

Amos 5:1-17 (PM)

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[0 : 00] Well, my sermon was titled, Ten Hot Tips for a Happy Life, but I feel like I'm regretting that decision now. A newspaper writer a hundred years ago said, The job 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 evening in Amos 5. But to see how, it would be really helpful if you had a Bible open in front of you.

So the black book right in front of you, just sitting there waiting to be picked up. Pick it up. Maybe it's the first time you've touched a Bible in your life. And turn to page 767, Amos chapter 5, as we look at it together.

God speaks to us today through His Word, through His prophet, Amos. God calls us first to hear His words of sorrow and 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, God gives words that will comfort the afflicted. After four chapters of anger and sorrow and judgment, now God graciously offers all of us His salvation by inviting us to seek Him and to live.

[1 : 35] God doesn't send His prophet Amos solely to judge the earth, but so that evil people may turn to Him and be saved. God's Word comes to seek and to save the lost.

God speaks His Word to warn us tonight, 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 by first afflicting the comfortable. Look at verse 1. God looks at Israel, the nation He has chosen to be His people, His children, this family that He's loved and saved and established and protected, and even promised to dwell with.

Well, here God delivers to them their eulogy. God gives a funeral lament at the death of His people. And it's ironic, because it's the people who are listening to this eulogy.

Has anyone here ever heard their own eulogy given? That's what God is doing here when He speaks to His people. God commands His people to hear His judgment.

[3 : 22] In verse 2, He says, Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel. Virgin here refers to someone's youthfulness. In a sense, their unfulfilled potential for life.

Israel is dead before she even grew up. God's people are like a child that has fallen, never to rise. Forsaken, slaughtered in their own home, with no one around to help.

It's a terrible picture of domestic devastation. A father lamenting the death of his child. God continues His eulogy for His people in verse 3.

The city with a thousand marching out of it shall have only a hundred left. 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. At this time the message was first delivered, Israel was enjoying a time of peace and prosperity.

[4 : 30] Israel, when Amos first spoke these words, had security from all of its enemies and enjoyed strength from within and wealth as well. So for an original hearer, these words wouldn't have matched their perceived reality.

Life was really comfortable if you were a wealthy Israelite when God first spoke these words. They're words that is promising affliction to those who are living in comfort.

It would have taken real faith to accept God's promise of judgment here. Because it would have seemed at odds with reality. Despite the current comfort of the nation of Israel, Yahweh in verse 3 foretells that 90% of Israel's warriors will be lost.

In verse 2, youthful Israel is fallen, forsaken, with none to help and no more to rise. It's dark. It's devastating.

It's devastating. It's supposed to unsettle 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.

[5 : 44] They're uncomfortable. But it's where we need to begin. Because if we're to understand the gospel, if we want to know who God is and receive his salvation, then we must first understand the seriousness of our sin and the peril that all of us face.

All of us are sinners. We are all evil. No one is righteous. Not one. Left to our own devices, by default, by default, all of us will turn from God to pursue power and pleasure and prosperity and popularity and comfort, often at the expense of others.

God's word first afflicts the comfortable. It declares to all of us that we are sinners who are in need of saving. We are enemies of God who will turn on one another.

Most Christians and most churches are embarrassed to talk about sin. We want the gospel to taste sweet, without any bitterness.

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

[7 : 07] Not Amos 5. It commands us to first hear God's judgment. We must first understand our current state if we are to understand why the gospel is such good news.

Without detecting our sin and therefore our need of salvation, we will never see the need to be saved. At this church about 20 years ago, one of our older, wise pastors gave a lecture called Why I Am an Anglican.

And in the lecture, the person said, I'm an Anglican 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.

Tonight, in the evening prayer, you just said this 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 comfortable. He commands us first to hear his judgment, to hear his lament over our evil and the impending death that will result from our sin.

[8 : 28] Are you uncomfortable yet? Are you feeling afflicted? Excellent. From this place of discomfort and affliction, the text now moves immediately to reveal to us 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, but then immediately, he invites us to receive his salvation. Notice in verse 4 that the word LORD is in all caps in your Bible.

Do you see that in the book in front of you? Whenever you see that, it means that the actual word in the original Hebrew was God's personal name, Yahweh.

