

**OPENING SERMON**  
for the  
**Fifty-seventh Annual Convention**  
of the  
**CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

delivered by  
The Rev. Edward J. Worley, Conference President

Text: **Amos 8:1-14**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and only Savior!

Dear fellow sinners, rescued from death and damnation in the sin-atoning, wrath-quenching, holy and precious shed blood of God's Only-Begotten and Well-Beloved, His Son, our Only Savior, Jesus Christ:

Our text was chosen to support our Convention Motto, "*Redeeming the Time*" (Ephesians 5:16), with specific application in both the essay and in the sermon to the urgency of training and supporting a future ministry — well-trained and faithful pastors, genuine shepherds to lead, feed and protect the flocks entrusted to their care by God Himself, our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. To this end our keynote sermon this morning declares to our ears, minds and hearts:

**A People RIPE for God's Terrible Judgment: A FAMINE of GOD'S WORD!**

under two main questions: **I.** When does God consider a people ripe for judgment? and **II.** What judgment does God send upon such a people?

By the way of brief introduction, consider the opposition the prophet Amos faced in his day. Amos was attacked personally. Often when someone cannot refute what you proclaim (God's Own Word!) they resort to personal attacks. Remember how our dear Lord was slandered as being mentally unstable, a drunk, a one possessed by a demon. Prior to our text, in Amos Chapter 7, after giving three visions of God's judgment against Israel and mentioning the royal family of Jereboam II by name, Amos is also slandered. Amaziah, the high priest in charge of the royal sanctuary of idolatry in Bethel, slanders Amos with conspiracy against the state, causing public disturbances and for doing so just to make money (cf. Amos 7:10, 12). How does Amos respond? Unmoved by the fear or favor of men he speaks as the oracle of God in these words: "*Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto My people Israel. Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord: Thou sayest, Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the Lord: Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land; and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land*" (Amos 7:14-17).

A true and faithful prophet stands fast to the Divine Call that gave him the office and the Lord who issues the call, seeking the praise of God no matter what the personal cost. God alone gives a man this moral courage. God alone makes a man a faithful steward (cf. II Corinthians 3:4-5). Amos is such a man — God made him a faithful, fearless prophet, unmoved by the fear or favor of men!

In our text Amos continues to announce God's impending justice. May God bless this message in our midst today.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, preserve us in the truth, in the love of the truth, by Thy Word which is the truth, that we may die in the saving Christian faith. May the love of the truth ever move us to support the Holy Ministry in our midst that, present and future, we may never lack faithful shepherds in our congregations. To these ends, bless the preaching of Thy Holy Word this morning. In Jesus' saving Name, Amen!

Our text begins: *"Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me; and behold a basket of summer fruit. And He said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon My people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God; there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence"* (Amos 8:1-3).

In our first verses we have a play on words (*paronomasia*) between *Kayitz*, "summer fruit," and *Ketz*, "(the) end." The point is clear: As soon as summer fruit is harvested, it must be eaten, being ripe and ready; even so the time of judgment has come and cannot be put off. God will no longer pass by them; instead, judgment will be executed; punishment will now come down upon their heads; the Northern Kingdom of Israel will cease to exist.

God's longsuffering is great but not indefinite. There comes a point in time when the limit is reached and judgment can no longer be put off. Noah preached for 120 years, and then the flood destroyed the first world. God put up with Sodom for only so long, and then the fire and brimstone consumed it. Jerusalem received nearly four decades more of grace after our Lord's ascension but was leveled by the Roman juggernaut in 70 A. D. The final cataclysmic judgment will devour the entire planet in fire at the end of the world. *When* are a people *ripe* for judgment? When past privileges are abused, when past warnings are ignored, when past calls to repentance are not heeded. God only puts up with so much.

Judgment will come to Israel. As long as the fruit still hangs on the tree, there is opportunity for a natural preservation. But once it is picked this opportunity is gone—irrevocably ended. When it comes, the songs in the Temple themselves "howl" like shrieks of terror and despair! The Hebrew text is striking, for the literal translation is: "Many the carcasses, into any place throw—hush!" God's judgment calls for silence amidst the strewn corpses! It is a horror show, a terror-reality, that takes your breath away. And well it should.

