

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Zephaniah 1:7-16

The Day of the LORD Is Near

7 Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests. 8 And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice—"I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire. 9 On that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold, and those who fill their master's house with violence and fraud. 10 "On that day," declares the LORD, "a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter, a loud crash from the hills. 11 Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar! For all the traders are no more; all who weigh out silver are cut off. 12 At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.' 13 Their goods 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 mighty man cries aloud there. 15 A day of wrath is that day, 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.

1:7 *Be silent before the LORD GOD.* See Hab 2:20. (CSB)

God's presence demanded such behavior. (TLSB)

Lord GOD. Lit, "Lord Yahweh." The two Hbr words usually translated as *lord* are here used side by side: the first word is comparable to "master," and the second is God's proper name, "Yahweh" (usually written as LORD). (TLSB)

The word Zephaniah uses to command silence is the same as our word "hush!" It is a strong command, calling for immediate and absolute compliance. The reasons are given. The people of Judah are standing before the Sovereign Lord. He is lord and master of the whole earth; He is God, who has chosen and saved Israel. In His presence the only proper response is silence. (PBC)

day of the LORD. Zephaniah's main theme (see Introduction: Purpose and Theme); not of deliverance for Judah, but of divine vengeance on the idolatrous covenant nation. (CSB)

Refers to the time when the Lord will act, anticipating the wrath and salvation of Judgment Day. This phrase is used frequently in Jl and Zep. (TLSB)

The need for silence is especially true in view of the fact that the day of the Lord is coming, that the day of the Lord's righteous judgment is near. Certainly this holds out the strongest possible reason for the people of Judah to give up their idolatry and return in true repentance to their Savior-God. (PBC)

sacrifice. The victim is Judah. (CSB)

The sacrifice spoken of here is the fellowship offering – one of the four blood offerings that were instituted in the Mosaic Law. In making this offering, the worshiper brought an animal to the sanctuary, confessed his sins over the animal's head, and gave it to the priest to be sacrificed. What was different

about the fellowship offering was that a portion of the meat from the sacrificial animal was given back to the worshiper. And then that meat was shared with the worshiper's family and friends and other invited guests in a joyous family festival. Their eating part of the sacrificial meat together signified happy fellowship with the Lord and with one another much as Holy Communion does today, and also based on the shedding of blood. (PBC)

Zephaniah now uses this imagery in a most unexpected way. The Lord is the one who supplies the sacrifice. This sacrifice is the nation of Judah, whose blood will be shed. (PBC)

consecrated. Since the coming slaughter of judgment is called a sacrifice, God's preparation of his guests is called his consecration of them—in preparation for their feasting on the plunder. (CSB)

his guests. The pagan conquerors (mainly Babylon). (CSB)

Foreign nation appointed by God to consume the sacrifice. (TLSB)

The guests whom the Lord has designated to share in the eating of the sacrifice are the invading troops, probably Babylonians, whom God invites to share in the plundering of Judah. What irony! A sacrifice which normally express Israel's covenant relationship with God and which was meant to proclaim forgiveness, joy, and peace now becomes a picture of God's judgment. (PBC)

1:8 *officials and the king's sons* – The first segment of Judean society to fall under the Lord's judgment is its grandest, the king's relatives. When Zephaniah speaks of the princes and the king's sons, he could be looking into the future, to a day when Josiah's sons, who refused to walk in the footsteps of their God-fearing father, were killed or exiled to foreign lands. He also could be referring to the nobles, state officials, and other members of the extended royal family who enjoyed special privileges in the country. (PBC)

Leaders of Judah are singled out as objects of God's wrath. (TLSB)

clad in foreign clothes – In and of itself, the kind of clothes these people wore was neither right now wrong. The Lord had laid down very few stipulations concerning clothing in the Mosaic Law. But when He did, it had something to do with the people's relationship with Him (for example, see Numbers 15:37-40, where tassels on garments are required to remind the wearers to keep God's commandments). The point is that wearing foreign styles displayed a certain mindset. It showed that the members of the royal family admired and were influenced by the customs and beliefs they found in the heathen cultures of Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. Perhaps the kind of clothing the godly in Judah wore looked dowdy and hopelessly out of style to them. As such, the clothing these people wore became a sign of the rejection of Israelite ways and of the Lord Himself. (PBC)

Some Judeans chose to imitate the dress of the heathen nations around them. (TLSB)

1:9 *who leaps over the threshold*. Perhaps referring to a pagan custom that began in the time of Samuel. (CSB)

Possibly refers to the superstitious practice of Philistine priests, who did not dare to step on the threshold of Dagon's temple. (TLSB)

The references Zephaniah makes in this verse were, no doubt, readily understood by the people of his day, but they are something of mystery to modern readers. The first question that arises is, who is the prophet condemning here? Is he still speaking of the princes and other officials of the previous verse or does he

have a different segment of society in mind? If it's a new group, then more than likely it's the priests of Judah that are being referred to. Second, the custom Zephaniah is speaking about is uncertain. It's true that the Philistine priests at the temple of Dagon in Ashdod avoided stepping on the threshold of their temple ever since their idol had fallen there before the captive ark of the Lord (1 Samuel 5:1-15), but the verb Zephaniah uses seems to imply more than just "stepping over" something. It speaks more of "jumping" or "leaping" in exuberance and joy. So it may even be that Zephaniah is talking about a totally different heathen custom. Whatever the practice was that Zephaniah had in mind, it was totally unacceptable to the Lord. (PBC)

violence. Can refer to unjust gain. (TLSB)

fraud. Dishonesty and trickery. (TLSB)

