just show you some of what goes on there. So Leviticus 26.

You start off with a reminder that this is a covenant relationship. You shall make for yourselves no idols, and erect no carved images or pillars, and you shall not place figured stones in your land to worship at them, for I am the Lord your God.

You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary. I am the Lord. Now, if you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you the rains in their season, and the land shall yield as produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing, and you shall eat your bread in full and live securely in your land. And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid.

[13:32] And I will remove dangerous animals from the land. And no sword shall go through your land, and you shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand.

Your enemies shall fall before you by the sword, and I will look with favor upon you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you. And I'll maintain my covenant with you, and you shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall, and you'll have to clear out the old to make way for the new.

And I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you, and I will walk among you, and I'll be your God, and you'll be my people. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be slaves no more, and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you walk erect.

That is a wonderful, wonderful picture, isn't it? It's like a return to Eden. Everything's overflowing. God is there. He is their God. They are his people, and it is beautiful.

Let's read on. But if you'll not obey me, and do not observe all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and abhor my ordinances, so that you will not observe all my commandments, and you break my covenant, I in turn will do this to you.

[14:51] I will bring terror on you. Consumption and fever shall waste the eyes, and cause life to pine away. You shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down by your enemies.

Your foe shall rule over you, and you shall flee, though no one pursues you. And if in spite of this you will not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins. I'll break your proud glory, and I'll make your sky like iron, and your earth like copper.

Your strength shall be spent to no purpose. Your land shall not yield its produce, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit. And it goes on.

Now friends, with that chapter in mind from Leviticus 26, I want you to return to Amos. See, I think Amos is deliberately interacting with the curses of Leviticus 26, and with Deuteronomy 27 and 28, that other passage from the Pentateuch.

And what I think he's doing is saying, look, Israel has had a long track record of doing the second option of breaking covenant. And God has a long track record of judging Israel for breaches of covenant.

[16:07] Israel sinned, and God brought the covenant curse of famine. He gave them cleanness of teeth. It's a wonderful little phrase, isn't it? Cleanness of teeth, because you've got no food to sort of muck up your teeth.

And lack of bread, verse 6. And can you see what God's intention is in doing this, in judgment? It is to bring to repentance, verse 6. Yet, he says, you did not return to me, declares the Lord.

Now, at some other point in the history of the people of Israel, God acted to bring upon them the covenant curse of drought. Verse 7 and 8 tell us that God acted in such a way that he brought drought, and to make sure that they knew he was behind the drought.

You see, what he did is he caused rain to sort of randomly fall on one place and not on another. So that they sort of asked, well, why is it falling on me and not on him? And then randomly next time the way around and so on.

He caused very unusual patterns of rain and drought. And his intention was to bring them to repentance. But what was their response? Yet, you did not return to me, declares the Lord, verse 8.

[17:13] The third covenant curse is agricultural blight and mildew. It's outlined in the first half of verse 9. The fourth is locusts. It's outlined in the second half of verse 9.

God acted again. You see, this is all designed to bring them to repentance. For them to say, all right, God, we understand what you're saying. We've broken covenant curses. We repent.

Yet, you did not return to me, says the Lord, verse 9. At other times, he sent the fifth covenant curse of pestilence. And it's outlined in verse 10.

Plagues like those that came upon Egypt came upon the people of God. And the sixth covenant curse was the sword. The nation's elite troops fared no better than captured horses.

God acted in judgment, again, with repentance in mind. Yet, you did not return to me. Now, do you remember Leviticus? How many? What did God talk about seven times? Number 7.

[18:11] Verse 11. It's the seventh and most disastrous covenant curse. God acts as he did on the grossly sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But that's not good company to be in.

He overthrows them. And what is he doing? He's again doing it to bring them to repentance. But look at the end of verse 11. God's refrain is unrelenting and condemning.

Yet, you did not return to me, says the Lord. Friends, you can't get much clearer. You know, you've got echo, echo, echo. You see, God has been long-suffering, is what is being said.

And he's been patient. He's seen his people sinning. He's repeatedly acted to return them from repentance, to give them a chance. Yet, they did not. They've simply just gone on sinning.

And in verse 12, Amos, therefore, tells them about the inevitable future toward which they are headed. Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel, because I will do this to you.

[19:12] Prepare to meet your God, O Israel. Can you see what's happened? Amos has outlined the seven great acts of God in the past, designed to bring to repentance.

Now he promises one final act. This time, God will not send some natural disaster to be his agent. No, this time, God's coming in person.

