

## The Day Of The Lord

It all comes down to one day!

A World Series, a Superbowl, an NBA Championship all come down to one day.

And when that day is over, there is joy and celebration in some quarters, and the weeping and gnashing of teeth in others.

One day can make a lot of difference!

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and those of us who were alive at the time will never forget where we were when we got the news.

And, of course, 9/11 is a day that none of us will ever forget.

But there is a day that is more important than all of these other days put together, and that is what the *Old Testament* prophets referred to as "the Day of the Lord."

We heard about it in today's Old Testament lesson which was taken from the prophet Zephaniah: "*The day of the Lord is near—near and coming quickly.*"

Well, what was going to happen on the Day of the Lord?

It had to be important, because it is mentioned by several Old Testament prophets.

Isaiah referred to it forty five times, calling it the "*great and terrible day of the lord,*" and describing it as "*a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger...a day of vengeance...distress, rebuke and disgrace.*"

Later prophets spoke about it as well.

Joel said that it would be "*a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness...a dreadful day...when the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood.*"

Echoing Joel, Amos said to the Israelites "*Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light—pitch dark, without a ray of brightness.*"

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, linked the Day of the Lord together with the coming of Messiah: *“Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?”*

On the other hand, the same prophets prophesied that the Day of the Lord would bring great blessings.

Isaiah proclaimed that on that day, *“the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat...[and]...the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea....”*

Joel prophesied that on the Day of the Lord God would pour out his Spirit on all people.

Amos predicted that the Day of the Lord would usher in a paradise, where *“...the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes and new wine will drip from the mountains.”*

So which would it be? Bane or blessing--or both?

Based upon their behavior, the Israelites had no right to expect anything BUT curses because they had wandered far away from Yahweh—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In spite of repeated warnings from their prophets, Israelite kings—Solomon among them—concluded military alliances and entered into trade agreements with pagan nations and ratified them by taking pagan wives.

Then they let them spread pagan religion among the Israelites.

Both of these were expressly forbidden in the Law of Moses. Spendthrift kings had impoverished the national treasury with reckless spending, giving no thought to the future.

The religious observances of the Israelites were a disgrace.

They had adopted the abominable Canaanite practices of orgiastic worship and child sacrifice.

The Israelites had become self-indulgent, morally bankrupt pagans whose sins, according to Ezekiel, had reached the point where they were shocking even to other pagan nations.

And God was enraged.

He thundered: *"I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust...."*

AND THEN THE DAY OF THE LORD CAME—AND IT WAS JUST LIKE THE PROPHETS HAD PREDICTED.

God's wrath over Israel's sin and injustice and unbelief and idolatry finally boiled over and came down like fire from heaven.

But what no one expected was that it did not fall upon the Israelites who had provoked his anger.

Instead, it fell upon one man—the Son of God—who took all of God's anger over sin upon Himself—a divine Scapegoat upon Whom God vented all of his wrath over the sins of Israel.

His name was Jesus and he came from a town called Nazareth in the region of Galilee.

And when Jesus the Scapegoat mounted the cross, God struck Him like a million bolts of lightning,

Then the signs that the prophets had predicted would come on the Day of the Lord began to appear.

Darkness came over the land, earthquakes erupted, there was weeping and wailing. It was a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, a cruel and dreadful day.

But the terrible things that took place on that day were a cause for rejoicing.

God had poured out all of his wrath upon the Scapegoat so there was none left to fall upon those who deserved it.

The million bolts of lightning unleashed a flood of God's grace that fell like gentle rain upon all mankind.

Just as their forefathers' sins had been atoned for through the Levitical sacrifices, all the sins of Israel were atoned for through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.

Their forefathers had been reconciled to Yahweh through the blood of bulls and goats, but now all people—Jews and Gentiles alike—were reconciled to God through the blood of His Son.

Then the greatest miracle of all occurred: the Scapegoat rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and offered eternal life to all who would follow Him.

So did Israel rejoice?

Did they flock to the arms of the risen and ascended Lamb of God, who had taken away all their sins and who now offered them eternal life in heaven with God?

Well, no.

Some did, but most did not—and still do not.

Such is the hardness of human hearts.

Multitudes of Gentiles, however, flocked to their new Savior

As God had promised Abraham, one of his descendents would be a blessing to ALL mankind.

That descendent was the Messiah, Jesus Christ, a descendent of Abraham according to his human nature.

Furthermore, God said, there was now to be a new Israel, an Israel which would include all those who became sons and daughters of Abraham by believing that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that one of his descendants would be a blessing to all mankind.

And all of us who are new Israelites now await another Day of the Lord.

And like the first Day of the Lord, it will bring both terror and blessing.

The terrible things that will come to pass on the next Day of the Lord are almost beyond our comprehension.

Jesus tells us that the roaring and tossing of the sea will be so great that men will faint from terror.

Cataclysm after cataclysm will shake the earth.

People will do terrible things to each other.

The horror will be so great that people will crawl into caves and beg the mountains to fall upon them, rather than face what is coming to pass.

This time Jesus will come not in mercy as our Scapegoat and Savior, but in wrath as our judge and executioner, and the punishment for sin will fall upon all those who rejected him.

They will die gnawing their tongues in agony and cursing God.

But for those who have believed God and received His righteousness as their new birthright, it will be a day of rejoicing.

*As Jesus tells us: When you see all these signs taking place, lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

Well, we've seen all the signs and they tell us that the second Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord is coming quickly.

But somehow, it's hard for us to believe.

After all, nearly two thousand years have passed since the promise was given.

Where is Jesus?

Or, as scoffers and enemies of the church like to say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?"

*Well, listen to the words of Peter: "...do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

The delay is motivated by God's love.

He draws time out so that all people might have a chance to repent and come to a knowledge of the Lord and be saved.

He stays the harvest so that he can bring the full number of souls into His granary.

But many, in their sinful minds, misconstrue the love of God and turn His patience and forbearance into evidence of his indifference or non-existence.

So hard are their hearts; so dull are their wits.

*“But,” Peter adds, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”*

If you want to think arightly about Jesus' second coming, if you want to live like Jesus' disciples did after he ascended into heaven—expecting Him to return at any moment—talk to someone who has come close to dying—or has recently experienced the death of someone they love.

Nothing in the world gets our attention as powerfully as a close brush with death.

When death comes near us it's like a bull in a china shop, smashing and rearranging everything in our lives.

Death is cruel and death is brutal.

But for all its cruelty and brutality, death forces us to face up to something that we are inclined to ignore: **there has to be a day of accounting.**

And when that day comes, our sins will either be charged to the account of the divine Scapegoat, or they will be charged to our account.

On that Day only one thing will matter, and it won't be our money or our friends or our possessions or our career or even our family: it will be Who have we believed—the doubters and scoffers—or the Lord.

Most of the children of Israel in Zephaniah's time trusted in everything BUT a Savior.

Most of the children of our age have followed in their footsteps.

What about you?

Do you trust the Lamb of God Who died for your sins and rose again to give you eternal life?

If so, the Day of the Lord will be a day of unimaginable joy for you.

If not, it will be a very different kind of day indeed.

Amen.