

Amos 5-9 • Seek me and Live!

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Open your Bibles, please, to the book of Amos. We are in the minor prophets here on Wednesday night, and as you can see, as we're getting toward the end of the Bible. That means we're getting toward the end of our third trip through the entire Bible here in the book of Amos. We're going to do our best to get through the rest of Amos tonight. We'll see how that goes.

But we started a couple of weeks ago. We took a week off for VBS as you know, and we did the first 4 chapters, the first time through Amos, and now we're going to take a swat at actually doing chapters 5 through 9 here tonight.

I don't know if you have ever kind of thought to yourself, "I don't know if the Lord could ever use me. I mean, I'm just, I'm kind of ordinary." Amos is one of those great books of the Bible that reminds us that God uses ordinary people. Amos was a farmer, and he took care of animals, and he took care of trees that were fruit bearing. And he was kind of just cruising along in life.

And then the Lord called upon him to begin to prophesy. It's interesting because he lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, but yet most of his prophecies were geared toward the northern kingdom of Israel. And it was a very difficult time to give prophecies because even though judgment was looming, it wasn't there yet.

And the rich people were still very well off and things were going well for them. And because things were going well, they were not keen to hear any sort of a message from Amos related to any future judgment that might be coming. As far as they were concerned, everything was hunky-dory and there was no reason to believe it was ever going to be otherwise.

And yet, here comes Amos kind of rains on their parade, by telling them that God's judgment is right around the corner unless they repent and get back with the Lord and get right with Him. And that wasn't a very popular message. And we're going to see that as we go through some of these chapters tonight.

In these chapters, you'll notice that even though God is saying to the northern kingdom of Israel, that judgment is truly right around the corner, He is also pleading with them in these chapters to turn. And He's basically telling them,

choose life. If you're going to pick any particular direction, pick life. Because that's what I have for you, if you will repent and turn to Me with your all your hearts. But you need to understand that when you turn away from God, death is the only other option.

I had somebody write to me just this last week and said, 'why is heaven and hell the only option?' You would think about it and it's kind of an interesting question, why is heaven and hell . . . why isn't there another option? Why isn't there just maybe like oblivion, or maybe there's just kind of the unknown or something like that. Why is it just heaven and hell?

We don't understand. And I think it's challenging to understand, but I think it's important to understand that our God is a God of life. And when we turn from Him, we turn away from life. And you know the opposite of life is death even spiritual death. And so there are no other options.

There isn't a plan B. There isn't heaven, hell, or gee-I'll-take-another-option sort of thing. Our God is a God of life. He gave us life. He breathed life literally into us at the beginning, and He is the sustainer of that life. And if we reject Him, we reject life. And so what God says to His people is, choose life. Choose life. And that's our word to our culture today, isn't it? Choose life.

So we're in chapter 5. If you're there in your Bible, chapter 5, it begins by saying, "*Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel.*" And of course, that word 'lamentation' tells you what this word is going to be. He doesn't say, as I take up this word of praise. He says, I take up this word of lamentation. And a lamentation is an expression of grief or an expression of sorrow. It is a cry from the heart, and that's what God is doing.

And as He cries through the prophet here, He says, verse 2, "*2 "Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel; forsaken on her land, with none to raise her up."*
3 For thus says the Lord GOD: "The city that went out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel."

So the House of Israel is going to be greatly diminished. And you might say, well, I didn't know that there were any left. Because we know that the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered and they were basically assimilated into other gentile nations, merged with those nations, which is where you get Samaritans. And so you think, well, I didn't know there was going to be any left.

You got to remember, just like we've seen here in the United States of America in the last two and a half years, populations shift. I actually saw a map that came out just a couple of days ago. It was about all the population shifts due to the pandemic. People are moving. People are moving from one state to another and shifting of population. And of course shifting of populations happens all the time, but it has even kind of gotten turned up a little bit.

Well, you have to know that there were people in the northern kingdom of Israel who heard the message that was given through Amos and other prophets. He was certainly not the only one who was given a prophetic word to that nation concerning the coming judgment and their need to repent. And there were godly people in the northern kingdom of Israel and they shifted.

