



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Amos 5:1-1

“Seeking the God No One Seeks”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Amos chapter 5, verse 1 through verse 15, the prophet writes.

“Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel: She has fallen, she will not rise again, the virgin Israel. She lies neglected on her land; there is none to raise her up. For thus says the Lord God, ‘The city which goes forth a thousand strong will have a hundred left, and the one which goes forth a hundred strong will have ten left to the house of Israel.’ For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, ‘Seek Me that you may live. But do not resort to Bethel and do not come to Gilgal, nor cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal will certainly go into captivity and Bethel will come to trouble. Seek the Lord that you may live, lest He will break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph.’”

The fact, incidentally, that he says house of Joseph simply confirms what we have known all along that he is thinking of the Northern Kingdom, particularly. Amos was the prophet of justice to that Northern Kingdom.

“Lest he break forth like a fire O house of Joseph and it consume with none to quench it for Bethel, for those who turn justice into wormwood and cast righteousness

down to the earth. He who made the Pleiades and Orion and changes deep darkness into morning, who also darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is His name. It is He who flashes forth with destruction upon the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress. They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks with integrity. Therefore, because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, you who distress the righteous and accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate.”

Incidentally, the gate was the place where justice was weeded out. That was the place where the elders met for judgment, and so we are thinking about the equivalent of our courts. Verse 13.

“Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time.”

That may be taken in two ways. That may be taken as the action of wisdom since nothing will change the situation, the wise man keeps quiet. On the other hand, that may be taken in a bad sense that those who speak out should speak out at the injustice and, therefore, to be silent is rather the wrong action for the prudent person.

“Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate. Perhaps the Lord God of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”

That’s a very solemn message, a kind funeral ceremony for people who are still living. So I don’t think I would have liked to be Amos in the Northern Kingdom. I don’t imagine he could have been elected to any office even dog catcher in the Northern Kingdom, but there probably were very few who in the eyes of God stood as Amos did there.

Since I am going to be here for, I think, about twelve Sundays straight unless the elders no we don’t want you to preach for the next twelve Sundays, I thought it would be good for us to do some more reading of Amos, and so next week, Lord willing, I’ll ask you if you’ve read Amos. So this week I hope you’ll take your thirty minutes out or so. Maybe for some of you who are slow readers maybe forty minutes and you read through Amos and I’ll read through it again in the original text. So we can read the book and get familiar more and more familiar with this rather amazing bold and courageous man of God. So next week see if you cannot read through the book of Amos and if you want to read through it twice, I don’t imagine that will hurt you either.

Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee and thankful for the privilege of the ministry of the word of God. And we acknowledge Lord that for us frail men to be able to proclaim the word of God is the greatest privilege that one could possibly have. We thank Thee for Thy word and for the way it ministers to us. And, Lord, we ask especially that those who attend Believers Chapel, who are member of the assembly here particularly, will never find themselves in the position of the member of the Northern Kingdom, great privileges and responsibilities unmet. Lord, we pray that by thy grace we may be kept truly close to Thee.

And we pray for each one of us that if we have strayed from that close communion with Thee that is the enjoyment of real life that we may follow Amos’s injunction and seek Thee that we may truly live. We pray for Believers Chapel for the

elders and for the deacons and the members and the friends and the visitors who are here today and ask for spiritual blessing upon them, upon us. Bless the ministry of the chapel and its outreach in its radio ministry and publications and in other ways in which the word of God is proclaimed. And the personal testimony, the personal witness of so many who are faithful when speaking to others concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray for our country and our president. Give wisdom and guidance to him. We also, Lord, ask thy blessing upon those whose names who are in our calendar of concern who have difficulties and trials in their own personal lives. We pray that their prayers may be answered first of all in accordance with our will and if it should please Thee Lord in ways that will minister to them to build them up in the faith and give them relief from the troubles that they face. We pray for each one. We ask Thy blessing for those who minister to them. Give wisdom and guidance to the doctors and physicians. And, Lord, bless as we sing, as we listen to the word today, and also may Thy blessing be upon our remembrance of the Lord Jesus this evening.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is, you will notice from the bulletin that you have in your hands, is “Seeking the God that No One Seeks.” The one great lesson that Israel had failed to learn was this. It’s one thing to know the promises of God, and it’s another thing to possess them. As the Lord Jesus said in the upper room discourse to the apostles, “If you know these things you’re blessed if you do them.”