The scribes who wrote down our Bibles, who made copies of it, didn't feel worthy to write down the personal name of God. So they would write LORD in all caps. It's kind of a code.

[9 : 36] So the person reading would know the word here is Yahweh. It's not Lord. Well, that word, Yahweh, Yahweh reveals to us that God does not want to relate to his people as some distant deity.

He gives us his name. A few weeks ago, one month ago, this service had a very special service. Do you remember? There were a million people here, and the service went for five hours, I think, and Aaron was wearing a big dress.

And there was a bishop here. Our national bishop was at our service, and we were ordaining some pastors. And a couple ladies at the back were chatting with each other, and they said, what do we call a bishop?

We call him bishop? Or your grace? Or your majesty? Like what? And the other lady responded, I call him Dan.

That's what God's doing here in Amos 5. God gives his people his personal name. Seven times in our text, God underlines that what he wants is not dutiful wooden obedience, nor petrified piety from his people.

[10 : 47] 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, and he warns of terrible judgment, but then instantly he offers all of us salvation.

Seek me and live. God promises to save the sinner who seeks 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 can 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's a promise of salvation that immediately follows God's promise of judgment.

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

[12 : 06] What God wants from wicked, wayward people is for them to turn to him and live. What God wants for us is covenant. He wants a relationship with his people.

If God just wanted to judge evil and destroy sinners, then he wouldn't have warned us that judgment is coming. He warns us because he wants you to live.

He wants you to be saved. He doesn't want to judge you. He comes not to judge the world, but so that the world through him may be saved. And so three times in our text, God invites us to be saved.

Three times he points us to live and to life as we contemplate the imminent shadow of death. Seek me and live.

God invites us to look to the one who 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.

[13 : 12] That's what all of us were made for, to seek God and live, to worship God and enjoy him forever. And God offers evil people who live 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 and judgment against evil, we are invited to look up and to see his eyes of love and to receive from him not the death we deserve, but life.

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 his life.

Judgment against evil is coming. No matter how prosperous or comfortable you may currently feel, devastation and death is coming for the wicked.

which is all of us. So seek God and live. That statement for me raises two questions.

[14 : 33] First, how do I seek God? What does that look like? And second, how is it that God can make me live? If I am a sinner in need of saving, how is it that God can give me life?

First, how do we seek God? Amos 5 is incredibly practical. It gives four ways to seek God.

The first is at the very beginning of verse 1. Hear this word. How do we seek God? By first hearing the words of God.

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

His words are what brought life in the beginning. And it's his words that will bring life to us now. His words are a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

[15 : 40] If you meditate on God's word, you'll be like a tree planted by streams of living water bearing much fruit. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd. God's children listen for the voice of their heavenly father, and they recognize his voice when he speaks.

To seek God, we must hear God's word. We must learn to recognize God's voice. And we do this by reading his word.

By studying his word. This is a hard thing to do. You ever tried reading the Bible? It's hard. It's hard work. We need help hearing God's word and understanding it and recognizing what God is saying to us through it.

In September, as is already announced, we're going to have community groups at the evening service. I encourage all of you to join one so that you can hear God's word and seek him that you may live.

Right now, in the middle of summer, you're not thinking of September yet, but start planning now in your schedule how you are going to fit in a small group in September. There are tons of groups in this church with all sorts of permutations.

[16 : 59] I cannot imagine there is a group that will not work for you and your schedule. To join one, you can talk to me. You can talk to Willie. You can talk to Aaron. Willie's email is on our website if you need it.

All right, second way to seek God. First way, hear his word. Second way, obey his word. Look at verse 5. 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. God will break out like fire in the house of Joseph and devour it, with none to quench it for Bethel.

This is an example of a difficult section of Scripture where you need to study it to understand what God is saying. You first heard that verse, you probably had no idea what was going on.

I certainly didn't. 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.

[18 : 05] 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 location as they journey toward the promised land and then settle down within it.

Originally, that central place of worship was the tabernacle, the special tent that God dwelt in that moved with God's people. But then eventually, the single place for Israelite 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 neighbors to the south, and they hated the southern kingdom.

