



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Amos 5:16-27

“God in a Box, or Assurance Versus Complacency”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are reading Amos chapter 5 in verse 16 through verse 27 for our Scripture reading. Amos chapter 5 in verse 16 through verse 27. But before we look I almost forgot. How many of you read Amos for today? Raise your pious hands.

[Laughter] Ah ha, there are about five or six. The rest of you we're going to have to pray for you to join the saints. We're going to give you two weeks this time and we will again read the Book of Amos. I hope that each of you will read it. I know you will get a whole lot more out of the messages the more familiar you are with the text and I'll let you know that I did read again through the Hebrew text of Amos and I'll read it again by two weeks from the today the Lord willing. Amos is the kind of book that rewards constant study. So I hope you'll read it. I know that every time you read it you will discover something else that will be worthwhile, spiritually, for you.

Now, let's turn to the reading of the text in verse 16 through verse 27 is our Scripture reading for this morning.

“Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the Lord, ‘There is wailing in all the plazas, and in all the streets they say, 'Alas! Alas!' They also call the farmer to mourning And professional mourners to lamentation. "And in all the vineyards there is wailing,

Because I will pass through the midst of you,’ says the Lord. Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord, for what purpose will the day of the Lord be to you? It will be darkness and not light; as when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him. Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him.”

Incidentally, in verse 19 that little word “or” that begins the fourth line is really erroneous and it should be either and or then goes home. In other words, Amos may be giving us simply one illustration rather than two. Now, verse 20.

“Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it? Now giving the words of God Amos says, ‘I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel?’”

That text may be understood in two ways. It may be understood as if Amos is saying you didn’t do that or it may be understood as yes you did do that but your heart was not right in the doing of it. It’s not an easy question but I’m rather inclined to the second view that Amos is saying yes you presented me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years but that’s what they were just sacrifices and grain offerings and your heart was not in them.

Verse 26 in the New American Standard Bible begins with a verb in the past tense, “You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.” A reference to a Assyrian or Assyrian worship of certain

gods. The chances are that that verb should be rendered as a future tense, “And you will carry along Sikkuth, your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves. Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus (that is to Assyria),’ says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.” In other words, Amos is suggesting that at this present time there was also being carried on in the lives of the Northern Kingdom’s citizens the worship of the false Assyrian gods and so Amos is saying when you go into captivity you will take your gods with you where they belong and where you belong.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the ministry of the word of God. And we thank Thee for the prophet Amos who has faithfully served Thee in the centuries past and left for us account of the ministry that he gave to the Northern Kingdom. It seems incomprehensible sometimes, Lord, to realize that the covenant people, those with whom Thou didst enter into covenant and to whom Thou hast made great promises, should drift so far from the worship of the Lord God. But as we look about us and look at the church and then as we look at ourselves, we sense that the pattern of the sin that still dwells in our natures even after we have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ reveals the tendency to turn away from Thee.

And, Father, we pray as we reflect upon these things that in our individual lives we may again keep short accounts with Thee and realize that often imperceptibly unwittingly unbeknownst to us we drift into a life in which we are indifferent to Thee. Deliver us Lord from the sin of indifference, complacency, and satisfaction with the status quo in the life of affluence and materialism in which we so often find ourselves.

And, Lord, for the Church of Jesus Christ and its professing manifestation which has in so many cases turned away from the word of God in apostasy and heresy just as

the Northern Kingdom did from Thee. We pray, O God that Thou will bring revival and return to the word of God. We pray particularly for Believers Chapel, deliver us, Lord, from the tendencies that are exhibited in the lives of the citizens of that Northern Kingdom. Deliver us, Lord, from satisfaction in things of which that doest have no real part.

We commit our lives to Thee. We pray, Lord, that this week may be represented in advance in our spiritual life. Give us, Lord, desire to spend time in prayer in communion in service true service in bow witness. We thank Thee for the chapel and its ministries for the elders and for the deacons and for the outreach that Thou hast given to the taped ministry and the publications ministry and the Bible classes. Lord, we ask that if it should be within Thy perfect will that there may be rich blessing upon these ministries to the glorification of Christ. We pray for those whose names are listed in our calendar of concern. We especially, Lord, pray for them and for those requests that are made if it should please Thee may there be a favorable response in accordance with Thy will. And now as we sing, as we listen to the word, may we by Thy grace be strengthened and built up in our faith and encouraged to serve Thee more acceptably.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject today as we continue our exposition of the prophecy of Amos is, “God in a Box, or Assurance vs. Complacency.” It’s an act of faithfulness to the saints to encourage the saints to self-examination. At least we know that because the Apostle Paul does that himself in 2 Corinthians chapter 13 in verse 5, he has written, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail the test?”

