

# Amos 5:1-17

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[ 0 : 00 ] There's a newspaper writer a hundred years ago who said the purpose of the free press is to afflict the comfortable and to comfort the afflicted. And I think that's what God's Word does this morning in Amos 5.

And to see how I'd love you to open your Bible in front of you to page 767 as we look at it together. God speaks to all of us today through His Word.

Through His prophet Amos. God calls us first to hear His words of sorrow at His judgment against His people who despite enjoying prosperity and peace are oppressing the poor and pursuing evil.

These are words that first afflict the comfortable. But then secondly, God gives words that comfort the afflicted. After four chapters of anger and sorrow and judgment, God now graciously offers all of us salvation by inviting us to seek Him and to live.

See, God doesn't send His prophet Amos solely to judge the earth, but so that evil people may turn to Him and be saved.

[ 1 : 23 ] God's Word comes to seek and to save the lost. God speaks His Word to warn us because He loves us and He longs for us to live.

God sees His people walking down the road of evil toward a cliff of judgment. And so He cries out that they may listen and turn and look to Him and live.

And He does this first by comforting... Sorry, He does this first by afflicting the comfortable. Look at verse 1. God says, Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel.

Fallen no more to rise is the virgin Israel, forsaken on her land with none to raise her up. God looks at Israel, the nation He has chosen to be His people, His children.

The family He has loved and saved and established and protected and even promised to dwell with. Well, here God delivers to them their eulogy.

[ 2 : 40 ] God gives a funeral lament at the death of His people. God commands His people to hear His judgment against them. Verse 2.

Fallen no more to rise is the virgin Israel. Virgin here refers to someone's youthfulness.

In a sense, their unfulfilled potential for life. God's saying Israel is dead before she even grew up. God's people are like a child, fallen, never to rise.

Forsaken. Slaughtered in their own home with no one around to help. It's a horrific picture of domestic devastation.

A father lamenting the death of his child. God continues His eulogy for His people in verse 3. He says, The city with a thousand marching out of it shall have only a hundred left.

[ 3 : 42 ] And that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel. It's a picture of catastrophic desolation. Absolute, abject military defeat and a subsequent slaughter.

And what's odd is at the time this message was first delivered, Israel was enjoying a time of peace and prosperity. Israel had security from her enemies and enjoyed strength and wealth from within.

So for an original hearer, these words would not have matched their perceived reality. Life was really comfortable for a wealthy Israelite when God first spoke these words.

They are words that are promising affliction to people who are living in comfort. It would have taken real faith to accept God's promise of judgment here because it would have seemed so at odds with reality.

Despite the current comfort of the nation Israel, Yahweh in verse 3 foretells that 90% of Israel's warriors will be lost. In verse 2, that the youthful Israel is fallen, forsaken, with none to help and no more to rise.

[ 4 : 58 ] It's a dark, devastating declaration. It unsettles us out of our comfortable stupor. These words should hit us like a bomb siren, breaking out over a peaceful city.

To warn of impending danger. They're uncomfortable. But that's where we must begin. If we are to understand the gospel, to understand who God is, and to receive his salvation, then we must first understand the seriousness of our sin.

The peril that all of us face. All of us are sinners. We are all evil. There is no one who is righteous.

Not one. Left to our own devices. By default, all of us will turn away from God and pursue power and pleasure and prosperity and popularity at the expense of others.

God's word first afflicts the comfortable. It declares to all of us that we are sinners who need saving. We are enemies of God who by default will turn on each other.

[ 6 : 15 ] Most Christians and most churches are embarrassed to talk about our sin. We want the gospel to taste sweet without any bitterness.

And so we talk about God's love, love, love, and we omit his justice, righteousness, and judgment. We censor him and his word.

But Amos 5 commands us to first hear God's judgment. We must understand our current state if we are to understand why the gospel is such good news and why all of us so desperately need it.

Without detecting our sin and therefore our need of salvation, we will never see the need to be saved. I heard J.I. Packer give a lecture at St. John's at least 20 years ago entitled, Why I Am an Anglican.