1:10–13 Wailing throughout the city (contrast 3:14–17). (CSB)

1:10 Merchants who had grown rich through corrupt business practices would be destroyed. (CSB)

To picture the Lord's approaching judgment on Jerusalem, Zephaniah describes the advancement of an enemy army on the city of Jerusalem – invading the city from the north, the direction from which its most feared enemies, Assyria and Babylon came. The prophecy came true in a preliminary way when the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Jerusalem in 586 BC. Again we need to remember, however, that Zephaniah, using OT pictures from Judah's experience and history, is also referring to the final judgment of God upon all the wicked. (PBC)

Fish Gate. In Jerusalem's north wall. Discovery of fish bones has confirmed that a fish market was here, likely stocked with dried or salted fish, since the Jordan and Great Sea were too far away to provide fresh fish. (TLSB)

This is located in the northwest portion of Hezekiah's wall. That is where the Israelite watchmen would sound the warning. That is where the inhabitants of Jerusalem would first cry out in pain as they felt the enemy's swords strike home. (PBC)

second Quarter. Likely the western hill of Jerusalem, an area with newer, wealthier homes. (TLSB)

This was the newest housing development in the city. It too was located in the northwest corner, west of the temple, and once the Fish Gate had been breached, it would have been starkly vulnerable. (PBC)

loud crash from the hills – These "hills" may also have been a newly developed area in the city. It too would have been easy pickings for the enemy. The wailing and crashing sounds Zephaniah mentions indicate the terrible human suffering involved in such a ruthless invasion and the destruction of the walls, houses, and buildings that would accompany such an invasion. (PBC)

Judah's hills will be filled with the horrible sounds of havoc and destruction. (TLSB)

1:11 *Mortar.* May have been an area in the Tyropoeon Valley, just south of Mount Moriah, where some foreign merchants lived. (CSB)

Possibly a business area located in a shallow valley in Jerusalem. (TLSB)

The next section of the city Zephaniah mentions was zoned for commerce. Zephaniah calls it "the Mortar" or "the Hollow" (NIV market district). Most commentators assume that it refers to the Central

Valley or Hollow, that ran north and south through the city between the old settlement to the east and the newly constructed ones to the west. This was the business district where the merchants plied their trades and bankers weighed out gold and silver. This would probably be the next section of the city to fall to the invading army. The verbs Zephaniah uses here paint interesting pictures. (Note: The word that the NIV translates as “be wiped out” could better be translated as “be silenced.”) They suggest a situation like this: At first there would just be the normal commotion and noise from the hustle and bustle taking place in the marketplace. That would be followed by the even louder wailing and howling and shrieking of people as the enemy soldiers caught up with them and attacked. Finally, there would be silence – an absolute eerie, unnatural silence. No one would be left to make noise. The people would have fled or been killed. This is part of what Zephaniah had in mind when he warned, “The day of the Lord is near” (1:7). (PBC)

traders. Businesspeople are referred to as Canaanites, who spent their lives in pursuit of money. The Phoenicians dominated regional trade. (TLSB)

weigh out silver. Not coins but pieces or “bits” of silver traded as currency. (TLSB)

cut off. The merchants and money-changers will be consumed and destroyed. (TLSB)

1:12 *search Jerusalem with lamps.* The Babylonians later dragged people from houses, streets, sewers and tombs, where they had hidden. (CSB)

As one uses a lamp at night to make a thorough search, so the Lord will search meticulously through Jerusalem. (TLSB)

Zephaniah does not want his readers to forget that the real arm of destruction he has been speaking about since verse 10 is not some army of men, some human agent. The real destroyer is the Lord. On the last day, the final “day of the Lord,” the Lord will use no agent, other than possible His angels, to carry out His justice. So here Zephaniah clarifies his picture. Even though he is still describing the activity of an invading army, now it is the Lord Himself searching every nook and cranny of the city. The contents of every dark corner will be revealed as the Lord seeks out the wicked, in the manner of invaders searching for soldiers and citizens who have hidden themselves. There is no possibility of hiding from Him. Absolutely no one will escape His wrath and punishment. (PBC)

The LORD will no do good. A typical depiction of the arrogance of the wicked (see note on Ps 10:11). (CSB)

Judeans had become like pagans who believed the Lord would neither help nor harm them. (TLSB)

