

Seek the Lord and Live

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[0 : 00] Amos, we've reached chapter 5 and we find our passage in page 767, page 767 of your church Bibles, Amos 5.

We'll be looking generally at this whole passage we read, the first 17 verses, but the main thrust you see repeated, certainly begins at verse 4, where God through Amos speaks to Israel and says, seek me and live.

And you'll see that refrain repeated another two times, seek me and live. You know, one of the more neglected aspects of our time when we come before God in worship, one of the more neglected aspects of that coming before God in worship is coming before Him with a receptive heart that really is prepared to hear God speak to us, to hear Him speak to us in His Word.

And of course, yes, we come in worship to praise God. We come and do that in fellowship one with another. We come before Him to call upon His name, to seek His faith, to express our devotion to Him.

But you know, isn't it often the case, or it can be the case, that too often we only hear what we want to hear. And sometimes we blank out the parts of God's Word that we might find unpalatable or maybe difficult even to absorb.

[1 : 37] And that's why, you know, we can't just skip parts of Scripture. That's why we, you know, we are, for example, going through the Book of Amos in many ways a difficult book. I'll be honest with you, it's the very first time I've, as you know, I've been preached in any part of Amos until a few weeks ago beginning this.

Because yes, it is a difficult book. It's a challenging book. But nevertheless, this is God's Word. And we come before God's Word to learn of what God is speaking to us through His Word.

Why is the Book of Amos here? Obviously, there's a very good reason why God has given us the Book of Amos. But what do we find here in particular in chapter 5? We find words of lament.

We find words of warning. But at the same time, we find words that tell us of the greatness of God, even amidst all the mess of human life and the context of disobedience, man's disobedience against the one true God.

And as I've said on a number of occasions, you know, as I've been going through this book, yes, the message may have been written a long, long time ago, but it's still utterly relevant to us today.

[2 : 50] Because the same themes that we find here in the Book of Amos, the same themes are with us today. Because we see the theme, for example, of God's greatness. That's there, verses 8 and 9.

We see the theme of man's sinfulness against God. We see the same theme of man's need for each one of us to seek the Lord.

And to seek life and not death. See, the theme of, as was then, as now, the theme of seeking justice and not injustice. And the same theme for you and I to come before God in repentance as we lament over our sins, as we come before him in repentance, whether it's our own sins, as individuals, sins as a church, sins as a nation.

So, I hope we come to this passage with our eyes opened. And, you know, with our eyes opened that we see a number of things that I've highlighted in the notice sheet.

But, see things that Amos focuses on here. The God who laments, the God whom we must seek, and the God who's there.

[4 : 04] So, the God who laments. Well, we've said God speaks to you in his word. Now, that is fact. It's a truth. And we might say, well, that's just so obvious to say even from a pulpit.

But, you know, we have to stress this again and again. God speaks to us. God speaks to you. Not in a vacuum. Not in an empty room. But, you remember what Jesus said on another occasion?

Jesus said, he who has an ear to hear, let him hear. In other words, pay close attention. And that's exactly what we're finding here right at the start of chapter 5. Hear this word that I take up over you. Here's this call for us to pay close attention to what God is saying through his prophet. And therefore, what God is saying through his prophet tells us that what the prophet is saying has the authority of God.

And if it's God's authority, we can't close our ears to what God is saying. Hear this word that I take up over you. What? In lamentation. O house of Israel.

[5 : 07] So, God is lamenting over his people. In other words, he's grieved over the sin that's caused his people to wander from him. They've just been wanting to be like other nations.

And that meant that they've, you know, worshipped or supposedly worshipped in false ways. In places like Bethel and Gilgal that you see there mentioned in verse 4.

And, you know, as we read God lamenting over Israel, notice how the word picture comes about. He pictures Israel as a young married woman who's cut down in the prime of her life.

Abandoned by everyone all around. And that word picture takes us unto the destruction of Israel. You see the 90% casualty rate among the army.

Verse 3. Now, when this prophecy was given, Israel had one of the best armies in the world.

They're a great military machine. And at the time of this prophecy, they're a strong king, strong army.

[6 : 11] But this army would soon be defeated. The cream of society, Israelite society, would soon be exiled. And God's grieving over his people. And this song of lament composed by God himself.

And you notice at the start of the section, the beginning, God is lamenting. And you see that theme that goes right through to the end to the verse 16 and 17.

The people, wailing people, lamenting. So there's this theme of lament, of mourning. Mourning over sin.

That, you know, has to surely be a response in your own heart. When we, you know, when you consider it, when I consider the sin within my own heart. I know when we even consider sin in its broader perspective.

Yes, even the sin within the church. Even the sin within our nation. God here, you see, is lamenting over his people.