They moved down into the southern kingdom of Judah. And that's why there are no such thing as the lost 10 tribes of Israel. God doesn't lose anything. When Judah was finally conquered and taken to Babylon, there were 10 tribes represented there, and they were brought back to the kingdom after 70 years. So, but the Lord is saying here, it's going to be greatly whittled down from what it originally was.

But then notice here in verse 4, this is where the plea to turn is expressed. It says, *"⁴For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live;"* and there you can hear that appeal. Even though the destruction is impending, He says it is senseless and unnecessary. God is telling them, for you to even have to go through this, just return to the Lord. So He's telling people, return to the Lord and you will live. Yes, destruction is coming, but if you turn to the Lord, you will live. Your life will be spared. That's the message that's being given here.

It's interesting that He goes on in verse 5 to say, *"⁵but do not seek Bethel,"* which is originally *bêṭ-'ēl*, but we say Bethel. So that's the way I'll pronounce it. And He says, *"and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing."*

And this is rather shocking language, because if you know your Bible and you've read through the Old Testament, you know that all of those places, Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba all have connections to incredible and powerful moves of God over the centuries with God's chosen people.

And God did incredible works there in all of those places. In fact, you'll remember it was Gilgal where they rolled away the reproach of the people of Israel after they came into the land. Remember? They hadn't circumcised their

people during the wilderness wanderings. And so when they got into the land, they came to Gilgal and they decided to they needed to take care of that.

God spoke to Joshua and said, this needs to get taken care of. So they went to Gilgal and they took care of it. That's where they reaffirmed the covenant. And it was a powerful work of the Lord that took place during that time. But now God says don't think that by going there, there's going to be anything special.

Those places have been corrupted. All of those special places that God used and moved powerfully throughout the history of Israel up to this point, has now been corrupted through pagan idolatry. So God says, don't go there thinking you're going to get anything special.

And so the Lord then says that again in verse 6. *"⁶Seek the Lord and live,"* boy. isn't that a word for today? *"⁶Seek the LORD and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, O you who turn justice to wormwood" (your Bible may say bitterness) "and cast down righteousness to the earth!"*

And then the Lord begins to speak about Himself, the One who is actually speaking to them. And this is one of those kind of eye-opening sorts of messages where He says, *"⁸He who made the Pleiades and Orion,"* (he's talking about constellations in the heavens) *"and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD" (Yahweh) "is his name; who makes destruction flash forth against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress."*

What is He doing here? God is essentially saying in verses 8 and 9, you need to know who you've pitted yourself against. Yes, you have. You're not dealing with some pagan god who isn't a God at all. You have pitted yourself literally against the Creator of the Universe, the One who created all things and who no one can stop. That's who you're messing with here.

Verse 10 says, now this is an interesting statement, and this is kind of a continuation of what He was saying back in verse 7 about turning justice into bitterness. He says, *"¹⁰They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth."* If you have an NIV translation, your Bible says something about how they hate him, who speaks in the court of law or something like that. And the reason the NIV did that is because 'the gate' refers to the city gate.

And the city gate was where business was done in ancient cultures, and particularly in Jewish cultures. Middle Eastern cultures. The city gate was where you went to conduct business. If you were selling land, if you were getting married, if there was an issue between you and someone that needed to be resolved, it would get resolved at the city gate.

That's where the elders of the city would sit, and they would sit in judgment over people's issues and problems and concerns. And so this is really, when you talk about the gate in the Bible in the Old Testament, it is often referring to this idea of where business and legal decisions were handed down.

And that's why He says, ¹⁰*"They hate him who reproves in the" (city) "gate,"* and what He's saying is the people actually hate the one who stands up and speaks truth in the city gate. That's what He's saying. He's accusing them of having feelings of hatred for people who speak up and speak the truth. And He's going to have something more to say about that as we go on.

