

## Amos

### “Seek the Lord and Live”

## Amos 5

I’m going to read through Amos 5 and then we’re going to go back through. And as we’re reading through, we’re going to kind of read segments as we go along the way, kind of almost in a synagogue style.

Okay. And what I mean by that is that by the time that Jesus is walking the earth, a practice had developed in the synagogues of the diaspora where the Israelites had been scattered, in which they would read small sections of text, and then they’d stand back. The preacher or the rabbi would stand back and sit down to teach, because that was the appropriate way. I won’t be doing that. I guess I could come sit on the steps. Promise you’d have to remain standing the whole time if we were really going to do this, and we’re not going to do it that way. But then the preacher would then just give some words out of that text, and then they’d read another segment and we’ve we actually see this in manuscripts. We see texts that are little small snippets. We can look in Hebrew text, for instance, and see where the reading marks are supposed to stop. And then the rabbi would give commentary. We even see Jesus do this, don’t we? In, Luke chapter four, where he goes into the synagogue where apparently he was want to do a thing he was want to do to go into the synagogue. He was he had the status of rabbi in his town, and he read from Isaiah 61 and then what does he do? Just a brief little section about the spirit of the Lord being upon him. And he sits down and he says, this is fulfilled in your hearing. He gives a sermon for a short sermon. This is fulfilled in your hearing. And everybody knows exactly what he’s saying, okay, that he is now ushering in the restoration. That is the day of the Lord, which is what we’ll talk about tonight. But in Briarwood fashion, I will read the whole text first, and then we’ll go back and consider it. This is, three major poems, okay? Three large poems. One goes from chapter from verse one to verse 17. That is a covenant lament. Then we have a whole poem about the day of the Lord from 18 to 20. And then we finally have a section dealing with indictment and judgment against false worship in verses 20 through 27. So this is the word of the Lord. Hear this word that I take up over you...

*Seek the Lord and Live*

5 Hear this word that I <sup>k</sup>take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel:

<sup>2</sup> “Fallen, no more to rise,

is <sup>i</sup>the virgin Israel;  
forsaken on her land,  
with none to raise her up.”

<sup>3</sup> For thus says the Lord GOD:

“The city that went out a thousand  
shall have a hundred left,  
and that which went out a hundred  
shall have ten left  
to the house of Israel.”

<sup>4</sup> For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel:

<sup>m</sup>“Seek me and live;

<sup>5</sup> but do not seek <sup>n</sup>Bethel,  
and do not enter into <sup>n</sup>Gilgal  
or cross over to <sup>o</sup>Beersheba;  
for <sup>n</sup>Gilgal shall surely go into exile,  
and <sup>n</sup>Bethel shall come to nothing.”

<sup>6</sup> <sup>m</sup>Seek the LORD and live,

<sup>p</sup>lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,  
and it devour, with none to quench it for <sup>n</sup>Bethel,

<sup>7</sup> O <sup>q</sup>you who turn justice to wormwood<sup>1</sup>  
and cast down righteousness to the earth!

<sup>8</sup> He who made the <sup>r</sup>Pleiades and Orion,  
and turns deep darkness into the morning  
and <sup>s</sup>darkens the day into night,  
who <sup>t</sup>calls for the waters of the sea

<sup>t</sup>and pours them out on the surface of the earth,

<sup>u</sup>the LORD is his name;

<sup>9</sup> <sup>v</sup>who makes destruction flash forth against the strong,  
so that destruction comes upon the fortress.

<sup>10</sup> <sup>w</sup>They hate him who reproves <sup>x</sup>in the gate,  
and they <sup>y</sup>abhor him who speaks the truth.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore because you <sup>z</sup>trample on<sup>2</sup> the poor  
and you exact taxes of grain from him,  
<sup>a</sup>you have built houses of hewn stone,  
but you shall not dwell in them;  
<sup>a</sup>you have planted pleasant vineyards,  
but you shall not drink their wine.