[7 : 13] His covenant people. They've sinned against him. They've followed after other gods.

They've been disobedient. They've broken their side of the covenant. And they've done it without shame.

And God's mourning over his people. The people, as we said, soon to be sent into exile. The people who may not be ashamed of their own sin.

But the people who are going to face shame in exile. And God is lamenting, is mourning over their sin. Think of Jesus. Think of Jesus when he lamented over Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. The people in Jerusalem who resisted the call of Jesus to come to him and obey him and trust him as Savior. Remember the words that Jesus spoke.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent it. How often would he have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not.

[8 : 13] Jesus grieving over the city that was about to be put today. The same city that God had present himself with in the context of the temple.

But the same city that was rejecting the Son of God. Rejecting Jesus when Jesus' claims were so obvious, so clear. And yet Jesus in the agony of his soul lamenting with that deep sorrow over the people of Jerusalem.

Because they'd rejected him. And if they hadn't repented of that rejection then lost eternally. And if Jesus laments over the sinfulness of rejection.

Rejecting him. Rejecting his salvation. What about you? What about me? What about our lamenting over the rejection of Jesus and his word?

Whether that rejection is seen in our families. Or yes, in our congregation. In our churches. In our nation. Because there are so many things that, you know, do and should cause you to grieve and to stir your heart.

[9 : 24] I mean, you know, in ordinary terms. In ordinary life there are things, ordinary things that irritate us and annoy us. Maybe in anger you're angry. When was the last time you actually truly

grieved over your sin?

When was the last time you truly mourned about the sin within your own heart? Or even mourned about the sins that we, yes, we do see within the church. Even sins within the nation.

When was the last time you actually lamented over the fact that the gospel is continually being rejected? People refusing to believe. When was the last time you mourned over what we see?

In so much of the attempts of those in positions of authority seeking to raise gospel truth in our own nation? The last time that you mourned when a loved one simply refused to come to the Lord Jesus.

And declared that he would have nothing to do with the Savior. Do you lament? Do you mourn for that? Do you have even tears that express the grief of your heart for a loved one who will not come to the Savior?

[10:36] Or what of those even who drift away even from church? Who are not so much turning away from the church but turning away from the Lord Jesus? That surely should cause you to lament and to cry out to God for mercy.

But do we? Do I? I mean, our hearts can become so cold and unconcerned for the eternal welfare of our family, of our friends, of our neighbors, of our work colleagues, of even those within our own congregation and those in other congregations.

You know, we can be so cold when we hear our leaders make so many pronouncements that so fly in the face of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. I pray that we really do wake up to the reality of, you know, of what's out there that should cause you and should cause me to grieve and to mourn, to lament over the sin that, yes, causes God to grieve and to mourn and lament.

And, you know, every believer who laments over sin, whether it's the sin in your own heart, the sin in a church, in a nation, well, remember this as Amos tells us here.

You who lament at the same time, you have a responsibility towards your soul. And you see that expressed three times. Three times that call to God's people to choose life.

[12:03] To reject the snare of false worship. To live a life that's so totally different to that which God is lamenting over. That demand, that command to call upon the one true God.

The God, in our second point, the God whom we must seek. Verse 4, seek me and live. Verse 6, seek the Lord and live. Verse 14, seek good and not evil that you may live.

And you might think, you know, in the context of what, you know, you read the first three verses, you might think this sounds a strange contradiction. Because the first three verses might suggest that there's no hope for Israel.

You know, that they're utterly defeated. But then there's this call to seek God and live. You might be asking, what's happening here? Well, surely, as the end of verse 15, I think, suggests, this is a call to what we call the remnant.

Those who remain. Those who haven't abandoned God for false idols. Who haven't gone to fool hog us at worth in false worship. This is a call to those who've remained faithful.

[13:15] A call to continue to be faithful. To continue to show faithfulness to the one true God. To continue to seek Him. To continue to call on His name.

So here's this call to have that true, sure focus of heart and mind towards the one true God. And in doing that, to seek life and to know life.

Life in all its fullness. So, when we hear the prophet, hear Amos. When we hear him declare to the remnant of Israel, those who remain. Remain faithful.

To seek God and live. Then, you know, this is surely what we're being instructed even for ourselves today. This is God's word breathed out through God's spirit. What's God saying to us today?

Through Amos. Well, before we answer that, again, I think we need to look a wee bit closer at the passage. The very fact that we see here in the passage here a small number of true believers.

[14:14] There's a minority there in Israel. Verse 3 tells us that. As we said, the 10%, as it were, who survive. And therefore, the temptation that verse 5 indicates is temptation for those who are remaining faithful.

But yet, the temptation is to go to the places where God's worship has been compromised. It seems it was a real temptation for these people. And the call then is for true believers to seek God.