Amos in his own special way sought to do just what the apostle was doing. It was in Amos’s case, a John Knox kind of way, but, nevertheless, that’s what he was interested in. He wanted to encourage the citizens of the Northern Kingdom who professed to

worship the Lord Jehovah to examine themselves to see if they really were in the faith. There is a difference between assurance and complacency. Assurance is divine and it’s plainly taught in the word of God. Listen, for example, to apostle in 2 Timothy chapter 1 in verse 12 he writes, “For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.” That was a true kind of assurance, a divine kind of assurance.

But in the case of complacency we have something else. It wasn’t in Amos’s mind to preach a doctrine of saved today but lost tomorrow but he wanted to do was to rouse the citizens of the kingdom to true hopes rather than resting themselves upon false hopes. He wanted them again as the apostle states in one of his writings in Titus chapter 3 in verse 8, he wanted them to realize that if they had a true faith in the Lord Jesus it would be manifested in certain ways. Paul says, “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable to men.” He lay stress upon the fact that the good works that should issue from a Christian life are the product of faith. In other words, our salvation is grounded in the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it’s received through the instrumentality of faith. But that salvation has certain inevitable consequences, and that is what Amos speaks about as well in his own special way.

So we’re in that part of Amos in which he is calling the Northern Kingdom to examine themselves, to look at their lives, to see how they’ve left the Lord Jehovah out of them. In the two verse that begin the Scripture reading verse 16 and verse 17, essentially, what he says is this that time has past and you now are on the way to ultimately divine judgment. In fact, your future is a funeral, and the punishment is portrayed by picture of the land of the Northern Kingdom filled with funerals. And looking at it in the meter in which he rights it again, he writes it in the dirge meter in order that the way in which he

has written is prophecy made conformed to the contents of it. “Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the Lord.”

Now, this is the third time within three verses that he has used the expression the Lord God of hosts stressing the sovereignty of the Lord God but this time he adds another “the Lord.” “There is wailing in all the plazas, and in all the streets they say, 'Alas! Alas!'” They also call the farmers to mourning and professional mourners to lamentation. “And in all the vineyards there is wailing, because I will pass through the midst of you,” says the Lord.”

Now the catastrophe is a catastrophe that is coming. It’s sure to come and it’s going to produce, Amos says, “Loud public lamentation,” customary, of course, in that land even today. Some of you might remember in 1972 at the Olympics when the PLO invaded the ground of the Olympics and slaughtered a number of the Israeli athletes and the loud public lamentation that took place in the land of Israel was a reflection of this same custom that is carried on even today. So Amos is simply saying the judgment is coming, the judgment of the Lord God upon the Northern Kingdom and it’s going to be like an entire kingdom is at a funeral service.

And one of the ironic things that he mentions is the statement concerning the farmers. They also called the farmer to mourning. Now, if you’re reading in the context here and through the context of the book you’ll notice that Amos has already said some very strong things about those who were oppressing the poor and seeking to gain their land and were imposing heavy rent upon them. The farmers were the object of the oppression of the influential and the wealthy. But Amos says that they are calling the farmers to the mourning. In other words, the ones who have been oppressed are called to bury those who have oppressed them desiring their land enviously seeking their property. So ironically, the influential against whom Amos is speaking as well as others but the influential are going to be buried by those that they have oppressed, the landless surfs whose land was expropriated by them. They are going to bury the oppressors in the

ground that they coveted. Amos has a happy little way of pointing out be sure your sins will find you out and you can be sure in nineteen eighty-six these same principles are at work.

Now, why is there going to be a land filled with funerals. Well verse 17 tells us why, “Because I will pass through the midst of you,” says the Lord.” Now if you’re a careful reader of the Bible you would immediately notice something that would be memorable about that expression, “Because I shall pass through the midst of you,” and your mind, no doubt, would go back to the first night in Egypt just before Israel left the land of Egypt and the Lord God passed through the land on the night of the Passover. And remember that Moses had been given instructions that the children of Israel were to place the blood of a lamb on the door posts and the lintels in the door posts and if the blood was there Scripture says, “I will pass over you.” That is, he will hover over those doors where the blood was and the destroying angel would be prevented from entering and destroying the first-born.