<sup>12</sup> For I know how many are your transgressions  
and how great are your sins—  
you who afflict the righteous, who <sup>b</sup>take a bribe,  
and <sup>c</sup>turn aside the needy <sup>x</sup>in the gate.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore he who is prudent will <sup>d</sup>keep silent in such a time,  
<sup>e</sup>for it is an evil time.

<sup>14</sup> <sup>f</sup>Seek good, and not evil,  
that you may live;  
and so the LORD, <sup>g</sup>the God of hosts, will be with you,  
as you have said.

<sup>15</sup> <sup>h</sup>Hate evil, and love good,  
and establish justice <sup>x</sup>in the gate;  
<sup>i</sup>it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,  
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD, <sup>g</sup>the God of hosts, the Lord:  
“In all the squares <sup>j</sup>there shall be wailing,  
and in all the streets they shall say, ‘Alas! Alas!’  
They shall call the farmers to mourning  
and <sup>j</sup>to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation,  
<sup>17</sup> and in all vineyards there shall be wailing,  
for <sup>k</sup>I will pass through your midst,”

says the LORD.

*Let Justice Roll Down*

<sup>18</sup> Woe to you who desire <sup>l</sup>the day of the LORD!

Why would you have the day of the LORD?

<sup>m</sup>It is darkness, and not light,

<sup>19</sup> <sup>n</sup>as if a man fled from a lion,

and a bear met him,

or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,

and a serpent bit him.

<sup>20</sup> <sup>m</sup>Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

<sup>21</sup> <sup>o</sup>“I hate, I despise your feasts,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

<sup>22</sup> <sup>p</sup>Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,

I will not look upon them.

<sup>23</sup> Take away from me the noise of your songs;

to <sup>q</sup>the melody of your harps I will not listen.

<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

<sup>25</sup> <sup>r</sup>“Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? <sup>26</sup> <sup>s</sup>You <sup>t</sup>shall take up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyyun your star-god—

your images that you made for yourselves, <sup>27</sup> <sup>u</sup>and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,” says the LORD, whose name is <sup>g</sup>the God of hosts.

Well, as we're continuing on now in Amos, we should we do well to locate ourselves, because right now, right about in the middle of the book. And if you remember the first two chapters were those oracles against the nations where the prophet was laying out all of the judgment

that the Lord was going to do to the enemies of the people of God. And when you see those judgment oracles, we have to recognize these are encouragements to Israel that, yes, indeed, the people who have been judging you, the people who have been treating you poorly, the people who have been harassing you, will be judged themselves. It's important for us to remember that there are really two sides of God's redemptive coin because of the fall that is redemption comes.

But the flip side of redemption and blessing is judgment. It always is the flip side of God's mercy. This is judgment. And what I mean by that is this when we see the judgment of God against the oppressor, against the Moabites, against the ammonites, against all those evil people who were oppressing Israel, you have to remember that's the other side of that judgment is the salvation of Israel. But they take heart knowing that God is just and will judge their enemies. It actually says something about a culture. If you only see divine judgment as a bad thing, and you don't recognize the good that it brings, it kind of shows that you are living in a comfortable, complacent culture because you're not worried about your oppressors and whether or not they'll be judged.

Okay, but if you grew up in a place where you were afflicted, where you were oppressed, where you were exploited, then you know what it feels like to say, I wish that the Lord would show up and that justice would happen. Okay, so that was the opening. It was the justice against the nations. And yet we saw how Amos took it, and he kind of almost in like a post-modern way. He took the genre of judgment against the nations, and he flipped it on its ear because the last nation who gets the judgment is Israel itself, his audience. And he says, you're going to get it. Worst of all, you were worst. Then you're worse than the Syrians, the Arameans, as we even see in this passage, they're going to be taken so far away they won't be taken past Damascus. They're going to be farther away than even the nations. So that then introduces another section that begins in chapter three and continues on till the end of chapter six. And that section is dealing now with the judgments. What are what is an account of the evils and what the Lord will do as a result of the evils of the northern Kingdom.

