

The LORD takes seriously His involvement in His children's lives in the midst of this wicked, dark, unbelieving world. Though the unbeliever *pretends* that life goes on without any reference to God as Creator, Provider and Redeemer, we know from Scripture's testimony that God has *furnished this world* with constant reminders of His sovereign control and vigilant watch-care for His own.

This week we will use the last chapter of Amos, to understand the LORD's support as the only reason that he could remain stable and strong in his thankless calling as prophet of divine judgment. We will look at some of the Psalms which Amos must have known and which he treasured as we do as well. May we see that this world has a "lived in" look because it belongs to God. He is the Householder, and this world is His property. One day soon, He will come not only to gather His own to Himself but to deal with those squatters who carried on as if God's good gifts were theirs to enjoy without Him.

Mon/Tues: Read Psalm 37:1-22 and Amos 9:1-10

Collateral Damage, Collateral Benefits

Both Amos and the Psalmist toll the bell that announces God's judgment against the wicked. Only a few years after Amos' prophecy, the Assyrians came and took away Israel from their land (2 Kings 17:1-18). Amos declares in almost every verse in his ninth chapter that the LORD will seek out and find the wicked. They cannot hide. The Psalmist also declares again and again that the wicked "will be cut off." (Psalm 37:9; 37:22; 37:28; 37:34 & 37:38) In fact, in the Psalms and the Minor Prophets the judgment of the wicked is a dominant a theme. Time and again, the LORD shows grace towards rebellious, lost sinners by warning them of their demise if they do not repent.

But what a difference for those who believe in Christ. They are "never forsaken" (Psalm 37:28) and will be "preserved forever." In a very real sense, the very foundation of the believer's life is set as in concrete in the righteous character of God. It is because God "loves the right" (Psalm 37:28) that His saints are not forsaken but are preserved forever.

The righteousness of God becomes the hedge which He uses to protectively surround the believer. When this righteousness is our hedge, we are secure – *even if we only have a little bit of what the world thinks is so essential for the good, stable life*. As Psalm 37:16 says, a little bit that the righteous man has is better, in terms of preservation and long-term safety, than the abundance of the wicked.

Meditate and Pray: What a transformation takes place when we see that God's righteousness is committed to saving us from sin and from every enemy. Without Christ, like the unconverted Martin Luther we fear the righteousness of God, rightly understanding how far short we fall of this perfect, righteous, standard.

Thank you, Father, for the righteousness that has been revealed in the life, sufferings, sinless obedience, and death on the Cross of God's Son. Thank you that we can have that righteousness as a free gift, and the protection and blessings that comes with it.

Praise the Lord for His righteousness as our protection using hymn # 521 in our red Trinity Hymnals. May this hymn remind us of Christ's iron-like grip of grace on our lives.

1 My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain: On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand;
all other ground is sinking sand.

2 When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every high and stormy gale
my anchor holds within the veil. [Refrain]

3 His oath, his covenant, his blood
support me in the whelming flood;
when all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay. [Refrain]

Wednesday: Read Psalm 37:23-24 & John 10:27-33

The Firm Grip of God's Hand

Yet another doctrine in the Prophets and in the Psalms which both comforts and convicts, giving hope to God's own while terrifying God's foes, is the reality of the hand of the Lord controlling every place and every period of history.

The constant goal of the wicked is to wiggle and squirm free of God's grip in order to run away and build their own sand castles of godless, practical atheism. For them, freedom is a fruitless search to be *released from the duty of bowing the knee to God*. They chase this fantasy and lie, thinking they can live apart from God.

The believer's joy is finding liberty *in* the service of God as His redeemed children. For us who are in Christ, there is great solace in knowing that "no one can snatch us" out of God's hand or the hand of His Son (John 10:28-29).

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that weak, helpless sheep like us can find a place of complete spiritual safety in the hands of God, "who is greater than all" (John 10:29). Give thanks also that because of God's hand and His grip upon us, we share in the delight of walking in the footsteps He lays out for us (Psalm 23:23-24).