I can really relate to that today, can't you? I don't know if you feel that in this culture today, but just like in Ancient Israel, truth has become very unpopular. And those who speak truth have become very unpopular. If you want to lose friends, speak the truth. I mean, we're told to speak the truth in love, and that's something we do need to learn how to do, frankly, because some of us have spoken truth in something less than love, and some of us have been rather obnoxious about it. But we are to speak the truth in love.

But even when you do it in love, people are going to hate you for it. And you will be scorned just like they were back then. And you will be despised just like people who spoke the truth were despised back then. It's getting harder and harder to speak the truth. We need to be people, though, that speak the truth in love.

Verse 11, ¹¹*"Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of gain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. ¹²For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins – you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate."*

And here it is. Another statement of this same thing we were just talking about, verse 13, ¹³*"Therefore he who is prudent" (your Bible may say wise) "will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time."* It's the same thing. He who is wise.

There's a lot of wise people who never opened their mouth today because they're afraid of the backlash.

You know what you say, well, backlash. What kind of backlash? Are you kidding me? You've been living under a rock. Haven't you heard of cancel culture? People are getting canceled today. I mean, actors and actresses who believe in the Bible and believe in some sort of a practical truth, have spoken up and gotten canceled.

I mean, their careers are over. Nobody will hire them. Nobody will put them into work because they spoke the truth, and that's all. And then that's just one industry. I know that many other industries people have spoken up and simply said what was true. Teachers have stood for truth and gotten fired. And that's the culture we're living in today.

Guys, we didn't think up cancel culture. It was going on in Ancient Israel, as we see here in verse 13, *"he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time,"* for the times are evil and he's afraid to speak up. He's literally afraid to talk for fear. He might get canceled. And by the way, cancel culture was even more brutal back then. They would cancel your life usually by taking your head off or something like that.

So God appeals to some who are willing to listen once again in verse 14. *"¹⁴Seek good, and not evil, that you may live;"* there it is again, that reference and going back to life. You come back to me and you're coming back to life, He says, seek the Lord that you may live *"and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said."* He's promising to spare those who listen in turn from idolatry. Even now, even in the midst of this, people ask me sometimes, 'have I sinned too much that I can't return to the Lord?' And I always tell them the same thing. No. If you have a heart and a desire to return to the Lord, you can return to the Lord.

It's not too late. We think we came up with the idea to return to the Lord and that's why we question whether or not we can. We think 'well, I want to return to. . .' where do you think that impetus came from? That came from God. That came from the Holy Spirit drawing you, wooing you. Jesus said, no man comes to me unless the father draws him (John 6:44).

If you want to return to the Lord, you are being drawn. The flesh of man does not want God. Period. If there is anything in you that wants God, it is from Him. It is Him wooing you and I'm sorry if that insults you, but that's the fact of the

matter. In my flesh dwells no good thing, Paul wrote (Romans 7:18). No good thing.

And so He says in verse 15, "¹⁵*Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate;*" (there's that reference again to the gate. That's where justice was supposed to dwell.) "*it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*" ¹⁶*Therefore thus says* (Yahweh) "*the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord: "In all the squares there shall be wailing, and in all the streets they shall say, 'Alas! Alas!' They shall call the farmers to mourning and to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation,¹⁷ and in all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through your midst," says the LORD.*" (ESV)

And that's not a good thing. He's basically telling them He's going to decimate their crops. And nothing will come up from the ground as part of the judgment. And He says in verse 18, "¹⁸*Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!*" Now let me explain what this is about. You see, there were some Israelites who would speak very longingly for the day of the Lord because they believed that when that day come, God was going to come against all of their enemies.

And so they were like, bring it on. Bring on the day of the Lord, because we want God to smash our enemies. Well, God goes on here to say, look what He says here in the middle of verse 18. "*Why would you have the day of the LORD?*" Why would you want that? He says, "*It is darkness, and not light,¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him.*" In other words, he went in there to relax, and he got bit by a serpent in his own home. And what God is reminding them of in these statements is that the day of the Lord is a day of judgment and suffering, and they're not going to escape if they have fallen away from the Lord.

The day of the Lord is just as much a time of judgment for them. So that's why He says, why are you longing for the day of the Lord? That's really dumb. If anything, you should long for the Lord and return to the Lord with all your hearts.