The objects of the Lord’s search are men who are like wine that has been left on its dregs. The dregs are the impurities that settle out of new wine during the fermenting process. The Israelites left that wine on the dregs for a while to strengthen the wine’s taste. If the wine was left too long, however, the dregs would embitter the wine, finally turning it into an unusable, jellied mass. The prophet’s point is that the wicked in Jerusalem have remained there undisturbed for such a long time that they have grown spiritually smug and complacent. The quality of their spiritual life has been destroyed. They have settled into their wickedness, are beyond redemption, and are totally useless to the Lord. Zephaniah describes their attitude by putting words into their mouths. “The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad,” they assert confidently. (PBC)

1:13 *goods ... houses ... vineyards.* Like practical atheists in any age, the people of Judah valued only wealth, real estate, and business. The Lord would destroy it all. (TLSB)

The assets of those who have become wealthy through dishonesty will be exposed and plundered (see Dt 28:30). (CSB)

What a shock the Lord's judgment would be when it came. The wealth they had spent so much time acquiring would become the spoils of war. The houses they had so proudly built would be razed to the ground. Their marvelously groomed and tended vineyards would become a heap of frying, withering vines. Everything that replaced the Lord in their hearts as a basis for their confidence would be gone. The Lord's judgment on them would rival and surpass any destruction that an invading army can inflict on a defenseless city. (PBC)

1:14–18 In a dramatic passage of great lyrical power, the Lord describes the destruction that will sweep the earth in the day of God's wrath. (CSB)

1:14 *great day of the LORD is near*. Some things Zephaniah prophesied took place at the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Other details would be fulfilled later. The ultimate fulfillment will be on Judgment Day.

Zephaniah's chief point is that the day is near. It will be here before anyone expects it. There is little time to prepare. This is the message that the Lord has given throughout the Scriptures through His apostles, His prophets, and His own Son. In fact, the last recorded words of Jesus in the Bible have Him saying, "Yes, I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:20). (PBC)

God says these things so often because His people need to hear them over and over again. We tend not to have the same view of time that the Lord does. Two thousand six hundred years ago Zephaniah said the day of the Lord is near. And two thousand years have passed since the exalted Christ spoke to the apostle John in Revelation. As you and I mark the passing days and years, that's a very long time. Without the Lord's constant reminder that the end is coming soon, our spiritual sense would become dull. We would become like the unbelieving scoffers that Peter describes: "They will say, 'Where is this "coming" He promised? Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:4). With the help of the Lord's Spirit, we confidently say, "The end is just around the corner." For that day is near at any moment and every moment – in Zephaniah's day, in Jesus' day, in Paul and Peter's day, or in our day. (PBC)

sound ... is bitter. To hear and read about the Lord's judgment causes even the bravest soldier to cry out in despair. (TLSB)

Zephaniah ends his chapter by describing the Lord's judgment in a climatic way. After warning that God's day of judgment will strike Judah soon, Zephaniah uses some of the most vivid imagery anywhere in the Bible, to describe what God's final judgment on the earth will be like. His words paint a mural of judgment and wrath that is hard to ignore. (PBC)

mighty man – Most commentators see the warrior as one of the defenders of the city. As the day of the Lord falls upon the city, the defender on the wall is the first to cry out in anguish at the terrible judgment that is about to come upon him and his fellow citizens. (PBC)

1:15-16 At the beginning of this chapter, Zephaniah suggested that the "day of the Lord" would reverse creation. God would "sweep away everything" that He created (1:2). Commentators suggest that Zephaniah is saying the same thing in verse 15. God created the world in six days. Here Zephaniah mentions the day of the Lord six times. It will reverse everything God did in those first six days of the earth's history and will bring history to a close. (PBC)

1:15 Reversal of the days of creation. Instead of light and life, there will be distress and darkness and death. God’s anger at sin will be manifested. This phrase served as the title of a long thirteenth-century Latin hymn, “Dies Irae” (TLH 607), which became part of the Requiem Mass famously set to music by Mozart and Verdi. (TLSB)

According to the prophet Amos (5:18), the Israelites thought that the day of the Lord would be the day on which the Lord would exalt Israel at the expense of the other nations of the world and that they would be totally exempt from the punishment and destruction that day would bring. Not so, says Zephaniah. It will be a day on which the Lord punishes sin and wickedness, a day on which He gives full expression to His wrath. Beware! (PBC)

distress. Any kind of adversity, affliction, or trouble. (TLSB)

Words seem to fail the prophet as he struggles to describe what God permits him to see. To compensate he heaps up all the terms he can find for the suffering and the mental and spiritual despair that will accompany it. The description reminds us of Jesus’ words, “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13). (PBC)

anguish. Severe mental or physical suffering. (TLSB)

Again the terms are piled up. What a reversal of creation! On the first day of creation God called out in the darkness, “Let there be light,” and light, the basic ingredient for life, came into existence. Now God calls out in judgment, “Let there be darkness!” and sinners are separated from the life-giving God, cast into the eternal night. No battlefield or conquered city – with suffocating smoke rising from its burning buildings and the odious stench of death rising from corpses rotting in its streets – ever presented a more hideous scene than the one Zephaniah paints of the world’s end. (PBC)

1:16 *trumpet.* Hbr *shophar*, “ram’s horn.” Used to sound alarms and signal the last judgment (1Co 15:52; Rv 8:6). (TLSB)

fortified cities. Cities deemed inaccessible and unconquerable because of their strong construction. (TLSB)

lofty battlements. High towers. (TLSB)

