

Study Guide for November 12, 2017

Theme: Be prepared to shine

Matthew 25:1-13; Amos 5:18-24; Psalm 70

The lectionary delves into the torrent waters of the apocalypse. A dark and mysterious hole none of us like to swim in. But here we are. We've been invited to jump in, and Jesus wants to know if we are ready. Are we?

The Old Testament reading comes from the prophet Amos, who in the 8th century BCE gives a powerful oracle from God that seems fit for today. Amos is known as the social-justice prophet because of his concerns with the oppressed, something Israel (and maybe you) knew all too well. He speaks of the "Day of the Lord," and reminds us that the day is "darkness not light." His sharp commentary on Israel's worship practices bites us as well. In this passage, Amos announces that God both detests and discounts the central worship practices of the chosen people. While his critique is hard to accept, Amos does not leave us hopeless; reminding us that God is, as ruler over heaven and earth, the one who loves us unconditionally, but *through admonishment* that we still have work to do. It should be of no surprise that our place in God's heart comes with some pretty heavy responsibilities.

In the New Testament, we cannot escape our call to be righteous (to do the will of God). We cannot simply rely on Jesus to do everything. We have to be involved in this life to prepare the way for our eternal life. This is not "works righteousness," but having a faith that is productive and pro-active. Building on the theme of "The Day of the Lord is not light but darkness," Jesus gives us a parable (which is used to give us a quick look at what the kingdom of God is like). This parable is about ten bridesmaids; five of who are wise because they come prepared for the darkness, the other five do not.

I equate "the oil" in the story with our individual faith. I believe this is what Jesus is ultimately stating the kingdom of God is like...filled with the light of those who have faith today, and enough faith to get them through the unexpected challenges of life (waiting patiently for Christ to come again). Jesus is reminding us that the kingdom of God is both present (where we prepare) and future (where we celebrate). So how we come prepared is important. Faith requires active participation; even if it means we fall, stumble and flat-out fail...actively trying is more important to the development of our faith than not doing anything at all. When difficult times come, we will be better prepared to handle the situation by relying on the "extra" faith that we have stored up within us.

The life and examples of these two men, Amos and Jesus, provide a blueprint on living intentionally in God's righteousness. Read **Micah 6:8** to see exactly what God wants from you. This is a goal we should all work towards daily; actively and faithfully participating in the kingdom of heaven now, to prepare yourself for whatever tomorrow may bring.

Prayer: Lord God, you have given me your Word to live by and left your Spirit for me to lean on so that I might do your will and build my faith. Help me to live my faith intentionally so my light may shine in the darkness of the world for all to see you. Amen.

Read: Amos 5:18-24; Isaiah 1:10-20

Q: What are the things you cherish most about your church? What would it do to your heart knowing God didn't share the same passion as you did (v.21-23)?

Q: Name some of the ways you (and your church) might be in sync with God? (v. 24)

God cares about you, in fact God loves you unconditionally...no matter what. But like I stated last week, God needs us to participate in that love. "God is thirsty, and we are holding the cup." God is craving you and me. But God also craves that we live in a way that shows love, kindness, justice, and fairness. This is the entire theme throughout the Scriptures. Jesus was the perfection of this, a living example of God's word for all of us to live by.

Q: In what way(s) will you live intentionally this week to uphold God's righteousness and to do the will of God? (Write it down on an index card, or a giant piece of paper and tape it somewhere so everyone can see. To live intentionally requires accountability too.)

Read: Matthew 25:1-13; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:35-38

Q: What is the central thread throughout these three passages?

Q: Which bridesmaid do you feel best represents you? And why?

Q: If God were to come as you are reading this sentence, how will you be found?

Being prepared for the coming of our Lord is important. First and foremost, it requires us to be actively participating in the present kingdom of God. Second, if we believe that the Holy Spirit is with us, or that God is always watching over you, then doesn't that mean God has come (and never left) and doesn't it suggest God already know what you are doing?

Q: Is there anything in your life that you feel like you are hiding from God?

Slow Read: Matthew 5:14 or Matthew 7:21 (or Psalm 70)

I invite you to sit with this question for a while. Think about what Jesus is asking of you. And listen to how your soul responds. As you meditate on these words, ask God for the Holy Spirit to shine light in places in your life where you are afraid to go or may have forgotten exist within you so that you might be better prepared to face the difficulties today and the unexpected timing of God.

Prayer: God my Father, be my life. God my brother, be my light. God my Spirit, be my guide. Together may we bring peace, justice, and fairness into your creation; healing and redeeming all of life back to you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.