For God's to be found. Rather than seeking some kind of identity in the places that were an utter abhorrence to God. Seek God and live.

Now, of course, that begs the question. Where would the people seek God? How are the people going to seek God? Why would the people seek God?

These are questions that are as relevant today as they were all these many, many years ago. Well, let's look at more closely then. Seek. Seek.

[15:18] It's a command. And it's not a negotiable command. It's a non-negotiable command. You don't negotiate this command. You don't, you know, argue it out. This is a command.

And it's for God's people to pay attention to. To obey whether in Amos' day or on our own day. And that command, seek. It suggests effort.

It suggests conviction. It suggests application. In other words, you know, don't sit back. Don't be a passive believer. But be active. Direct your whole heart towards the one true God.

You see, in Amos' day, it wasn't for the remnant, those who remain faithful. It wasn't for them to be half-hearted believers. You know, sort of half in, half out, as it were.

You know, some kind of token worship on, well, then we would say that the Sabbath. And then the rest of the week just, you know, do their own thing. No. It's a whole-of-life seeking.

[16:19] A whole-of-life rejection of the kind of worship that was being carried out in these places. As we said in verse 4, Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba. Remember what God said to another prophet, or through another prophet, Jeremiah, you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

And it's as applicable today as it was in Jeremiah's day, Amos' day, the prophet's day. Because half-hearted Christian, half in, half out, that's no way to approach God.

You've got to be with your whole heart. And what about that seeking then? Where do you seek? How do you seek? Well, surely seeking comes from searching.

Searching God's Word. Hearing His voice. Studying His Word. Feeding on that Word of Truth. That's the seeking that God requires. The kind of attitude you read in Acts 17 of the believers in Berea.

What it was said of these believers. They received the Word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Seeking, true seeking.

[17:32] It's the priority of life that Jesus spoke about in the Sermon on the Mount. Remember, Jesus contrasted the priority of the world, the world that seeks first, you know, physical things, material things.

But no, Jesus spoke of a seeking that truly matters. Seeking first the Kingdom of God. Is that your seeking? Seeking first the Kingdom of God.

Seeking first to have God's reign in your heart. Are you seeking Him? Are you seeking that which is life? Life in all its fullness.

As opposed to the sentence of death. You know, we can give ourselves when we don't seek God. When we seek anything else but God.

And the people of Amos, I mean, they weren't without the means to seek God. They had His Word. The prophets spoke God's Word to the people. We have God's Word today. All that God's chosen to reveal to us about Himself and about the way of salvation.

[18:34] We have that Word before us. Seek God and live. We've got the Old Testament. We've got the New Testament. Our catechism tells us the only rule to direct us how we might glorify God.

So seek God through His Word. Study it on a Sunday together. Do it in fellowship one with another. Study it on a Monday in your private devotion.

Study it in the context of a family. Study it in the midweek meeting when we come together on a Wednesday. If you're able to do that.

Study it in fellowships, Bible studies. Study it in the many books that are published, you know, that help you to understand God's Word. Study to seek God.

To apply what we learn of God. Of course, we seek Him through prayer. When you commune with God in prayer. Seek Him in the ways that He reveals to you of Himself and His providence.

[19:38] Seek Him in the majesty of His creation all around. And when you seek Him, you will find Him. When you find Him, you'll know that life that He promises to all who truly desire Him.

So, whom are you seeking? What are you seeking? Is it fame? Is it success? Is it material things first and foremost? Is it power?

Popularity? Status? Are you seeking first? The Lord Jesus, are you seeking first His kingdom? Remember the question that Jesus put to, the risen Jesus put to Mary Magdalene.

Remember, Mary was looking for, well, for a dead Jesus. Jesus had risen. She didn't know that. And the risen Jesus spoke to her and said, whom are you seeking? Well, that question has been given to you.

Whom are you seeking? Are you seeking? Not a dead Jesus. Not a dead Savior. But the living, risen Savior of the world. Well, seek.

[20 : 38] Amos says here, seek the Lord and live. And live. Seek the Lord. Seek Him. And live. Truly live. And you know, each one of us, me, you, you have to confess the many, many things that we haven't sought Him as we ought.

And so we come before Him in repentance, confession, that we haven't sought Him as we truly ought. But seek Him. And when you seek Him, know that life that never ends.

That life that's found in the author of life, the Lord Jesus. And you seek Him. You seek Him because you know that He's there. He's the God who's there is our final point.

And this we particularly see in verses 8 and 9, right in the middle of this section. And at first you might think this is odd. You know, excuse me.

You're straight after, you know, God's announcement of lamentation. First three verses. And then verses 4 to 7, you've got God's revealing His call to the people to seek Him. And then right in the middle here, well, there's more words of condemnation in verse 12 to 13.

