

INTRODUCTION: The message that should be at the highest priority for every gathering of the church today is the proclamation of God's word, singing the praises of deliverance, and seeing God as high and lifted up. The word of God is truth. It is sure. It is firm. Psalm 19:7-11, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

THE OVERVIEW OF AMOS AND WARNING OF GOD'S JUDGEMENT

Amos accuses Israel and Judah of rejecting God's law and oppression. Amos sarcastically calls the women "cows of Bashan" for their extravagant living and oppression of others. Amos also laments over Israel and calls for them to repent and seek the Lord and live, cf. Amos 5:4,6. In fact, God rejected their empty religious rituals, Amos 5:21-22, "I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings." The truth is many today attend church out of habit, know all the church clichés, rather than for excitement to sing and worship.

A further warning is given to those who are complacent, Amos 6:1, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion." They trust in wealth and military power, they have territory and kingdoms they think are great, but, Isaiah 31:1, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord." Chapter 7 reveals three visions concerning their judgement, and the plumb line illustration, which shows Israel's failure to measure up, Amos 7:7-8, "Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. The Lord said to me, What do you see, Amos? And I said, a plumb line. Then the Lord said, Behold, I am about to put a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer." God is measuring Israel's faithfulness. The point for us today is we have the word of God as our plumb line. Not man's ideas or standards. Examine yourselves to see if you are plumb to His word. If it's off, it's not the plumb line that's off, it's you.

Chapter 8 and this is where we will expound upon our text, reveals the basket of fruit is ready or ripe, and Israel's judgment is near, Amos 8:1-3, "Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, there was a basket of summer fruit. He said, What do you see, Amos?" And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then the Lord said to me, The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer. The songs of the palace will turn to wailing in that day, declares the Lord God. Many will be the corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence."

THE FAMINE TO COME (Vs. 11)

The judgement is vs. 11 is simply because Israel was happy to reject God's message when it was available to them, God will withdraw it and they will be without it. A definition of famine is "A severe or prolonged shortage of food that leads to widespread hunger, malnutrition, and often death." Notice this important

truth about our text, it is God who sends the famine. They won't lack food, water, clothing, or shelter. They will have all the comforts of the world. But they will not have the words of God.

How this applies to us today. In America, we have more access to God's word, and yet, the biblical ignorance is astounding. I am grieved as I am reminded of the parables Jesus spoke in Matthew 13 and the fact that many today hear the word of God in church and TV and amply opportunities, yet, according to Jesus in Matthew 13:13-17, "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." This is not a scarce theme in Scripture, it's way too common and true that many today have ears to hear and eyes to see, but don't.

The context here in our text on vs. 11 is alarming and straightforward. He pictures people searching for God's word as starving people seek food or water. But they would not receive any word from the Lord. Since they had rejected the word and not realized its great value, they had lost it forever.¹ This ought to be a fearful thing for us today. For the Christian who is rebelling against God to do your own thing, and to the one who is just externally righteous who assumes good intentions, membership or just having some knowledge about God is well enough.

WHAT DOES A FAMINE LOOK LIKE?

The truth of God's word will be the only hope for setting you free from bondage to sin, John 8:31-32, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." The famine seems to stem from an itching ear. That is, to hear what is pleasing to you and what satisfies your own will. Many ministries have made this the platform to build thriving services and extraordinary worship events. It caters to people whose first love is themselves and care not for God, unless they can have Him without disrupting their lives. In fact, a spiritual famine today might look something similar to many churches in America. There is wealth, health, A/C, TV's, iPads and phones, seats with comfort, Dollar General's close by, restaurants to eat after service, food, drinks, supplies and almost every convenience we can imagine. I am not asking for hard times or trials or difficulties. I am grateful and rejoice at the goodness of the Lord to us.

Paul wrote two letters to Timothy. In his first letter, he urged Timothy to remain at Ephesus to (1 Timothy 1:3-4) "Instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith." Furthermore, chapter three is a list of qualifications for elders and deacons. Clearly some will not hear sound Bible preaching, but there's a hearing of what one wants to hear. In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they

¹ Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): Old Testament; Copyright 2004.

will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” The mainstream philosophy in modern-day ministry is a “give people what they want to hear” platform.

