

Amos: “Seek me and live”

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[0 : 0 0] Today's scripture reading comes from the words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa. The vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah, and Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, was king of Israel. These passages are found in your bulletin if you'd like to follow along as we read. This is what the Lord says, For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl, and so profane my holy name. There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court, and detest the one who tells the truth. You levy a straw tax on the poor, and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them. Though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses, and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent, and take bribes, and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

Therefore, the prudent keeps quiet in such times, for the times are 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. This is what the sovereign Lord showed me. He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested, and just as the late crops were coming up. When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, Sovereign Lord, forgive. How can Jacob survive? He is so small.

So the Lord relented. This will not happen, the Lord said. And this is what the sovereign Lord showed me. The sovereign Lord was calling for judgment by fire. It dried up the great deep and devoured the land. Then I cried out, Sovereign Lord, I beg you, stop. How can Jacob survive? He is so small. So the Lord relented. This will not happen either, the sovereign Lord said. This is what he showed me.

The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord asked me, What do you see, Amos? A plumb line, I replied. Then the Lord said, Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel. I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined. With my sword, I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam, king of Israel. Amos is raising conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words, for this is what Amos is saying.

[3 : 1 8] Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile away from their native land. Then Amaziah said to Amos, Get out, you seer. Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there, and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy any more at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom. Amos answered Amaziah, I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, but I was a shepherd, and also took care of sycamore fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel. Now then, hear the word of the Lord.

You say, Do not prophesy against Israel and stop preaching against the descendants of Isaac. Therefore, this is what the Lord says. Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will surely go into exile away from their native land. This is the word of God. Well, good morning, Watermark. You get me again this morning.

For those of you who weren't here last week, we began a series on the prophets, which we're going to do over the course of the summer. And last week, we began with Jonah. Have any of you heard the phrase, the terrible twos? Okay, I can see the parents over there with young children nodding, yes, and maybe some of the young people over here, I think, I haven't got a clue what you're talking about. Is that a rock band or something like that? And then there's some of you maybe with older children who think, yes, I know exactly what you're talking about, and I do not want to go back there. Well, I think the phrase, the terrible twos, is very misleading. Because you kind of think to yourself, well, when your child turns three, they're no longer going to be terrible. And they're going to somehow be angelic, and the tantrums will end, the strong will will end, and you're going to have this perfect child. And my wife and I found out that that isn't exactly the case.

Even this morning, my little son was walking around, he's just turned three, and he's got my sermon notes, and he says, this is rubbish. So the sermon has already been judged. Okay. But the other night, my wife and I, we are sitting at home, and I'm at the table working, and she's on the couch, and it's time for bed. And she says to Elijah, Irina, my wife, says to Elijah, Elijah, it's time to go to bed. Can you pick up your toys, clean up your toys? And he looks at her, and he says, no. And at this point, my ears prick up, and I think, well, that must be his mother's jeans coming out. And my wife gives me this look and think, that's your jeans coming out, obviously. So she tries again, a little bit firmer, and she says, Elijah, pick up your toys.

And then he says, you do it. Okay. At this point, I sort of stand up and think, well, what this situation really needs is the voice of authority. So I kind of walk over there, and I say, Elijah, listen to mommy and pick up your toys. He says, no, mommy can do it. Okay. At this point, we start taking on different roles. My wife suddenly becomes good cop, and I obviously take on the role bad cop.

[6 : 53] And she says, Elijah, my boy, daddy and mommy love you. You know, just say sorry, pick up your toys, and we can go to bed. And I'm like, I give him an ultimatum. I said, Elijah, pick up your toys, or you're going to get a smack. And he looks at me, and he goes, no. So at this point, I'm now, I'm in a battle between my three-year-old, and he's winning. And so now I have to do this. And I have to tell you, as a father, I don't enjoy disciplining my children at all. It's not something I kind of relish in. I don't want to do it. But now I've kind of told him this, and I have to follow through with the consequences. So anyway, I pick him up, and we go through to his bedroom, and my wife comes along too. And I sit him down and said, Elijah, say sorry to mommy. Ask her to forgive you.