[21 : 50] There's another call to seek the Lord, verses 14. There's this reference to lamentation in verse 16 and 17. And right in the middle there, verse 8 to 9, there's this focus on God.

And you might think, well, does this break the pattern of the chapter? But no, this is absolutely deliberate. This is absolutely the way that it was intended to be presented to us.

Because what we find here in the emphasis of God in verses 8 and 9 is that God is at the center. That He's there.

That He's the one whose greatness can't be rejected. He's the one whom we must seek. He's the one whose power has to be seen in all its creative might and glory.

He's the God who laments over His people's sins. And therefore, He's the God who's got to be sought. The God who condemns injustice. He is the God of heaven and earth.

[22 : 52] The maker of heaven and earth. He's the one who has all power. That power that no man and no false god can equal. As we see there, as we said in verse 8 to 9.

So He's the God who's there. Verse 8. I mean, again, this wonderful language. This descriptive language. As a singer once wrote, He's the Lord of the star fields. He's the Ancient of Days.

He's the one who changes night to day and day to night. He's the one, as we see in these verses, He's the one who controls the flow of the ocean. He's the one who's able to destroy the mighty fortress that's built by man.

And, you know, if we've said that even the whole manner of lamenting over sin is such a forgotten exercise in the Christian life, then I think, too, we can forget so easily that we come before a God of all might.

The God of all might, of all power. That we worship God, maker of heaven and earth. And so, yes, dwell. Meditate on the God whom Amos directs us towards here.

[24 : 05] God in all His majestic splendor. God in all the world. God in all the world. Because elsewhere, we're told the heavens declare the glory of God. And it's no mere man-made God that's offended by sin.

It's no false God who laments over the sin of His wayward people. It's Almighty God. The God of all power. The God of all grace. It's no mere false God whom we seek.

The Lord. Creator. Redeemer. Savior. The one, as we're told here at the end of verse 8. The one who's Lord. The Lord is His name.

And we worship that great Lord and Savior. The one whose name is Lord. This expression here, Lord. This name we know in the original language.

The name Yahweh. The name that God made Himself known to His people. As the covenant God. The name that means I am. The one who is and was and ever shall be. The eternal one who's all pure.

[25 : 08] All holy. All powerful. Who changes not. That's all within that name. Yahweh. I am. This is the God before whom we bow each Lord's day in worship.

This is the one whom we bow before in all reverence. This is the one whom you give your whole heart of devotion to. Think of the Lord Jesus when He was asked who He was.

Remember when He gave an answer regarding His credentials. He said before Abraham was. I am. Telling of His divinity. Telling of His eternity.

Telling of His being God the Son. Equal in power and glory with God the Father. And God the Holy Spirit. And when we know Jesus. The eternal one.

Then surely we bow. In adoration. Of the one who is. The great I am. The great Savior. And therefore it's so relevant.

[26 : 09] So relevant this morning. That you do come before Him. And seeking. And knowing Him. And in knowing Him. Know life in all its fullness. And yes.

In knowing Him. To lament over the many times when we've rejected His. Our Savior. When we've gone our own way. And done our own thing. And not given Him. The glory.

And so truly. For you and for me. To honor Him. And the more. You know. That we come to know. Our God and Savior. The more that we come to dwell.

In the majestic power and glory. Of our almighty Lord. The more you will seek Him. The more you will know. That life in all its fullness. The more you will have that true satisfaction.

For your needy soul. Yes. Lament. And seek. And know the God who saves. And know the God who gives life. To the uttermost.

[27 : 10] Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord and our God. We give you thanks for your word. Your word that directs us. Your word that leads us. To yourself.

And yes Lord. May it be that truly we do lament. Over our sins. And that truly we do seek you. And that we truly do find you. And that we truly do know that life.

That you give to your people. That life in all its fullness. And so Lord bless. We pray your word. Forgive anything that's been said amiss. Or thought amiss this morning.

And may we know. That your hand upon us for good. And all its blessing. Continue with us now Lord. We pray. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Let's close in Psalm 130.

In page 421. The well known words. Of the psalm. To the tune martyrdom. Lord from the depths. To thee I cried.

[28 : 12] My voice Lord. Do thou hear. And to my supplications voice. Give an attentive ear. Lord. Who shall stand. If thou O Lord. Look at this number of times. The name of Lord is mentioned.

Lord who shall stand. If thou O Lord. Should mark iniquity. But yet with thee forgiveness. That fear. Thou mayest be. The whole of Psalm 130. To God's praise. Lord who shall stand.

Boy cannot show for good. Lord who shall stand. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[31 : 02] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Amen.