AMOS 5:18-24
PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD!

"You don't really want that." I was young, around five, and I was thirsty on a hot summer day. My dad took my brother and I into a store to buy us some pop. I picked out one that my dad said I wouldn't like. But it had a picture of a genie on the can! He was insistent I wouldn't like it. I was insistent I would. He bought it for me. My brother and I went outside to drink our pop and my dad went shopping. I took one drink, and didn't like it. I tried some small sips, and still didn't like it. My dad was still shopping and my near full can of pop went into the nearest garbage can, and when he came out of the store I thanked him for the drink and never told him where it went.

That's how our text starts, with the sentiments of: "You don't really want that!" You don't really understand what you're asking for when you ask for Jesus to return today. Our text describes it as a day of darkness and not light. We think of it as the day when we get to meet Jesus and go to heaven, and escape all that's bad in this world and go to a place where all is good. However, all will not be good on the day that Jesus returns, particularly for those who don't believe in Him. Think of your friends and family members who don't have faith in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Do you really want them to go directly to hell and not pass onto heaven?

For those who don't love Jesus as their Saviour from sin death and the devil, they're enemies of God. This text speaks directly to those who reject God's Son as dying to pay for their sins.

Shortly before our text God tells the people to "prepare to meet your God" (4:12). He still says the same thing to us today. We don't know when Jesus is going to return, and so we need to be prepared. Our Gospel tells us that for those who are not prepared God will say to them, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." We are to watch and be prepared for the day of Jesus' return, because it could be today, and when it comes there'll be no running away from it. You cannot run away from God. God says that any attempt to run from Him will be like running from lions to meet bears, or you rest for a second and are met by serpents.

I hear so many Christians joyfully talking about the Day of the Lord, the return of Jesus and the end of this world of sin, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20), and yet they forget that this is a world of sin, and there are other people in it besides themselves. Our Lord God is a Holy God. If He weren't a Holy God then we wouldn't have to worry about sin. He likely wouldn't care too much about our sins. Yet, because He is Holy, sin arouses His wrath. He cannot overlook our sins, or the sins of those around us, nor could we respect Him if He did.

Our text calls us to step away from our idealistic view of the return of Jesus and us going to heaven and see all the people around us, all the sin around us, and the fact that we too sin and turn away from our God, or we think of our God too lightly. A day of darkness is coming and for many that will be a very unpleasant day. Are you prepared for it with faithful oil in your lamps, or is your faith running on empty, risking God saying to you, "I do not know you.", because all you have is a picture of a genie on your lamp?

Darkness is coming, like the darkness that came upon Egypt in the ninth plague. Darkness not light. No oil in the lamps. God said let there be light, and there was light. Adam and Eve said they wanted to be like God and there was darkness, the darkness of sin. And now we await in that darkness for God's judgment on Sin. Any thought of safety in this darkness of sin without the light of Jesus is an illusion.

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"" (Matthew 27:45-46). This is the only darkness that will save us. It's not the darkness of the Day of the Lord that we should be looking to, but rather the darkness of the crucifixion of Jesus. In that darkness Jesus paid for the sins of the world, past, present and future. For those who have no faith in Jesus, on the Day of the Lord, in that darkness they will pay for their own sins, eternally separated from God.

We need to cast aside our deceptive images of God as a loving God who will just pour out His blessings on all people regardless of their behaviour. Our society wants us to embrace all sorts of sinful behaviours, and it has deceived many Christians into embracing sin and giving up their faith in Jesus. As Christians we try to speak nicely about them saying such things as, 'We all believe in the same God.', a god of love. And yet when people reject parts of God's Holy Word then we don't all believe in the same God. On the Day of the Lord our God will wipe out all evil, both that of unbelievers and that of His own sinful rebellious people.

As Christians we have been conditioned by our society to hate these words that I'm preaching, and if I was to name sins as abortion, euthanasia and homosexuality, you'd hate it even more. Yet for those who hate hearing God's Word, God responds by saying that He hates our worship services. Hate, despise, take no delight in. When the Word of God is rejected then all worship services by those who follow God's altered Word is corrupt. I don't have to name denominations. You know who rejects God's Word and who embraces such sins as abortion, Medical Assistance in Dying, and the LGTBQ ways. To embrace sin is to be hated by God.

There's no escaping the harshness of this word. The Hebrew word for hate is hate. There's no alternate translation. Yet, by Jesus' day the Greeks had expanded the word to also mean despise, disregard and be indifferent to. Today we change it to compassion and love. Christians tell themselves that God is a God of love and God loves what we're doing. Such delusion leads to the Day of Darkness. God's justice does hate evil and it acts accordingly. We need to stop lying to ourselves and to our fellow Christians. It does matter when their lamps of faith are running on empty, with only a fake genie on the outside.

So God calls out to all of His children in the last verse of our text trying to encourage us to turn from our sinful ways, and trying to give us some hope. He says, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (v. 24). How are those words of hope, compared to the judgement of darkness on the Day of the Lord?

God's words express a wish, a desire, a polite command expressing potential. In the immediate context of our text the administration of justice and righteousness are commands given to rebellious Israel. However, in the larger context of Scripture they are gracious promises given to us because justice and righteousness are attributes of God Himself. They describe how God is and what He does. They were Law for Israel, but Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law for us. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves through His Son Jesus. God's Word does what it says.

The justice and righteousness that God commands of us He also freely gives to us through Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf. Justice is accomplished through Jesus' death on the cross, and Jesus righteousness is credited to all who believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

"The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, . . . at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:21-26).

"Faith was "counted to [Abraham] as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in [God] who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). May we throw all of our genies in the garbage, and trust only in Christ Jesus. Amen.