In the Egyptians homes, however, where there was no blood the destroying angel would enter and the first-born would be slain. As someone has said there was death in every house in Egypt that night, a death in the Egyptian the first-born and then in the Israeli’s house or the Israelites house the death of the lamb. The same expression, “Because I shall pass through the midst of you speaks this time of the judgment that the Lord God will bring upon those who did not experience the judgment in the day of the Passover.” Ironically, those who on the night of the Passover were saved through the shed blood of the lamb that looked forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ are those who suffered the judgment in the future. “I shall pass through the midst of you.”

You know, there is one thing the Bible makes very plain in Old and New Testaments and it is this; those who do not seek him are ultimately found by him. Look at the 4th verse, “Seek Me that you may live.” Look at the 6th verse, “Seek the Lord that you may live.” Look at the 14th verse, “Seek good and not evil, that you may live.” But

those who do not seek are ultimately themselves sought and found by him in divine judgment. So Amos then prophesied first that the land is going to be filled with funerals as a result of the unbelief of the kingdom.

In the 18th through the 20th verse, he takes up another related matter and this has particular reference to those who have great assurance but false assurance, those who are complacent. Because you see it was the feeling of that Northern Kingdom and the feeling later of the southern kingdom as well but since the Lord God had entered into covenant relation with them it was not possible for them to experience judgment. They continually spoke about the fact that they were the object of the Lord’s electing promise. God had entered into covenant relationship with them and, therefore, they were safe. They had been saying in modern language “I’m all right Jack.” And so, consequently, they thought of the day of the Lord as being a day in which they would be vindicated and the gentiles of the world would be judged. That’s the way they thought of the day of the Lord.

Now, Amos noticed that they thought that way and took great pride in the fact that God would deliver them and he would judge the others very much as, I hesitate to say it but I think it’s true, but many professing Christians take great pleasure in speaking about the rapture of the church and how the church is going to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air but at the same time their lives don’t really measure up to the Christian life set forth in the pages of the New Testament. The same kind of false hope may grip believers today, professing believers today, as gripped these professing believers in the day of the prophet Amos. They thought of the day of the Lord as a marvelous day that is coming but actually for them it was just the opposite.

Listen to what Amos says in the 18th through the 20th verse. “Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord, for what purpose will the day of the Lord be to you? It will be darkness and not light.” It’s a day of judgment. You’re right about that. It’s the Day of Judgment but not simply the Day of Judgment for gentiles. It’s the Day of Judgment for Israelites citizens of the Northern Kingdom who have not entered into the

possession of those promises in which they have taken such great delight. He goes on to say, “As when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, and goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?” The admonition is very striking this the earliest datable of reference, incidentally, to the expression the day of the Lord. It wasn’t a creation of Amos. It’s obvious because it was a term that was already used but it was part of their faith. It was part of the eighth century hope of the great society of the Northern Kingdom but they learned and as we all learned that great river of souls can take place.

We rush out on Thanksgiving to see the Cowboys to beat the Seattle football team and we come home disappointed and the turkey doesn’t taste quite as good when we come home. Or if you’re a router for the University of Alabama yesterday as I was then I didn’t see the game fortunately that was a blessing from the Lord [laughter] but, nevertheless, I read in the paper this morning my hopes were dashed again. And I’ve always followed the Scotties in high school football and there on the front page was the Scotties also of Highland Park lost as well lost ignominiously forty-one to fourteen. Our hope often suffers reversals. We know in more serious matters as well. And so Amos says, “You’re looking for the day of the Lord but it’s not going to be the kind of day for which you are looking.”

Now, I wonder if Amos addressed this message to the crowds that were celebrating the festivals in Bethel. Shouting lustily, “Yahweh is with us,” because that’s what they were saying. Look at the 14th verse, “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!” So in the midst of their rejoicing, in their covenant relationship of the Lord, they were shouting how the Lord was with them but the Lord was not with them as Amos says. So in the midst of all of the shouting God wasn’t with them. What they were shouting was biblical truth. In other words, they understood the theology of the day of the Lord but they didn’t know

the Lord. There is a big difference in understanding the theology of the word of God and knowing God. And it’s possible for us to know a great deal about the theology of the Lord and not know the Lord. That’s what Amos is talking about. He’s says that’s a reality. That’s something with which we all have to deal. And then in order to illustrate the point perhaps I should say this before I turn to the illustration.