Perseverance in unbelief leads to ruin beyond human imagination and description. Look at the bodies! ...the silence ordered by God is the proper response to such devastation. As you hear this, you are not only to think about Judgment Day, the time when God's longsuffering for the planet will come to an abrupt end; you are also to consider that the day of grace also comes to an end in the lives of individuals when their appointed time arrives in death. To die in unbelief is to be damned; and there is no second chance, no reprieve, no appeal. Death ends a person's time of grace. And death can come upon you at any time. Are you ready to meet God *today*? *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

Sadly, tragically, the vast majority of Israel died in unbelief. They failed to heed the last admonition given in our text: *"Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? And the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their works"* (Amos 8:4-7).

As a nation, the Northern Kingdom is described as a people determined to make money at the expense of the poor "by hook or by crook," as it were. The rich and the power-elite ate the poor for breakfast. Like great white sharks cruising around an island of seals, they couldn't wait to sink their teeth into the poor. These predators sought easy prey; and, as soon as their hypocritical observance of holy days was over, they employed their tricks making the measure of wheat small and the weights used to measure the payment large, thereby greatly increasing their profits upon the backs of those who could least afford it. They made money

also by false scales. Debtors were sold into slavery for small debts by these rapacious predators as if they had no conscience regarding the untold suffering they were causing by their fraud. God was not in their thoughts. Godless people have no real love for their fellow-man and abuse others without one thought of remorse. The nation of Israel as a whole was filled with such people.

As in the account of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-21) the rich man's godlessness was evident in his total disregard of others, no matter how needy and afflicted. He regarded neither God nor man until it was too late. At the end of the world, many souls will be just like him (cf. Revelation 6:15ff.). If a person remains impenitent, he shall be damned in his unbelief, as Paul declares, Romans 1:28-32, 2:2-11: *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful, who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them... But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man that judgest them which do such things and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God."* *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:16).

In our text the Lord swears by the excellency of Jacob. The excellency of Jacob is the Lord, so that the Lord is swearing by Himself. God swears an oath of judgment upon Israel, vowing not to forget any of their ungodly works. (This should remind us of what Enoch prophesied about the end of the world, as the Apostle Jude recorded it in vv. 14-15 of his brief epistle.) The Law offers no mercy, no forgetting of sins, no relief from God's just wrath and eternal curse — none!

The believers in Christ can take great comfort in the fact that one day the persecutors shall receive the due reward of their unbelief, as Paul says in II Thessalonians 1:7-10 — *"And, to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day."* We shall look up to see the fulness of our redemption drawing nigh (*"to wit, the redemption of our body,"* Romans 8:23c) (Cf. also Luke 21:28 and Hebrews 9:28).

In our text we now hear what judgment God sends upon such people as those described in the Northern Kingdom: *"Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? And it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned as by the flood of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon; and I will darken the earth in the clear day; and I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day"* (Amos 8:8-10).

God's judgment is so great that the land itself is quaking and rolling like the waters of a Nile flood; and the sun sets at noon, sending darkness when there are no clouds. The joy departs for mourning, the songs become dirges, the festive clothing is exchanged for sackcloth, and every head is shaved. The mourning is like that of a parent losing his or her only child — the end is a bitter day. For the judgment of God is far more devastating than any which has come before it, way beyond any physical plague or famine: *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the LORD and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst. They that swear by the sin of Samaria and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beersheba liveth, even they shall fall and never rise up again"* (Amos 8:11-14).

The people, from the leaders on down, had trodden under foot God's covenant, wiping their idolatrous feet on the Word of God like a doormat. They ordered God's prophets to shut up and persecuted and slew them. So God sent upon them a famine of the Word nationwide. They died of spiritual thirst, no matter how young and vital they had been. Without the Word they were doomed to eternal pain. Their idols could not help them, no matter how fervently they called upon them. As one commentator puts it: "Thinking oneself wiser than God, tampering with God's revelation, changing, contaminating, falsifying His Holy Word, substituting man's ideas, man's philosophy, for the eternal wisdom of the Lord is ruinous, suicidal. Here their judgment is pronounced by the Lord, from whose tribunal there is no appeal: they shall fall and never rise up again. He that hath an ear, let him hear!" (Dr. Theo. Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 182). Dr. Kretzmann comments: "History shows that this judgment of the Lord has repeatedly gone into effect upon such as first rejected His message, His Gospel. The word of Luther that the Word of God is like a rainstorm which quickly passes over may well be heeded in our day" (*Popular Commentary*, O. T. Vol. II, p. 667).