The day of the Lord’s judgment will be unstoppable. It will roll forward like the mightiest army the world has ever seen. No walls or towers of human construction will be able to prevent it from happening or will protect people from its destructive power. (PBC)

1:17 *like the blind.* See Dt 28:28–29. (CSB)

They are helpless, bewildered, and lost. (TLSB)

sinned against the Lord – Sin is serious, not simply because it ruins a person’s life or disrupts society, but because it offends the Lord. (TLSB)

blood...poured...dust – Humanity is totally sinful and deserves to be thrown out like things unclean and worthless. (TLSB)

1:18 *Neither ... silver nor ... gold will ... delivered them.* In the day of God’s judgment, material wealth cannot buy deliverance from punishment. (CSB)

1:18 On Judgment Day, no one will be able to buy salvation. (TLSB)

fire of His jealousy. The Lord is a jealous God (Ex 34:14), who demands the full devotion and worship of His people for Himself alone. (TLSB)

1:7–18 God’s day of wrath would come swiftly on the people of Judah because of their materialism, worldliness, and general disobedience. The final Day of Judgment will likewise come unexpectedly, as a thief in the night (1Th 5:2). We have all missed the mark of God’s perfection and deserve only His punishment, now and eternally. However, God so loved the world that He sent His only Son to endure the punishment for our sins. All who believe in Jesus have no need to fear the Day of Judgment. • Lord, fill me with joyful anticipation for the day of Your return. Give me confidence that I shall stand before You cleansed and holy because of Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

The Day of the Lord

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

5:1 *times and seasons.* See Ac 1:6–7. There have always been some Christians who try to fix the date of our Lord’s return, but apparently the Thessalonians were not among them. (CSB)

The classical Gk word for “time” (*chronos*) referred to stretches of time, whereas the word for “seasons” (*kairos*) referred to a point in time, in the sense of the right time. Paul, however, made no such distinction. He was saying that he does not need to write to the Thessalonians about the time aspect of the second coming. (TLSB)

Many people are very concerned about knowing just when Christ will return. Some religions have even been founded by men or women who said they knew when the Lord’s coming would take place. New prediction continue to be put forth by those who overlook what Scripture says about “times and dates.” (PBC)

5:2 *fully aware* – More literally, accurately, having been carefully instructed on that point by Paul. (Concordia Bible)

day of the Lord. See 1Co 5:5. The expression goes back to Am 5:18. In the OT it is a time when God will come and intervene with judgment and/or blessing. In the NT the thought of judgment continues (see Ro 2:5; 2Pe 2:9), but it is also the “day of redemption” (Eph 4:30); the “day of God” (2Pe 3:12), or of Christ (1Co 1:8; Php 1:6); and the “last day” (Jn 6:39), the “great Day” (Jude 6) or simply “the day” (2Th

1:10). It is the climax of all things. There will be some preliminary signs (e.g., 2Th 2:3), but the coming will be as unexpected as that of a thief in the night (cf. Mt 24:43–44; Lk 12:39–40; 2Pe 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15). (CSB)

In the OT, this refers to the Day of Judgment, in which the righteous will be vindicated and Yahweh will make an impartial judgment. In the NT, with the recognition of Jesus as Lord, the function of final judgment is attributed to Him. Therefore, here it refers to the day in which Christ will be revealed in glory to vindicate His people and judge the world in righteousness. (TLSB)

thief in the night – Suddenly and at an unexpected time. It is God’s will that men should live in constant preparation for it. All overcurious computations for the purpose of fixing its exact date are vain and profitless. (Concordia Bible)

Sudden and unexpected. It is important to be alert, looking forward to the Lord’s coming. (TLSB)

5:3 *while people* – The wicked, who are living in careless security. (Concordia Bible)

destruction. Not annihilation, but exclusion from the Lord’s presence (2Th 1:9); thus the ruin of life and all its proud accomplishments. (CSB)

Implies utter and hopeless ruin and despair for those who put their hope in this world rather than in Christ. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Do not, while present prosperity smiles upon you, forget its certain end, lest adversity without end succeed it” (SLSB, p 56).

sudden. Paul stresses the surprise of unbelievers. He uses a word found elsewhere in the NT only in Lk 21:34 (“unexpectedly”). (CSB)

The appearance of the Lord will be announced in a flash and a twinkling of an eye by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet blast. Once this has begun there can be no preparations by unbelievers in order to escape their ruin in God’s judgment. It will be too late. (PBC)

labor pains. Here the idea is not the pain of childbirth so much as the suddenness and inevitability of such pains. (CSB)

Just as a woman who is in labor pains can’t escape those pains by changing her mind and deciding she doesn’t want to be pregnant, so they will have no chance to turn back. (PBC)

not. † An emphatic double negative in the Greek, a construction Paul uses only four times in all his writings. An alternate translation would be: “In no way will they escape.” (CSB)

By human reason and strength, no one can escape God’s righteous judgment and scrutiny (Ps 139:7–10). Only those sheltered in Christ will escape God’s wrath, which will come upon all those who have broken His righteous Law. (TLSB)