Now, that is, it seems to me, the major lesson that comes forth as we read the 5th chapter of the Book of Amos. In the verses that we have read for our Scripture reading, we read of a tale of three shrines. We read of a God who makes a difference, and we also have a hymn of a transforming God in verse 8 and verse 9.

How would you like to be present at your own funeral? How would you like to hear the sermon that was preached at your own funeral service? How would you like to

be sitting in the audience and hear what people said about you? How would you like to be able to look into the casket before the service and see yourself? That would be quite an interesting experience wouldn’t it? But really that’s what Amos is doing here. He’s giving the funeral service for people who are still living.

Listen to what he says, “Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel.” In other words, the first three verses here form Israel’s funeral sermon, their funeral dirge. It’s written in a style that may be called “*qiynah* style.” The Hebrew word *qiynah* means a dirge, and this is the style in which it’s written. It’s written in that meter, peculiar poetic form. We have a good illustration of this when David mourns over the death of Jonathan in 2 Samuel chapter 1. That would give you a good idea of what a funeral dirge was and the special kind of meter limping, halting effect is very appropriate for a funeral sermon. In fact, if you have seen over the television screen funeral services and funeral processions, you’ll notice a rather doleful kind of dirge like music that accompanies it and also the peculiar gate of those who walk in a funeral procession. So what we have here is Amos preaching Israel’s the Northern Kingdom Israel’s funeral sermon although they are still alive.

Now, you can sense as you read it that Amos is not happy to do this. He doesn’t say, “Now ladies and gentlemen it gives me great pleasure to be able to preach your funeral sermon.” I’m sure there are probably lots of people who would like to see some others who worked here with us any longer and would like to give the funeral sermon but we don’t do that kind of thing. Amos was not like that, however, he was really obviously grieving over what he had to say with reference to the nation Israel.

Now, that brings us to the central point of the chapter, historically. Now, what Amos says, essentially, is this “What you need to do is to give up festival pilgrimages to the three hallowed shrines of Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba and make a personal shrine to the Lord God.” In other words, seek him. Don’t seek Bethel. Don’t seek Beersheba. Don’t go to Gilgal. Seek the Lord, and you shall live.

Now, these were, as we have been saying all along, these people in the Northern Kingdom were schismatic people. That is, they had broken away from the southern kingdom and broken away from the teaching of the word of God because in Israel worship was to be carried on in Jerusalem, official worship. Sacrifices were to be accomplished in Jerusalem. The feasts were to be made in Jerusalem. But when the kingdoms divided and Jeroboam established the Northern Kingdom he realized, as we have been saying, that if the children of Israel in the Northern Kingdom every year went up at the feasts days to celebrate in Jerusalem it wouldn’t be long before they wouldn’t yield him political allegiance.

And so being a wise politician but a very dumb spiritual man, he determined that he would set up places for worship in the Northern Kingdom and so at Dan and Bethel he established places of worship. He even made the golden calves so that the children of Israel would have an object. Now, he didn’t say that these are our gods in the sense we don’t worship Yahweh. These represent Yahweh and when you worship here and when you worship at this particular shrine you’re really worshipping Yahweh.

Now, of course, to make something that is physical representation is to suggest that Yahweh is a corruptible being and he’s the incorruptible God. There isn’t anything that we could make that would properly represent him. The minute that we make from this creation and say this represents God, we have abandoned truth concerning him. One of the things that we learned from the study of the Bible is that God has certain attributes. And one of those attributes is incorruptibility and since he is incorruptible to seek to represent him by a corruptible image is itself to deny him his being, to deny that he is a kind of God as he is represented in the Bible. So in the Northern Kingdom they went to Bethel to worship. They went to Gilgal to worship. They went to Beersheba to worship.

