

Let me read to you a report that the president of the International Mission Board sent out to us trustees and it's good news, right?

So the fiscal year ended and 2 million

And 66,251 people heard the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world through your missionaries.

196,497 became new followers of Jesus.

Just under 30,000 were baptized.

About 7,700 new churches were planted.

29,018 leaders were trained up in church planting.

225,578 people were disciplined to take the next steps of following Jesus and being a witness for him.

And what a great report.

And in addition to that, through Send Relief,

2,277,589 lives were impacted across 80 countries through 472 send relief projects.

So man, that deserves some praise, right?

And so God is on the move.

God is doing great things.

And yet we turn to American Christianity.

And it's a different story, right?

Surveys have been done, right?

No noticeable difference in lifestyle from non-believers to believers.

Believers are acting the same.

No difference in the language being used, the attitude toward money, entertainment, sexual practices.

This is all, you know, Gallup and Barna polls.

Biblical illiteracy is on the rise.

In other words, people don't understand what the Bible even talks about.

Attendant service and giving down noticeably.

And most people, even those who claim to be Christians, are getting their worldview not from the Bible, but from social media and entertainment and family and friends.

And so America is becoming more and more secular.

I was reading a book and it talked about secular and where that word comes from.

And it comes from a word that means lifespan.

So to be secular means that you're living your life for your lifespan, not for heaven, not for the future, not for impacting generations to come long after you're gone.

You're living

to get the most enjoyment out of your lifespan.

That's what it means to be secular.

And we're seeing that even those who claim to be Christians have fallen into that trap.

In short, we as American Christians seem to just be going through the motions.

But our loving God is not going to allow that to happen.

He's not going to let us get away with that.

He has saved you and me from much more than that, than imitating a lost world.

So today, another prophet of old, Amos, calls us to return to God, to quit going through the motions of playing religion.

Next Sunday, we're going to short, well, it's a very short sermon series, just three, but we're going to finish it up with Ezekiel calling us to return with the good news that God is not done.

and that God's glory one day will come back.

Well, we started this with the call from the prophet Isaiah last week to repent and to return.

Now we're picking it up with Amos.

Amos' name means burden bearer, and that's what he did.

He was a farmer, and he probably enjoyed being a farmer, but God called him to go and preach in

the Northern Kingdom.

He wasn't from the Northern Kingdom.

He was from the south in Judah, about 10 miles south of Bethlehem, and yet God called him to go up north and to some hostile area and be a spokesman for God and give some bad news that judgment was coming.

Just like Isaiah.

And that's no fun to tell people basically, turn back, you're going to be destroyed.

And yet we know his message was real, it was true, it was from God because what happened

In 722 BC, the northern kingdom was destroyed.

People killed, many taken to captivity in Assyria.

And so he had a hard job to do.

And what was the time period?

So this guy, Amos, he prophesied in a time period with King Jeroboam II, and that king was an evil king.

up north, right?

And it was a time of luxury and prosperity.

So people, those that claim to be fears of almighty God and worshipers of God, they were living in luxury.

They had their money, they had good crops, they had the wine that they wanted, they had, and Jeroboam believed in diversity.

So they not only worshiped Yahweh, the one true God,

But they turned also to Baal to hedge their bets.

If God wouldn't come through, surely there's another God who would come through for us.

And other fertility cults and things like that.

And then there was great oppression of the poor because all these wealthy people were content.

Life was good.

And they didn't care about the poor and the starving in their land.

And so it was to this situation that Amos

This farmer was sent to teach people the truth and to restore justice and righteousness.

And as I said, 40 years after his prophecies, well, for 40 years, nothing happened.

But 40 years after, that's when God, with the sword of the Lord, came through via Assyria and destroyed him.

I want to point out some things from the book of Amos that will help us because I have a feeling that if this church is a normal church, if you're normal Christians, if I'm a normal pastor, sometimes we're all going to go through the motions, right?

In our prayer time, in our Bible reading, in worshiping, we're going to go through the motions and God won't let us get away with that.

So here's the first point this morning.