And Packer said simply, I'm an Anglican first because Anglicans take sin seriously. Every Anglican service begins with all of us confessing our sin, detecting the evil in our own hearts and our status as sinners in need of saving.

[ 7 : 33 ] In today's morning prayer, you just said, along with me, we have not done what we ought to have done. And we have done what we ought not to have done. And there is no health in us.

God's word afflicts the uncomfortable. He commands us to first hear his judgment, to hear his lament over our evil and our impending death that will result from our sin.

Are you uncomfortable yet? You feeling afflicted? Excellent. From this place of discomfort and affliction, you are now ready to hear of the grace of God.

Verse 4, For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, Seek me and live. Right after afflicting the comfortable, God's word now comforts the afflicted.

We first hear God's judgment against his people, and then immediately he invites us to receive his salvation. Notice in verse 4 in your Bible, the word LORD is in all caps.

[ 8 : 50 ] Whenever you see that, it means that the actual word in the original Hebrew is God's personal name, Yahweh. But the scribes writing it out didn't feel worthy to write so holy a name, so they would write a code name, LORD, in all caps.

What's significant about that is God does not relate to his people here as some distant deity. He gives us his name. A few weeks ago in this service, our national bishop was preaching, and he said he overheard a conversation at the back where one person said, How are we supposed to address a bishop?

We call them bishop, or your grace, or your majesty. And the other lady responded, I call him Dan. Well, that's what God's doing here in Amos 5.

God gives his people his personal name. If you look, it's seven times in our text. God is underlining that what he wants is not dutiful wooden obedience, nor petrified piety from his people.

What he wants with them is relationship. He wants us to love him as he loves us. He wants to comfort us. He laments over our evil.

[ 10 : 10 ] He warns us of terrible judgment, but then instantly he offers us his salvation. Seek me and live. God promises to save the sinner who will seek him.

He comforts the afflicted. Verse 8 reminds us that this God, the one true God, Yahweh, can turn the deepest darkness into glorious morning light.

Into the land of deepest darkness, his light has come. In light of imminent, terrifying judgment, God gives a command with a promise attached.

Seek me and live. This refrain is three times in our text. It's the center of the book of Amos. It is a promise of salvation that immediately follows God's promise of judgment.

And the point is that God does not want people to perish. He wants us to live. He doesn't want his wrath and his judgment to be unleashed upon us like an all-consuming fire.

[ 11 : 16 ] What God wants from wayward, wicked people is for them to turn to him and live. What God wants is for his covenant, his relationship with his people, to be restored.

If God just wanted to judge evil and destroy all sinners, then he wouldn't speak to warn us that his judgment is coming. He warns us because he wants us to live.

He wants you to be saved. That's why you're here. That's why you're listening. He doesn't want to judge you. He comes not to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

And so three times in our text, God invites us to be saved. Three times he points us to life as we contemplate the imminent shadow of death. Seek me and live.

God invites us to look on the one we were created to see. We were made in the image of God to know God, to see God, to enjoy God, to glorify God.

[ 12 : 27 ] That's what all of us were made for. To seek God and live. To worship God and enjoy him forever. And so God offers evil people who are living on the cusp of judgment and annihilation to instead enjoy salvation and life.

It's incredible. For four chapters in Amos, God, the roaring lion, rips into his people for their evil. And now from the fangs of God's wrath, we are invited to gaze at his eyes of love.

To receive from him, not the death we deserve, but life with him. Seek me and live. Look to me and find life.

Seek me and you won't find an angry judge who can't wait to smite you for your sin, but a loving father who can't wait to lavish you with his love and life. Judgment against evil is coming.

No matter how prosperous and comfortable you may currently feel, devastation and death is coming for the wicked, which is all of us. So seek God and live.

[ 13 : 41 ] That statement for me raises two questions. First, how do we seek God? What does that actually look like? And then the second question, how can God save us?

How is it that God gives us life? How is it that God can save sinners from his judgment? So those are my two questions.

How do we seek God and how do we live? First, how do we seek God? Amos 5 is very practical. It gives us four practical ways to seek God.

