

# St. Paul: On The Same page

for 11.16.14 Pentecost 23a

## Day One: Zephaniah 1:7-16

*<sup>14</sup>The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. <sup>15</sup>A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, <sup>16</sup>a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.*

As the year draws to a close, our lessons focus more on the Day of Judgment. How do you think about the end of the world? Some are afraid. Some are eager. Some deny that it will happen, and some predict the date. It all depends on your perspective. You might say, it all depends on where you are sitting.

Zephaniah calls it a “day of wrath” and he describes it in terms of a battle, a strong army attacking a fortified city. If you are inside that city, then the prospect of approaching enemies is frightening, and the

stronger those armies are, the more frightening they will be.

But what if you are one who has been enslaved by those cities? What if those strong cities have been places of evil and injustice, and you have longed for the day when they would be overthrown and you would be set free? You would see those oncoming armies with joy, wouldn't you?

It is not Russia or China that God comes to conquer. It is not North Korea that is our worst enemy. It is Satan's kingdom that God's armies will attack, and the rule of sin in our lives and world that he will destroy.

All that is evil, all that brings corruption and fear and sadness and death into your life, that is what God plans to bring to an end at last. Looking forward to that last day, how do you feel now?

**Prayer:** *Father, hasten the day of Jesus' return. It will be a day of darkness for Satan, but a day of light and joy for me and for all who trust in you. While we wait, grant that we may ready others to greet Jesus in joy. Amen.*

## Day Two: Zeph. 1:7-16

(continued)

*<sup>12</sup>At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.'<sup>13</sup>Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste.*

Everyone understands the idea that God would judge those who don't believe in him or who rebel against him on the Last Day. We tend to think that God's anger in the judgment comes just from his hatred of sin. But there is something worse than just opposing God. There is something God hates more than rebellion.

Your parents would feel bad if you were angry with them, or said to them, "I hate you." But I have known people to say even worse about their parents. Some of my classmates told me, "My mom and dad don't care what I do."

I hope they were not telling the truth, because that would be even worse than anger and hatred. It would be indifference. Coldness. Such a total lack of love that all concern has died.

Jeremiah says that some people are so dead to God that he is irrelevant in their lives. They speak about God as if he doesn't even matter. They tell others that God doesn't see what they do. He doesn't care if they do good or evil. They teach people that, if God exists, he is apathetic to our fate.

Kidnappers have been known to tell their captives such things. "Your father and your mother don't love you. They have already forgotten you. They will never come to rescue you. You should give up hope in them and love me instead."

But God says that he will root out such monsters. His greatest anger is reserved for those who would steal the love of his children from him. His love for us is greater than any force on this earth. He will come to save us. He has already given us everything – even his only Son.

He is not cold to us. How can we be cold to him?

**Prayer:** *Father, your love for me burns hot. Let my love for you be just as passionate, just as bright. Amen.*

### Day Three: 1 Thess. 5:1-11

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

<sup>2</sup>For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

<sup>4</sup>But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober... <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

A few years ago, Harold Camping predicted Jesus' return on May 20 – it didn't happen. Then said it would be October 20 – it didn't happen then either. Now he says, "Oops." He guesses he has more studying to do.

Real students of God's word were not fooled. Such false prophets have been common, as Jesus said they would be. In just the last century there have been dozens of false predictions of

the end of the world – not only from Christians, but from other religious figures, and even from atheists! Such false prophecies are dangerous because they distract the people of God from their true purpose in life.

We do not need to know the date. We know the Way (and the Truth and the Life). We do not need to be afraid of a Second Coming. We know the one who Came, and who brought us salvation.

We are not spiritually sleeping or groping in the darkness, but we are always eager to see our Savior, and we are "children of light."

Our job now is to build each other up and encourage one another with this truth. When our brothers and sisters face sadness and loss, when they deal with death, when they suffer the effects of sin in this world, they may become discouraged. But we have words to build one another up. He is coming!

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, give me wisdom to tell true prophets from false ones. Turn my eyes only to you, so that following you I may not be surprised at your victorious return. Amen.*

### Day Three: Matt. 25:14-30

<sup>14</sup>"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.

<sup>15</sup>To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.... <sup>24</sup>He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup>But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant!'

Have you ever had a hard boss? That kind of person may be hard because he wants the maximum profit. So when the boss is near we're nervous.

But what does our Father want? Is he a hard boss because he wants to get the most out of his investment in us? Of course not! We have nothing that he needs.

The master in Jesus' story is not a hard boss in the sense that we usually think of it. On the contrary, he gives his servants gifts and leaves it to them to use these gifts however they think best.

This is a master who trusts his servants. He gives them freedom to structure their lives, and to decide how they will use his gifts. And there is no sign that he is hard on those who don't do well. Instead, he gently gives different gifts and different levels of responsibility, understanding that not all of them can carry the same weight.

But one thing he cannot tolerate. That is when his servants whom he loves, and those to whom he has entrusted his treasure, do not trust him in return. They don't even try to serve him!

Such a servant is condemned, not because he failed to pay a dividend, but because he refused to accept and use the master's gift.

If you knew you could not fail, would you try less or try harder? Knowing your Father loves you, you can risk all in service to him, investing your very self in service because you cannot lose.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you gave me gifts to use in service. Often I have failed. And yet each day you give me more. Lord, let me rejoice today as I serve you in forgiveness. Amen.*