Question for you, when calamities come, do you ever consider that just maybe God might be getting your attention?

And you know what I mean by that, when tough things happen nationally, worldwide, maybe in your family with parents, kids, siblings, maybe a job situation, whatever, and tough things happen,

Did you ever consider that God might be trying to get your attention?

Listen to what Amos 4.

Open up your scriptures and turn to Amos chapter 4, verses 4 through 6.

This is what this prophet wrote.

Go to Bethel, Bethel, house of God, and sin.

What?

prophet would tell people to sin?

Go to Bethel and sin.

Go to Gilgal and sin yet more.

Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years.

Burn leavened bread as a thank offering.

Brag about your free will offerings.

Boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do, declares the Sovereign Lord.

Verse 6, I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not turned to me, declares the Lord.

I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away.

I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another.

One field had rain, another had none, and dried up people staggered from town to town for water, but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord.

Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, I struck them with blight and mildew.

Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord.

So verse 12, Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.

So Amos is speaking for the Lord, recounting how

In past seasons, there's been times of rebuke, of correction, and the people didn't recognize it.

This is just the cycle of drought coming.

This can't be the judgment of God.

We're going to continue to do things the way we've always done them.

Eugene Peterson wrote the message, and though it's not a translation, it's just a paraphrase, it's really enlightening to read sometimes.

And this is what he paraphrases the passages say.

You know, don't you, that I'm the one who emptied your pantries and cleaned out your cupboards.

Who left you hungry and standing in bread lines?

But you never got hungry for me.

You continued to ignore me.

Yes, and I'm the one who stopped the rains 3 months short of harvest.

I'd make it rain on one village but not on another.

I'd make it rain on one field but not another.

And that one would dry up.

People would stagger from village to village craze for water and never quenching their thirst.

But you never got thirsty for me.

You ignored me, declares God.

Prepare to meet your God.

There's another prophet named Haggai.

We're not going to go into detail on him, but in Haggai 1, 5-6, this is what that prophet said.

Now this is what the Lord Almighty says.

Give careful thought to your ways.

You've planted much but have harvested little.

You eat but never have enough.

You drink but never have your fill.

You put on clothes.

but are not warm.

You are in wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it.

In other words, every good thing that God had for them was just falling through the cracks of their fingers.

God wanted to bless them, but He couldn't because their hearts were so far away.

They were going through the motions of religion.

I remember when

In our church when 9-11 hit years ago, and there was a great increase of attendance, I don't know about your church, but 9-11 were attacked.

Actually, another country, a group of terrorists are attacking the United States of America on our own soil, and church attendance just boomed that next Sunday.

I don't know if you remember that, all across the country.

And the next Sunday after that, I remember it was pretty good.

And the Sunday after that, a little bit less, a little bit less, it was back to normal.

Nothing had changed.

God really hadn't gotten our attention.

I'm not saying God ordained that or created it, but He allowed it to happen in His perfect will, in His providence.

He allowed it to happen.

Do you ever consider that maybe the troubles you face, the calamities, are God trying to get your attention?

Now, understand this, that as I spoke about a couple weeks ago, there's storms of perfection and storms of correction, right?

And so sometimes in our lives, we encounter trials and tribulations and storms, and there's storms of perfection.

God wants to make us better.

He wants to make us stronger.

And so He allows us to sail on rough waters.

He allows us to go through a patch where things are not good, where we really don't wake up with happiness in our lives.

And those are storms that He very much superintends, and He allows them to come our way to perfect us, to sanctify us.

Those are good storms.

But remember I said there's also storms of correction.

And those are the ones you don't want.

Those are the ones that Amos is talking about, these storms of correction, where God hasn't got your attention through His Word or through

people speaking into your life, and so he's got to do it through circumstances, hard, hard circumstances, storms of correction.

Well, that's the first question.

Do you have discernment to see that perhaps some things that have happened in your life are meant to correct you, that God's behind them?

Here's the second question.

Have you become desensitized to evil?

See, that's what was happening in the northern kingdom and, by the way, in the southern kingdom of Judah, where this farmer was from.