Stephen preached this message in these words: *"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers, who have received the Law by the disposition of angels and have not kept it. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart; and they gnashed on him with their teeth"* (Acts 7:51-54). Paul preached this message in these words: *"And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles"* (Acts 13:44-46).

Dr. Luther reminds us: "God's wrath is greatest when He removes His Word or permits people to despise it. When the Greeks despised His Word, He took it away and gave them the Turk and Mohammed; to us Germans and to the Italians He gave the Pope and with him all sorts of horrible things —the denial of the faith, for example, and the entire papacy" (E. Plass, *What Luther Says*, Vol. III, p. 1557, #5060).

What about North America (the U.S. and Canada)? Rationalism, enthusiasm, existentialism and a host of other "isms" permeate the hearts of the people amidst hypocrisy and worldliness. What our Lutheran forefathers fled Europe to escape is now reigning on our own shores. How long shall God suffer this? Has the fruit been picked already? Can Judgment Day be far off? And, if it arrives today, are *you* prepared for it? Scripture records God's message to you. Will you, by God's grace and power alone, *heed* it; or will you *despise* it? St. Paul writes: *"We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)"* (II Corinthians 6:1-2).

And what about the Concordia Lutheran Conference? Shall we also experience, firsthand, a famine of hearing God's Word in our midst? "Now wait just a minute, Pastor Worley. You aren't going to say we deserve God's judgment, too?! Are we not better than they? Oops! We already know the answer to that one! It is a resounding "No!" St. Paul in Romans chapter three spells it out in no uncertain terms!" (Cf. Romans 3:9-20.)

Beloved, what we *deserve* is obvious...eternal damnation in hell, the due reward of our original and actual sin (Romans 6:23a). Specifically, we also *deserve* a famine of hearing God's Word because of our sin, neglect and ingratitude. Moreover, the sad fact that so few of our men have entered our seminary program over the last 50+ years is also telling. Now that we have three men enrolled for this coming academic year, we have an opportunity to show our genuine repentance for past neglect, ingratitude and selfishness by doing all we can to support them in their studies. If we continue in our sins of the past, refuse to repent of them, and fail to bring forth the fruits thereof in amendment of life, we will have only ourselves to blame when we "reap what we sow" (Galatians 6:7). God has graciously blessed us with faithful pastors, who, unmoved by the fear or favor of men, preach and practice the Word of God rightly divided. They have prepared you for the day of your death or Judgment Day, whichever comes first! "The Water of Life is [still] flowing for thee. No price is demanded! The Savior is here! Redemption is purchased! Salvation is free!" (TLH 278, 1). "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God*" (Romans 3:23-25).

Yes, today you can *still* quench your spiritual thirst, but tomorrow may be too late! "*The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the Water of Life freely*" (Revelation 22:17). God would have all men turn "*to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come*" (I Thessalonians 1:9-10).

The Psalmist admonishes: "*Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him*" (Psalm 2:12). The Savior's blood is your only hope! (I Peter 1:18-19). "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him*" (John 3:36). For unlike the Law, the Gospel is all about Christ's propitiation of divine justice by His vicarious active and passive obedience (I John 2:2), about God's reconciliation of the world unto Himself for Christ's sake (II Corinthians 5:19), about His putting all our sins behind His back and remembering them no more (Isaiah 38:17; Hebrews 10:17), the imputation of Christ's righteousness to poor sinners (Romans 10:4). For the sake of the holy and precious, propitiating blood of God's Son, He says in His sweet, life-giving Gospel: "*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*" (Isaiah 1:18). "*I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake and will not remember thy sins*" (Isaiah 43:25). "*The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin*" (I John 1:7b). "*Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself... in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unprovable in His sight*" (Colossians 1:20, 22).

May the unfathomable grace of God in Christ Jesus, manifested to us in His precious Gospel, motivate and enable us to guard our priceless heritage of faithful Christian preaching in the congregations of our beloved Conference, that we be spared the famine of hearing the words of the Lord which He threatens upon all who despise His grace and scorn His Word of Life! On the contrary, let us do everything in our power, while it is yet day, to foster and support the study of workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth, so that by His grace we may never lack a faithful shepherd's leading, preaching and teaching to the salvation of our souls! In Jesus' name, Amen!

*Soli Deo gloria!*