Clean up your toys, or are you going to get a smack? No. So anyway, I smack him not very hard. I'm not beating my children, but I smack him gently. And he still doesn't relent or repent. And so I say to him again, okay, you have a choice. Either you're going to say sorry to mommy and ask her to forgive you, or you're going to get a smack. Which one do you want? He looks at me, and he says, smack me.

But hold me tight. I don't know why hold me tight. But anyway, so I do it. And the second time, he kind of realizes this isn't going to end so well for him, right? Like whose will is going to last the longest? And so eventually, he relents, and he goes to mommy. And mommy's like, Elijah, my boy, I love you. And he goes, I love you too, mommy. I'm so sorry. I'll pick up my toys. And off they go, they pick up their toys, and it ends all kind of well. But God had the same problem with his children, Israel, in about the 8th century BC. And he needed someone to go and tell Israel what their behavior was and what the consequences would be. So he sends two prophets, Amos and Hosea, to tell Israel.

Now, they were two prophets with the same message, but a very different strategy. And they were sent at different times. Amos arrived, and he came with warning against Israel. Where Hosea came, and he was wooing the people back to himself. Amos comes across as very tough, where Hosea is quite tender, appealing to the people. Essentially, Amos is preaching the justice of God to Israel, while Hosea is preaching the mercy of God. And both are needed. Honestly, I would much rather preach to you this morning from Hosea. It's just a nice comfort, the tenderness, and all that. Instead, I got Amos. But this week, I've really spent a lot of time in Amos, and read up about it, and got to know it. And I see that even amongst us, there is such a beautiful ray of hope. And I hope we don't miss that today. But let me give you a bit of background, okay? Israel had three kings. They wanted a king, and they got a king. But they chose him. They chose Saul. He was tall, good-looking, charming, the people's choice. But Saul didn't end so well. And then they chose someone else, David. Now, David was described as a man after God's own heart. And for a while, Israel was at its peak. It was doing very, very, very well. But one lustful look, and the kingdom started going down. David broke five out of the Ten Commandments because of it. And then the third king was David's son, Solomon. And Solomon actually brought a bit of glory to Israel. But he did so with heavy taxation and forced labor, because he rebuilt the temple of God. And he also kind of built his own palace, and got a couple of good things going for himself. So his legacy was he rebuilt the temple, but it was a divided people.

Because what was happening, all this tax money was coming from the north, and it was all going into Jerusalem, into the south. And you can imagine the people in the north were not impressed by this.

[11:16] And they said, no ways. We're not having enough. We're not giving you our money just to do this kind of thing. And they broke away. So the ten tribes in the north called themselves Israel. And the two tribes in the south, Judah and Benjamin took on the name of the bigger tribe, Judah. And they were at civil war with each other. They were not doing so well. And into this situation comes Amos. Now why was Israel in trouble? Why were they being such a stubborn child? What were the social conditions in the 8th century BC? You see, God had intended that Israel was to be a model to the rest of the world, what a relationship with God would look like. But instead, it was something entirely different.

You see, God made a covenant with them. And He said to them, and they agreed to this, they accepted it. He said, if you obey, you will be more blessed than any other peoples on the earth. But if you disobey, you will be more cursed than any other peoples on the earth. And if you look at the history of the Jewish people, that's been very, very true. So at this time, last week we learned Jonah went to the Syrians, right? And he told the Syrians off. And they actually listened, which was quite incredible.

And they stopped their warmongering. They were no longer a threat to Israel. And it was a great time. Israel experienced this time of peace. And with this peace came this prosperity.

prosperity. But with prosperity came a class and a difference between the haves and the have-nots. People became obsessed with luxury goods rather than the necessities of life. It was a fashion to have a second home, a second summer house that you would go to. And property, real estate agents were just jumping up, left, right, and center. These were the quick, rich, get rich quick boys.

