

What If God Would Take His Word Away From Us?.

Text: Amos 8:11-12

1) The blessings of the Word of God

Suggested Hymns:

2) Loosing The blessings of the Word of God

264, 171, 267, 262, 268

3) Why the Word of God was lost

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Amos 8:11-12, ¹¹ ***“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord GOD, “That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹² They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find it.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We have now arrived at the second of the three pre-lent Sundays. Today is Sexagesima Sunday which means that this Sunday falls within sixty days of Easter.

In order to understand our text, we must know its historical setting. Amos is known as the shepherd prophet. His home was a little town about eight Km south of Bethlehem. Amos had no special training. He had never attended a school for prophets, nor did he come from a prophet's family. We read in Amos 7:14, ¹⁴ ***Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: “I was no prophet, Nor was I a son of a prophet, But I was a sheepbreeder And a tender of sycamore fruit.”***

However, God took him away from his flock and sent him to the children of Israel with a special message.

Jeroboam II was king of the Northern Kingdom. He was one of the greatest kings that ever occupied the throne of that kingdom. Politically, economically, things looked good enough. Morally things were in a bad way. Religion had degraded into sham and hypocrisy. Bethel, about twenty Km north of Jerusalem, the center of the religious life of Israel, was the scene of pagan idolatry. The whole thing smelled up to heaven.

It was under such conditions that God sent Amos to Bethel with a warning. Amos spoke of the impending judgment of God. Israel would not heed the warning voice of Amos. The high priest, Amaziah, tried to silence him. Finally he told Amos to go back home and preach; if preach he must.

We read in Amos 7:12-13, ¹² *Then Amaziah said to Amos: "Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, And there prophesy. ¹³ But never again prophesy at Bethel, For it is the king's sanctuary, And it is the royal residence."* But Amos was unmoved, and he drove his message home once more.

Our text is taken from the final warning addressed to the house of Israel, *"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹² They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find it.*

Because Israel will not heed the Word of God, God will take His Word away and cause a great spiritual famine. The question is, *What if God would take His Word away from us?* That is the message of our text. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Blessings Of The Word Of God

The experience of Israel has often been repeated in the history of mankind. Who will dare to say that it will not be repeated again?

The Word of God is a very great blessing indeed. We have it in our Bible, which we can read and study. It is preached to us in our churches. It is taught to our children in our Sunday School and in our Confirmation classes.

The center, the heart, of God's Word is the revelation of His love and mercy in Christ Jesus. That solves for us the great problem of sin and fixes our relationship to God.

What a great blessing this is! If you had just one more day to live, what would you do on this last day? If you knew that tomorrow morning at this hour you would have to die and leave behind all the things that are near and dear to you and go into eternity to meet God, what would occupy your mind today?

The story is told of a king who on his death-bed called his jester and tried to put off the thought of death by telling the jester that he was about to take a far journey into a distant land from which he would never return. When the jester asked what preparations the king had made, the reply was that no preparations had been made for the journey. *“Then you are a bigger fool than I am,”* said the jester.

How many of us are like this king! We all realise that we must make this last journey, and not one of us knows how soon we shall have to make it. What preparations are we making? Who can tell us something about the land of eternity into which we must journey? Who can tell us something about a possible passport? Who can tell us something about the requirements of citizenship in order that we may live happily in that land of eternity?

If we are indeed at all serious, immediately the question of sin, of judgment, of retribution, will force itself upon us. God’s demand is written in Leviticus 19:2, *You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.* That is the entrance requirement for the life in the world to come. Nothing less will do.

You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. And we poor, damnable sinners are so far from being holy. We do not even dare to hope that we could meet this one requirement. There is no school in this world that can prepare us for these entrance examinations. There is no philosophy of people that can solve this problem for us.

However, God Himself, that same God who said, *“You shall be holy,”* has come to our rescue. He has revealed to us a plan of salvation which alone can save the children of night from eternal death. In His great love He gave His only-begotten Son to be made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus took our place that we might take His place. He became accursed in our stead that we might become the adopted sons and daughters of God.

In order that you and I might know of this one possibility for a blessed hereafter, God has revealed His love to us in His Word. That Bible of yours, in which you learn of God’s plan of salvation, is not given by any human interpretation, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. *“Thus says the Lord”* was the message of Amos to the people of his day.

What a blessing, then, this Word of God is! Where is there anything that can measure up to the importance of this revelation?

Suppose you would have to give up all but one thing, what would be your choice? Henry Morton Stanley, on his trip through Africa, had to throw away all his books, one after another, but he kept his Bible. Which book would you keep?

2. Loosing The Blessings Of The Word Of God

We are so accustomed to having God's Word in our home and in our church that it is only with difficulty that we could imagine that the day could ever come when all this could be taken away.

And yet, that has happened in the history of mankind again and again. The most appalling example is probably Israel. Israel had God's Word in full measure. From among all the nations of the then known world this one people had been singled out to receive the revelation from on high.