Most of all, give thanks that Christ is "one with the Father" (John 10:30) meaning that He also is "greater than all" and is, as very God of very God, able to keep His sheep in His eternal grip – just as strong as His Father's grip! Sing about the security which is ours in hymn # 463:

1 A debtor to mercy alone,
of covenant mercy I sing;
nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
my person and offering to bring.
The terrors of law and of God
with me can have nothing to do;
my Savior's obedience and blood
hide all my transgressions from view.

2 The work which his goodness began,
the arm of his strength will complete;
his promise is yea and amen,
and never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
nor all things below or above,
can make him his purpose forgo,
or sever my soul from his love.

3 My name from the palms of his hands
eternity will not erase;
impressed on his heart it remains,
in marks of indelible grace.

Yes, I to the end shall endure,
as sure as the earnest is giv'n;
more happy, but not more secure,
the glorified spirits in heav'n.

Thursday: Read Amos 7:7-17 & 1 Peter 2:1-5**All Reclaimed, All Revealed**

The hand of the LORD is active to call and equip His servants to speak God's Word even in dark days. Amos was challenged by the blasphemous false priest who sought to silence the prophet and to send him home. His answer was, "the LORD took me from following the flock, saying to me, "Go prophesy to Israel." (Amos 7:15) God's strong hand uses a plumb line (Amos 7:7) as a sign that it was time for God the Builder to destroy the house of the kings of Israel and to rebuild a people of living stones (1 Peter 2:1-5). Just as the LORD laid His hands on Amos to call him to speak the living words of God, so He is going to lay His hands on Israel to destroy her for failing to heed the prophet's words.

God's hand is always active. He is not a God who lives far away and periodically sends e-mails or texts from a distant land. He brings His building projects down to this world. As Amos 9:6 puts it, though God's upper chambers are in the heavens, He nevertheless builds the foundations of His house on the earth. That is how close God is! James 5:9 says, "The Judge is at the door!"

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that God has brought the furniture of heaven down to our world. God has set up "digs" to dwell down here in the midst of His creation. Everywhere we turn, there are signs that God dwells here. To live in what He has created and to enjoy the blessings of His world, with no acknowledgment of Him, is to live the life of a squatter and a thief. One day all who have thus stolen knowledge, gifts and wisdom from God will have to give an account and *return everything to Him*.

This is why no one will be recognizable in hell. All gifts, graces and personality accidents that make people pleasant and even attractive in this world will be gone. All unbelief will be unmasked and revealed forever as the ugliness of naked enmity against God. This is what Romans 8:7-8 promises.

Friday: Read 2 Kings 15:32-38; Psalm 37:23-24 & John 10:28-30**A Firm Path through Troubles**

We began this week with an emphasis on the strength with which the LORD builds up His own people. Though the foundations of society all around be destroyed, and threats of violence overshadow the lands where they live, the LORD is able to "order the steps of the righteous." There is always a pathway through troubles in this world for the believer, always light at the end of the tunnel.

King Jotham began to reign at a time when threats faced the kingdom of Judah, yet we see the LORD's hand guided him and enabled him to hold onto the LORD (Psalm 63:8). Second Chronicles 27:6 says, "Jotham became mighty because he ordered his ways before the Lord." Yet Israel remained largely devoted to worshiping secretly at the pagan high places.

Even though the kings of Aram and Israel made an alliance that threatened the kingdom of Judah and caused unbelievers in Judah to panic (2 Kings 15:37) Jotham was still made powerful by the LORD and was able to withstand this threat. Throughout his life, no one could snatch Jotham out of the LORD's hand. Remember the promise of Psalm 37:23-24? There the Psalmist promises that the steps of the man who belongs to the LORD will be "established" or "grounded in" the LORD's plan and purpose. Why? Because the LORD delights to show His own children the way in which they should walk.