They just wanted to make money. And they were jumping up on the, they were speculating on the property price. And essentially what it led to was the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. Now I want to remind you that we are talking about the 8th century BC.

[13 : 46] But the parallels to modern day society is actually very frightening. So what were the moral effects of all this? You know, how were they doing amongst this prosperity? Well, as you can imagine, there were financial scandals. There was bribery and corruption. There was no longer justice available in the courts, especially the poor. The poor suffered the most out of everyone. And because trading was booming, people were getting rich and they wanted more and more of it, they moved closer to a seven-day trading week. And they forgot about God's Sabbath. They became sexually lax, a very permissive society.

And alcohol consumption increased greatly. And Israel experienced their first problems with alcoholism. Again, I want to remind you, we're talking about the 8th century BC. Isn't God's word amazing and relevant to us? What about their religious life? How were they doing spiritually?

Well, I want to tell you, in amongst all this prosperity and things, religion was booming. Unfortunately, it wasn't the orthodox faith of their fathers. It was the people of Israel started to mix and add in all the fertility cults, all the things that they liked from the pagan people and introduced them. And they started worshiping all these fertility cults and mother nature worship came in to the temple. And they even resurrected, they built a sculpture of a bull, which God said, do not do any graven images. They built it outside the temple. Now the bull was a very fertile animal, very sexual animal. It was there. And then they went a step further and they had male and female prostitutes at the temple. So, you know, guys would go in and they would pick a girl to have sex with. And the girls would go in and they'd pick a guy to have sex with. Now you wouldn't believe me, but attendance was very high. Okay. And the whole reason they were doing this was they thought this would persuade God to bless their crops. If we are fertile and we kind of do it in a weird way, then you will bless our crops. And it wasn't so much that Israel believed nothing. It was that they started believing anything and everything. But above all, they just showed no concern for the poor.

And even within the temple, worship became all about singing. There was all the songs. And in Amos, it actually says, it's just like, I'm tired of your singing. Your songs make me sick. And slowly, the preaching of God's word began to disappear and replaced with these meaningless songs.

So essentially what happened is these people, they were called to be a holy people, a royal priesthood. They'd become just like everyone else, just like everyone else around them.

[16 : 59] Now you would kind of, wouldn't blame God if he just washed his hands of such a people, how they had fallen so far. But Israel was God's children.

And instead of giving up on them, he decided he needs to discipline them. And there's this constant refrain throughout Amos. It says, for three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not relent. For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. So the first thing he did was create a food shortage. And it was kind of like God was demonstrating to them. You think your fertility cults are what makes your crops grow?

Well, I want to show to you that I am your provider. I am your minister of agriculture. I am the one who provides. So there's food shortage. And then there's this phrase, So God brings a water shortage. Now, if you know anything about Israel, they are dependent on their water. And again, yet you did not return to me. So he sent disease and he ravaged their crops.

And there was mildew and there was locusts. Yet you did not return to me. And it was obvious for everyone looking that something was wrong. But in all this, they just didn't ask the right questions. And they didn't ask the right person. They never went to God and said, what is wrong with us? Why is this happening?

And they carried on. So God sends plagues and raids. There were plagues. First time Israel was experienced massive disease in the place. And there were these bandits that would come into the land of Israel and steal their livestock. And it was as if God was saying to them, I'm trying desperately to get your attention. I'm trying everything to get your attention. What else could he possibly do?

[18 : 58] And he did do two more things. The first one was an earthquake. Now, if we read in Amos 1.1, it actually refers to the earthquake. And 250 years later, they're still talking about it as the earthquake. Now, if we know anything about natural disasters, when they happen, it's always a reminder to us about how fragile human life is. The fact that none of us can guarantee that we will be sitting here next week. The fact that life can be taken from us just like that, in a moment. And often when people have been through a natural disaster and they interviewed, they suddenly get a new perspective on life. And the things that they thought were so important to them are not as important anymore. But it didn't work with Israel. Yet, you did not return to me. So God is left with one final, final act. And that is exile.