Verse 20, "²⁰*Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?*" And He says, "²¹*I hate, I despise your feasts,*" (he's talking about their religious feasts) "*and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.*" ²²*Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.*"

I want you to notice here, yes, they're accused of falling into paganism, but the Jews didn't fall completely away from the Lord in the sense that they continued to do sacrifices. But they did it without a heart of devotion. You see, they were just going through the motions.

Do you know the type, we're talking about religious people here. When I use the word religious, I'm talking about people who do things just kind of by rote. They're doing it because this is what we've always done. We go to church, if we take communion or anything, we don't even give it a thought. It's just something we do.

It's something we do there. Why do you do that? Well, we've always done it that way. It's just what we do. And that's the way the Jews were still doing some of the sacrifices. And He even says here, "²²*Even though you offer me your burnt offerings*" in verse 22, notice that He says they're offering them to the Lord.

He says, but even though you offer them to me, I'm not going to accept them. Why? Because their hearts weren't right, and they missed the point. And that's what religious people miss. They miss the point that God doesn't want your sacrifices. He wants your heart. He wants you, then the sacrifices are acceptable.

But if your heart isn't there, then all the sacrifices in the world aren't going to make a hoot of difference. Right? That's what God is basically saying to them. He said, I'm not going to accept any of these things, any of your peace offerings, your fatten animals, all of that.

And so He says in verse 23, "²³*Take away from me the noise of your songs;*" Isn't that something? I'm willing to bet their songs weren't just noise, but to God's ears it was noise. Why? Because they were no longer singing it with a heart of devotion. It was just music. It would be the same as if you're singing a beer drinker song in the saloon.

No difference. Just a song. He says take it away from me. He says, "*to the melody of your harps I will not listen.*" What's He want? He says, "²⁴*But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*" In other words, if you're going to show that kind of outward devotion, let it come from an inward heart that desires to do what is right.

He says in verse 25, this is kind of an interesting question. He says, "²⁵*Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?*" And of course these people weren't there then, but this is

God's way of saying you're going through all these sacrifices and you're thinking that everything is fine.

They didn't do that in their time, in the wilderness, and yet God was with them and guided them, and directed them, and they were walking in obedience every day. I mean, there were issues during the wilderness wanderings, but you know, when the Lord said 'go' they went. When the Lord said 'stop' they stopped. When the Lord said 'camp here' they camped there.

I mean, there were always rabble rousers and the earth had to swallow up people a few times, but that's just kind of par for the course. But by and large, the people walked with the Lord and yet they weren't sacrificing. So that's kind of the question about that.

And so He says in verse 26, this is kind of, it's almost like a little bit of a taunting. He says, ²⁶*"You shall take up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyyun your star-god –"* (in speaking of their pagan idolatry) *"your images that you made for yourselves,"* (those are the ones you're going to take up) ²⁷*"and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts."*

I don't know if these couple of the verses here sound just vaguely familiar, but actually Stephen quoted these very verses before they buried him under a pile of rocks (Acts 7:42-43). But they are different because you see Stephen was quoting from the Septuagint, which is the pre-Christian, Greek version of the Old Testament.

And there are some differences in the wording from that, but the message is still the same. The message is, I know who you are. I know you're going to call upon your false gods, and that's why I'm going to send you away and you will be a conquered people.

Chapter 6:

¹*"Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes! ²Pass over to Calneh, and see, and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines."* (ESV)

He's telling them to look at some of the other nations around them. And then He asks this question, *"Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory, ³O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence?"* (ESV)

This is kind of an interesting sort of a statement that He's making. But He's calling upon the people of Israel to learn from their neighbors and the disasters that their neighbors have suffered in and around them. And He's asking them, do you think you're going to be any better? Do you think you're going to escape My hand of judgment? And so He says, *"⁴Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, ⁵who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, ⁶who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! ⁷Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away."* (ESV)

I believe with all my heart that there were people living at that time who grieved over the sinful condition of the northern kingdom of Israel. I do. I believe there were. But I believe that God is also speaking to a huge amount of people who were part of the upper crust, if you will, of society in the northern kingdom who just lived their lives on the backs of poor people and had absolutely no thought for the degradation of their society.