And you remember we had a little lawsuit I mentioned. This is like a this is a covenant lawsuit where the Lord reminds them of all he had given them, and then he gives them a certain set of, you know, some judgments against them and what's going to happen. The allegations, okay, it's called a receive a covenant lawsuit. All right.

That's the beginning of this judgment, Oracle. But now we continue on to through chapter six, which is where we are right now, right in the middle of this, where he's still laying out now the judgments that are going to come against the Northern Kingdom once we hit chapter seven until the end, the Lord is going to be offering them now mercy in one hand and judgment in the other is take, take mercy.

I'm offering you mercy. This is not just he's not just haranguing the Northern Kingdom. This is all for the purpose of them being saved through repentance. And we get little hints of that in this passage today. But this passage is right now firmly in the middle of these judgment oracles that we're having between chapter three and chapter four.

And notice we have three poems. As I mentioned before, the first one is a lament. And what is a lament? A lament is a kind of poem where you sing about it's kind of like almost like an elegy or a more mournful relief. You sing about a tragedy as if the tragedy already happened. What are you doing there?

You're actually kind of forcing the audience to imagine for a moment, stop thinking about the thing being out there. Think about what it's going to be like when it actually happens. Maybe that will ignite your imagination so that you'll repent and turn to the Lord. So if you notice here, the judgments against Israel are stated as if they've already taken place, as if the prophet is watching them happen.

And in this judgment lament this covenantal lament. He starts with this vision of the tragedy that is to come, that is the fallenness of Israel. He then has a call to action, and it's common. And to do poems this way a call to action, how they ought to respond. Notice implicitly, implicitly tucked in that call to action is that if they respond the way he's telling them to respond, and the Lord will show mercy, then we come to the middle section.

There's a speech now to the fallen Israel. We tells them this is why this happened. Then verse 30, excuse me. Verse 14 through 15, he goes back to a call to action. He says once again, having been confronted with the judgment of succumb, repent, I, I'd love to show mercy. You even have a line in there that is, common amongst some of the prophets where it says may be, may be.

The Lord will show mercy. There's two if you want to remember two Hebrew phrases. Okay. And these are easy to remember are two Hebrew phrases that are key for the prophets. You're theologically profound. They are where, God's sovereignty and human responsibility somehow touch on these two phrases that when the Lord says things like, I'm going to bring justice to you, we will regularly have the prophets say two things either one, who knows if we repent, maybe the Lord will show mercy.

Okay, here's the Hebrew phrase me you dare say that after me? Me? You dare. Okay, like you're learning Hebrew. Okay. Who knows, you could pray that. So when you're suffering, you're under some kind of affliction. You've got a bad medical prognosis. You're in a tough relationship. Pray to the Lord. Lord have mercy. Me you day. Maybe you will have mercy upon me in this.

Who knows? Because we don't know what the Lord has in store. And yet we know that he loves to show mercy. Here's the other line. And this is the one that occurs here in Amos. This is the

word ugly or you lie would be the best way to say it said if you lie, that means maybe he'll respond and show mercy.

You see, the prophets know that God is not like Bill. He's not a vending machine God where I can put change into, you know, I can put a sacrifice on the altar and he'll give me everything that I want. We know that God is not, a rabbit's foot for us to pull out and rub when we want to get the right things.

It's not a vending machine. He's not, you know, put in your ticket, you get back the thing you asked for. We have to recognize in all things. Who knows? Maybe me, you day, July. Who knows? Maybe the Lord will have mercy upon us. And notice that's what happens here in this call to action. Seek the Lord and live.

I know I've just said Israel has fallen like a virgin. She's fallen, she's fallen. She can't get back up. But seek me and live. I love to show mercy. I'd love to pick Israel back up again. I love to keep that thing not happen. Make sure that that thing doesn't happen. But then finally, in verse 16 through 17, we have a call or an invitation to lament.