5:4–5 *day ... night*. Used figuratively. As people walk in the light of the sun, so all those who walk in the light of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, are children of the day. (TLSB)

5:4 *darkness*. Believers no longer live in darkness, nor are they of the darkness (v. 5). See Jn 1:5; Ac 26:18. (CSB)

The Day of Judgment will come suddenly to Christians and unbelievers alike; but the contrast which the apostle brings out is this, that only the latter will be surprised by it. Christians are watchful, open-eyed, alert; they do not know when the last day is to come, but they are wide awake to any signs of its coming. This fact is brought out by the apostle in describing the state of the Christians: But you, brethren, are not in darkness that the day should surprise you like a thief; for you all are children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness. (Kretzmann)

The darkness of ignorance and sin. They had been enlightened by the reception of the truth. (Concordia Bible)

The people who say, “Peace and safety,” are in “darkness.” They really don’t know what is going on. They ignore the fact that their sins make them enemies of God. They do not have the peace they imagine. They do not realize that their unforgiven sins must bring judgment of a just God on them. They have a completely false sense of security. (PBC)

brothers – Christians. (Concordia Bible)

thief. Surprise you in an unprepared state, as a thief does. (Concordia Bible)

5:5 In Semitic languages (such as Hebrew) to be the “son of ” a quality meant to be characterized by that quality. Christians do not simply live in the light; they are characterized by light. (CSB)

The expression “sons of” simply expresses a very close relationship with a person or object. (PBC)

children of light – This double expression emphasizes that the Thessalonians had learned so much about the gospel and were so active in spreading it, that they surely were not people who knew or cared little about the Lord’s coming. Therefore, it was unthinkable that the last day would find them unprepared like those who lived in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief. (PBC)

5:6 *asleep*. Unbelievers are spiritually insensitive, but this kind of sleep is not for “sons of the light.” (CSB)

Not death, but a life in sin, which is a life in darkness. Those in Christ, the light of the world, are awake and sober. (TLSB)

Live in stupidity and carnal security; unmindful of and uninfluenced by the great truths of the gospel. (Concordia Bible)

To insure their preparedness, Paul urges the Thessalonians to put a lot of distance between themselves and their unbelieving neighbors. (PBC)

keep awake. Lit. “watch,” which is in keeping with the emphasis Paul is placing on Christ’s coming (cf. Mt 24:42–43; 25:13; Mk 13:34–37). (CSB)

Instead of being unconcerned like one who is drunk, Christ wants His followers to await His coming in full possession of their senses. The believer knows all that the last day means for him, and he knows it will be a great day for him. (PBC)

sober. A contrast with the conduct mentioned in v. 7. (CSB)

We can be alert and self-controlled by putting on our God-given armor. (PBC)

As we know that will call us to judgment, but cannot know when, we should be always ready, and so live that whenever called we may give our account with joy, and not with grief. (Concordia Bible)

5:7 *those who sleep at night* – As the natural night is the time when men indulge in natural sleep and drunkenness, so they who live in the spiritual night of ignorance and sin may be expected to give themselves up to spiritual sleep and dissoluteness. But not so we, who are of the day, as the apostle proceeds to show. (Concordia Bible)

Commonsense basis of Paul’s figurative language. (TLSB)

The alcohol dulls their senses and for a time they become totally unconcerned about those problems. (PBC)

breastplate ... helmet. Paul also uses the metaphor of armor in Ro 13:12; 2Co 6:7; 10:4; Eph 6:13–17. He does not consistently attach a particular virtue to each piece of armor; it is the general idea of equipment for battle that is pictured. For the triad of faith, hope and love see note on 1:3. (CSB)

The military imagery used here is based in both the OT and the NT, and particularly in the Roman army. Paul advises the Thessalonians to guard their faith and love in Christ and His promises in the Gospel so that they may withstand all kinds of spiritual assaults. (TLSB)

hope. Confidence. (TLSB)

5:9 *destined.* God’s appointment, not man’s choice, is the significant thing. (CSB)

God’s purpose is the salvation of all people. He does not want anyone to be lost. The faith active among the Thessalonians was the proof that He destined them for salvation. John Chrysostom: “Do not despair of yourself, O man, in going to God, who has not spared even His Son for you. Faint not at present evils.... Neither should we fear, if we were going to a judge who was about to judge us, and who had shown so much love for us, as to have sacrificed his son. Let us hope therefore for kind and great things” (NPNF 1 13:363). (TLSB)

wrath. God did not “appoint us to suffer wrath.” That is, it was not God’s will or plan that sinful man should be sent to hell and there ‘suffer’ eternally the punishment of His “wrath.” No God wanted to rescue us from the terrible situation we had brought on ourselves by our sins. (PBC)

salvation. Our final, completed salvation. (CSB)

That is evident from their having believed in Christ. Those who believe in Christ and obey His commands show that they are elected to eternal life and are heirs of heaven. (Concordia Bible)