They saw what was going on, but they still couldn't see the depth of what was really happening. And it's interesting today that we still have that same attitude among people. I mean, you poll a bunch of people, I mean a bunch of people from all over the country. And there's going to be some people that are telling you we are heading in the right direction, things are going well, we're doing good, we are evolving, we're moving forward, we're making good decisions. So maybe that last decision from the Supreme Court some will say, which we think was good. But yeah, a lot of people think that everything's going great in the United States of America.

And God speaks to those people who thought everything was hunky-dory. And He says they didn't grieve. They never grieved. They didn't see it. They didn't see that God's heart was being pained as well as people being manipulated and used. So He goes on in verse 8. He says, *"⁸The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares the LORD, the God of hosts: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it." ⁹And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die."* (ESV)

And that means basically, if they seem to escape the first round of judgment and they all huddle together in a house to try to stay safe they're going to die. They're going to be found out. That's what He's saying. And look what He goes on to say in verse 10, *"¹⁰And when one's relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to*

him who is in the innermost parts of the house, "Is there still anyone with you?" he shall say, "No"; and he shall say, "Silence! We must not mention the name of the LORD." (ESV)

Now, this is an interesting conversation that you're hearing potentially going on. Man, it's hard to understand without an explanation, but the Lord is saying that He would so completely judge the people of the northern kingdom of Israel that again, even if ten men would hide in a house, they're still going to be met with death. They will not escape the sort of judgment. And so something is going to happen. But then when someone comes to bury those who died in the house, he would forbid anyone from mentioning the name of the Lord for fear that they might draw the unwanted attention of the Lord against them as if they had been overlooked.

And that as if God kind of lost them in the fray. So don't say God's name. Don't talk about the Lord because you might get His attention and He might realize there's a couple of them that got away, and He'll come and nuke us too. That's essentially what it's saying.

And those are pagan thoughts. That's pagan thinking. To think that God would somehow overlook, and if we say something. . . don't say something wrong . . . because you'll get His attention and that won't be good. It's just crazy thinking.

Verse 11, *"¹¹For behold, the LORD commands, and the great house shall be struck down into fragments, and the little house into bits. ¹²Do horses run on rocks?" (not very well) "Does one plow there with oxen?" (meaning among the rocks as well) "But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood –" (which again is bitterness) "¹³you who rejoice in Lo-debar, who say, "Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?"*

So what the Lord is doing in this section, He's advancing two images, which are ultimately absurd. And they are: first of all, horses running on rocky crags, which you know they can't do; and then plowing oxen in those same areas where there's rocky crags. Does a farmer go and plow among the rocky crags?

No and no. Those are both ridiculous ideas. And yet God is saying to Israel, and yet you have done the ridiculous. Meaning you have turned justice and made it toxic, and you've taken righteousness and you've made it bitter. Can you imagine taking righteousness and making it bitter? Bitter for the people? He says that is ridiculous. If a horse running on a rocky crag and a man plowing

among the rocky crags is so ridiculous sounding to you, try this one on for size. Look what you've done.

Verse 14, *"¹⁴For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel," declares the LORD, the God of hosts; "and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah."* (ESV)

Chapter 7, and this is an interesting chapter. It begins with a series of visions that are given to Amos of certain potential judgments that God may bring upon the land, or plan to bring upon the land.

Look at verse 1: *"¹This is what the Lord GOD showed me:"* (do you get that, this is a vision, it's what God showed him) *"behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. ²When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, "O Lord GOD, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" ³The LORD relented concerning this: "It shall not be," said the LORD."* (ESV)

Now this is fascinating. What's going on here? God is showing Amos a vision. So He says, Amos, I have a vision for you. And He shows in this vision where God is literally fashioning these locusts to come upon the land. And He says they're going to descend upon the crops at a particular time when they are just in the latter growth.