Now, there were many interesting experiences that Israelites have had at these places. In fact, there were good reasons why Jeroboam and others chose these places because reflect upon Bethel for example. Think of Bethel and the history of Jacob. It

was there that Jacob had his remarkable vision of the ladder that reached from earth to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. And then it was at Bethel that God appeared to Jacob again and said, “I am with you and furthermore, Jacob, I’ll be with you until I accomplish all of my purposes that I have for you.” So Bethel was a place with remarkable spiritual associations for the Northern Kingdom or for all of Israel for that matter.

And then think of Gilgal. Gilgal is the place to which Israel came after they had come through the Jordan River into the land. They finally had come to possess the Promised Land and so at Gilgal the men who had not been circumcised in their years in the wilderness were circumcised. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. So that was a kind of covenantal renewing that was made at Gilgal. Gilgal was the place to which Israel came back for rededication, great association in the history of the past, and true spiritual associations as well.

Beersheba. Beersheba was actually a place prominent in the life of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Look at Genesis 21, at Genesis 26, and then again at Genesis 46, and there is each of the lives of the three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God appeared to them and gave them promises that he would be with them. So Beersheba had remarkable associations with the divine presence and divine companionship. So Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba, what more suitable places to establish shrines so that the children of Israel worship Jehovah.

The only problem is God had said that the worship should be carried on in Jerusalem and in carrying on worship in these places, they were in violation in the word of God. Not simply an unconscious kind of violation but a conscious violation. It was rebellion, rebellion against God. Think of it. You mean to say that you can worship in the wrong place and rebel against God in so doing even though there’s no outward difference between the worship in Jerusalem and the worship in Dan or Bethel. Yes,

that’s what God says. In other words, it was personal rebellion against the Lord God and, therefore, offensive to him.

So the time has come when that which was manifested in Jeroboam has reached its fruitage in a nation that has departed from the Lord because when we begin to depart from the Lord unless there’s a return to him we continue to depart from him. He who commits sin becomes a slave of sin and that’s what happened in the Northern Kingdom and now the kingdom is an apostate kingdom. As a whole there is still a remnant there and Amos will appeal to the remnant but the kingdom is still apostate; it’s dead.

Now, Amos by God is called upon to preach the funeral dirge. They are dead, but Amos will address them and listen to what he says, “She has fallen, she will not rise again, the virgin Israel.” An Israel that has not reached her potential just as the young girl who loses her life as a virgin has not reached her potential. So Israel, virgin Israel, she lies neglected on her land. The land that was promised to her, the very heart of the promises that God had made and now Israel lies abandoned on her land. There is none to raise her up, “For thus says the Lord God, “The city which goes forth a thousand strong will have a hundred left.” He’s talking about military catastrophe. “And the one which goes forth a hundred strong will have ten left to the house of Israel.”

Just like a battalion should go forth to war and all that returned was a company. Or if a company should go forth to war all that remains that remains after the catastrophe is a platoon. So if a thousand go forth, ninety percent of them are destroyed. If a hundred goes forth, ninety percent are destroyed. This is Amos’s funeral message. It’s not a very good message death, abandonment, dispossession, but most of all what Amos is saying is you’re alive but you’re really dead. I’m preaching your funeral sermon. You’re alive physically but you’re spiritually dead. In fact, Israel is a nation of zombies at the present time. The sentence has been pronounced upon the nation. They’re dead. They look like zombies because they are reanimated dead. That is they’re walking around but they are really dead.

Now, you can see, of course, that the Apostle Paul in the New Testament speaks of everyone like that. He speaks about all of us being dead in trespasses and sins until we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal savior. In fact, every one of us before we, by God’s grace, come to know him as savior and Lord that’s what we were. We were spiritually zombies, alive but really dead. So Amos you can see wasn’t a very popular fellow in the Northern Kingdom. I can just imagine him catching a few tomatoes and a few other things as well and lots of people would have been happy to tell him go back to the south where you belong. But, nevertheless, God had given him a message but he delivered it. It’s a terrible message to have to deliver but after all, a servant of God has to deliver his message. “So you in Northern Kingdom,” Amos said, “In all your seeking after shrines the Lord himself is left out. Stop going to Bethel. Stop going to Giliad. Don’t cross over to Beersheba.” You can see that Amos knows the land very well because often in the visit Beersheba in the south one had to pass heathen territory to get to Beersheba and so that’s why he says don’t cross over to Beersheba. So in all of their activities, religious activities mind you, the Lord God is absent.