Think of the Temple in Jerusalem. The sacrifices. The priesthood. The preaching of the great prophets. Then think of Egypt, of Assyria, of Phenicia, of Babylon, of Rome, of Greece, and all the pagan idolatry with its debasing influence. What a singular blessing Israel enjoyed!

And yet the prophet says in our text, "***Behold, the days are coming,***" says ***the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD.*** Israel lost its blessing. Why? Israel lost the Word of God because it did not cherish it. It turned a deaf ear to the Word of God.

When Amos was sent to Israel to preach the Word of God, he was told by the priest, ***Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, And there prophesy. ¹³ But never again prophesy at Bethel.*** Amos finally went and the Word of God went with him. And shortly afterwards the land was overrun by the Assyrians. Israel was led away and has disappeared from the history of mankind. Today we speak of the lost tribes of the house of Israel.

What if God would take His Word away from us? Do we appreciate God's Word, or are we like Israel of old? As we look into the Christian churches by and large, must we not confess to our shame that we do not appreciate the blessings of God's Word as we ought?

Certainly, there are left also today the seven thousand who have not bowed their knees before Baal. There are also left today in our churches men and women and children who truly love and highly cherish God's Word, who, if need be, would give up everything in life, but never God's Word. Thank God for them!

But what about the great masses in the churches of today? It is estimated that fewer than fifty per cent of the people who are outwardly connected with a church are regular attendants at Divine Services. Sometimes it seems as though, even that figure, is too high.

There are many churches which can hold the entire congregation but not many people are regularly worshipping in it! Today, it is simply taken for granted that they will not come. Half the people are not in church.

Or think of the blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Luther once said that, if a person does not receive the holy Sacrament some four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises it and is not a Christian, and *"shows that he has no sin, no flesh, no devil, no world, no death, no danger, no hell; that is, he does not believe that they exist, although he is in them over head and ears."*

Four times a year Luther calls a minimum. Something is fundamentally wrong, he says, if this minimum is not reached. By that token, how many church people are still to be counted as Christians?

I know that you cannot figure out Christianity by mathematics. But I also know that, if you no longer hunger and thirst for the blessed Sacrament, it is high time for you to examine yourself and see whether Jesus still counts for anything at all with you or whether your religion has deteriorated into such a watery solution that you may as well pour it away altogether.

The priest, Amaziah, told Amos to go back home and do his preaching there, if preach he must because the people of Bethel were tired of his preaching. In the end God sent a famine of His Word, and they wandered from sea to sea and from the North to the East and sought the Word of the Lord, but no longer found it.

Is the day coming in which our country and our churches will no longer have the Word of God? Is the day coming when our land will sink back into paganism? Is the day coming when other nations and other people who are today grovelling in the night of pagan ignorance will have the light of God's Word?

Is the day coming when these people from other lands will send missionaries to Australia in order to establish Christianity again?

3. Why The Word Of God Was Lost

No other nation enjoyed the privileges of the Israelites. To Israel was *“committed the oracles of God.”*¹ Yet the time will come for this people, the LORD says, when they will be totally deprived of His Word. Like thirst-crazed, dying men they will stagger from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea and from Galilee to Gilead looking for a message from the LORD, but they will not hear it.

The strong young men and women seem to be best equipped to survive famine and thirst, but they too will become faint for a lack of the Word and will finally fall.

The reason for the famine of the Word is plain. Instead of fearing the LORD their God, serving Him only and taking their oaths by His name, the people have followed other gods, the gods of the people around them.² They now swear their oaths by the *“sin of Samaria”* — an idol god — or by the golden calf-image which Jeroboam I set up at Dan, or by the god they worship with their pilgrimages to Beersheba.

When God raises up prophets from among their sons, they command them not to prophesy.

Likewise in the New Testament we read in Matthew 23:37-38,³⁷ *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”*³⁸ *“See! Your house is left to you desolate.”*

People who refuse to hear the Word of the LORD finally cannot hear it, because God takes His Word away.

St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:2, *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* Luther commented on this text and said, *“The preaching of the gospel is not an eternal, lasting, continual teaching, but it is like a passing shower which travels on. Some ground is watered and another place stays dry. It does not return and also does not stand still. Then the hot sun comes and licks up the moisture that remains.”*

If we neglect the Word of God and refuse to follow our Saviour's leading, the gospel will pass on to others like a summer shower and will not return to us and our children. The time to hear, believe and follow the Word is now, while we live in the day of God's grace!

Oh, let us cherish God's Word! Let us consider it the greatest blessing we are enjoying. Let us say from our heart as the psalmist once said, ***LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house, And the place where Your glory dwells.***³

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁴

Precious Word from God in heaven.
Full of blessedness to me,
All my trust to Thee is given,
My salvation rests on Thee:
I in Thee find all I need
That my soul to God can lead.

Let Thy grace sustain, protect me,
That my ways ne'er from Thee part;
Thy enlight'ning Word direct me:
Seal this treasure in my heart,
That in faith I steadfast prove
Till I walk by sight above. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 3:2

² Deuteronomy 6:13-14

³ Psalm 26:8

⁴ Hymn 262 v 1 & 5