Notice that, but it was after the king's mowings. What are the king's mowings? Well, that's when the king comes and takes his portion. In other words, that's kind of like they're the taxes they would pay to the king. The king would come and take the first part of the crop that was the king's mowing, and then what's left over? Well, that's what you get.

What he sees in this vision is the locust come after the king gets his portion and they decimate the rest of the field. So what's left for the people? Nothing. Exactly. And so you'll notice the response that Amos has to this vision, which by the way has not come to pass yet.

And he says, oh Lord, please forgive your people. They're such a small people and this will destroy them. And it says in verse 3, *"³The LORD relented concerning this:"* saying *"It shall not be,"* now, this is really interesting. This is an interesting exchange between Amos and the Lord.

And you can come up with all kinds of what-ifs. And you can ask all kinds of questions like, "well, did God really mean that He was going to do that?" And was He just looking for Amos because He knew Amos was going to pray about it? And so it was like, well, I'm going to throw this thing out there, but I will pray for the people. And he'll pray and he'll cry out to Me and then I'll relent. Is that what we think is happening? That sounds like emotional manipulation to me. "I'm going to do this. Oh, well. Okay. I guess I won't." No, that's ridiculous. No, I think God was really going to do it and I think Amos cried out. Amos believed He was going to do it because you'll notice that he cries out to the Lord, oh Lord, please forgive.

Look at verse 4, *"⁴This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, the Lord GOD was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. ⁵Then I said, "O Lord GOD, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" ⁶The LORD relented concerning this: "This also shall not be," said the Lord GOD."* (ESV)

You know what's interesting about these particular visions? And there's another one to come here. What's interesting about this is that God responds to the prayer of His servant, doesn't He? Now, that's fascinating.

I believe that Amos prayed because he believed that his prayer was going to make a difference. And his prayer made a difference. Let me ask you a question: when's the last time you prayed about something because you believed your prayer was really going to make a difference? I mean, you really prayed, and you prayed believing that your prayer was going to have an impact?

When was the last time? Has it been a while? This is a fascinating revelation right here from the book of Amos about the power of prayer. And I told you before, a couple Sundays ago, when we talked about seven critical mistakes that sincere Christians make. The very first one I talked about was how Christians underestimate prayer.

But I admitted that I don't understand everything about prayer. I don't understand all how it works, and I dare say you don't either. But we're called to do it. We're not called to analyze it or put it under a microscope before we start to do it. We're supposed to step out in faith. God says pray. And we see in the scriptures that prayer makes a difference when we lay it at His feet and come before the throne of grace.

Verse 7. This is another interesting one. He says, *"⁷This is what he showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a*

plumb line in his hand." Now we have things like lasers today to keep things plumb or to keep things level.

But back in those days, and I've never seen a plumb line, but I've read about it and apparently it has to do with weights and measures in such a way that a string is held by weights. That literally gravity keeps the line completely level. And so you set up this plumb line and it works with gravity and that line shows, it gives you this [Pastor Paul makes flat hand gesture]. And if the builder keeps his building to the plumb line, then we say the building is going to be plumb, meaning level, all right?

So it says he sees the Lord standing beside a wall, but He's holding a plumb line. And the Lord said to him, "*Amos, what do you see?*" And I love Amos's response. He goes, "*I said, 'A plumb line.'*" He doesn't try to get all weird and interpretive. Well, I think what I see is I think there's a spiritual sort of an insight that you're getting.

He just got a plumb line. You got a plumb line there. I like that. I really do. Sometimes people will write to me and they'll say, Pastor Paul, I can't figure out this parable. And I'll write them back and I'll say, you're looking too deeply into this thing. Parables are often very simple.

They're often given to give us one message and sometimes parables don't have a connection to every single thing in life. "Well, what exactly does this symbol mean?" Nothing. It's not meant to. Because we sit and we try to analyze parables and we miss the message that they were meant to convey. And sometimes that's what people do. And I love how Amos just says, you have a plumb line in your hand there, God. Then the Lord said, now want you to notice the message:

"Then the Lord said, 'Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; ⁹the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'" (ESV)

All right, now that's interesting, isn't it? So basically the plumb line is essentially this picture of the righteousness of God. And what God came to do is He came to measure the people of Israel, according to the righteous standard that He had established through the law of Moses.