In the 1990s, John MacArthur wrote a book entitled “Ashamed of the Gospel” and accurately addressed the “ear tickling” in the church. It was noted that many ministers were making church “user-friendly.” Many churches are offering skits, music only, multimedia, and employing every imaginable theme to make unbelievers comfortable. Worship-themed services such as disco, rap, dancing, comedy, cage fighting, props, live basketball shooting, martial arts, and mimes. In fact, what you get is simply witty messages, no reference to judgment or wrath, sermons that are relevant, upbeat, and best of all short. One pastor said we must make our worship service like a 25-minute sitcom.

This isn’t new to the faithful church either. Charles Spurgeon dealt with this in the 1880s. It was called the downgrade as he saw the denomination, The Baptist Union, he was a part of, take this slippery slope. He said this in summary to those going down this slope, “We cannot hold the inspiration of the Word, and yet reject it; we cannot believe in the atonement and deny it;... we cannot recognize the punishment of the impenitent and yet indulge the ‘larger hope.’ One way or the other, we must go. Decision is the virtue of the hour.” There were four areas which Spurgeon was concerned some in his denomination were flirting with or openly promoting:

1. The denial of the infallibility of Scripture
2. The denial of the necessity and substitutionary nature of Christ’s atonement
3. The denial of the existence of hell
4. The affirmation of universalism

Universalism is the idea that all people, regardless of faith, can attain salvation or spiritual truth. This is very popular among many “evangelical” type churches in the USA today. A version of truth that applies to you, and the so-called comfort of heaven on your terms. It’s important to note these differences that Spurgeon dealt with were doctrinal issues, not secondary liberty issues. These mentioned are clear separation issues.

Matthew Henry notes, “When Amos prophesied, and for a considerable time after, they had great plenty of prophets, abundant opportunities of hearing the word of God, in season and out of season; they had precept upon precept and line upon line; prophecy was their daily bread; and it is probable that they surfeited upon it, as Israel on the manna, and therefore God threatens that hereafter he will deprive them of this privilege.”²

WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF THIS FAMINE? (VS. 12-14)

They shall stagger and wander from sea to sea. They will go from sea to sea and north to south if God will send them prophets. When they are disappointed in one place, they shall try another and shall run to and fro, as men at a loss and in a hot pursuit to seek the word of the Lord, to enquire if there be any prophets,

² Matthew Henry Commentary on Amos 8:11-14

any prophecy, any message from God, but they shall not find it.³ I think we see a great truth from Isaiah 55:6 regarding this as well, “Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.” Proverbs 1:24-29, “Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me, Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord.”

Some think the virgins and young men are the Jewish churches and masters of the synagogue. These shall lose the word of the Lord and the benefit of divine revelation, and shall faint away for want of it, shall lose all their strength and beauty. Those that trust in their own merit and righteousness and think they have no need of Christ.⁴

They are charged with idolatry (vs. 14). They swear by the guilt of Samaria, that was an idol worshipped at Bethel. They are guilty of worshipping another golden calf in the god of Dan. And they claimed the way of Beersheba. The judgment is that they will fall and not rise again, that they will seek the Lord and He will not be found. The application is similar to what we find today: worship in many churches is man-centered and user-friendly. And many today who claim to be followers of Christ find themselves serving little gods. They sit in church and know and read and yet find themselves comfortable. The fearful and horrid danger is that those things that give you comfort now will be gone, and you may seek peace and not find it.

THE ABUNDANCE OF HOPE AND MERCY

In chapter after chapter of judgments, God is merciful and one who keeps His word, cf. Amos 9:11-15. There's mercy still. God not only is the author of wrath and judgment, He is also a mercy-giving God who will save and rescue. What must I do to be saved asked the jailer in Acts 16? The response, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” Acts 20:21, “Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Repentance literally means, “a change of mind, a change in the inner man.” Consider the great warning today: He may be near, call upon Him. Today is the day of salvation.

³ Matthew Henry Commentary on Amos 8:11-14

⁴ Matthew Henry Commentary on Amos 8:11-14