I just want to look at a couple of parts of this poem first, before we move on to the next one. Notice in verse two, fallen, fallen, no more to rise. Is the virgin Israel forsaken on her land. With none to raise her up. As soon as you see Israel called a virgin here. Okay, we can know that this is covenantal language, because we're talking about Israel as God's wife.

Okay, yes, it's true in the Old Testament and in the new, the people of God who are in a covenant relationship with God are often referred to as the son of the father and the wife of the husband. I think of Hosea, whose wife, Gomer, is a picture of Israel, and Joseph's faithfulness to her is a picture of God's faithfulness to Israel.

Think about Jeremiah, who's not allowed to marry because of the coming exile. Think about Ezekiel, who, when his wife dies, he's not allowed to grieve her because she has become now a symbol of the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem. Okay, he says, Israel, like Isaiah, says this as well. Israel was once like a virgin bride. In other words, she was faithful to me. She came to me as a perfect bride. I received her, but look how she has given up, how she has flaunted that status. She will finally be crushed, to finally be fallen. Not because. Not even because of me. As we'll read in the zeal and the other prophets who say it's because of the suitors that she chose to run after the other gods, they won't serve her like I served her.

This opening, which I know you will not be able to see in English so much, but I'm actually going to read some Hebrew just so that you can feel it when you slide into lament poetry in the Old Testament, you know that there's actually a style of poetry. They had a little rhythmic thing that they would do whenever they were doing lament poetry.

Okay, it's called the kena meter. Okay. This is a little technical stuff. It's Sunday night so we can get a little experimental, right? It's called the keynote. I'm here. All Kenan means is lament. That's the Hebrew word for lament. But this is how it goes. It's two lines, it's couplets, and they have three beats. And we'll get into what the beats are, but they have three beats on the first line.

Two beats though in the second line it's called a staggered gait. It goes like this.

It's the first line. Then in the second line, it's a poem of a staggered gait. There's a debate is the staggered gait, because it's showing somebody kind of limping along three steps on one side, two steps on the other, because they're suffering, they're grieving, they're weakened. Or maybe it's something more almost like symbolic of what we see in funeral military funerals.

You know, for instance, when you see planes fly over and then one will pull away, is that last beat that's not in the second line. Sort of communicating this sense of loss. It's interesting that this poem actually begins with that of meter. If you wanted to hear what it sounds like, I'll read it for you. You can kind of get a sense of it. But this is the line falling. No more to rise. Is the Virgin Israel no fly low to see if come. That's the first line. But a lot Israel. The second line. Okay then. Moving on now to the next couplet.. Don't do it. As he paints out this vision of the tragedy, he does it using this very familiar lament rhythm to tell us it's like he's it's like he's moving into blues, right? As he invites Israel to imagine the destruction that's going to come. It's going to be destruction through warfare. We remember that with the with the prophets.

Sometimes it's destruction in nature, sometimes it's in warfare. In this case, it seems to be in warfare because we have a thousand who are going out. Why are they going out? They're going out in battle. But only a hundred will come back. They're gonna be literally decimated. I mean, knocked down to a 10th. So he starts by painting this picture of this destruction of Israel, the one who was once the perfect, faithful bride to the Lord has now become a failed marriage, has become a wandering wife, a destroyed city.

Now, then we get to verse four and there's an immediate call to action. Therefore, how should we respond to this? Seek me and live. In other words, you don't have to be destroyed. Seek me and live, says the Lord. I'm painting a picture for you, so to avoid it, seek me out, but don't seek me in the high places.

Don't go to Bethel and Gilgal. Don't go to those places that are not where my name resides. That is Jerusalem. You see, he's calling them to faithful worship. And the implicit thing there is that he's going to then give them relief. He loves to show mercy. But if you don't, what does he say in verse six? A fire will break out in the house of Joseph, and it will devour with none to quench it.