One of the great failures that is made in evangelicalism today and we can see tendencies of it here is to confuse success with blessing. In other words, we are great. We’ve grown. We have great festivals. We have great meetings. We have impressive ceremonies. God is surely blessing us but there is a great difference between success and blessing. Look at the New Testament. Look at the apostles. Look at the other churches. God blessed many of those churches. He surely blessed the apostles and, of course, the preeminent blessing was upon our Lord who was crucified and upon the apostles who were scattered over the face of the earth and hunted down like animals for the most part. And the early churches who could not even meet in public but suffered persecution that is true success and blessing. We must never confuse success with blessing. If we confuse with blessing then we’ll be worshipping often in false sects as well.

So Amos said let’s look at the reality of things. Let’s look at how the word of God judges us. And he uses a marvelous metaphor, illustrative metaphor, I can just imagine this really taking place. We can imagine a man who’s out not jogging. They didn’t jog in those days, but I can imagine, at least I don’t think they did. At any rate, I can imagine him being out in the woods wandering along reflecting upon life and suddenly as he turns past a tree or two there confronts him a mountain lion. And, of course, he’s petrified. He stops, hesitates, can’t hardly move but finally his legs begin to speak before his mind does and he begins to run. He turns and runs and he runs as fast as he can and wonders if he’s going to be able to keep ahead of the lion. He begins to perspire and finally looks back and the lion is no longer there. He stops. Turns around and there

confronts him a bear. And the bear is obviously after his blood starts lumbering after him. He starts running.

Now, he is really tired and perspiring. He thinks he’s gonna end his days in the mouth of the bear and he says a little shack over in the midst of the trees and he rushes over to the shack. Gets in it. Slams the door shut and he’s wet with perspiration. He’s tired. It’s warm. So he thinks I’ll take off my clothes and lie down and rest for a while. As he takes off his clothes, he puts his hand up against the wall and there’s a crack in the wall and there’s a poisonous snake in the crack. And seeing the hand of the man the poisonous snake strikes him. He looks down horrified. His face and hand begins to swell. His face has suddenly turns gray and he dies a miserable death having escaped the lion and the bear but the poisonous snake is the means of his death.

That’s what Amos is talking about. You see Israel had escaped the Egyptians, the lion. It escaped the Syrians. It escaped the Philistines, the lions and the bears, the big things and God had given them a marvelous Northern Kingdom, very successful very prosperous. Everybody had money and everybody was enjoying life but the snake. The snake that comes that but you don’t expect. What shall we call it? Greed, oppression, materialism, indifference to the relationship to the Lord, personal relationship to the Lord all of the other things that characterize a society that is outwardly prosperous and affluent, but inwardly is corrupt, decaying, and really dead. That’s the snake. That’s Amos’s beautiful little illustration of the society of the Northern Kingdom and I must say it’s exactly like our society today.

The things that we think are so great are often not great in the sight of the Lord God and so when Amos says will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light even gloom with no brightness in it, he’s speaking about us. He’s talking about us and how we’ve substituted so many things for the personal worship of the Lord God. We, who confess and profess that we are believers in Christ, who rarely ever get down by the side of our bed and offer a prayer or have a time of prayer, who rarely ever opened a

word of God and read and ponder, who have no habit whatsoever to turn to the word of God, who miss opportunity after opportunity to give a testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ or to represent him or even more in our business activities, in our personal activities manifest virtues that are not Christian virtues at all. That’s what Amos’s is talking about. He’s says, “Your faith will be seen in the justice and the righteousness that is discernable in your conduct.” So in a moment when he says, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,” he’s talking about the products of a true knowledge of the Lord God. And if those products are not there then we have reason to question the reality of our relationship to the Lord. It’s as simple as that.

Now, leading up to the shocking last few verse of the chapter for they are shocking. Giving the words of God remember righteousness justice in the courts in the dealing of the citizens one with another not sacrifices in the shrines by people whose hearts are filled with injustice are the things that please the Lord God. As a matter of fact, this section could be entitled what does the Lord require, like Micah’s famous statements in the 6th chapter the 6th through the 8th verses of his prophecy. They thought they knew the answer. These people in the Northern Kingdom were religious people. They were used to the festivals that were more impressive than anything we have in Christendom.