Meditate and Pray: “LORD, please continually remind us that you are committed to upholding us. Oh dear Father and Son: thank you for the Triune reality that “no one can snatch us” out of either of your hands. (John 10:28-30) You are One in essence as persons of the Trinity and also One in mission – you will bring all your sheep home!

Sat/Sun: Read Amos 9:1-9; 2 Kings 17:1-23 & John 3:31-36

The Lord’s Hand

As we come to the end of 2 Kings and the exile of Israel to Assyria looms in 2 Kings 17, pause to ask yourself again: How are God’s people, the LORD’s remnant, expected to survive such difficult times?

Well, certain non-starters rise in our minds. We are NOT going to survive by political reform, nor economic success or personal wealth or stockpiling. Neither will we stake our hopes for a stable future on family-centered lives instead of faith-centered lives. As John 1:12-13 makes clear, our hope is for the Kingdom of God *within us* by the new birth! But how does God express His commitment to us to give us new life, to redeem us out of bondage to sin, and to write His laws on our hearts, especially in evil days?

The answer is in this very simple but all-powerful metaphor of the LORD’s hand. Consider the following facts about the “hand of the LORD” gleaned from this week’s readings as the only explanation as to how the LORD’s people survive in an evil day.

- 1) The hand of the LORD means He is committed to continuously holding onto our lives. For example, even though David was in the wilderness being hounded by Saul in Psalm 63, he nevertheless clung to the LORD in his evil day *because* God’s right hand upheld him.
- 2) Note especially that this promise in Psalm 63:8 is that the LORD will continuously uphold us. The verb tense of “uphold” means He will continuously and by habit uphold us. The scholar J.A. Alexander comments on Psalm 63:8, that the LORD is our “habitual upholder.”
- 3) Because of God’s 24/7 commitment to hold onto us and hold us up above the wickedness of the day in which we live, we enter into the very safety which Jesus promises us in John 10:28-30. Because of Christ’s divine grip, no one can snatch us out of His hand.
- 4) By contrast, tremble and pray for the LORD’s protection from the ways of sinful rebellion outlined in Amos 9:1-9 and 2 Kings 17:1-20, a rebellion which *engages God’s hand against us*. For the LORD to be against us means that He hands us over to the power of the idols and hostile nations which we serve.
- 5) Be assured that Christ’s hand over your life is an omnipotent hand. Consider the size and power of that very hand by which Christ holds onto us. John 3:35 says all things have been given over into Christ’s hand. The Father has poured all that He is and has into the hand of the Son, which means that the Son of God must be equal with the Father – able to hold within Himself “all things,” beginning with the fullness of His Father’s nature. Christ in this way shows He is just as immense as His Father and that all God’s unlimited Spirit and possessions reside in Him.

What a hand that holds onto us and orders our steps! There is simply no limit to what the LORD Jesus possesses for our good as His people –

He has the Spirit without limit (John 3:34) to be our Comforter and Guide.

He has the Hand which exercises authority over all things, since He is “above all” (John 3:31).

Because He is “above all,” He as the “Heir of all things” has our spiritual and eternal inheritance in His hand, secure and safe.

He holds “all things” in His hand, meaning each of our steps in life are already mapped out by Him.

In short, to sum up all that we have in Christ by which to be kept safe in the days in which we live – here is what Fisher’s Commentary on the Westminster Shorter Catechism says:

Q: What does God grant to us when He promises to be our God?

A: All His glorious excellencies to be ours: His infinity to be the extent of our inheritance; His eternity to be the date of our happiness; His unchangeableness to be the rock of our rest; His wisdom to direct us; His power to protect us; His holiness to sanctify us; His justice to justify and protect us; His goodness to reward us in the way of grace, not debt; and His truth to secure us in the accomplishment of all His promises.

Meditate and Pray: With such a Savior’s care overarching our lives – we can sing under the shelter of His wings (Psalm 63:7)! Praise His name. Spend time thanking God for these truths and live up loved ones and circumstances into His strong and competent hand.