For Bethel.



Now we get to the middle section, where he speaks directly to the audience. Okay. He's speaking now directly to the people who will be in fallen Israel. And notice what he says. He says, O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth. So what is he saying? They've committed this this not just sinful worship.

And by going up to Bethel and Gilgal, but they've also been committing injustice. As a matter of fact, they've been flipping it so that justice becomes rotted wood. They're taking righteousness, and that righteousness is talking about a kind of public righteousness. In other words, going out and caring for and loving others. And they've thrown it down in the dirt.

You see, as we've been saying with Amos, there's a there's a very smooth, slippery slope in between false worship and oppressive behavior. If you start oppressing, you're going to start doing false worship soon. If you start doing false worship, you're going to start oppressing soon. The two are deeply connected. I think we even see that in the world around us today.

When people set aside the living God, when they set aside what he has called humanity to do, what they are to do, and what they are to believe concerning him, we see injustices abound. You who have done these things, you should listen because he who made the stars in the sky. Now it's interesting actually, we think that he's talking about places in Orion.

For those of you who are interested in astronomy, we think that's what he's talking about. Literally, he says this the one who made the group and the fool, the one who made the the it's possibly the group of the flock knew what was Plato's. But it's these are both have to be visible. So whatever he's talking about has to be visible to the naked eye.

Okay? He's talking about a grouping of stars, most likely. And we're also going off of job nine and elsewhere in the Bible where these two are mentioned as stars. And he's saying the one who spun out the cosmos is the one who, who, who threw out Orion out there and put them in the sky in a bright way that we can all see him.

We might even say today, the one who's, looking through that, you know, the it's not the Hubble telescope, but the more recent one, the better one. And it's looking way out into the distance, and it's seeing all those candy wrapper galaxies. Have you seen these pictures where they'll have a, a square from a frame that's just a very small part of the sky.

And it will be 5000 galaxies. The one who threw those out there into existence is the one who was calling you to repentance, the one who calls, who summons the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth. The Lord Adonai, Yahweh, is his name. Saying, what are you doing? What are you doing? Trampling the poor? What are you doing? Acting like your god. See, that's ultimately what this is about. Israel. By diminishing God and just counting him as one of the many gods out there that they ought to worship. Kind of a part of a pantheon of not treating the worship of the living God as a as an honorable thing, but rather ignoring his statutes

to, to go and worship in Jerusalem and setting up their own high places just so they can feel religious and what they're doing when they make gods small like that.

What happens when you make gods small? You end up yourself becoming quite small. You end up going and struggling after what you can get right now, what you can kind of get your grubby mitts on, right, how you can control others. You end up trampling the poor, not thinking about how the poor speak to the glory of God because they're made in his image.

You start worshiping in ways that are cheap, worshiping in ways that aren't satisfying because you're worshiping a small God. You're trying to diminish him. But as you see in the Bible, God will not be diminished. So what does he say? He says, because you trample the poor, because you exact the taxes of grain. And this is what will happen.

I'm going to reverse the conquest. Notice what he says here. You'll build houses that you won't live in, and you'll have vineyards that you won't enjoy the fruit juice of the grapes of. Notice what he's doing? There's he's actually flipping the conquest on its ear, because that's what was said before about the Canaanites. They planted houses, but they won't live in them.

The Israelites will live in them, and they had vineyards that they won't be able to enjoy, because the Israelites will enjoy them. And now what is he saying? The same thing will happen to you, Israel, because don't think that I won't kick you out if you disgrace my land the way that the Canaanites did. You then refers or returns again.

There's a reprisal of his call to action in verse 14. Seek God and not evil, that you may live again. He's offering forgiveness if they only repent, hate evil, love good, established justice in the gate. But then we get to 16, verse 16, and we have the invitation to lament. Notice he calls out to the people, to his audience and he says, go out and get your skilled mourners.