In 721 BC, the Assyrians rose up again. And they came in and they took the people off into exile. And now, we might think that's a heavy price to pay for disobedience. But God, in his mercy, had warned them again and again and again what he was going to do. In Amos 3.7, it says, surely the sovereign Lord does nothing without first revealing his plans to his servants, the prophets. He had told them again and again, this is what you're doing. This is what the consequences would be. And they just didn't believe them. It's kind of like my little boy, right?

But when I said to him, what you're doing is wrong, these are the consequences. And he didn't believe me. And it was the exact same with Israel. So Amos comes into this situation. This is the message he brings. Now, Amos arrived. He was a southerner. He was from Judah. And he gets sent to the north. And he arrives at the temple in 750 BC. And he was a sheep farmer from the south. And it says he was also a dresser of sycamore trees. Now, sycamore trees, they had a fruit on them known as the poor man's figs.

And if you were very poor, this is the fruits that you ate. They didn't taste very good. They weren't very good. But if you were very poor, this is what you ate. And here's Amos. This is what he does, right? He tends sycamore trees. So he's by no means a hot shot in society.

And he even says, you know, I've got no religious training. I haven't been to the school of the prophets. I haven't been to seminary. And anyway, so he's not qualified. He's not the obvious choice.

[21 : 57] But under God's hand, he's the perfect man for the job. Because God was using the lowly things of this world to shame the wise. He used a poor sheep farmer and a sycamore tree dresser to go to the wealthy and the prosperous and tell them what was wrong with it. Last week, we learned in Jonah that God used a vine and a worm to expose Jonah's hypocrisy. God uses the simple things in this world to expose our hypocrisy as well. So here's Jonah. And he comes to them and he tells them, you're doing a few things wrong. And to me, chapter 7 is a beautiful picture into Amos' personal life, what he went through when he encountered this situation. And from chapter 7, we can learn two amazing things. Number one, Amos' praying affected God. And number two, his preaching angered men.

First, his praying. Amos sees three pictures. And the first two pictures he sees are of locusts and fire.

And Amos pleads with God. He says, these pictures show Amos what God intends to do. And Amos pleads with God. He says, please, God, no, don't do that. Don't do that. He says, sovereign Lord, forgive. Forgive. How can Jacob survive? He is so small. And these were the very people that he damned with his preaching, but he pleaded with God in prayer. Now, it's either very hard or very difficult. I mean, sorry, it's either very hard or very easy, depending on what type of person you are, to point out to others when they go wrong. But I wonder how many times when we do that, are we praying for those people? Are we pleading on their behalf? Or do we just enjoy pointing out their faults?

When I was a young and very foolish man, I went to Nepal. I went hiking in the Himalayas. And I was on my own, and I kind of met up with another group of hikers. And within that group of hikers, there was this Israeli girl who was very beautiful. And we got on very well. This was a kind of, she had been to the army. She knew how to fire a gun. And we just got talking. And anyway, you know, after the hike, we kept in contact. And then I came back to South Africa, and we started emailing. And before long, this romantic relationship had developed. And I knew it was wrong. I knew that as a believer, I shouldn't be romantically involved with an unbeliever. But I justified it to myself, as we often do, right? I've got this one under control. And it took my best friend, and it took one phone call one day where he called me up, and he said some very honest, honest, but very harsh words to me about this relationship and what I was saying. And I knew he was right. I knew it was the truth. And because of that conversation, I called off, I broke off the relationship, what seemed very painful at the time, and full of self-pity, and all that kind of thing.

But I am so grateful today for the fact that I had a person like that in my life who was prepared to speak the harsh words. Because of it, a few years later, I met the most amazing woman.

[25 : 53] And somehow she fell in love with me too. It took a lot of effort, but she did. And she became my wife. And she's the mother of my two children. We have a great marriage. She's got a few problems with the way I washed dishes. But other than that, it's okay. And I would have missed out on all that.