People were desensitized to evil.

it's easy to do, right, in today's culture.

We're desensitized to murder, to violence, to all kinds of language, to sexist sport, to a radical militant LGBTQ plus agenda.

We're descent.

We've seen it all, we've heard it all, and we just go on our merry way.

But Christ followers are not immune to the influence by the evil one.

Every day, in addition to my prayers,

I pray the Lord's Prayer.

And part of that, of course, is deliver us from the evil one, right?

Do you ever pray that anymore?

Do you ever ask God, Psalm 119, 133, direct my steps according to your word, let no sin overcome me.

Psalm 143.10, teach me to do your will for you're my God.

May your good spirit lead me on level ground.

Psalm 19.14, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight.

Oh God, my rock, my redeemer, right?

Do we ever pray to be delivered from the evil one anymore?

I think that's what Amos was asking these people to do and they weren't responding.

And so we watch, we're confused.

We watch social media.

We watch every streaming platform you can come up with.

And I'm not here to preach against Netflix or anything like that, all right?

But I'm just saying, do you use discernment?

We shelter our kids from some things.

Do you ever shelter yourselves?

I remember Susan and I, there she is.

We had, we're watching a

a streaming platform series that we kind of liked and it was just getting worse and worse and worse.

And we decided as much as it was well done and it was funny, we just had to not watch it.

We had to turn it off.

Couldn't do it, right?

Is it because we're not mature enough to handle it?

No, it's because evil influences, right?

The evil one will use any open door to attack.

And so we can't pray with Jesus, deliver us from the evil one and then open the door.

So what about you?

Have you been able to recently discern between evil and good because there's some gray areas there?

Have you been able to discern, right?

Amos was calling them to do that.

Well, here's the Scripture, verses 13 through 15, For the times were evil.

Seek good, not evil, that you may live.

Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you just as you say He is.

Hate evil, love good, maintain justice in the courts.

Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

The message says of that same passage, justice is a lost cause.

Evil is epidemic.

Decent people throw up their hands.

Protest and rebuke are useless, a waste of breath.

Seek good and not evil and live.

You talk about God, the God of the angel armies being your best friend.

Well, live like it and maybe it'll happen.

We got to learn to recognize, right?

We're living in a system.

Jesus called it the world, right?

But it's really a system

a secular, man-made system.

And we all have to live in it.

And we can't just preach about everything in the world and turn people off, but we have to be discerning.

And we got to see what this secular system is feeding us and our kids and our grandkids.

Basically, Amos is just saying, train yourself up.

That's what Paul said to Timothy, right?

Train yourself to be godly?

It takes work.

It takes daily discipline.

discipline.

And just as you students out there going to school, you're training yourself up, or maybe in the corporate world, you're taking some other classes for certifications or your next degree, you're training yourself.

The Bible says you got to train yourself to be godly.

It's not going to happen.

It's not going to just happen.

You've got to intentionally train yourself.

Train yourself.

And that sometimes means to separate yourself.

Well, that's the second question.

Have you become desensitized to evil?

Here's the third one.

Do you ever look at your religious practices from God's point of view?

You might say, wait a minute, we're in church.

You're preaching to the crowd.

You're preaching to the choir.

We're in church today.

Okay, your religious practice of going to church.

What is happening today that's going to change your life for Christ?

How are you going to be a better follower of Jesus, more sold out, more sacrificial?

willing to take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Jesus as a result of today?

You go to church.

We're God's people, yes?

As God looks down, are you living like God's people?

We have our Bible studies.

We do good works, yes?

That's great, you should.

But what does God see when He looks down about our lives?

How radically different are we?

than other people.

So it could be that you could be a fan of Jesus and not truly a Christ follower.

Here's the thing I'm convinced of more and more is that true religion is going to cost you something, right?

If you haven't found out, this is not a feel-good sermon, right?

About 3 weeks ago, you know, eyes fixed on Jesus, running your race, that was a feel-good one.

Lots of stories.

This from Amos today, it's kind of hard.