It's kind of like today when people are grieving, you know, and we'll have everyone put a flag at half mast and we'll have police officers come out and block out the roads so that the funeral parade can go by. In the Old Testament, you would pay people who would go out in the streets and would mourn for you, and they'd yell out, whoa, whoa!

Actually, they didn't say, whoa, do you know that? They didn't say, well, what they said is a word that not as compelling to us in English. So our English translator said, let's say, well, instead of what they actually said in the Hebrew, they're saying, oh boy, oh boy, how terrible this is. If you look it up, it's oh, actually, in this case, it's holy.

But what is this? This is an interjection. That is an emotive interjection. You're weeping. You're crying. Whoa! Please, Lord have mercy. So he's inviting Israel. Lament for your future destruction. And the best way to lament is by repenting and turning to me. And so that's the end of this opening World War II. Excuse me? A lament or a poem?

Now he switches over to a World War oracle where he says something very similar. And I just want to highlight one part of this. He says, woe to you who are longing for the day of the Lord. Woe to you who are longing for the day of the Lord, for the Yom Adonai, when the Lord will come and set all things to right.

Now we know a few things about the day of the Lord from the 12 Minor Prophets. Amos doesn't have a very worked out theology of the day of the Lord, and yet most scholars recognize that we should understand the day of the Lord that we find in Joel. Okay, to be sort of instructive for the day of the Lord in all of the other books of the 12.

And Joel says this the day of the Lord has three major aspects to it. The first one is this there's going to be judgment and restoration for Israel, and that's what we're talking about now. There's going to be judgment against the wicked. But restoration of the remnant in Israel. Secondly, there's going to be a cosmic revelation of some kind of event where all people will see what is taking place in the day of the Lord.

Think about Isaiah, right? We all know that one right off the top of our heads because of Christmas, that all flesh will see it together, right? That's a part of the day of the Lord. That all flesh. I remember when I was a child growing up, I thought that it was going to be all fish. We'll see it together.

And that didn't make sense. But I don't know why the fish are getting a special audience here, but it's all flesh. Notice you can't say all of the world without saying something like all flesh. It's not all Israel. It's just not all humans. It's not all the brothers or the saved. Everyone will see it together. Judgment is the last one.

Judgment on the enemies of God's people and assurance for Zion. So judgment and restoration for Israel. Cosmic revelation for all people to see. This is good, by the way. This is just good to put in your back pocket intimacy. Day of the Lord in the Bible, you think about these three different perspectives on the day of the Lord.

The last one, judgment on the enemies of God, and assurance for Zion. Notice what he's saying here. He's saying you guys are longing for the day of the Lord. You're saying, Lord, come quickly. You're saying, I can't wait till I get to see Jesus, right? That's what they're saying. And he goes, but you don't understand. When you see Jesus, he's going to come in judgment against you.

It's not going to be a day of goodness. It's not going to be a day of light. It's going to be a day of darkness. Woe, woe to you who don't realize that when you lean against that door, that is the day of the Lord. There's going to be a snake on it that bites you. There's going to be a lion that trounces you.

In other words, repent. Turn back to the Lord. Turn back to the Lord of your salvation. That. Whoa! Oracle of the day of the Lord. Then moves, reminds us that we ought to be careful of a false sense of security that leads to presumptuousness. God's people should always seek him. Now, the way I'm all about having an assurance of faith.

You heard the sermon this morning I was talking about. You need to be assured of your faith. That's a good thing. But one way you can be assured of your faith is by asking yourself, in my seeking the Lord and repentance and humility, don't triumphal mystically wait on the day of the Lord. If you don't have repentance and humility, okay, the people of God should yearn for the day of the Lord. We should say, come quickly, Lord Jesus, but we should do it in a spirit of worship and faith and repentance.