5:10 *died for us.* Christ died as our substitute. As the blameless and holy Son of God, He did not deserve to die. But out of love for us, He who was holy died on our behalf so that we may be free from the wrath of God due to our sin (2Co 5:21). After paying the debt of our sin, He rose from death. (TLSB)

are awake or asleep. That is, “live or die”; or, if the sense is moral, “are alert or carnal” (see v. 6). (CSB)

Physically dead or alive. (TLSB)

Be found among the living or the dead. (Concordia Bible)

with him. To be Christ's is to have entered a relationship that nothing can destroy. (CSB)

5:11 *build ... up.* The verb basically applies to building houses, but Paul frequently used it for Christians being edified. (CSB)

The Thessalonians can help one another grow spiritually by love. (TLSB)

Well may the apostle therefore add: Wherefore encourage one another, and let each one edify the other, even as you also do. While Paul's fine courtesy and tact acknowledge the progress which has been made by the Thessalonian Christians in this respect, he does not hesitate for a moment to urge them forward toward further comfort and edification. Exuberant energy, joyful hopefulness, willing steadfastness must characterize the Christians at all times. (Kretzmann)

5:1–11 After describing the future glory of those who have died in Christ, Paul now proceeds to tell the Thessalonians about the coming Day of Judgment in which the Lord will give His final verdict. Let us walk in holiness and righteousness so that we may not be ashamed when our Lord appears to judge our work. The Lord who has chosen us for salvation and died for us will be on our side on the final Day of Judgment. • Lord, help us to recognize that there is a Day of Judgment for us. May the work and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ be our defense when You come to judge the living and the dead. Amen. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 25:14-30

The Parable of the Talents

14 “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. **15** To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. **16** He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. **17** So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. **18** But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. **19** Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. **20** And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ **21** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ **22** And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ **23** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ **24** He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, **25** so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ **26** But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? **27** Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. **28** So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. **29** For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. **30** And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Aspects of the parable are easy enough to interpret, and all flow from the obvious central point: the master in the parable is Jesus himself. This means that in advance, Matthew's readers/hearers will believe that the master is good and gracious, whose authority to call his disciples to faithful service is completely valid. The slaves represent those who publicly claim the identity of being Jesus' disciples. The statement in 25:15 that the master entrusted differing amounts "to each according to his own ability" shows the wisdom and kindness of the master. (CC - Luz)

What might be a careful decoding of the "talents" in the parable? The closest parallel may occur in Jesus' direct teaching to his disciples in 13:11-12. Jesus, speaking to his disciples, declares, "To know the mysteries of the reign of heaven has been given to you. Jesus' disciples are to work with all that has been entrusted to them for the honor and advantage of the master. (CC)

25:14-15 The master represents Jesus, the servants stand for believers, and the talents symbolize the various gifts God places into their stewardship. (TLSB)

25:14 *again* – The object of this parable was to show, that our blessings come from God, we are accountable to Him, and should so use them as to meet His approbation. (CB)

Another parable about the end times. (TLSB)

Point of Comparison – As the servants were responsible for their talents, so men are responsible for the use they make of their abilities. (Syllabus for Sermon Theory II)

Central Truth – Be an active Christian. (Syllabus for Sermon Theory II)

It is not difficult to see that Jesus is telling His disciples that before long He will be leaving them. He will suffer and die and rise again and ascend into heaven. But that will not mean the work of His kingdom will stop in this world. No, He will rather provide His disciples with everything they need in order to continue that work. (PBC)

The outstanding fulfillment of that promise came on the Day of Pentecost, when the ascended Lord sent the Holy Spirit upon His disciples at Jerusalem. He thereby supplied them with the necessary understanding of the Word of God and God's whole plan of salvation – as well as the courage to proclaim that message unto the ends of the earth. (PBC)

The transition from the previous parable to this one is very abrupt, indicating a very close connection in thought. It is the question of faithfulness and its test in the judgment of the last great day. Since the hour of the Lord's return is unknown to us, and since He will require a reckoning from us, therefore the lesson of this parable is so important. (Kreztmann)

entrusted to them his property – Masters frequently put trusted servants in charge of their estate (cf. Gen 24:2). (TLSB)

Christ's meaning is plain. The rich man is God Himself. The servants are those that profess faith in Him, who are His followers. To these God delivers spiritual gifts and goods, the means of grace, His Holy Spirit, all the Christian virtues, ability along the various lines of work in His kingdom. To every one, to each individual, God has given spiritual gifts to be used in His service, 1 Cor. 7:7; 1 Pet. 4:10. He knows the intellectual as well as the moral strength of every one, and is sure that He expects too much from no one. But He wants to see results, in the individual and in the whole Church. He wants to have each one invest the talents he has received with all energy, to work unceasingly in His service. It pleases Him to

give a reward of mercy to those that are faithful in these small things, in their own little sphere. To them He will give a partnership in the joys of the Kingdom above. But woe unto the small, mean-spirited weakling, the slothful servant, that refuses to invest his talent, to make use of his gifts and abilities in that sphere of activity where the Lord has placed him. He thereby shows that he is not worthy of the Lord's bounty and cares nothing for His grace. There are few excuses so poor and so miserable in sound as those by which professing Christians attempt to evade work in the Church. All the more terrible, then, will be the Lord's sentence: From him that hath not even that which he hath shall be taken away. (Kretzmann)