True religion is going to cost you something.

It's going to cost you your time, your money.

It's maybe going to cost you a relationship that you really kind of like and enjoy and God says no and you have to walk away.

It's going to cost you something.

It's going to cost you your pride.

It's going to cost you to be embarrassed for Christ sometimes, to step out.

True religion is going to cost you.

But God looks down and He sees

the kind of religion that we're practicing.

And here's what Amos says.

Chapter 5, 21 through 24.

I hate, I despise your religious feasts.

I cannot stand your assemblies.

Can you imagine if Jesus would show up and say,

I can't stand what you're doing here today.

I don't think he would.

I think he enjoyed the worship this morning and us focusing on God and responding to him.

I think he would say yes to preaching God's Word, to your prayers and all that.

But what if all this was a sham?

What would Jesus say?

I hate, I despise your religious feasts.

I cannot stand your assemblies.

Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I have no regard for them.

Away with the noise of your songs.

Wow.

I will not listen to the music of your harps, but let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.

There's a slide of

Yeah.

Is that you at church?

The message.

I can't stand your religious meetings.

I'm fed up with your conferences and your conventions.

I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals.

I'm sick of your fundraising schemes, your public relations and image making.

I've had all I can have of your noisy ego music.

When was the last time you sang to me?

You know what I want?

justice.

I want oceans of it.

I want fairness, rivers of it.

That's what I want.

Man, we've got to be careful, right?

Playing this game of religion, playing this game of church, it's so easy to get in routine and go through the motions where we're not making a difference.

So this is Ryan and Kristen Piant and they're boys and they're visiting down from Omaha on their way back from Table Rock Lake.

Ryan, won't you come up and join me and I'm going to grab this microphone right here.

And he is gracious enough to indulge me coming back from vacation.

So Ryan is the care pastor at LifeSpring Church in Omaha.

And you know, when I grew up as a boy, here's what we were supposed to do, right?

Invite people to church because they're gonna come, not just Easter and Christmas.

That's what good people do.

They come to church, yes?

They put on the nice clothes and they come to church.

And it might be because they own a business and they want to be seen as a church person.

Maybe because they want to be married in church one day or buried in church one day, but you come to church.

That's what good people do.

Well, folks, the world has changed.

People have no obligation, even on Easter Sunday, the Resurrection Sunday,  
to come to church.

I've talked to them and they say, Why would I go on Easter when I don't go to church?

Why would I go on Christmas Eve when I don't go to church?

And they're not guilty about it, right?

They have no relationship.

And so if we think that we're going to become a healthy church here, a growing church here, just  
by having people automatically come, because that's what people do,

We're wrong.

And so talk to us about that.

How have you seen just this thing of meeting people's needs, a key that unlocks the door to  
everything, to the gospel and all that?

So tell us a little bit about your story.

Good morning, Knoll Avenue Baptist Church, by the way.

Thanks for welcoming me and my family in this morning.

It's been a pleasure to get to see Steve and Susan again.

And yeah, it was some vacation when I got to hear that I'm going to be up here and speak.

But this is great.

It's great to be up here.

Anyways, church, we know that this world is broken, correct?

Jesus said even recorded in the Gospel of John that in this world we will have trouble.

And so raise your hand here if you've been lonely before.

And in this environment of the church, did God bless you?

And what about grieving a loss of a loved one?

Raise your hand.

And in this environment of the church, did God give you comfort?

What about needing to experience and receive love?

Hopefully, yes.

Hopefully we all needed that at one point.

And salvation, yes.

And so that's my point is here in this church, as Steve,

alluded to is that we are blessed here, but what about the world outside?

What about the community outside these walls?

They're just as broken.

They're dealing with just as much stuff.

And as Steve said, they're not going to just walk straight in here.

Not a rare case, maybe.

But how do we reach them?

How do we become

The hospital for the hurting, I like to say.

How do we become the When the world knows, when the world has a medical emergency, where do they go?

Emergency room, right?

Hospital.

What about when they're grieving?

What about when they're lonely?

What about they have anxiety or depression?