The first way is at the beginning of verse 1, where it just tells us simply to hear this word. How do we seek God? By hearing the words of God.

God's words are what bring life. God's words are what call us to him. In Genesis 1, God creates by speaking.

[ 14 : 42 ] His words are what brought life in the beginning. And his words are what will bring life to us now. His words are a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Meditate on God's word and you will be like a tree planted by streams of living water bearing much fruit. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd. God's children listen because they know the voice of their heavenly father.

So if we are to seek God, we are first to hear his word, to learn to recognize his voice. And we do this by reading his word. By studying his word.

It's a hard thing to do. If you are reading through a Bible in a year program, last week was the halfway point of the year. And it wasn't an encouraging realization.

I'm only halfway. Anyway, the Bible is hard to read sometimes. We need help reading it, to understand it, and to recognize what God's voice is saying to us through it.

[ 15 : 52 ] In September, our community groups will be restarting. And I encourage all of you to join one so that through them, you may hear God's word and seek him, that you may live.

plan for it now to fit into your schedule once September happens and your social life explodes as our families does.

There are tons of groups in this church with all sorts of schedules and permutations. I cannot imagine there is not a group that would work for you and your busy life. If you want to join one, you can contact me or Willie.

His email is on our website. So first, hear God's word. A second way to seek God is to obey his word. Look at verse 5.

It says, Do not seek Bethel. Do not enter into Gilgal. Don't cross over to Beersheba. For Gilgal shall surely go into exile and Bethel shall come to nothing. Verse 6.

[ 16 : 49 ] God will break out like fire in the house of Jacob and devour it with none to quench it for Bethel. This is an example of a difficult section of scripture where at first glance, you probably have no idea what's going on.

You need to study it to properly hear what God is saying and is telling us. In the law section of the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 12, God speaks and he commands the Israelites to worship him in one central place that he will reveal.

In Deuteronomy, God has just saved his people from slavery in Egypt and so he speaks and he gives them his law and part of it is to worship him in one place, one location as they journey toward the promised land and then settle within it.

So originally, this central place was God's tabernacle, a special tent that moved with God's people and then eventually, the single place for worship became the temple in Jerusalem.

But for Amos' original hearers, they didn't want to worship God in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the capital city of their enemy neighbors to the south.

[ 18 : 00 ] They hated that southern kingdom. They'd split from it and they'd declared independence so they wanted to have nothing to do with Jerusalem. So God's command from Deuteronomy 12 was inconvenient for the Israelites in Amos' day and so they ignored that part of God's word.

Instead, they decided to worship God alongside pagan gods in their own cities. We're not going to go to Jerusalem. We'll go to Gilgal and Beersheba and Bethel so that we don't have to go to Jerusalem.

They weren't obeying God's word because it was inconvenient for them. The Israelites are compromising on God's word to suit their own preferences.

They're refusing to obey God's word, omitting certain parts to create a more comfortable religion for themselves. And God calls them to stop. See, we seek God not just by hearing his word, but by obeying it.

Be doers of the word and not hearers only. In the parable of the two builders, which was fantastic, both men heard Jesus' words.

[ 19 : 14 ] Both the wise and foolish builder heard what Jesus said. They both knew God's word. But what made the wise man wise was that he obeyed Jesus' words.

Jesus says in Matthew 7, 24, whoever hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house upon the rock. And what made the foolish builder a fool is that he heard Jesus' words and he did not obey them.

So we seek God by hearing his word and then by obeying it. Not conforming God's word to our own comforts or to the patterns of this world, but rather being transformed by submitting to what God commands.

So we seek God by first hearing his word, second by obeying it, and now third in verse 15 we're told to hate evil. We seek the Lord by combating evil.

Interestingly, in Amos 5, evil is depicted as judicial corruption and injustice. Evil in Amos 5 is evil in the civil court system.

[ 20 : 31 ] God gets really specific about what exact evil Israel is committing. So with your Bible open, look at verse 7. God says, you turn justice to wormwood, you cast down righteousness.