25:15 talent. The term was first used for a unit of weight (about 75 pounds), then for a unit of coinage. The present-day use of “talent” to indicate an ability or gift is derived from this parable (see note on Lk 19:13). (CSB)

Gk monetary unit. A silver talent was worth c 7,300 denarii (a denarius equals one day's wage), and a gold talent could be 30 times more valuable. Sizable amounts of money are in play here. (TLSB)

To be sure, the monetary amounts entrusted to the various slaves are significant; recall that a talent (originally a measure of weight) was a lot of money in the ancient world, and one talent – the smallest amount entrusted – would be about six thousand day's wages, something like twenty years of salary. (CC)

The talents that our ascended Lord distributes to all believers are never exactly the same for any two individual (see 1 Cor. 12:4-11). But one gift is basic, and that is faith. Each of us must confess with Martin Luther, “I cannot by own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him,” Faith is not a gift we can get along without, for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). (PBC)

The talents that Jesus gives us include all the intellectual and physical abilities we are born with and those we develop as we mature. Our talents include all the material passions that rightfully come into our hands. And they include the many opportunities God provides us for using our talents to serve Him and our neighbor. (PBC)

Considering the fact that the talent, as Jesus uses the term, is money, it is surprising how seldom this parable is applied to our stewardship of money. We are quick to apply it to our skills and abilities, and even to our time, but surely Jesus also has something to say here about how we spend our money. It is not only the envelope we put into the offering on Sunday that concerns Jesus; the money we spend on groceries and recreation is also part of Christian stewardship. Whether you have been give five talents or two or one, God is looking for faithfulness. (PBC)

each according to his ability – Representing the various gifts which God bestows on different individuals. All our blessings we receive from God, and to Him we are justly accountable for the use of them. He does not give the same to all, and He requires only according to what a man hath. Of course, no one will be condemned for not having received more. (CB)

Jesus had a reason for making the servant with only one talent the unfaithful one. If it had been one of the servants with more talents, we would be too inclined to say, “What a shame! What a terrible thing that a person so richly blessed should be so ungrateful to God! But, of course, my gifts are not very numerous or great, so the Lord surely cannot expect much from me. (PBC)

Most of us would place ourselves into the category of the servant who received only one talent. That may be where most of us belong. But that surely is no excuse for being unfaithful with the talent God has given us. It will not do at all for any of us to say, “I can't do much; so it is all right if I don't anything. It won't make any difference.” (PBC)

It may be true that the work of God's kingdom will get done without the support of those who have very limited means and talents. But we need to realize that God calls upon us to serve Him with out individual talents, not because He cannot get along without our help, but rather because faithful service to Him is of great value to those who the serving. (PBC)

Martin Luther's explanation of the Lord's Prayer in his Small Catechism says it very well: "The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer; of itself; but we pray in this petition that it come unto us also." And: "The gracious good will of God is done indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it be done with us also." We cannot stop God. We cannot prevent Him from doing His gracious work in our world. But we can deprive ourselves of the blessed opportunity to share in that work. "From this preserve us, heavenly Father!" (PBC)

25:16 *traded with them* – Showing the good improvement he made of what was given him. (CB)

traded. Though the nature of their business is not specified, both men earned 100 percent profit. (TLSB)

The first two move in tandem, differentiated only by the number of talents entrusted to them. They apparently believe that as slaves of this particular master, they have a purpose and that is to serve him and seek to increase his possessions. (CC)

25:18 *hid his master's money* – Where he would have no trouble in taking care of it, while he ought to have traded with it for his lord's profit. This shows that a failure to improve our opportunities to do good is heinous sin which Christ will severely punish. (CB)

Third servant tries to keep from losing his master's money rather than putting it to productive use. Later, he will pay for this lack of effort. (TLSB)

25:19 *after a long time.* The master's departure and lengthy absence correspond to Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand (22:44); the master's return is Jesus' Parousia at the consummation of the age (24:3, 27, 37, 39). (CC)

master – Jesus Christ. (CB)

settled accounts. The master wanted a report of how each servant had administered the funds left in his charge. (TLSB)

Because the talents were entrusted and not given, they remained the property of the master, and now he has returned to settle accounts. (CC)

25:20 *I have made you five more talents* – Those who employ the blessings which God bestows in His service and to His glory, will have their blessings greatly increased. (CB)

The first servant does not try to take any cut for himself, but turns over everything to his master. Cf. Lk. 17:7-10. He will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work that He has begun in them (Phil 1:6), if they cling to Gods' Word, pray diligently, abide in God's goodness, and faithfully use the gifts they received. (TLSB)

25:21 *I will set you over much* – Advance to a higher station in my service. The principle here stated is perpetually illustrated in Christ's dealings with His servants in this world, but will have its highest fulfillment at the resurrection of the just. (CB)

The faithfulness and productivity of this servant is rewarded with an even larger sum to administer. (TLSB)