Now, if ever a generation needed something like that it’s the generation of professing Christians in nineteen eighty-six. We need that. We need that in Believers Chapel. We need to be reminded Sunday after Sunday that when we attend a meeting like this that we really and truly are to seek the Lord. In other words, going to God or seeking God is a good bit different from going to church. There are often people confuse these things and you know from your own conversations from people that we tend to think that if we go to church we’re really seeking the Lord. As you can see they went to Bethel to the shrines of worship. They offered their sacrifices. They were busy in the offering of sacrifices. They were actually in their religious activity but they were not seeking the Lord at all. In fact, it’s possible in the midst of their nice endeavors to not seek the Lord at all. There are people who attend marriage seminars, youth seminars, Bible conferences, who go to Bible institutes and theological seminaries and are not

seeking God at all. They’re engaged in religious activity and people look at them and think how nice it is that they are going to these things and interested in these things and are attending these institutions, but the actual seeking of the Lord God is something that gets lost in the midst of the activities. These are words for us. In fact, if we do not know the Lord this is Amos’s funeral sermon for us.

Now, of course, the physical side of it will be different because the Northern Kingdom was a kingdom. In fact, it was a *theodius*, a theocratic kingdom. That is a kingdom with God as the ideal head. The church is a bit different and individuals are a bit different but this is Amos’s way of calling all who claim to know the Lord God back to the fundamental thing that is to know him in a personal intimate way. No religion, no worship is worthwhile if it’s not a personal worship of the Lord God. The result is as here a decimated remnant when a people do not carry out their responsibilities.

Now, in verses 4 through 7 Amos gives a kind of explanation of what he’s talking about. The shrines cannot do for them what they thought they had done for the patriarchs. “I know what you’re thinking,” Amos would have said. “You’re thinking that if you go to Bethel you have some kind of experience that will be like Jacob’s experiences there. He had marvelous experiences at Bethel but you think that by being associated with Bethel and offering up sacrifices that that guarantees that you will have some kind of experience like Jacobs and further the Lord God will regard you as he regarded Jacob when he gave him those marvelous promises in Bethel. But the associations do not necessarily mean spiritual blessings when you do not seek the Lord God. And you think that by going to Beersheba and taking your pilgrimage down to the south so far away that you hear the Lord God say to you things that he said to Abraham and to Isaac and Jacob.”

Now, of course, I don’t think that people really thought quite like that. If they really thought like that it would be possible for them to have spiritual experiences but

obviously they didn’t. They went there simply because they thought that the association would be recognized as being acceptable to the Lord God in heaven.

Now, what does it mean to seek God. Well, in those days one could seek God in several different ways. He might go to sanctuary to sacrifice. In fact, even before the time of the tabernacle it was possible to sacrifice to the Lord God around an altar and we have evidences in the word of God that individuals in seeking the mind of God would go to the place of sacrifice and personally the mind of God. Offer a sacrifice. Ask for God to give them wisdom and guidance. And on the other hand, it also in the Old Testament to seek God that expression meant to enter into personal fellowship with him. One finds to use the term used in that sense in passages in Josea and Isaiah and other places.

Well, that’s evidently the sense in which Amos is using it. When he says, “Seek me that you may live,” he’s talking about entering into fellowship with the Lord God. So as one of the commentators has put it, “An attachment to bricks and mortar is no substitute for religion.” Back to God is not the same as back to church. God refuses to recognize man-made religion. That is something that our twentieth century needs to understand as well because we tend to think that if we worship we are worshipping the same God. That is apostate teaching. That is false teaching. God does not recognize man-made religion. In other words, the only religion that he accepts is that that is based upon his word. Obviously it must be that way. He not only says it. He sets it out plainly in the Scriptures.