Well, listen, those the feasts of Passover, first fruits unleavened bread, trumpets, all of the other feasts of the Old Testament set out in the Leviticus 23 were great festivals very impressive they would have made the festival of our modern churches appear to be amateurish. Even the Roman Catholic Church’s festivals would appear amateurish by the side of the Israelitish festivals. They had everything so far as festivals were concerned and on top of that they had a divinely given form of worship with the sacrificial system and the priesthood and the beautiful flowing garments and particularly that day of atonement with the most impressive change of the garments of glory and beauty and garments of purity representative of the Lord Jesus Christ and the carrying out of his saving work,

anticipating all that would be done in him all of that to the accompaniment of the praises and shouts of the people and the harps and the music and the choirs. They had it all.

We’re really amateurs at that but listen to what God says about it. I say they thought they had the answer the Egyptian’s did too. The Babylonians did as well, the Canaanites as well. They all had their worship and their festivals and we could add the Americans too because when we look around in the United States of America this country and the western world we have our church calendar days. We have Easter and we have Christmas coming up. If Christmas is a Christian festival, it’s hard to find any indication of it except in the homes of some of the genuine Christians. What we have is a great outpouring of greed and affluence and lack of concern for the true meaning the things that we are interested in.

I’m not against Christmas, incidentally. We’ll have a Christmas tree, and we will enjoy Christmas but I hope that Christ is truly the center of the activities that we have at Christmas time but when we look about us it’s hard to find anything about him. In fact, it’s illegal to have any great stress upon him in our society. We have one Sunday we have advent and we have the rituals. We have the candles and the images and the processions and the genuflections and we have the choirs who could ask anything more. We have everything and we have it in beauty and style. Well, let’s see what God thinks about it. Remember he was talking about something more impressive and, further, from a people who had the covenant from him in which, incidentally, we only participate. It was made with them. Listen to God. I hate. I reject your festivals. Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.

You know that Hebrew word means I will not breathe the odor of. In other words, God looked down at the festivals which were in accord with Holy Scripture mind you outwardly and he said pardon me they stink, the stench of formal worship without Christ to the nose or nostrils of God. I do not delight in your solemn assemblies even though you offer up to me burnt offerings and your grain offering. I will not accept

them. I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from me the noise of your songs. You think they are beautiful lovely artistic beautiful songs to me, they’re noise. That’s all. Noise. And, finally, I won’t even listen to the sound of your harps, your orchestras, and all of that goes along with it. I hate it. I don’t pay any attention to it. It’s vile as far as I’m concerned.

Now, think about that for a moment. God told them to observe the festivals. God told them to bring the sacrifices. God told them to praise him. As a matter of fact, on the Day of Atonement he said, “Afflict yourselves, enter into it, afflict yourselves.” Give me the praise of the confession of sin. But wait a minute I looked at those offerings there and the sin offering is missing. We have the burnt offering. We have the meal offering. We have the peace offering. We don’t have any sin offering. We don’t have any trespass offering. It’s as if they’ve forgotten the fundamental fact. That they’re sinners and that their approach to God is grounded in the acknowledgment of their need of him. And if they don’t have him as the atonement for their sin they don’t have him at all. So God’s reaction is nauseating disgust and vehement rejection of Israel’s stately services, festivals, burnt offerings, noises must have been vivacious and thrilling but not to God. He heard noise. He smelled a foul odor.

Now, let me make a word of application. I don’t really think I have to. I think you can see that when I pose as a Christian and I carry my Bible and I come to church and I sit in the Sunday school class or the ministry of the word service or I’m at the prayer meeting Wednesday night the night of the Bible reading as the case may be, and I say that I have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and I really am trusting in him but there is no justice no righteousness no out flowing of the true effects of personal faith in Christ. God’s not sad and crying. He’s more than that. He considers our lives a stench. He hates that. Even though we engage in things that are set out in Scripture as things Christians should do and we do them but our heart is far from him and we have not sought him and we have not really entered into a relationship of personal communion

with him. We’re disgusting to him. He hates that kind of activity. He detests it. He will not accept the words of our mouths which we offer to him coming from hearts that are not bowed before him.

This marvelous 24th verse someone has called the golden verse of Amos, “But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Beautiful open country metaphor floods after water rains and what is with unfailing streams in summer drought a vigorous kind of response that perseveres in the midst of trials and indicates reality. That’s what God demands. That’s what he expects of his covenant people we who claim that we are related to him by the new covenant. That’s what he expects. That’s what he should have our worship, our praise, our true fundamental heart relationship to him whereby it can be said we really do know the Lord.

