

Every Word of God is pure, and has been given for our instruction in righteousness. Amen.

*Amos 8:11-12 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God,
"That I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine of bread,
Nor a thirst for water,
But of hearing the words of the Lord.
12 They shall wander from sea to sea,
And from north to east;
They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord,
But shall not find it.*

In the Name of Jesus, who invites all to His heavenly banquet feast - dear fellow redeemed.

An article published by the World Health Organization in July of last year said, "The number of people affected by hunger globally rose to as many as 828 million in 2021, an increase of about 46 million since 2020 and 150 million since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a United Nations report that provides fresh evidence that the world is moving further away from its goal of ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030."

The article goes on to paint a pretty grim picture of the world's fight to end world hunger. Due to many factors like the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, extreme weather patterns, and general wastefulness, the WHO reports that one in ten people in the world are affected by hunger.

Looking at the statistics and hearing some of the testimonials by people in places like Africa who are struggling to feed their families, it may be hard to imagine a more pressing need in the world than to make sure that everyone has enough food for their stomach. But in our sermon text for today, we will see that there is actually a need much greater than that: a need for the Word. Ending world hunger is an important and admirable goal, but even more important is the need to **END WORD HUNGER**. I: Many are starving and don't know it. II: Many are seeking and don't find it. III: But God is speaking - don't ignore it! May the Spirit fill our souls with the bread of life this morning.

Amos is one of the minor prophets that we don't get the opportunity to talk about very often. He was a shepherd in Judah at the time of the divided kingdom when the LORD called him to go and preach to the Northern kingdom of Israel. He was a prophet at the time of Isaiah and Hosea, which just goes to show how bad things have gotten in the land of Israel and Judah, and how the LORD worked to bring His people to repentance. He sent not one, not two, but three prophets to His people to preach the Law and turn them to repentance. And even after this, the LORD would send a fourth prophet, Jeremiah, to preach the same message: return to the LORD and be saved!

These two verses of Amos for our meditation are a pretty good snapshot of the message God gave Amos to preach. There isn't a whole lot of Gospel, is there? God says, "I will send a famine. Not of food or water, precious resources they may be, but a famine of My Word." Could there be a more dire resource shortage than to not have access to the reading, hearing, and preaching of God's message? Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 *Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.* God's Word isn't an optional thing - it's needed more than food and water. Israel had plenty of both of those things as they enjoyed a time of prosperity during Amos's ministry, but they lacked the most important resource. Israel was starving and didn't even know it.

They had turned from the LORD to worship false gods. In particular Amos denounced their worship of the golden calves in Bethel and Dan. These two idols were set up to try and deter the people from going to Jerusalem, which was in Judah, to worship on the festivals. They worshiped these carved images, they worshiped foreign gods, and they pridefully worshiped themselves by not giving heed to the Word of Jehovah. By despising God's message of repentance and forgiveness, they were breaking the 2nd commandment and despising His Word. They weren't listening to God, and so God warned them through Amos there would be consequences.

They say, "you don't know what you have until it's gone", and boy, was that true for Israel when they were led into captivity. Psalm 137 gives us some insight into the sorrow and repentance that Israel felt in Babylon when the Psalmist laments, *By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion. . . For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" 4 How shall we sing the Lord's song In a foreign land?* When things were good, Israel couldn't be bothered to turn to the LORD. When things went sideways and they were taken out of their homeland, then they desperately sought Him.

What about you? How important is God's Word to you? What sacrifices have you made, or would you be willing to make, in order to be here, today, listening to God as He speaks to you? We're really good at coming up with excuses to not listen to the LORD in church and in daily devotion. "Church is a bit far away, and I'm pretty tired." "I just don't have time to read my Bible each day, work is really busy right now." Or the old classic, "I've been meaning to, but I just haven't yet. I'll be sure to fix it." And then we just. . . don't! We treat God's Word more like a vitamin supplement than the Bread of Life; something that helps but isn't essential. The Bible is something that we can turn to on the bad days, but otherwise it has nothing to offer. The truth is that when we treat God's Word as optional, we are despising it. We are starving ourselves and we don't even know it.

And this doesn't just affect us, it affects the people around us. Israel was God's representative nation. They were the ones through whom He spread His message to other people. When Israel had to go in captivity in order to be led to repentance, the land of Israel didn't have the Word anymore. For seventy years, travelers going through Israel who may have heard about the power and love of God from the Israelites now heard nothing. Empty streets, empty homes, empty synagogues, and an empty and ruined temple were all that remained. Amos foretold that *They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, But shall not find it.* Many were seeking the will of God found in His Word and they did not find it because the people of Israel had despised that same will and Word of God.

Now we are God's ambassadors; we are the spiritual Israel. What happens if we despise the Word? If we take our study and growth in the Word as optional, how will we be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in you? I think everyone here realizes that church membership is in decline and would like to see that trend reversed, but how can we expect others to come when we ourselves find so many reasons to not? This is your church! This is your home! This is God's Word that we hear and speak and sing every Sunday! How can we think that this time we spend here being reminded of our sin and seeing again the brilliance of God's grace to us in Christ is something to be taken or left as it suits us? When we treat it like it is, it doesn't only have terrible effects on our own faith, but also on our witness to those around us. Like Israel, if we aren't here then others will not be able to hear the Gospel we proclaim.

There's world hunger, but more importantly there is Word hunger. People are looking for answers to their questions, their doubts, their fears, and their guilt. And you have the answers. You can end Word hunger because you have the Word. Martin Luther once said that the Gospel is like a raincloud. It comes and pours down life-giving showers, bringing forth bountiful fruit, and then it moves on. But for now, the Gospel is still here. The Word is still here. The Word that tells us that we are, indeed, each one of us, sinners deserving of death and hell. Which tells us that despite this, God loved us so much that He came down from heaven and died for us. Which tells us that nothing can separate the one who trusts in Christ from His redeeming love and atoning sacrifice.

God is still speaking - don't ignore it! In fact, it may be more accurate to say that we *can't* ignore it. The Holy Spirit has created faith in your heart to believe that Jesus is the Christ so that you may have life in His Name. That saving faith will produce fruit to understand, appreciate, and seek the LORD while He may be found. As He invites all in Isaiah 55, *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.*

We can be like Mary who, even when there were other things that needed doing, put them aside to sit at the feet of her Savior and listen. And having heard, we can be like the Apostles who declared, *we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*. Because there is a famine of the Word in the world today. Many churches have become social organizations and believe they have no use for the Word. Others use the Word but only when it suits them and supports their agenda. *But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Jesus said in John 6, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."* And again to the Samaritan woman at the well, *"whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* When the guilt of our sin leaves an aching void in us, we can go to the Word and be filled. When time away from God has left us malnourished and frail, we can go to the Word to be restored and strengthened in the sure hope of eternal life. When others come to us starved and parched in spirit, we can point them to where they can find abundance and grace: the Holy Scriptures.

The United Nations Chronicle reported last year that twenty-five thousand people in the world die from starvation every day. What could possibly be a more pressing issue? Well, there is one: the fact that every single person in the world does eventually die. How can we fix this problem? **End Word Hunger.** There are many who are spiritually starving and don't know it. But we have the opportunity and the joy to feed ourselves through the Word. Many are seeking and don't find it. But we have the opportunity to point them to where their hunger for righteousness is sated, and their thirst for salvation is quenched. And God is still speaking today - we will not ignore it. May the Spirit raise up the New Man who lives in us by faith to go to God's Word every day for the forgiveness, comfort, and instruction that we desperately need. 1 Peter 2:2 *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.* Grant it to us, O Lord, for Jesus sake. In His Name, Amen.