

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 12 January 2025

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 105:1-3

Opening Psalm: 18A I Love You, LORD, My Strength (1-4)

Confession of Sin

Almighty God, Who are rich in mercy to all those who call upon You; Hear us as we humbly come to You confessing our sins; And imploring Your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken Your holy laws by our deeds and by our words; And by the sinful affections of our hearts. We confess before You our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness; And all our failures and shortcomings toward You and toward fellow men. Have mercy upon us, Most merciful Father; And of Your great goodness grant that we may hereafter serve and please You in newness of life; Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Hebrews 4:14-16

Psalm of Preparation: 18A I Love You, LORD, My Strength (5-7)

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 18:1-19

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 24:29-35

Sermon Title: When He Comes

Hymn of Response: 386 Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending

Confession of Faith: Nicene Creed (p. 852)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Hymn: 407 Let Our Choir New Anthems Raise

PM Worship

271 Blessed Jesus, at Your Word

95C Now with Joyful Exultation

119M O How I Love Your Holy Law

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 95:1-11

New Covenant Reading: Hebrews 3:7-19

Sermon Title: Deadly Unbelief

Extended Time of Fellowship – Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 51

Q. What does the fifth petition mean?

A. "Forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors" means:
Because of Christ's blood,
do not impute to us, poor sinners that we are,
any of the transgressions we do
or the evil that constantly clings to us.
Forgive us just as we are fully determined,
as evidence of your grace in us,
wholeheartedly to forgive our neighbors.

Suggested Preparations

Monday (1/6) Read and discuss Matthew 24:29-35

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (ESV)

There are two keys to interpreting this passage:

First, we need to figure out what Jesus means when He refers to “this generation” when He says “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. While some try to identify this with the last generation before Christ’s Second Coming, it is more natural to understand Jesus as referring to the generation that He is speaking to. If that is right, then Jesus is talking about the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem which will take place within one generation of His impending death.

Second, we need to realize that the Old Testament regularly uses cosmic language to describe great upheavals that take place on earth. For example, in this week’s Old Covenant reading from Psalm 18 we read:

In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.

Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.

... Out of the brightness before him
hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.

... The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
and the Most High uttered his voice,

hailstones and coals of fire.

... Then the channels of the sea were seen,
and the foundations of the world were laid bare
at your rebuke, O LORD,
at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

Or consider Habakkuk 3:10-11:

The mountains saw you and writhed;
the raging waters swept on;
the deep gave forth its voice;
it lifted its hands on high.
The sun and moon stood still in their place
at the light of your arrows as they sped,
at the flash of your glittering spear.

And Isaiah describes God's judgment of Judah by Babylon like this:

Behold, the day of the LORD comes,
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the land a desolation
and to destroy its sinners from it.
For the stars of the heavens and their constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising,
and the moon will not shed its light. Isaiah 13:9-10 (ESV)

To read these images woodenly is a failure to take them seriously. The cosmic language of the sun and the moon not giving their light is not a commentary on astronomy. It is intended to convey just how momentous the judgment will be that the LORD is bringing about. The same thing is true in today's passage from Matthew 24.

Read or sing Psalm 18A I Love You, LORD, My Strength (1-4)

Tuesday (1/7) Read and discuss Matthew 24:15–28

“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs

and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. (ESV)

R.T. France writes:

The most obvious sign that “the end” is near in Jerusalem is cryptically described in familiar scriptural language. The “devastating pollution” is explicitly identified as a motif from Daniel, though the phrase is sufficiently distinctive to be recognized even without explicit attribution, as Mark clearly believed. In Daniel the phrase stands for the horrifying sacrilege which was to be perpetuated by the “king of the north” when he abolished the regular sacrificial ritual of the Jerusalem temple. The reference is clearly to the events of 167 B.C., when Antiochus Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem and prohibited Jewish sacrificial worship, setting up an altar for pagan sacrifices (including the slaughter of pigs) on top of the altar of burnt offerings; it stood in the temple for three years until Judas Maccabaeus regained control of Jerusalem, purified the temple, and restored true worship.

The specific desecration referred to in Daniel as now long in the past, and Jesus is speaking of something still to come. That is why discernment is needed: hence the editorial aside, “let the reader understand” – which itself recalls the comment in Dan 12:10 that only the wise will understand the secrets revealed to Daniel. The reader is presumably to identify something which is in recognizable continuity with the devastating pollution set up by Antiochus, but just what form it will take is left to the imagination. The wording suggests some sort of offensive pollution “set up in the holy place,” which should mean the temple, and the context requires that it be of such a nature and at such a time as to allow those who see it to escape before it is too late.

Read or sing Psalm 18A I Love You, LORD, My Strength (5-7)

Wednesday (1/8) Read and discuss Psalm 18:1-19

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:

I love you, O LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,

and I am saved from my enemies.

The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction assailed me;
the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.

In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.

Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
He bowed the heavens and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
He rode on a cherub and flew;
he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.
He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him,
thick clouds dark with water.
Out of the brightness before him
hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.

The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
and the Most High uttered his voice,
hailstones and coals of fire.
And he sent out his arrows and scattered them;
he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.
Then the channels of the sea were seen,
and the foundations of the world were laid bare
at your rebuke, O LORD,
at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

He sent from on high, he took me;
he drew me out of many waters.
He rescued me from my strong enemy
and from those who hated me,
for they were too mighty for me.
They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
but the LORD was my support.
He brought me out into a broad place;
he rescued me, because he delighted in me. (ESV)

James Mays writes:

“The LORD lives!” That exultant, thankful cry can be taken as the theological climax of Psalm 18. When Israel spoke of the living God, the epithet did not mean alive as opposed to dead but active in contrast to ineffective or passive. The entire psalm is praise of the God who acts. The action of God is not an abstract notion in the psalm. The LORD acts specifically on behalf of the anointed king, who is threatened by death and enemies in a deliverance that is at the same time the LORD’s own vindication as God of history. The action of God is what the LORD does to vindicate the reign of God. ...

A theophany description (vv. 7-15) stands after the hearing in heaven and prepares for God’s reaching down. Its function is to portray God’s coming down to assert sovereignty in the world. The description of an appearance of the deity is a literary genre of its own. The typical features of the genre are a depiction of God’s appearance in awesome meteorological and geological phenomena and a description of the effect of God’s coming into the world.

Read or sing Hymn 386 Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending

Thursday (1/9) Read and discuss Psalm 95:1-11

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart,

and they have not known my ways.”
Therefore I swore in my wrath,
“They shall not enter my rest.” (ESV)

Tim Keller writes:

This psalm and the next give us almost a liturgy for a service of gathered worship. The first stage is adoration. Let us *rise up in joy to God the Creator* (verses 1-5). Let us praise Him for being the maker and sustainer of the world. Worshipping is not always quiet and decorous. It can entail shouting, praising, leaping to our feet, singing our hearts out. When the love of the immeasurably great and transcendent God of the universe becomes real to us, the joy should be uncontainable.

The next element of worship is confession of our sin and need. Let us *bow down in humility to God the Redeemer* (verses 6-7). In contrast to the exuberance of the first five verses, which fits with the postures of standing or even dancing, each of the three verbs in verse 6 have to do with getting low before God, since the Hebrew word for “worship” here literally means to prostrate oneself. We are to bow reverently, to kneel humbly before God, admitting our sinfulness and dependence. While adoration comes from seeing a God of glory, submission comes from seeing a God of grace, one who is our covenant God, who redeemed us and brought us as sheep into His fold.

The third element in corporate worship is to soften our hearts and listen to God’s Word read, studied, and taught. Israel failed to do this, but Hebrews 4:1-13 says that we too can fail. In Christ we are offered not [merely] a physical promised land but the ultimate rest – rest from the crushing burden of self-salvation through effort and performance (Hebrews 4:10).

Friday (1/10) Read and discuss Hebrews 3:7-19

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.
Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.’
As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. (ESV)

John Kleinig writes:

The introduction of 3:7-19 by “so,” shows that it continues the unit of instruction that began in 3:1 with the command to “consider” Jesus. Since the Christian congregation is God’s house, which depends on access to Him to fulfill its “heavenly calling,” the teacher gives two further imperative instructions to his hearers in 3:12-13 based on the warning against hardheartedness in 3:8. In 3:14 he recalls his earlier address to them as “partakers of a heavenly calling” by the confessional affirmation that they are “partakers of Christ.” In 3:14 he also repeats his emphasis from 3:6 on their need to “hold on to” what they already have. Likewise he once again addresses them as “brothers”, just as he had in 3:1. Yet despite these links there is a topical shift in the sermon from instruction about the faithful service of Jesus as High Priest over God’s house to instruction about the consequence of faithlessness for those who make up His house.

Read or sing Hymn 407 Let Our Choir New Anthems Raise

Saturday (1/11) Read and discuss Matthew 24:29-35

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

Here Jesus employs strong language of cosmic distress. The overall message is straightforward: God will come in judgment “immediately” after the tribulation of those days in the first century. After those divinely shortened days are completed (24:22), then the judgment will come upon Jerusalem. This destruction will be a type of the final judgment, to be sure. The language of darkened sun and moon and falling stars in this verse, however, refers to laying waste of temple and the city by the Roman legions. The language is figurative, as in the Prophets and the Psalms. In the eighth century BC, when God’s threatened judgment came upon Israel through the Assyrians, the powers of the heavens were shaken. During the sixth century BC, the sun grew dark and the moon did not give its light when Babylon came and destroyed Jerusalem and took away the leaders of Judah into exile. So it was in Jerusalem in AD 70. The language is figurative, but the judgment will be literal. God will be doing the deed.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow’s morning and evening worship services.