And, furthermore, he’s made it as easy as it possibly could be made in the words of Holy Scripture. If we do not worship the Lord God through the Lord Jesus Christ we are not worshipping God. “There isn’t another name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,” the Apostle Peter says. Jesus himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the light. No man cometh unto me but by the Holy Spirit.” The absoluteness of Christianity is a stumbling stone for many, but it’s either that or no Christianity at all. Over and over again the prophets, the apostles, the Lord Jesus in the

utterances of the word of God the absoluteness of the one God and the way of approach to him is affirmed over and over again and it is nothing but human rebellion to refuse to come in the way that he is set forth when he’s made every opportunity for an individual to come and worship him truly through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amos is a great master of language. He says, “Seek me that you may live. Do not resort.” That word is the same word as the preceding word. “Do not seek Bethel. Do not come to Gilgal.” And that’s an interesting line. Do not come to Gilgal. Amos plays on words here. In fact, you could render it something like this if you wanted something like this if you wanted to try to catch the play on words. “Gilgal shall taste the gall of exile.” That’s the way George Adam Smith renders it. Or Vilhausen noted for his rebellion against the teaching of the word of God, but a well-known Old Testament scholar has rendered it, “Gilgal will go to the gallows” or I like this one a more modern interpreter, “Gilgal is a gone gosling.” Now, Amos was given these words by the Lord God, but there were ways by which those things would stick in the minds of people. Gilgal is a gone gosling and so is every object of worship that is not the Lord God. And so is every people who seeks to worship the Lord God in a way contrary in that set forth in the word of God.

There’s a story about Sunday morning and a church service was going on and the devil is supposed to pass the church and pause to listen to the songs coming from within. And the congregation was singing, “Where he leads me, I will follow I surrender all and My Jesus I love Thee.” A passerby asked the devil, “Why he didn’t go in and disrupt the service? Doesn’t worship like this frighten you,” he asks? And the devil assured him he wasn’t at all disturbed and as he left he was heard to say, “They are praising God on Sunday, they’ll be all right on Monday. It’s just a little habit they’ve acquired.” I think Amos would have appreciated that because that’s essentially what happened in the Northern Kingdom. They have the habit of worshipping God. They have the habit of going to the shrines. They have the habit of offering sacrifices, but they’re not seeking

the Lord God at all. He says in the seventh verse, "For those who turn justice into wormwood and cast righteousness down to the earth." The poor had to taste the wormwood the bitterness of justice meted out by respectable people who never missed church on Sunday.

Amos was not mistaken incidentally. The things that he prophesied did come to pass in 722 B.C. Do you think it's possible for individuals who attend church regularly, Christian church, maybe even evangelical church to be guilty of turning justice into wormwood, casting righteousness down to the earth? Well, if you're young you might think it's impossible, but if you get as old as I am you'll know many, many illustrations of the people who are sitting in assembly justice you are now who do exactly this.

Now, having said that Amos goes on to make a demand that there be some evidence of changes in life. And so he writes and he returns to his favorite theme when he does this because remember he's the prophet of justice. He refers in verses 8 and 9 to the god who can make changes but I am going to save that for one comment near the end. People who say one thing with their minds and their lips and who act one way in their daily activities but deny that in the evils that they commit are saying something louder than everything they say that we hear. They are saying essentially God doesn't make any difference at all.

Now, listen to Amos's catalogue because really there are some things here that we all have to be careful to remember. He states in the 10th verse, "They hate him," and when he says, "they," he's talking about the Northern Kingdom. "They hate him who reproves in the gate and they abhor him who speaks with integrity." In other words, they want no judge to pronounce a correct verdict if it means they will be hurt by it. And, furthermore, they do not even want a witness to speak truthfully in their trials. What does that say? Well that says very plainly that they are not interested in the word of God. They are not interested in the truth of Holy Scripture at all. They want no judge to pronounce that which is correct. They have no regard at all for the word of God.

Listen to what he says in verse 11, “Therefore, because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine.” What were they doing? Well, they were leaning on the defenseless, in fact, a kind of early protection racket. You impose heavy rent on the poor and then in addition since the poor don’t have any other thing to rent then that which you’re renting to them they say, because this is an act of cultural economy, they say, incidentally, we’d appreciate it very much if you would also give us part of the grain that you’re producing this year from agricultural activities. So in other words, they were exacting heavy rent upon the poor and then taking further advantage upon them. Warning them that if they didn’t do that then, of course, they might lose the place that they’re renting at an exorbitant price. Do you think those things happen today? Well don’t think about the world. We know they happen in the world. Do you think they happen among believers, professing believers? Well, yes they do. They happen among professing believers.