Well, the chapter concludes with culmination in captivity. The covenant people mind you, God’s people, going into captivity. Did you present with me sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years oh house of Israel? Yes, yes we did but that’s all they were just sacrifices and offerings. Your hearts were not with me. You didn’t seek me. You’ve lost touch with me. Well, you will also carry along Sikkuth your king because they had begun to worship the false gods too and Kiyyun your images. After all, worship all the gods. Cover all of your tracks. So in case one turns out to be the true God you worship him too that kind of eclecticism that characterizes so much of the society of the human race. So you carry, carry your king Sikkuth and Kiyyun, the worship of the star Saturn and you’ll take them with you -- you who have made them yourselves and you will go also over into the land where they are worship really vigorously and zealously in judgment. Well what was the matter with the Northern Kingdom? Well they had put God in a box but that won’t do.

Jeremiah has an interesting expression. It’s a familiar one. I know you are familiar with it. I’m going to read the verse. It’s Jeremiah chapter 7 and it’s verse 11. And the prophet uses just a little phrase that I think is just so significant. Chapter 7

inverse 11, “Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” declares the Lord.” “Den of robbers,” well I want to change that a little bit “a den of rustlers” because my mind goes back to the days when I read Zane Grey.

In fact, I got of all of Zane Grey’s novels. I still have twenty or thirty that I haven’t read and I’ve read a lot of them. Every now and then when my mind goes into neutral I say I’ll get a Zane Grey novel and read through it and I read about rustlers. And one characteristic of the thieves and the rustlers and the robbers in the days of the west is they always had a place to which they could escape. It might be a little shack up in the hills that nobody knew about or it might be a cave often a cave that no one knew about. And the characteristic thing about those caves was this; these fellows would ride on their horses and they’d ride into the cave and what they would do, would be to make a few new plots if they didn’t spend some time shooting each other up a little bit. They would make some new plots and then they would ride out again.

And the significant thing about them was there was absolutely no change whatsoever in them from the time when they went in. They went in and they came out the same people. That’s what our Lord is talking about when he talks about the den of thieves in the temple in Jerusalem and mind you the application is obvious isn’t it? Believers Chapel can be something like that too. We could come in here like a group of robbers and thieves. We haven’t been practicing what Amos is talking about. The justice hasn’t been rolling down like the waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. And we come in and listen to the word of God and perhaps we exchange a few words with one another, sometimes not altogether favorable. And then we walk out at twelve o’clock and we’re the same old people that we were when we came in. And, thus, a chapel or a church becomes a den of robbers.

One thing in this chapter that would give us some hope is the fact that Amos uses a marvelous number of names of God I referred to them. For example, we read, “Thus

may the Lord God of hosts be with you,” verse 14. Verse 15, “Perhaps the Lord God of hosts.” Verse 16, “Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts,” the Lord even adds something there. He speaks in verse 15 of perhaps the Lord God of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph and when one thinks of the remnant of Joseph one thinks of the expressions that are used of Joseph in chapter 39 three times chapter 41 once of how the Lord was with him, the Lord was with him. The Lord was with him. That’s the hope. The Lord is with us. He’s the Lord God of hosts. He’s the sovereign Lord God of hosts. And my Christian friends, my professing Christian friends and my non-Christian friends too if we flee to him we’ll find a sovereign God who receives sinners and receives saints who’ve been sinning as well.

May God help us to profit from Amos’s exhortation addressed to the Northern Kingdom but relevant for us in nineteen eighty-six. If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ then, of course, your first responsibility is to recognize that he has died for sinners. He has accomplished and confirmed the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins and you may receive the forgiveness of sins by coming to him acknowledging your sin and receiving as a free gift that which God has provided through Christ’s sacrifice. So we invite you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ come to him. Believe in him. Trust in him and receive the gift of eternal life. And for those of us who’ve strayed a bit from the injunctions set forth in the word of God come to him too. Confess your sin. Restore the relationship by God’s grace. Live in communion with him. Spend time in prayer with him. May God help you to be an effective servant of him in our society today and may, Lord, may Believers Chapel never become a den of robbers and thieves.

May we stand for the benediction.

“God in a Box, or Assurance Versus Complacency” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the exaltation the prophet Amos has given to his people and to us as well. Oh Lord may we be properly responsive that our savior who loved us and gave himself for us may be glorified.

For his name’s sake. Amen.