And God does that. God checks things out to see, are you guys level? See our standard is the Word. Our standard isn't what the world thinks. It's not what

your opinion is. The standard is the Word. What is right and wrong. The Word tells you. And we don't comment on it from the standpoint of saying, "well, I disagree with that. I think it's just a little over." No. The standard is God's standard. And He judges according to that standard. He doesn't grade on a curve. He doesn't say, well, you guys have really gotten evil, so we're bringing the line down a bit. No. It's constantly the standard of righteousness. That is His plumb line.

Now you'll notice that He says, "*Jeroboam shall die by the sword,*" He's talking about Jeroboam, who is the current king of the northern kingdom of Israel. You'll remember that Jeroboam I was the very first king of the northern kingdom of Israel when they split during the time of David's grandson, King Rehoboam, who was an idiot.

But he foolishly split the kingdom and Jeroboam was given by the Lord rulership of the northern area, the northern ten tribes, and he'd completely fumbled the football. I mean, he set up a rival worship system of a golden calf in two different locations just so he wouldn't lose people to the southern kingdom of Judah.

It was ridiculous. Well, all the kings followed suit, and now Jeroboam II is in power and he's no better than Jeroboam I. And you'll notice that Amos just prophesied that Jeroboam was going to die by the sword. Now, I want you to notice what happens next. ¹²*And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah,"*

Oh, you know what? I think I missed some here, didn't I? I need to do verse 10. Sorry about that.

¹⁰*Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹For thus Amos has said, "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land." (ESV)*

So who is this Amaziah? It says he's a priest of Bethel. When did God tell them to have priest of Bethel? Never. So we know right now that this is a false priest and he doesn't like what Amos is saying.

And so he goes to the king and he tells the king. Now we're coming to verse 12. This is where Amaziah then speaks to Amos. ¹²*And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy*

there, ¹³but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."''

That's interesting about this. He's telling Amos to kind of blow off, just, you leave. Where would you go? Would you go back home? We know that you're from, by the way, Amos lived around the area of Tekoa, which was very near Bethlehem and not that far from Jerusalem. So he was part of the southern kingdom.

And so Amaziah is telling him, just would you go home. We don't want you here. This is a holy place and you're desecrating it and we don't like you and your words, so please leave. Now here's the thing, Amaziah doesn't know that God has already shown Amos visions of judgment for which Amos cried out to God and interceded on their behalf.

He has no idea. Amos has been interceding crying out to God to spare them from the wrath of God. Isn't that crazy? And he's telling this man to go home. Hey, it's because of this man that locusts and fire haven't come in devoured you already.

I want you to notice what Amos says. This is great. *"¹⁴Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, 'I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. ¹⁵But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"* You know what Amos is saying here? He's saying, I didn't ask for this job. I got inducted into this thing from the Lord. I was happy. I was happy taking care of flocks and taking care of sycamore figs and just going about my business. But God called me to speak a word to you, and I'm going to speak a word to you, and here it goes.

Verse 16, *"¹⁶Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. 'You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.' ¹⁷Therefore thus says the LORD: "'Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"* (ESV)

Wow. You got to admire the guts of Amos because he's just been threatened by this priest who's already ratted on him to the king, and he wouldn't be the first prophet to lose his life for simply speaking the truth.

And yet Amos says, you know what? I'm a farmer. I didn't ask for this job, but I'm going to do it. I'm going to be faithful. I'm going to do what the Lord has given me to do. Here's the message. And if you don't like it, take it up with God.

Chapter 8 says, *"¹This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit."²* Your Bible may say ripe fruit, and the idea is it's the last fruit of the year. It's ripe and it's not going to last long. So keep that in your mind.

"²And he said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them." In other words, I'm never going to let this slide anymore. So this is an illustration that is being given to Amos, essentially saying the last fruit of the season, the last ripeness of the land, is upon them. They're experiencing the best that they'll ever experience but it's almost over and it's going to go bad really fast. You know how bananas go bad really fast. They look really good one day, and the next day it's like, yuck, the thing just turned black. Well, that's really what the Lord is kind of saying here, but using this picture of fruit, of this illustration.