Maybe if I didn't have a friend like that in my life who was prepared to speak those harsh and honest words to me. But what I found out later, and we're still friends, by the way, is that he was praying for me. He was pleading with God for me to have mercy on me. I wonder if we're doing the same. And that's what we see with Amos, right? And what else we find out in prayer is that prayer can affect God's plans. It says God relented. He actually changed his mind. Because Amos prayed, God changed his mind.

Now to me, that's just amazing. God considers what we say to him in prayer. This isn't an immovable God, and we just kind of pray so we kind of accept and go along with it. This is a God who actually listens to our prayer and considers this tiny little speck called Graham Smith and what he says. Now we will never change God's character, but we can change his plans. We see it with Moses, and we see it with Jesus.

And I just wonder for me and for us as a church, if we really understood that about prayer, maybe it would change the way we pray. Maybe it would change what we pray. And I think above all, it would change the amount of time we spend in prayer.

there's just one thing I want to point out here. It says there, Sovereign Lord, forgive. Jacob is so small. Now why was he calling Israel Jacob? You see, Jacob was a man who was, he was called Jacob before he wrestled with God. And after he wrestled with God, God broke him and changed his name to Israel. Now Jacob was a, he was a deceiver. He was a little bit corrupt. This guy deceived his own father to get a blessing. Now there's one verse about Jacob in the Bible, which I think is the funniest verse. And whenever I read it, I laugh out loud and it probably shows something of my sense of humor, but it's the story of Jacob, right? So he's working for Laban and Laban's got two daughters, Rachel and Leah, and Jacob just falls for Rachel. She's beautiful and he's totally smitten. And he says,

[28 : 43] Laban, I want to marry your daughter. And he says, absolutely fine, but you've got to work for me seven years. And Jacob's so in love, he says, I'll do it. Seven years later, the day arrives. It's the wedding day.

They throw in this big wedding banquet. The bride arrives. She's got this veil on. And anyway, all the festivities happen and it goes late into the night, but then the time comes and there's the marriage tent and Jacob and his bride go into the marriage tent. And you know what they do, right? They're in the marriage tent, right? Anyway, in the morning, Jacob wakes up and he wakes up and he looks over and he's got the ugly sister. Now, if that happened to your best friend, that would be so funny, right?

But if it happened to you, it might not be so funny. But the moral of the story there is that here was a man who was deceiving. He deceived his own father. He was constantly deceiving people.

Now, he was deceived. It's kind of like the biter is bit. And it's like God saying to Israel, you have taken on the character of Jacob again. You have become just like Jacob. And then God shows Amos another picture and he shows Amos a picture of a plumb line. Okay, that's a plumb line. It should be a piece of lead at the end of a string. It's a rock I picked up this morning. Okay, let's just hope it stays in there. But a plumb line is straight. It's what they used to measure buildings with in the old times. And it's kind of like God saying, I'm looking for a straight people. No longer are you going to measure yourselves against your own standards. You're going to measure them against my standards.

You know, and we tend to do the same thing, right? We deceive ourselves sometimes where we kind of compare ourselves to people who are a little bit more bent than we are, right? Maybe a little bit more selfish, a little bit more unkind, a little bit more evil, a little bit more greedy.

[31 : 02] Well, I'm not quite as bad as they are. And I'm sure we've heard people who say when talking about Christians, they will say, well, you know, I'm better than a lot of those Christians. And you know, most of the times it's true. They are better than a lot of Christians in the way they live. But it's the wrong comparison. The comparison is how do you stand up to the plumb line? And for us, the plumb line is Jesus Christ. How do you match up to Jesus Christ and His righteousness? Are you straight?

Are you righteous all the time? And that's what He's saying to Israel. In fact, fast forward 800 years later, and we get Jesus saying the same thing. He says to them, when I was hungry, you didn't feed me. When I was thirsty, you didn't give me anything to drink. When I was in prison, you didn't visit me. And they said, Lord, what are you talking about? When did we see you hungry? When did we see you thirsty? When did we see you in prison?