Thanks for writing, and for the question. In a way, your guess is as good as mine! What I have thought, however, is that if the Day of Christ brings resurrection of the dead, a renewal of creation and the restoration of God's plan for his created order, in some sense the original mandate to "have dominion over/for" the created order might be continued. I tend not to think of Judgment Day and eternity afterwards as an existence of "doing nothing," but rather of being restored to full capacity to love God, and love one another and the things that He has made. (Jeff Gibbs – 6/2012) (Walter Stuenkel)

Again—it's obviously just a guess. But it might mean that all things (including we ourselves!) will be so restored and made holy that we will always and forever do as Luther has to exhort us to do after our morning devotion: "Go joyfully to our work, singing a hymn like that of the Ten Commandments"! (Jeff Gibbs – 6/2012)

joy of your master – The greater reward for this servant is being called into the presence of his lord. This passage symbolizes the Christian's entry into eternal life. (TLSB)

25:22-23 The second servant produces the same margin of profit and therefore receives the same commendation and rewards. He differs from the first servant only in the that he began with fewer talents. (TLSB)

25:23 *good and faithful servant* – He receives the same reward as the servant to whom five talents had been entrusted; because it is not the amount of talents given, but the faithful use of them, that Christ regards. (CB)

We suggest that the kai is epexegetical: "good, namely faithful". In what sense is a Christian good? Not morally, because both the OT and the NT say that man is not good. Cf. Ps 14:1-3 and Romans 3:10-12. No man is good but only God is good. Mt. 19:17. Even Christians must confess that in their flesh dwells no good thing. Rom. 7:18. In Scripture only the works of Christians are called good, Eph. 2:10, not their persons. They are righteous but only by imputation. Therefore we suggest that kai in vss. 21 and 23 means "namely." The Bible does not require goodness of me. Christ is my goodness. But the Bible does require me to be faithful. Rev. 2:10; 1 Cor. 4:2.

25:24-25 When the third slave approached the master, he did so as the one who had received one talent and who remained in that state of having only one; that is all that he had. This slave only fears his master, and that by his own admission. His response to his master (as he perceived him) was to hide what was entrusted to him and do nothing with to further his master's benefit. (CC)

The third slave appears and lays his unused talent at the feet of the master. To the readers in Matthean churches what he says to the master sounds insolent and unfair. They know from their own faith experience that their master is not a "strict Lord" who is only concerned for the interest he will earn; he is "friendly," his "yoke is gentle" (1:29-30), and he saves them as their Immanuel (1:23) when they are about to drown (14:28-31). For them the slave's outrageous language shows that he is a hypocrite. (CC)

25:24 *where you did no sow* – Not scattered sea. This showed that he had no love to his lord, no disposition to honor him, or even to be just towards him. (CB)

Third servant characterizes his master as "hard" to blame his own failure on his master. The description has a variety of unflattering connotations: cruel, demanding, strong, or violent. (TLSB)

25:26–27 The master responds with righteous indignation rather than sympathy. Even granting that the master was “hard,” would that not make it even more urgent for this servant to produce some growth with the talent entrusted to him? (TLSB)

25:26 *you knew* – This may be taken as an argument out of the servant’s own mouth. (CB)

The master’s harshness, however, is simply his response to the slave who has shown himself a fool and defamed the master. (CC)

25:27 *bankers*. The Greek for this word comes from *trapeza* (“table”), a word seen on the front of banks in Greece today. Bankers sat at small tables and changed money (cf. 21:12). (CSB)

interest. The Greek for this word was first used in the sense of offspring, interest being the “offspring” of invested money. (CSB)

Lawful and proper increase was the meaning of this word. (CB)

25:28–29 Most productive servant ends up entrusted with even more of his master’s property, while the unproductive one loses his stewardship altogether. (TLSB)

25:28 TAKE THE TALENT – As he would not rightly use what he had, he could no longer have it. Those who refuse to employ what God gives them in His service and to His glory, will soon have all their blessings removed, and no more will be given to them forever. (CB)

The sentence of the master is therefore quickly passed upon him. He calls him a wicked, mean-spirited servant, one of those small souls that never rise above the dirt. The real trouble with him is laziness, together with lack of appreciation of the chances offered him. And so his one talent is to be taken from him and added to the ten talents of the one whose energy and ambition shone forth in comparison with this sluggard. (Kretzmann)

25:29 EVERYONE WHO HAS – A disposition to rightly use the blessings which God gives is a preparation for more and greater blessings. (CB)

DOES NOT HAVE – He that hath not this disposition, when God calls him to account will be deprived of all blessings, and for his unfaithfulness will be punished as he deserves. (CB)

25:14–30 Our relationship to God and the world is one of stewardship. We are to use everything entrusted to us in such a way that it benefits God’s kingdom. Though modern people often have far more material and technological means than any previous generation, they often use these tools selfishly. An unfailing promise attaches to faithful stewardship: if we use the things entrusted to us for God and His purposes, we will be blessed here and in heaven. • “Give me a faithful heart, Likeness to Thee, That each departing day Henceforth may see Some work of love begun, Some deed of kindness done, Some wand’rer sought and won, Something for Thee.” Amen. (TLH 403:3) (TLSB)