Verse 3 says, *"³The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day," declares the Lord GOD. "So many dead bodies!" "They are thrown everywhere!" "Silence!"⁴Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end,⁵saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances,⁶that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?"⁷" (ESV)*

Wow. The chaff of the wheat was usually good for burning. And yet they were selling it to the poor.

"⁷The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. ⁸Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?" ⁹"And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. ¹¹"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹²They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they

shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it."
(ESV)

Isn't that interesting? People are going to come to a place where their desperation is so great that they're going to cry out to hear from God and He's not going to talk. He's not going to speak because they weren't willing to listen in the good times.

"¹³In that day the lovely virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst. ¹⁴Those who swear by the Guilt of Samaria, and say, 'As your god lives, O Dan,' and, 'As the Way of Beersheba lives, 'they shall fall, and never rise again.'"
(ESV)

Chapter 9:

"¹I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: "Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away; not one of them shall escape. ²"If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. ³If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them; and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. ⁴And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them; and I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good."

⁵The Lord GOD of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt; ⁶who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth—the LORD is his name. ⁷"Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel?" declares the LORD." (ESV)

You have to know that the Cushites were people who lived in kind of what to Israel at that time was the outermost parts of the earth. And they were, for that reason, unimportant. They were just kind of like people out there. But He says here, "⁷"Are you not like the Cushites to me," do I not consider you as the same?

He says, ""*Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?*" In other words, yes, I brought you up out of Egypt, but I brought other nations to where they eventually live too. I am the sovereign God who works in the midst of all nations, not just you.

"⁸Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," declares the LORD. ⁹"For behold, I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall to the earth. ¹⁰All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, 'Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.'" (ESV)

Notice God says in verse 8, He says, I'm not going to utterly destroy the house of Jacob. And so I believe it was in the hand of the Lord that people did move down into the southern kingdom. And they were spared. And even though they were ultimately taken by the Babylonians, they were brought home.

And now verse 11, through the end of the chapter, God begins to describe the blessings that await Israel now after judgment has been meted out. And so this is a complete turn of everything we've been hearing up to this point. And God says, *"¹¹In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, ¹²that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the LORD who does this. ¹³"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;" (because there's going to be such an abundance of harvest) "the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it." (and here's the message) "¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel," (and by the way, we're seeing the beginning of this in our lifetime. "and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit." (ESV)*

But this last verse is something that we have not seen yet come to full fruition. And that is where God says, *"¹⁵I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the LORD your God." (ESV)*

That last statement is something that God reserves for the millennial kingdom. When God will put down the enemies of Israel finally and establish them in the land in a way that will truly bring peace and prosperity and unity among the people. So that's where we complete the book of Amos. And we'll carry on with the minor prophets next time. So let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word and for these chapters that we've studied tonight. And we are very grateful, Father, for your Word and the ministry of it to our hearts. For it speaks a word of wisdom and grace to us. And

we see, Lord, that much of the world that we're living in today, and how society has gone away from the Lord, is very similar to what was happening in the times of Israel, in the days of Amos. And we see that the Word was going out for people to turn from their ways and to live to embrace life and the Giver of Life.

And Lord, that message is still going out and people are still responding, I'm very pleased to say. Perhaps not as many as we would like, but well, we would like them all to respond. But Father, we pray that you would use us, each one of us, every day, to speak truth in love and to share the message of life and light through Jesus. And to bring people to the cross where they can be reconciled to God. Where they can have peace with God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We thank you, Father, for the message. We thank you for the commission that is upon our lives to bring this message of life and hope to a very dark and confused world. We ask you to strengthen us, in the power of the Spirit, to go forth, Father God, not in our power, but in yours.

So we ask you to empower us this day, and each day. We call upon your name, oh Lord, that we might be light and salt to a quickly decaying society. Use us, Lord God, until the day that you return. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, who is King and Lord of all, amen.