And He says to them, whatever you didn't do for the least of these, you didn't do for me. And God is helping them make this connection that their relationship with Him is so connected to how they see and they treat the broken and the poor around them. And they failed to see it. But let's have a look at Jesus, right? People who were completely bent, completely crooked, and they knew they were far off the plumb line. Jesus came to them and He didn't leave them down there. He didn't kick them while they were down. He said, I'll bring you up. You can take on my righteousness. You can be straight.

But it was the people who were maybe a little closer to the plumb line. Maybe on the outside, they looked pretty good. And the closer they got, the more self-righteous they got. And the more they looked down on everyone else below them. These are the type of people who didn't like Amos' preaching.

And Amos' preaching angered them. But Amos comes very cleverly to Israel. And he starts off and he says to them, you know, for three sins of Gaza. And he starts talking about Israel's neighbors. And when Israel hears this, they think, yeah, that's good. Finally, God is going to judge those neighbors because they're wicked. And then Amos brings it a little bit closer and he talks about Israel's cousins, Edom. And he says, for three sins of Edom, I will not relent. And they say, oh, that's great. Good God.

[33 : 38] You're going to judge them too. That's fantastic. And then he talks about Judah. And I remember Israel and Judah, they're not in speaking terms. And when they hear that, they think, great. This is fantastic. God is going to judge Judah. And then Amos turns it around on them. And he says, for Israel, I will not relent. And when he says that, totally offends, especially the religious leaders. And there was a priest called Amaziah who was particularly offended by this because he too was enjoying the prosperity and all the good things that were happening. And he probably also had a second summer house. And he says, farmer boy, go back to the south. Go and do your prophesying and your preaching over there. We don't want you. And then he goes and he runs to King and he says, King Jeroboam, Amos is here and he's just causing problems. You know, he's saying all the stuff that we're going to go into exile and all these things. He said, get rid of him. Get rid of him. He's no good, right? It's amazing what we do when we're faced with the truth sometimes, right?

They had seen all the things God was doing. They had seen the water shortage. They'd seen the food shortage. They'd seen the plagues. And when he said exile, no ways. God will not do that. And Amos comes against this priest and he says, you know what? You think it's not going to happen, but it's going to happen much worse than you think. Your wife is going to become a prostitute. The wife of a priest, a prostitute. Your own children are going to die in this land.

Now they're enjoying everything. They've built these vineyards. They've built these nice storehouses. They're not going to enjoy them. In fact, they're going to die in this land by the sword. And you yourself, who so boldly stand here and think you know what you're talking about and think you know God, you yourself are going to die in a pagan country and you will be exiled.

And it's kind of like God saying to them, it's like Israel, right? I chose you out of all the nations of this world. I chose you as my own people and that's why I need to punish you more severely than the rest. You know, we sometimes think that God will never discipline us. We kind of think, well, because we're his children, that he will never discipline us. And sometimes he's a little bit more severe with his own children because he loves us, because he cares, because he's intimate in our lives. But he says to Israel, you know, you've gotten so used to sin, you don't even know how to blush anymore. You know, your conscience no longer pricks you and you just carry on as before.

And essentially what he's saying is you've got all this ritual. You still think you're the people of Israel. You still think you're God's people and you've got the ritual and you've got the temple, but you've missed the most important thing. And that's a relationship with me. You know, we can do all the external things. We can have the ritual and we can do all the right things, but we miss it if we don't have a relationship with him. And Amos says it, and I think it's the most beautiful verse in the whole of Amos. It says, seek me and live. Seek me and live. And Jesus said the same thing. He said, seek first my kingdom and my righteousness and all else will be given to you. Seek me and live.

[37 : 34] The final picture, God shows Amos. He says, Amos, what do you see? And Amos says, a bowl of fruit that's so ripe, it's just about to go bad. And God says, that's right. My people, Israel, are ripe for judgment. And both Amos and Hosea describe God as a roaring lion, ready to pounce on Israel. Now I'm very excited today because I'm from Africa and I can tell a lion story. Okay. So you see from Texas, they can tell you stories about stakes, but I'm going to tell you a story about a lion.