The last section, now in verse 20 through 27, talks about the use of idols, the false worship that the people are participating in. I'm just going to explain the last section, because we've talked about these themes already over the course of this series, but I just want to point out, for those of you who see sixth or sixth and kyun or kyun, okay, if you if you're wondering what's going on there, that actually is a bit of a Hebrew problem. And you have to know more than just Hebrew to understand what's going on here, it seems as if this is just a guess, but it makes sense. Okay, we know that there was a deity. There's a Mesopotamian daddy now known as C Koth or Sixth, who would be treated almost like an arbiter of decisions or a counselor for kings, and the king would take him.

We actually know the Assyrian kings would take their idols with them into battle, and it was so that the idols could care for them and watch over them and give them counsel. Notice how he calls him back. Who's your king? And then there's also reason to believe that Kyun or Kyon should be understood as the same as Saturn.

Okay, notice what's he called here? Your star God, right? They're not distinguishing between planets and stars here in the ancient world. So they're seeing Saturn in the sky. They're thinking like the Romans do. There's Saturn, right? But they're named for him as. And the Lord is telling them here, you put your trust in sackcloth and Cologne, but they won't do anything for you.

And it reminds us that the idols in the Old Testament are sometimes described as being nothing. I'll give you some verses there where idols are just nothing. Isaiah makes quite a lot of fun of idol makers who are whittling away at their idols, and they're putting them up on the mantel and they're saying, oh my maker, I worship you.

And Isaiah says, you just made him. You just made him, and you're calling him your maker. They're nothing. And I think what they're drawing attention to, there's the fact that if you are not, if you're talking about God as our God is, then those idols are nothing. They are no gods, and yet they're not to be treated lightly. Elsewhere in the Old Testament and in the new, idols

are referred to as demons. So it's not to say that there's not spiritual power, there's not spiritual warfare out there.

And yet, in light of the God who we serve in light of Jesus Christ, we have nothing to fear from those demons, from those spiritual forces. I remember my daughters being afraid at night sometimes, and we talk about it, and I don't want to always be careful with them not to say, well, there's no such thing as ghosts or something.

And of course, they're not really worried about ghosts or worried about spiritual things that are scary. And we didn't want to go in there and say, oh, there's no such thing as them, because that's not true. But what we would sometimes talk about is remember what happens when Jesus meets those guys, those bad guys, and when he meets a thousand of them on the shore of the gatherings, when they meet him, do they come before him and say, put up your dukes, Jesus, we're going to fight now what do they say?

Why have you come to persecute us before the given time? In other words, they say, we know we've lost. But you're coming to bring home the victory a little early, aren't you? There's not even a fight. There's not even about it. So it's good for us on one side to acknowledge the reality of spiritual warfare, of spiritual forces out there.

And yet to also recognize that we serve the second person of the Triune God who spun Pleiades and Orion into existence, who calls forth the waters and the rivers, who makes the spirits okay, the battle is won. We have nothing to fear. So as we read these passages, these poems can seem very distant from us. They can seem like a very different kind of thing than what we're used to reading in the Christian life.

And yet I would encourage you to kind of slow down and spend some time in them. This is a loving father who's coming to his people, who he chose and called out to himself, but they're playing with fire. They're about to burn down the house. They're about to burn down the house of Joseph, as he says here. And what is he doing? He's speaking in no uncertain terms, saying, come back, repent, turn to me. That's the spirit of Israel. It should be the spirit of Judah, and it should be the spirit of us today calling one another to repent and humility and faith, and to return to the Lord so that the day of the Lord will not be a day of darkness for us, but will be a day of joy, a day of assurance of all who reside in Zion.

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father, as we come before you, I pray, Lord, that your word would be efficacious to draw our eyes to you and to your justice. But as quickly as we see your justice, Lord, let our eyes and be averted to your mercy. I pray, Lord, that through the power of the spirit we would seek you and live. We pray that we would see justice in our lives and the lives of those around us, but

we would also be people of mercy who love to show mercy because our Savior loves to show mercy. Guide us, Lord, quicken us and chasing us through the power of your spirit we pray.

Amen.