

When I was a kid, I was a big fan of the TV show “The Lone Ranger.” Countless times I turned on our old black and white to channel 29 in Minneapolis. For, “nowhere in those sterling pages of yesteryear can one find a greater champion of justice. We turn again to those thrilling days when out of the past come the thundering hoofbeats of the great horse Silver. For the Lone Ranger rides again!”

In every episode, 29 minutes and 30 seconds into the half-hour program, somebody would inevitably ask the question, “Who was that Masked Man?” Here was someone who was in the clutches of death—inches from total annihilation without a pistol—or in a prison or certainly in a pinch or a pickle, and the Lone Ranger delivered, saved, and rescued them. And they missed it! After it was over, they were left wondering aloud: “Who was that masked man?” They missed it!

From their youth Israel had been called out of Egypt, fed, nourished for the journey, and given their tribal inheritance. They had the sure and certain prophetic words of Elijah and Elisha. God had again and again delivered, saved, and rescued them. And through unfaithful living they missed it!

God says through Amos: “Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. Also, it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?” declares the LORD. “But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, ‘You shall not prophesy.’” (Amos 2:9–12)

After everything God had done for His people, they told His prophets, “You shall not prophesy!” They had had enough of listening to the Lord. Ignoring divine love and salvation, they missed it!

So, Amos asks, “What good is the day of the LORD for you? It will be a day of darkness and not light” (Amos 5:18). Those listening to Amos believed that “the day of the LORD” would usher in more wealth, more prosperity, and more blessings. But it was all an illusion. The day of the LORD was going to be a night of severe judgment.

Amos was very much aware of the toxic waste of hatred, pride, and idolatry that was buried directly underneath Israel's faltering foundation and that this waste would soon destroy the land. God's sunshine was about to turn into the darkness of the Assyrian judgment upon Israel in 722 BC. This would be the night the Lord has made.

Two hunters came across a bear so big that in their fright they dropped their rifles and ran for cover. One man climbed a tree while the other hid in a nearby cave. The bear was in no hurry to eat, so he sat down between the tree and the cave to reflect upon his good fortune. Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, the hunter in the cave came rushing out, almost ran into the waiting bear, hesitated, and then dashed back in again. The same thing happened a second time. When he emerged for the third time, his companion in the tree frantically called out, "Woody, are you crazy? Stay in the cave till he leaves!" "Can't," panted Woody, "there's another bear in the cave!" What we may think is a safe place is actually a place of doom.

This is exactly what Amos says: the night the Lord has made is like a man fleeing from a lion, and a bear meets him, or like a man who goes into the house and leans his hand against the wall, and a serpent bites him.

You and I fall into the same judgment. In the baptismal flood we were called out of Egypt. In the Lord's Supper we are fed and nourished for the journey. "We have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven" (1 Peter 1:4). And we have "the word of the prophets made more certain" (2 Peter 1:19). God has again and again delivered us, saved us, and rescued us. And repeatedly... we miss it!

Why? John 3:19 states, "This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

We love the darkness of self-centered narcissism. We live in the darkness of lies and half-truths, and we have an ongoing lust for more of the darkness that feeds our flesh. The Prince of Darkness mocks our feeble discipleship, our failed relationships, and our fatal attractions.

Why do we so frequently live in dark when we can walk in the light?

Rose Crawford had been blind for fifty years. Then she had an operation in an Ontario hospital. She said, "I just can't believe it," as the doctor lifted the bandages from her eyes. She wept when, for the first time in her life, a dazzling and beautiful world of form and color greeted her eyes, and she could see. The amazing thing about her story, however, was that twenty years of her blindness was unnecessary. She didn't know that surgical techniques had been

developed, and that an operation could have restored her vision at the age of thirty. The doctor said, "She just figured there was nothing that could be done for her condition. Much of her life could have been different."

And our lives may be different as well! There is no need to remain in the darkness of God's judgment. Jesus is the Light that took on flesh so that He might take us into His arms, heal our hurts, forgive our filth, and destroy our darkness. He became one of us, not to demonstrate the innocence of infancy, but in order to live the life we could not and die our death so we need not. Jesus is dazzling light, brilliant light, and eternal light. No wonder the Nicene Creed declares that Jesus is "Light of Light!"

But the Light of the world also knows the night of the Lord. For three hours He hung on the cross in darkness, bled in the darkness, cried in the darkness, and thirsted in the darkness.

Does this thick darkness mean that Jesus would never shine again? Would the betrayal, the blood, and His burial be the final curtain call?

Never! Jesus is the great Light! John 1:5 states, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it!"

Art Holst, a veteran NFL referee, tells about a Sunday when a Kansas City Chief tight end named Fred Arbanas was tackled so hard that his artificial eye popped out. Soon the missing eye was found. Arbanas popped it back into place and was eager to resume play. Holst then playfully said to Arbanas, "Fred, I'm impressed with your courage. But what would you have done if you had lost the other eye?" "That's easy," snapped Arbanas, "I'd become a referee!"

While it may *seem* like referees live in the dark, we oftentimes *do*.

All that changes as we trust and follow Jesus, who leads us to live forever in the light of His love! **Don't miss it!** Amen.