And further in verse 12 Amos says, “For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate.” Will you hate the fellow who reproves in the gate that shows that you don’t love God’s truth? Then when he says, “You impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them further you’re not interested in the common self-submission that should take place within in a society that is supposed to honor the Lord God in heaven. And when you the Scriptures your transgressions are many and your sins are great and you distress the righteous and you accept bribes you are saying that you have no concern whatsoever of the Lord God upon your activities.

And when you turn aside the poor in the gate and the other things that go along with that you are saying that you have no regard whatsoever for moral integrity. These are all of the things that they are saying by the actions that they are carrying out. The

courtroom, the courtroom was in the open gate of course. And one must not open one’s mouth over injustice. So he says in verse 13, “Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time.” They were rigged trials. In other words, one had to produce the money in order to get an acceptable verdict. So the judge would wait until he could see as we say the color of your money. And having seen the color of your money, then he would render his verdict. Our society is filled with that. One reads the newspapers all over this land and we have corrupt judges. They’ve caught a lot of corrupt judges, a lot of corrupt businessmen but think of the ones who haven’t been caught. So Amos’s society is our society. Our society is Amos’s society and our society is supposedly largely a professing Christian society. Amos’s words are words for us.

That statement in verse 13 probably is intended to mean that the prudent person should not keep quiet. Therefore at such time the prudent person keeps silent for it’s an evil time. Standing on principle destroys prospects for success but Amos is not speaking approvingly. He’s speaking disapprovingly. There is a time when we must speak up. And the idea that if we speak up nothing will happen, we still should speak up. And Amos, I think, has that in mind here. So to sum it all up then what Amos is attacking is a religion that leaves one’s life untouched.

Now, I’d like to come back just for a moment before we close verses 8 and 9, where Amos speaking about the Lord God gives us what is called a nature hymn. In fact, there is another one in the 4th chapter and one very similar to it in the 9th chapter.

“He who made the Pleiades and Orion and changes deep darkness into morning, who also darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, The Lord is His name.”

Now, notice what Amos has done here. Of course, it’s the Holy Spirit speaking through the prophet and that explains how such remarkable things could be said. But the

Lord of whom Amos is speaking is the one who makes the seasonal changes. The Pleiades and Orion were constellations in the sky which were used as markings of the change of the seasons. So he’s the God who makes seasonal changes. Furthermore, he’s the God who makes daily changes too for he says he changes deep darkness into morning and he darkens the day into night.

And in addition he makes the occasional and historical ones for he pours out on the surface of the earth the floods of the waters of the sea refers back probably to the flood in Genesis and attributes the flood to the Lord God. In other words, it’s the Lord God who does all of the things that affect our daily life and if that’s so then the implications are clear he can change men. He can change you. He can change me. He’s the sovereign God of this universe. As we sang in that hymn of Isaac Watson the last stanza I believe he talks about reigning grace. It’s the grace of God that reigns through the Lord Jesus Christ. He can change men and, furthermore, if you think that he can change men, that means he can even change religious men. Now, that’s difficult. It would be easier to change the Pleiades and Orion, easier to bring a flood over the face of the earth, a universal flood for that matter, easier to make the night day and the day night then to change a religious man. So it seems but he can do even that.

Now, the presence of the Lord as Amos says, “Follows seeking him.” He says it several times verse 4, “Seek me that you may live.” Verse 6, “Seek the Lord that you may live.” In verse 14 he says, “Seek good and not evil that you may live.” Seek the Lord. Don’t seek the shrines. Seek the Lord. Don’t seek the church. Seek the Lord. Don’t seek experiences. Seek the Lord. Don’t go to conferences. Don’t be interested in seminars. Seek the Lord. Be sure that you seek the Lord. That’s the important thing. Someone might say, “Dr. Johnson you tell us all the time that men cannot seek God.” Well, I don’t claim to be the originator of that. I didn’t originate that. Paul said it. He said, “There is none that seeketh after God,” no not one. “Well, then Dr. Johnson if there’s none that seeks after God then how can we seek after God?” So when Amos’s says seek the Lord

that you might live, seek me that you may live well, that’s something you cannot do. Now, we know some do seek the Lord but it’s obvious it’s only because the Lord has worked in their hearts. So, therefore, I will do nothing until the Lord works in my heart then I will seek the Lord. And if he doesn’t work in my heart I’ll continue in my own rebellious way.

