

# ***Before It's Too Late!***

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## **Amos 5: 1-15**

I'm talking about life in some absolutely amazing times. Businesses? Getting better by the day! The real estate market? Ramping up. National pride and prestige, although it suffered a bit: still quite high. Consumer goods? The shops and markets .. full to the brim! On the other hand, attendance at God's house of worship? Down. Greed and materialism: rampant. The poor are still being neglected, judges are corrupt, political officials taking bribes, and violence is on the increase. And the morals of the people? Enough to make God blush....and to make it worse, far too many of God's people are part of the problem! And for those who did come to worship, it certainly didn't make much of a dent in the way they lived the other six days of the week!

And you think I am talking about.... where? Chicago? Close, but no. Las Vegas? Wrong again! Virginia Beach? Our beloved United States of America in 2009? Not right now. We're taking a snapshot look at the nation of Israel some 750 years before our Lord Jesus was born through the eyes of God's prophet: Amos.

Take out your Bible and turn to Amos, if you would. It's in the Old Testament, the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of the minor prophets: minor only because they didn't write as much as the "majors," but what they wrote is just as powerful today as it was back then.

Amos was from Tekoa, a little town near Bethlehem. He took care of sheep and raised figs, but his skill with words showed a quality education.....(although he predated Lutheran schools by about 2600 years!) By the time he started his ministry, Solomon was dead and the northern 10 tribes had separated from the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Both kingdoms were rich, the people were prosperous, they were militarily secure, and they were full of pride. After all, it had only been a few years since Elisha had prophesied a resurgence of Israel's power and even Jonah had prophesied a full return to the glory days like they were under David and Solomon. It's no wonder that the people of Israel felt God was pouring out blessings like He had back in the good-old days.

You know the old expression: pride goes before the.....fall. And the people of Israel, the northern 10 tribes were certainly ripe for the fall, which is exactly why God handpicked Amos for the job, sent him 'up north' and put him to work. It's easy to imagine Amos walking from town to town holding up his sign that says, "*REPENT, THE END IS NEAR!*" It doesn't say much for the future, does it?

Isn't that what you would like to do, if not on a full time basis, at least once in a while....just paint up a big sign that says "Repent, the End is Near" and walk down the street? As Christian people called to be His witnesses in the world around us, it's almost sickening to watch our culture turn away from God and His Holy Word. What will the future BE for us, our children, and our grandchildren? We can worry about the economy and what it

will do...or not do. We can worry about retirement...or if we will have one. We can worry about God's creation!

We stand by and watch almost with amazement as countries who were once bastions of Christianity in Europe (Germany and France, for example) are only a generation or so from becoming Islamic states ruled by Suria Law and we wonder what kind of a future our children and grand-children will have.

The things we stand for as Christians are being mocked and ridiculed by the "mainstream media" until we get to the point where we might even begin to feel like Elijah.....saying to God, "*Am I the ONLY one left? Has the entire world left their faith in Jesus Christ behind and gone over to other altars?*"

And to add insult to injury, we as members of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod watch in disgust and sorrow as the leaders of our fellow Lutherans in the ELCA have made decisions in the name of political correctness that have left even many of their own people literally shocked and speechless.

I find it easier to understand both the motivation and the message that Amos was proclaiming with every day that passes....don't you? What's next? What are we as Christian people to do: as pastors, as teachers, as parents, as grand parents, as living parts of a culture that is very obviously under attack by the evil one?

*We have, it seems to me, 3 ways we can go. 3 options. 3 choices.*

The first choice is simply to give in, give up, close our mouths and shut down in fear of what the world might do to us. We could do what the Essenes did 100 years before Jesus was born, simply go out into the wilderness and hide. It's a choice, to be sure, but it's completely contrary to the Word of God and the Great Commission Christ has given us to "*make disciples of all nations.*" It's not going to happen if we take our message and our witness and "hide them under a bushel," is it? NO! So choice number one is off the table and off the list.

How about choice number two: compromise? You know how that goes.... We give a little here and take a little there until everyone seems to be happy. It's like the story of the Russian who was bear hunting one day and came upon a huge brown bear. Just as he drew a bead on the bear, it spoke up in a soft, deep voice, "*Isn't it better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Let's compromise!*" The hunter replied, "*I want a fur coat.*" "Good," said the bear, "*Let's talk. I want a full stomach.*" So they sat down to talk and eventually the bear walked back into the woods all by himself. He had a full stomach and the hunter? He was surrounded by a nice, warm fur coat.

God's Word will not be compromised....and neither will His will. God is the Creator and Lord of the universe. Just as Israel had forgotten their true worship and service at the time of Amos, far too many among us today stand dangerously close to doing the same thing....and suffering God's justice as a result.

It is SO easy for us....any of us....to forget what God has done for us through Jesus Christ and His cross when things seem to be going so well. And when things are going well, it's easy to stop attending church and begin believing that the source of life is the stuff o the world.....money and pleasure and so much more. And when the world around us seems to be winking and nodding at behaviors that would make God's Old Testament prophets blush with embarrassment and bluster with anger, the temptation is there to diminish the danger of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh, danger that can turn deadly if the Law is not proclaimed and the Gospel is not received.

Amos called on the people around him to seek God and live, to hate evil and do what was right for everyone.....and Amos' message is just as powerful as it was then....with one difference. Amos preached a "coming kingdom." Because Christ Jesus HAS already come into the world, we have the joy and privilege of sharing that the kingdom has ALREADY come. Forgiveness of sins has already been won for everyone by Christ's death on the cross.. Righteousness has come into the world with Christ's perfect keeping of God's law, and all of this is available to everyone who will hear the Good News of the Gospel and keep it alive in their hearts and active in their lives.

Whether your witness is in your own home, in your classroom, in your office, or on the streets of your neighborhood, day after day God's people rub shoulders with people who are in danger of "missing the kingdom." They are living lives without Christ, wrapping themselves in their own self-righteousness and self-service, all the time unaware that, in Amos' own words, "*The end is near and the judgment is coming....seek God and live....it's the only real future there IS!*"

The future is NOT going to be found in material possessions, no matter how much of it we have, he who dies with the most toys is still dead. The future is not going to come though political power and the constructs of ANY type of government. Nations rise and nations fall. The future is not even going to be assured by taking care of the planet, because in the end, even this world will go away. All that people build and all that people have will ultimately be torn down, all, that is, except Jesus Christ and His Word of Hope: *He who stands firm to the end....will be saved!*" That is our future.....and it is ours to share....before it's too late!

AMEN