Verse 10, they hate the one who speaks the truth. Verse 11, they trample the poor, extorting money from them to build opulent homes for themselves. It's a timely word for Oak Ridge.

Verse 12, you afflict the righteous, you accept bribes, and you deny justice to the needy. Evil in Amos is systemic corruption in society, especially in the legal and political systems that make rich people richer by squeezing the poor to build mansions and deny them justice.

It's a court system based on bribery and corruption to comfort the comfortable, casting down righteousness and justice in order to further afflict the already afflicted.

It's a society that cared nothing for truth or justice or mercy or charity, just personal profit, pleasure, and power for the privileged at the expense of the poor.

[ 21 : 48 ] So hating evil here specifically means public resistance against state systems of corruption and injustice and oppression and evil.

And there are implications for us that are uncomfortable. As our society moves further and further from the will of God and the pursuit of human flourishing for all, we must take these words and consider them deeply.

How should we oppose social evil in our society? What does this mean in our school systems? where in some places curricula are celebrated and children are indoctrinated to reject the will of God.

What are the implications for this for our engagement with our public health sector? Where the foundational principle to preserve and protect all human life is now under assault.

How should we defend the needy in light of the housing crisis that plagues our cities? As the rich get richer and houses get grander and the homeless, destitute, and desperate grow.

[ 23 : 05 ] What does it mean for us today in this place of comfort to hate evil by upholding righteousness and defending the defenseless in our context?

That is a huge question that I raise and we now together need to answer. Let's think on this deeply. Seeking the Lord means seeking His will.

It means standing up against evil in all its forms. It means caring for the needy, defending the defenseless, upholding truth in the face of deception and delusion, and calling for justice in the face of corruption and cruelty.

And now the fourth way to seek God in Amos 5. In verse 14, it tells us to seek good, not evil, that you may live.

And so Yahweh, the God of hosts, will be with you. Verse 15, hate evil, love good, establish justice in the courts. It may be that Yahweh, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

[ 24 : 18 ] In your life, in your job, in your family, in your time, with your money, in your relationships, seek God. Seek good.

The reason God made His covenant with His people in the first place was so that through them the whole world would be blessed. God's people are to be the channel whereby His goodness and His blessing and His righteousness and His life are extended to the ends of the earth.

Now this is how we seek God in Amos 5. Four things. We hear His word. We obey it. We hate evil. And we seek good. And now finally, very briefly, my second question.

If we seek God earnestly, how is it that God can give us life? We're still sinners. But how will God save us?

How can God make a wretch His treasure? At the kids' Bible camp this week, all of our children and volunteers got t-shirts. And on the back in bright red letters was Luke 19, verse 10, which says that Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

[ 25 : 38 ] God knows our salvation from God's judgment is not contingent on our ability to seek God. God knows all of us are lost.

He knows all of us are living in deep darkness, far away from Him with no hope of saving ourselves. And so, He sends His Son into our world to seek us.

God has come so close so that we might see Him in the face of Jesus. 750 years after Amos in John 6, verse 40, Jesus tells God's wayward people a familiar refrain.

Jesus says, this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life. Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost.

He has come to invite all of us to look to Him, to see Him, and to live. Jesus has come to complete God's great rescue operation to seek and save us from our sin.

[ 26 : 50 ] the gospel of Jesus Christ shows us how God saves sinners and gives us life. It tells us that God so loves the world, so loves us despite our desperate evil that He gives His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

And then it tells us that God didn't send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. The way we pass through God's righteous judgment into His everlasting life is by Jesus, His perfect, righteous Son, taking upon Himself our sin and our evil and receiving from God judgment for our sin.

Jesus has been lifted up on the cross, the righteous for the unrighteous. He has been offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world and all of us who look to Him, who seek Him, shall live because we shall see our sin taken and forgiven by Jesus Christ.

Whoever looks to the Son, seeks the Son and believes in Him shall have life. Maybe this morning you feel lost. Maybe you feel afflicted.

Maybe you feel comfortable. Well, God Himself, God the Son, has come to seek you and to save you.

[ 28 : 26 ] Look to Him and receive life. Thanks be to God. Amen.