

# Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – (Part 1)

## THE DAY OF THE LORD

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

## Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Michael Hoy

*7 Be silent before the Lord GOD!*

*For the day of the LORD is at hand;  
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,  
he has consecrated his guests.*

*12 At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,  
and I will punish the people  
who rest complacently on their dregs,  
those who say in their hearts,  
“The LORD will not do good,  
nor will he do harm.”*

*13 Their wealth shall be plundered,  
and their houses laid waste.*

*Though they build houses,  
they shall not inhabit them;  
though they plant vineyards,  
they shall not drink wine from them.*

*14 The great day of the LORD is near,  
near and hastening fast;  
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter,  
the warrior cries aloud there.*

*15 That day will be a day of wrath,  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation,*

*a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
16 a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities  
and against the lofty battlements.  
17 I will bring such distress upon people  
that they shall walk like the blind;  
because they have sinned against the LORD,  
their blood shall be poured out like dust,  
and their flesh like dung.  
18 Neither their silver nor their gold  
will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath;  
in the fire of his passion  
the whole earth shall be consumed;  
for a full, a terrible end  
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Ignoring the Day of the Lord**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Living as If There Were No Lord Yahweh*

"The LORD will not do good, nor will he do harm" (v. 12b). That is the phrase of people now as then. It means that there is no God who watches over his people. We are our own judge and our own jury, our own creators of our own destiny. We are "complacent," like the thickened syrup or "dregs" on the top of wine in the presses (v. 12a), hardened to any suggestion that anyone else other than ourselves is in charge of this world. There is no other to whom we are responsible—only ourselves and what we want. Furthermore, there is no urgency to pursue what God desires.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Not Listening*

And so we cannot hear the cry of the prophet who speaks about approaching battle, “Be silent before the Lord GOD!” (v. 7). This was the cry before the sacrifice before the holy war, to consecrate those preparing for conflict. But we have already succumbed to the numbness of believing that we are the source of our own lives’ well being and security.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Found in Our Darkness**

Dense as we are in the fog of understanding and limited vision, that still does not stop God from coming to find us. “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps...” (v. 12). There is no dark corner to which we may retreat, but that does not mean that we have escaped the “darkness and gloom” that surrounds us (v. 15). God is the “warrior” (v. 14) searching to call us to account for our unfaithfulness. It is the day of judgment, in Latin dies irae. “Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD’s wrath; in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth” (v. 12; cf. 1:2!).

## **PROGNOSIS: Heeding the Day of the Lord**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Found in Our Darkness**

The promise comes in the One who comes looking for us in our darkness—our Lord Jesus Christ. Not with silver and gold does he redeem us, but with his own precious body and blood. He is the sacrifice consecrated for us (v. 7). Making our dark corner his own, he endures the wrath and judgment that would lay us waste, and gives to us instead his promise of life and righteousness. On this day of our Lord, his light of mercy and grace shines upon us.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Listening for**

### *Promise*

With hearts awakened in his promise, we tune our ears to his saving cry in the midst of battle for our sakes. Silent before his cross, we find the redemption for our sinful and idolatrous lives, and trust that his grace will be the true basis for our well being and wholeness.

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** : *Living for the Promised Lord*

All of this prompts us to rise from our lethargy, to take on the mantle of our Lord's promise, and to bring it into the lives of others. No longer complacent, we are actively engaged in bringing hope to the world. Even in the darkest hours of human history, there is the lamp of the Lamb of God shining for all.