God is arriving. And as he does, Israel should remember who it is that they are dealing with. They are dealing with their God. And you know who their God is? He introduced himself on Genesis 1.

He's the creator. That is, they're dealing with the God outlined in verse 13. Look at it there. Behold, this God is the God who forms the mountain.

He creates the wind, reveals his thoughts to mortals, makes the morning darkness, treads the heights of the earth. The Lord, the God of hosts, is his name. In other words, he is entirely able to do what he's about to do.

[20:08] So prepare to meet this God. So there we have the chapter. Let me see if I can summarize it for us. I think it goes something like this. Four points. One.

One. Hear, O Israel. You are sinful. You will be judged. Two. You can go on practicing your empty and boastful religion, but it's not going to help you.

Three. Remember that God has already given you plenty of opportunities to repent, which you have refused. And four.

And so God is going to come in imminent and assured judgment. Let me just repeat the four. Hear, O Israel. You are sinful and you'll be judged. Two. You can go on practicing your empty and boastful religion, but it's not going to help you.

Three. Remember that God has already given you plenty of opportunities to repent, which you have refused. And four. And so God's going to come in imminent and assured judgment.

[21:12] Now, friends, it's now time to see what we can make of this in terms of our own context. And the way I'd like to do this is by looking at a New Testament book that talks about the second coming of Jesus. And Martin on Sunday morning used this very passage.

I'd already prepared my talk before this. And so we think alike about this passage. But turn with me to 2 Peter chapter 3. And I'm going to read it again because it's very salutary to listen to.

So 2 Peter 3, verses 1 to 15. I'm going to read just a bit beyond where Graham read. This is now, beloved, the second letter that I'm writing to you.

And in them, I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour spoken through the apostles.

First of all, you must understand this, that in the last day scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging in their own lusts and saying, where is the promise of his coming?

[22:15] For ever since our ancestors died, all things continuous they were from the beginning of creation. They deliberately ignore this fact that by the word of God, heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world at that time was deluged with water and perished.

But by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and the destruction of the godless. But do not ignore this one fact.

Beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. And then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise and the elements will be dissolved with fire and earth and everything that is done in them will be disclosed.

And since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of person should you be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for? And this is his next word.

[23:24] And hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and are dissolved and the elements will melt with fire. But in accordance with his promise, we wait for a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found in him at peace, without spot or blemish. And regard the patience of our Lord, our salvation.

So also our beloved Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him. I want you to notice a few things that Peter says. First, did you notice how he talks, same as Amos does, about God the creator?

Do you see it in verse 5 there? Just as Amos does, Peter indicates that God being a creator guarantees that he will also be the judge.

This is a very important point within the Bible. Don't think that the Bible starts with creation because it's chronologically first. No, creation is, the Bible starts with creation because it is theologically first.

[24:30] It undergirds nearly everything that follows. In other words, because God's a creator, he can do everything else. Because he made the world, he has right to do with it as he sees fit. So, just as Amos said, God's coming to judge is certain and sure.

So that's the first thing, God's a creator. Second, I want you to notice what we can expect when Jesus comes again. Peter makes clear, doesn't he, that the coming of Jesus will be accompanied by terrifying judgment.

I mean, look at all the words that occur in here. Verse 7 indicates it will be a day reserved for fire. A day of judgment. A day when the godless will be destroyed. Verse 10 indicates that day is to be a day when the heavens will pass away with a loud noise.

The elements will be dissolved with fire. The earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Laid bare before God, its creator. As verse 12 indicates, that day will be a day when the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire.

So first, God's a creator. Therefore, he can judge. This is what we ought to expect when Jesus comes. It will be a terrifying day of judgment. Three, I want you to notice what Peter says about why Jesus has not yet come.

[25:46] Look at verse 9. Peter is saying that the coming of Jesus has been delayed because God wants to give everyone a chance to repent.

God is patient. God is patient. And long-suffering. I mean, you can't get much more patient and long-suffering than that, can you? And to watch humanity go on with what they are doing and to hold off.

He would prefer that everyone comes to repentance. However, at the same time, it's clear, isn't it, that his long-suffering will have a definite end, just as it has in Amos 4.

There will be a coming day when opportunities for repentance will have run out and an accounting will have to be made as to how we have lived. So that's the third point.

And the fourth, Peter makes clear what we should be doing while we wait. Can you see that there? It's in verses 11 to 15. God tells us through Peter that we should be living lives of holiness and godliness.