What about where do they go then?

Do they know?

Do they know where to go?

And so

My point in this is that we at LifeSpring Church, and it's part of Steve's heart and vision up there when he was a senior pastor, is that we want to create open doors and open hearts ultimately to the hurting world around us, knowing that they're not going to just come in on a Sunday morning.

But if we can be that

that for grieving people, that emergency room for people with anxiety and different struggles, and to know that they're going to be welcomed in and loved on has been our vision in our heart.

And yeah, I guess I'll just keep speaking to that, what I've seen.

Well, yeah, so tell us, give us some examples of the kind of ministries you're doing that meet needs that would cause people to say, okay, I'm going to risk

going to a church, when I'm not used to going, just list some of the ministries that you're involved in.

Yeah, just over the course of time, we've set up seven different support groups trying to create an Ave.

for somebody or doors for somebody to walk through with whatever they're going through.

So we have a grief share support group that ministers of people who are grieving.

We've seen hundreds of people come through our doors that would normally come to church and some of them have come to faith in Jesus Christ and been baptized.

Hallelujah.

And we also have, I mean, if you look at statistics today, just, you know, grief, not grief, anxiety, depression, loneliness, all the just mental struggles

The statistics are just through the roof.

It's atrocious.

And so how do we as a church love on those people?

How do we show the love of Jesus to those people?

So we started a group called No Shame, and that's just the idea to kind of remove the stigma of mental struggles that people deal with, and that's since the name No Shame.

And so we have a

We have a curriculum.

We have a support group with a curriculum.

Every week they come in and again, same thing, just they get loved on.

They get loved on and accepted.

We point them to Jesus.

We lead them to Jesus.

And thankfully we've gotten to do that several times and baptize them.

And many of them or some of them are coming to our church now on Sunday mornings.

And that's just a wonderful thing.

When their testimony, if they were up here this morning, they would say,

I didn't know a church could love like that.

I didn't know I was worthy of that kind of love, from what they've been through in their life.

And that's a real snapshot of the community around us.

They need to experience that love.

So that's one.

And there's divorce care for people going through that struggle.

Similar, similar thing.

And then, yeah, I'm trying to think what else we have.

We have Alcoholics Anonymous.

We have a group for people with

physically challenged family members called Joyful Journeys.

And then Celebrate Recovery.

Celebrate Recovery would be the other one we've had for quite some time, dealing with addictions and different things like that.

So it just overall, just being those open doors in the open hearts for people that would come in and get loved on.

And I believe that is now the way the church can reach the hurting community around us.

Is there anything else, Steve?

No, that's good.

Thank you.

Of course, not every church is called to do every one of those ministries or many, many more.

My point is it's meeting people's needs that's going to attract him to this church, that there's something we've got that the world can't offer.

And his name is Jesus, by the way.

And so

Let's pray together for God's future for this church that we discern what ministries need to be done, who God is calling out to help.

And this church is already doing many ministries to try to reach people, but particularly what is He calling us to do in this next season?

Well, the lesson is we just can't go through the motions.

It's not going to happen automatically.

And so

As we close this message, let me just ask you these questions again.

Life is short.

It's too short to go through the motions.

What will last in the end?

What will last?

It's the Word of God and the souls of people.

I would suggest that you would prioritize those things in your life more than anything else.

The Word of God and the souls of people.

including the next generation that does not know.

Amos says, prepare to meet your God, right?

And one of the ways we can do that simply is to do something with our faith.

To do something.

So the homework this week is choose one way to demonstrate to God that you really do believe in Him

and you're trusting Him.

One way to step out and do something.

I know faith is faith.

We don't work our way to heaven.

We all get that, right?

But find one way this week that you can say, I did something for God.

I did something for the church.

Maybe it's to grab a flyer or two and pass them out to some neighbor kids.

Maybe it's to invite somebody.

Maybe it's to be a prayer warrior this week and pray like you've never prayed before.

I don't know what it is.

Maybe it's to give sacrificially.

I don't know what it is.

But do something to prove that you're not just playing the game.