And when a lion actually stalks its prey, it's incredibly quiet. You don't know that it's coming up close to you until it's right upon you. And just before it pounces on its prey, the lion will roar.

And the reason it does that is it stuns the prey. You get such a shock that you freeze. It's kind of like your three-year-old running up and shouting in your ear sometimes. You just freeze. And that was this picture. And God saying, the lion is right here. He's roaring. He's just about to pounce. And he said, only a little bit is going to escape. You're only going to get away from a sheep, maybe a leg or an ear. Now as farmers, they would have understood that picture.

They would have known that in Israel at the time when lions were coming, they would have known that sometimes when a lion attacked their sheep, all they would get is a leg or an ear back.

But in that is hope. God's saying, I'm not going to destroy all of Israel, only the sinners, only the sinners. There will be a remnant. There will be a leg and an ear that survives.

[39 : 28] And then God starts pouring out. In the gloom and the darkness of all this discipline and judgment, this beautiful ray of sunshine opens up. And it's kind of like the sun breaking through the clouds.

And God starts pouring out these promises. He says, you know what? I'm going to bring you back to your land a second time and never again to be uprooted. You know what's more? I'm going to rebuild the tent and the tabernacle of David. And you know what's more? I'm going to bring the Gentiles in to the faith.

Okay, kind of at that point, I hope some of you get excited because that's us, right? Bringing us into the faith. In Acts 15, the church is having this huge debate about whether Gentiles need to become Jews in order to come into the faith. And James stands up and he actually uses Amos to say, here's the promise.

Here's the promise. God promised to bring us into the faith. And it's true of the land of Israel. Israel is back in their land. They're back in unbelief, but they are back in the land.

So what is our response this morning? Or as Tobin likes to say, how are we doing? Okay. Discipline, it's the horrible D word that we don't like talking about. And Hebrews says, discipline is painful at the time, but it produces this harvest of righteousness. And we shouldn't make light of the Lord's discipline and we shouldn't lose heart when he rebukes us. Because the reason he's doing it is because he's a good father. In fact, he's a holy and just an amazing father. And he's doing it because he loves us. The choice we have is how do we respond to God? It's always the choice we have. How do we respond? Do we set up our own plumb line and we try and justify ourselves by the way we do things and what we do? Or are we the kind of people that God has to keep on saying again and again and again, yet you did not return to me? Or are, and this is really what I hope we are, are we the kind of people that seek him and live?

[42 : 03] Watermark, I want to tell you this morning, and this is the desire of my heart and the desire for us as a church. I pray that we see God, that he is faithful to his promise, that he will do what he said.

I will bring Israel back. I've brought Israel back. I will bring Gentiles into the faith. I have brought Gentiles into the faith. I promise that I will be with you. I promise that I will love you.

And I promise that as children, when you go wrong, sometimes I will come beside you and I will discipline you because I love you.

What is our response? I don't know where we all are in our walk today, and we're all in different different stages of our walk with God. But on every stage of the walk, it's this voice that says, seek me and live. Because I've promised to give you life. I've promised to give you freedom.

Seek me and live. Can I pray with us? Do you mind standing? Father, we come before you. Almighty God, the King of kings and the Lord of God, Lord, a God of justice and a God of mercy, a God who brings us harsh words sometimes to soften us and tender words to comfort us.

[43 : 39] Lord, we thank you that you are good. We thank you that you are for us and not against us. And I pray for us as a people that we will be a people that seek you, Lord. Lord, we will not follow rituals and things of this world, but we will follow you. We will seek you, Lord, because only in you we have life. And Lord, I pray for my response and for the response of us as a people that we respond to you and come running into the Father's arms and hold the Father's hand as you promise to walk through this life with us.

We love you. In Jesus' name. Amen.