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September 25, 2022
Pentecost 16
Amos 6:1-7

God's Patience is on a Timer It ran out on the Israelites It ran out on His Son

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Amos after which this book is named was originally not a prophet. He was a shepherd. Instead of spending his time tending to his flock, God called him to proclaim a message of judgment on the nations of Judah and Israel. The people had become callous, complacent and selfish.

Prior to Amos' time, the histories of both nations were filled with war time, economic depressions, and all around uncertainty. There were betrayals, assassinations of kings, and almost constant worshipping of false idols. But now, times had changed, at least politically. Under Jeroboam II, Israel experienced a time of great economic growth as well as military growth. Their prosperity was the greatest it had been since the days of Solomon.

But, as great as their prosperity was, so also was their depravity. Amos spends a large portion of his book condemning the people for their transgressions. They did not lie on basic beds, but had to have beds of ivory. They feasted on roasted lamb and prime rib on a daily basis. They didn't just drink wine, or use it as a cleansing agent, but they drank it by the bowl-full. They did not reserve the best oils for the worship of the LORD, but they anointed their own heads with it, making themselves more appealing. Now, these things are not wrong in and of themselves, but the people did them without regard for their fellow man, nor with regard to what God's Word said. They were abusing their blessings of luxury, refusing to honor the one from whom they came. Self-indulgence and indifference filled the hearts of the people.

Their worst offense of all was they did not mourn the destruction of Joseph. Joseph did not receive land in Canaan, but it was given to his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh. They grew to be two of the largest nations in Israel and sometimes they are used to describe the whole nation of Israel. The people did not feel remorse for their sins and they did not mourn or recognize the incoming judgment that would fall upon Israel. In a few short years, the nation of Assyria would swing through the northern tribes and take away its people into captivity, where they will never return.

God's patience had run out. They disregarded His law, they followed man-made gods, and they ignored and even killed God's prophets who tried to warn them. God had been extremely patient with them for nearly 1000 years, but that time had come to an end and Amos delivered the verdict.

Why didn't the people fear the judgment of God? They simply did not care. They felt that because they were God's chosen people, they were safe. They looked upon their abundant prosperity and figured, "God must be pleased with us, otherwise we would not be so prosperous. No way He is going to judge us."

There is hardly a nation in this world that is more prosperous than America is today. Has a similar mentality settled in among "God's chosen people?" Now our society has definitely fallen into the same sin as Israel in their self-indulgence. Turn on the TV and see how every commercial makes it their mission to make you think that you absolutely have to have their product. If you don't buy what they are selling, you are missing out. Paul warned Timothy of the same attitude in our Epistle Lesson today: "Godliness with contentment is great gain." All our blessing come from the LORD and we should thank Him for everything He has given us and be content with His blessings.

The main problem Amos is dealing with is not with the society, or the unbelievers, it is with the people of God, the church. He is condemning them for the lack of Law within the church. The people of Israel openly rejected the word of the LORD brought through the prophets. They did want to hear what they were doing was wrong, but only cared about the quality of life they had. They would look the other way when there were abuses in the temple, or people not worshiping Jehovah as they should. As long as their pockets were full and their bellies stuffed, they could not care less.

This is the attitude so often found in American Christianity today. Take a look at the ELCA. They have changed their position on gay marriage, the inerrancy on Scripture, even on the ordination of LGBTQ clergy. What once was a confessional Lutheran church body has now become unrecognizable because they have abandoned the Law. Everything goes. They never felt the need to stand up against the foolishness of the world. In an effort to appeal to the world, to gain members, they lost the one thing that separated them from the rest of the world: The truth of God's Word.

What about us? Does it ever seem like that attitude is creeping into the CLC. We certainly pray that God preserves us from that, but it is not impossible. It is no secret, membership in CLC churches is low and weekly attendance even lower. What is the answer? How do we keep our numbers high? Is it by being more accepting of the world around us. Should we change to fit the popular theme of the day? The world has not changed. Even in the days of Amos, Satan used the world to seduce the faithful of God away, to lull them into a false sense of security, and open the door for God's judgment.

Just because we belong to a CLC church by name alone does not exempt us from God's judgment. Jeremiah wrote, *"Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'*" It is not enough to say, "I belong to such and such a church" and sit back content. You and I are members of not just a physical church, but the Holy Christian Church. If we are not willing to stand up for the truth of all of God's Word, we are no better than the nation of Israel, inviting God's patience to come to an end. Are there any pet sins that you have learned to ignore? "I'm going to sin anyway, and this sin isn't as bad as what I could be doing, so its no big deal." That attitude towards sin is what opens the door to a greater disregard for God's Word. A complacency worthy of God's judgment.

In 2014, there was a public execution in Iran. During a street fight, a 17 year old, named Balal, had stabbed another boy his age. In Iran, executions were carried out differently than in America. There, the victim's family is invited to take an active role in the slaying. Balal was tied, hand and feet, and hoisted on top of a chair with a noose around his neck. The grieving parents were invited to kick the chair out from under him so that his neck would break. Naturally, Balal was terrified. The mother of his victim walked up, looked him in the eye, and slapped him across the face. Then, her husband stepped forward and slowly put his trembling hands on the prisoner's neck and lifted the noose away. Immediately, Balal's mother rushed forward and hugged the merciful mom. Together they cried: one for a son who was murdered; the other for the son who was spared.

2000 years ago God's patience came to an end when His Son was executed. There are some big differences in these two events. Balal was guilty beyond a doubt. Jesus was completely innocent of any crime. Balal would have escaped if he was given the chance. Jesus could have walked away at any moment if He wanted to. If He decided the world full of sinners wasn't worth the suffering, He could have given up. He could have ordered a legion of angels to fight for Him so He would not be crucified. Balal received an undeserved pardon. Jesus received an undeserved condemnation.

But this Jesus bore willingly. Jesus knows sinners. He knows us. He knows that we will stumble and fail and so He covers those sins. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to create the faith in our heart to believe unto **HIM** for salvation. It's not about what we belong to, but Who. We belong to Jesus. This faith in Jesus delivers us from the Judgment of God. In love, Jesus comes to us through the **Law** and the **Gospel** in order to strengthen us, to keep us from becoming complacent. He wants to set us up as bright shining lights to light the way for others in this sin-darkened world to escape the Judgment of God.

God has not changed since the beginning of the world. His desire has always been and will continue to be to reach all people, show them His loving patience, and bring them to faith in Jesus Christ. He did this for the people of Israel by sending prophets like Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. He did this by sending His own Son to die for a world who deserved nothing but eternal death.

What does God demand in return? Nothing. God does not demand anything of us, but He gives us His Holy Spirit who fills us with love for Him. That love makes us want to serve Him. That love inspires us to be active in the church preserving and protecting His Word in the face of a rapidly changing and degenerating world. We are like the prophet Amos, proclaiming God's warning to the world. God's Patience is on a timer. It ran out and brought judgment on Israel. But It also ran out on His Son. And because of that, God's patience will never run out on those who are covered by the blood of the Lamb of God. Amen.