[26 : 46] Since God is coming in judgment, we should make every effort to be found by him spotless, blameless, and at peace with God. Now, friends, it's this very last issue that I want to take up with you, that last one I've dealt with there.

And before I do, I want to reiterate what I've been saying in all the talks up until this point. Amos often speaks about judgment. And as he does, I want to tell you that there's only one way to be blameless before God on that judgment day.

Only one. It is only through the work of Jesus that we can be right with God. And we can call upon Jesus and what he's done time after time.

The sacrifice of Jesus is enough to save us from God's coming rock. In fact, the sacrifice of Jesus is the only, only, only thing that will be able to save me and you from the fierce heat of God's anger at sin and at sinners.

So let me reiterate it. The sacrifice of Jesus is enough to save us from God's coming rock. In fact, it is the only thing that will be able to save us from the fierce heat of God's anger at sin and sinners.

[28 : 02] And God seeks us to run from the coming rock into the cool shelter provided by the death of Jesus on our behalf. So before everything else I want to say, I want to say that at the conclusion of what we're doing.

However, I want to take up the issue of Christian morality. You see, in the past few years, it's been made clear that Christian leadership, both in our country and around the world, has been far from spotless and blameless.

But they're not alone, are they? My own impression is that Christians of all shapes and sizes are increasingly, under the pressure of the world that we live in, accepting lower and lower standards of morality.

We soak up the forgiveness that God has given us in Christ, and yet we are so much like the ancient people of God.

We have immorality in our financial dealings, immorality in our ethics, our sexual morals are getting looser and looser, what we can put up with is getting looser and looser, our use of tongue, our tongues, our lack of compassion and generosity, the bitterness that we feel ready to harbour, our dealings with each other, things that were once not named as fitting among Christians are now considered okay.

[29 : 29] I'm not saying that we're any worse at it than we were before, but now we actually don't hide it. Some things are now considered okay, and we easily justify our slander, our gossip, our greed, our theft, and our covetousness.

Oh sure, we'll have a go at people who are homosexuals, but in the very same, you know, and other forms of sin that we think abhorrent. But in 1 Corinthians 6, greed is in the very same list.

It's there with immorality. God regards it as being in the same group. See, we practice a form of religion, but often denies impact upon our ethical and moral lives.

And friends, if that is the case, then the word of Amos to the people of God in his days is true today as it would have been then. There is a coming judgment for such things, and God will want to know how we have lived, and he will call us to account.

And so as we look at this coming judgment of the world, and God's creation of a new heaven and a new earth, which will be the home of righteousness, let's determine that we're going to be people who will be at home with a home of righteousness, that we'll be people of righteousness.

[30 : 51] And since, friends, we look forward to these things, not scared of them, we look forward to them, let us make every effort to be found spotless and blameless and at peace with God on that day.

Friends, we don't need to be reminded again, but I'm going to do it because we forget so easily. I forget so easily, so I assume you're probably like me and you forget so easily. You know very well that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night.

And when people are saying to themselves, there's peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them. We are not to be, though, like our neighbours. We are not of darkness that the day should surprise us like a thief.

We are children of light and children of day. Friends, friends, please, let's not fall asleep in these dozy, easy days.

Let's keep awake, be sober and sensible and watchful. We belong to the day. We are children of the light.

[32 : 03] Let's put on the breastplate of faith and love and cover our heads with the helmet of salvation. Friends, these are evil days. So let's guard our beings in this evil world with the knowledge that God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus died for us. And he died so that we might live with him and for him. With that in mind, let's urge each other on because, friends, we cannot do it without each other.

Let's watch over each other. Let's pray for each other. And let's encourage each other and build each other up. Friends, here are some of the things you can do in these last days.

And these exhortations that I'm just going to give you are taken from 1 Thessalonians 5, just like the ones I've just given you, in case you recognise some of the quotations. Look around your congregations.

If you belong here to Holy Trinity, look around this congregation. Look around your Christian friends. And in the light of the Lord's coming, let me give you these encouragements.

[33 : 15] Admonish the idle. Encourage the faint-hearted. Help the weak. Be patient with all of them.

Make sure that no one repays evil for evil. And always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always in what God has given you.

Pray earnestly and without ceasing. Give thanks. Hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

And may the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely. And may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, the one who calls you is faithful. And he'll do it. So let us turn to him and encourage each other to do that.

[34 : 17] Let me pray and then we'll see if there's some questions tonight. Thank you.