They'd split from that kingdom, and they declared independence, so they wanted to have nothing to do with Jerusalem. So God's command to worship in one place was inconvenient for the Israelites in Amos' day.

So they ignored that part of God's word. Instead, they decided to worship God in their own cities, in Gilgal and in Beersheba and Bethel, so that they did not have to go to Jerusalem.

[19 : 13] So what's going on is they are not obeying God's word because it's inconvenient for them. The Israelites are compromising on God's word to suit their own preferences.

They're refusing to obey God's word. They're omitting certain parts to create a more comfortable religion for themselves. And God calls them to stop.

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 that we saw in the children's focus, both of the men, the wise man and the foolish one, heard Jesus' words.

Both of them heard Jesus speak. Both of them knew what Jesus had said. But what made the wise man wise is that he obeyed Jesus' words.

Matthew 7, 24, Jesus says, whoever hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man. So what made the foolish builder a fool is that he heard God's word, but he didn't obey it.

[20 : 27] We seek God by hearing his word and then by obeying it. Not conforming it to our comforts or the patterns of this world, but by being transformed, by submitting to what God commands.

So we seek God by hearing his word and obeying it. And now third in verse 14, we are told to hate evil. This is the third way we seek God. We seek the Lord by combating evil.

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

In our chapter, God gets really specific about what exactly Israel is doing. So if your Bible is still open, 767, look at verse 7.

You turn justice to wormwood. You cast down the righteous. Verse 10, you hate the one who speaks the truth. Verse 11, you trample the poor, extorting money from them to build opulent homes for themselves.

[21 : 35] That one hits a little close to home for us. Verse 12, you afflict the righteous. You accept bribes and 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 denying the poor any justice.

It's a court system based upon 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 cares nothing for truth or justice or mercy or charity, just personal profit and pleasure and power for the privileged at the expense of the poor.

So hating evil here means public resistance against state systems of corruption, injustice, oppression, and evil.

[22 : 41] And there are implications for us today 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 for us 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 of 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 the city as the rich get richer and the houses get grander and the homeless, destitute, and desperate grow?

What does it mean to hate evil by upholding righteousness and defending the defenseless in our context today? These are hard questions.

[23 : 59] But God's word challenges us to confront them and to discern with one another what does it look like to seek the Lord, to seek his righteousness by hating the evil around us.

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.

The fourth way to seek God in Amos 5 is in verse 14. The flip side, if we are to hate evil, we are also to seek good that you may live.

And so Yahweh, the God of hosts, will be with you. Verse 15, Hate evil and love good. Establish justice in the courts. And it may be that Yahweh, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

In your life, in your job, in your family, in your relationships, in your finances, in your free time, seek good. Seek good. Seek first God and his righteousness.

[25 : 14] The reason God made his covenant with his people in the first place is so that the whole world would be blessed through them. The people of God 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.

That's how we seek God in Amos 5. Four ways. We hear God, we obey God, we hate evil, and we seek good. And now finally, briefly, my second question.

How is it that God can give us life? How does God save sinners? How can he make a wretch his treasure?

At the kids' Bible camp this week, all the 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.

Our salvation from God's judgment is not contingent on our ability to seek God. God knows we are all lost.

[26 : 26] We're 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 that we might see him in the face of Jesus Christ. 750 years after Amos in John 6, Jesus says this, the will of my Father is that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.

Jesus has come to seek and save the lost. He has come to invite us to look to him, to see God's Son and to live.

Jesus has come to complete God's great rescue operation, to seek and save us from our sin. The gospel of Jesus Christ shows us how God saves sinners and gives us life.

It tells us that God so loves the world, he so loves us despite our evil, that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[27 : 39] For God didn't send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world would be saved through him. The way we pass through God's righteous judgment into his eternal life is by Jesus, his perfect righteous Son, taking upon himself our sin and our evil and receiving from God the judgment that we deserve.

The Son has been lifted up on the cross. He's been offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of the world that all who look to him and seek him shall live because they will see their sin taken and forgiven by Jesus Christ.

Whoever looks to the Son, seeks the Son, believes in him, shall have life. Maybe this evening 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. Look to him and receive life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.