Now, that’s the way a lot of people understand the Bible, unfortunately. In other words, they’ve taken biblical doctrine and have corrupted it. But let me assure that when the Bible says there’s none that seeketh after God that’s true. And when the Bible says that we are to seek that we may live and to seek the Lord that you may live and to seek that which is good and not evil that’s true also. In other words, what the Bible says is that if by, I won’t tell you how, but if the Scriptures say, “Seek the Lord,” there is a sense in which we may seek the Lord.

Now, we know that the doctrine of inability is taught in the Bible. I’ve given you there’s none that seeketh after God no not one. In fact, there’s many, many text that affirm essentially the same thing. But when the Bible says and when we teach that we are unable to come to the Lord we mean we are unable to come to the Lord in our own strengths. That’s what we mean by that. And so when we say the inability of man, we’re affirming only that there’s no natural strength in us by which we may attain the belief but this is far from asserting that on making the effort we shall find it impossible to believe. We may believe in God’s strength.

Our case is parallel, if I may illustrate it, by the man with the withered hand. Think about it for a moment. He stood before Jesus of Nazareth. He had an impotent hand. He couldn’t use his hand. He had no power in his hand. He knew when Jesus said, “Stretch forth your hand that he couldn’t stretch it forth.” He had an impotent hand. He couldn’t stretch it forth but the Lord Jesus said, “Stretch forth your hand.” That was the characteristic of an impotent hand. It cannot be stretched forth. It’s impotent. So the

Lord commanded and marvel of marvels he stretched it forth. In other words, God commands what he wills and he gives what he commands.

And if God is placed in your heart the desire to stretch forth your hand to seek him you’ll have the strength to seek him but if you don’t want to seek him then my dear friend you’re getting exactly what you want. You have no complaint whatsoever. When you read in the Bible, “There is none seeketh after God no not one.” So when we say that the inability of man is taught in the Scriptures, we don’t mean that a man cannot come to God. We mean he cannot come in his own strength. The very struggles of the soul are an evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit within us. So then we’re justified in saying to every distressed sinner act against sin in Christ’s name as if you had strength and wonder of wonders you will have strength.

So I call upon you. Seek the Lord that you may live. Seek to know him that you may have eternal life. Trust in Christ and receive forgiveness of sins. Something you cannot do of yourself but if God has implanted within your heart the desire to come to him you come to him. You’ll find forgiveness of sins. Come to him. Believe in him. Trust him. Seek him that you may live.

Amos had some words for the remnant for some did come. In fact, there were some coming all along. They were going down to Jerusalem even in the Northern Kingdom to worship. So I as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ call upon you to come to him. Believe in him who offered the atoning sacrifice that you may be saved. Christ died for sinners. He died for those who cannot seek him that they might seek him. Come to him. Believe in him. Trust in him and find life. That, of course, is our prayer, our desire for you and, I think, I feel truthful when I say this the desire of all of the believers in this auditorium that you find Christ as your own personal savior by coming to him. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the great truths of the word of God. We thank Thee that the Lord Jesus Christ may speak to Lazarus who was dead and Lazarus may come forth. And we thank Thee that he speaks to men who are dead and they come to him. And we thank Thee that he is able to speak even to the Northern Kingdom over whom the funeral dirge was proclaimed and find some who come.

And Lord if in this audience there should be some who deep down in your heart we know from other passages of Scripture by the grace of God and Christ have the desire to come they’ll find the strength to come that comes from Thee. At this very moment Lord if there is some in this audience who have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, oh by the Holy Spirit move in their hearts to come. May at this very moment they confess their sin its guilt and condemnation and come to Christ and receive as a free gift apart from works forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.