

# Ivory Houses & Fat Cows: The Excessive Nonsense of the Modern Christian Church

by Joseph LoSardo

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*Joseph LoSardo's sermon critiques the modern church's complacency and idolatry, drawing parallels to the warnings of the prophet Amos in ancient Israel.*

**Duration:** 58:29

**Scripture:** Isaiah 1:11-17, Jeremiah 5:31, Hosea 6:6, Amos 4:4-5, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:6-8, Matthew 23:23

**Topics:** "Sensuality"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the decline of a nation that was once a leader in industry and ponders its future. He emphasizes the importance of focusing on God and His saving mercy rather than worldly wealth and pleasures. The speaker then discusses the relevance of a book called Amos, written by an unknown sheep breeder farmer to a population that no longer exists. He highlights the timeless and unchanging authority of the Word of God, stating that what was said thousands of years ago still applies today. The sermon concludes with a call to action, urging listeners to examine their own hearts and prioritize their relationship with God over religious activities and worldly pursuits.

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## Transcript

We have come to our tenth week studying the oracles of Amos, the ancient Tekoan sheep breeder called by God to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel. The climate in Israel on Amos' day was one of peace and prosperity, though it had not always been so. It had been 170 years by the time Amos is prophesying, 170 years since Jeroboam I was named the first king of Israel as a nation separate from Judah.

Remember when Israel split into the northern and southern kingdom? Well, 170 years now since Jeroboam I was the first king of Israel. Jeroboam I, desiring to keep the people of the north content, actually established temples in the northern kingdom in Bethel and Dan. And he did this to keep his citizens from needing to travel south for the feast days.

The motivation of it was basically, well, we want to make it convenient for our people here in the north. They're not going down three times a year as they need to to go down to Jerusalem, so we'll set up the temples here in the north. And he also set up golden camps in those temples, again, in order to enhance what he believed was the worship of God.

During the 170 years between Jeroboam I and Jeroboam II, who was the king during the time of Amos, we had gone through 13 kings, and not one of those 13 kings ever sought to remove the golden calves from the temple. Though they had great prophets, though they had men speak to them and warn them, men the likes of Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, and Amos. Through civil war, through internal divisions, through wars with their enemies, they had a rapid turnover in their leadership.

Through murder and slaughter and wickedness, God was warning and warning and warning and warning in word and in providence, in circumstances, but few would listen and repent. About 30 years before Amos comes on the scene in Israel, the prophet Elisha is on his deathbed, and he prophesies to the king of Israel that they'll have victory over Syria. And at that time, the king was Jehoash, and under Jehoash, Israel did indeed have victory over Syria and began to secure her borders.

Ten years after Israel's victory over Syria, Jeroboam II is made king, and though the Scripture says of him, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, which, by the way, it says of all 13 kings, they did evil in the sight of the Lord, but despite this, the Lord grants some measure of success to Jeroboam II as he completely restores the borders of Israel. Their borders are restored and there's a return to material prosperity in the land at the time of Jeroboam II. But, what they counted as a sign of God's favor was nothing of the sort.

Rather than that, their very prosperity became the thing that led them into further sin and more sin until we've seen that they've committed the proverbial fourth transgression, upon which God says enough is enough. Though prosperous, Israel became more sinful. We have seen they have set aside the law of Moses.

They've taken advantage of the needy. They've profaned the holy. They were immoral in their deeds, even in the temple.

They ignored the loving grace of God, and they despised His prophets. And they did so all the while under the guise of worshiping God. They did so in their houses of worship with great visible zeal, with great noise, with great song, yet they continued in their rebellion.

It's in the midst of the reign of Jeroboam that Amos comes on the scene in 760 BC. Amos we have seen has come as a covenant messenger, announcing that God would soon visit His people in covenantal justice. That though He is a patient God, that He would soon fulfill His part of the covenant that the people ratified of their own will on Sinai, saying that we will obey, we will do all that which the Lord has commanded.

And now God is fulfilling His part of the covenant because they've broken theirs. And they find themselves under the curse of God rather than His blessing. And we found this last time in every way, God has turned Himself against Israel.

They were relying on the fact that they were the elect of God, but their physical election and their place of privilege as a nation only made them more responsible. As God said in Amos 3, verse 2, He says, You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.

They were resting on their laurels. We're God's chosen people. We're the church.

We're God's people. But yet they found themselves, in the words of a modern songwriter, Keith Green, asleep in the light. The church, rather than a place to hear God's Word, to be provoked to repentance, to grow in their love for God and become a place of comfort and luxury and even wanton pleasure.

And the church which God ordained, God ordained to be the outward manifestation of His glory became the very place where God's name was being defiled. And this has happened throughout history. Throughout history, the same thing.

Lutheran scholar, John Montgomery, in his 1970 publication entitled, *Damned Through the Church*, wrote, I've heard people say very often, it's better to go to church than not to go. It can't hurt you. Well, my friend, it can hurt you.

The church can be a place of accelerated salvation, but it can also be a place of accelerated damnation. Throughout history, as I said, this has been a pattern. Even from the time of Augustine, Bishop of North Africa, had to rebuke members of his congregation because they were frequenting idols.

He says this, Just because I frequent idols and get advice from visionaries and fortune tellers, does not mean that I've left the church. I am a Christian. Of course, he was saying that sarcastically.

The problem escalated when the church was formally recognized in the fourth century. Persecution had kept the church fairly pure. There were no fair-weather Christians who would dare join a persecuted church.

But once the church became accepted and embraced by the state, the separation between the invisible and the visible church became less evident as there was mixing. Later in medieval Europe, the church was very grand, very impressive in its authority, in its majesty, in its architecture. It was beautiful on the outside.

But inside, it was filled with corruption the likes of 8th century B.C. Israel. In the 18th century, there was no better. The church had become gutted with unbelief due to the rise of rationalism and deism.

In the 19th century, it was characterized by dead orthodoxy. And then in the 20th century, that downgrade which Spurgeon spoke about over a hundred years ago, the downgrade had continued. The dumbing down of doctrine.

The dumbing down of preaching until we arrive here in the 21st century with the megachurch where you can literally have it your way. You can go to the church and order at a Burger King. It might be found operative on a church campus.

Today, it's not uncommon to hear from God's people about God's love being greater than His holiness. God's love is so great that His holiness is not important. I'm saved by my faith.

I made a decision to follow Jesus one day. It makes no difference how I live. I'm good to go when I die.

I'm safe. I'm a person of the times. I can no longer believe that you have to be a Christian to be saved.

Who can believe that in a pluralistic society like ours? But it doesn't mean that I'm not a Christian. Or in a social realm. I have to do business as a businessman.

I have to do business the way they run businesses nowadays. But that doesn't mean I'm not a Christian. Or even worse, hey, look, the church is a business.

And in order to be a business, in order to be successful, we have to run it like a business. There's supply and demand. And we need to do whatever is necessary to make sure the cash flow keeps coming in.

But that doesn't mean we're not Christian. To this day, just like Israel in Amos' day, we're faced with the reality of a visible church that is filled with unbelievers who think that God must be their friend because they've made some kind of profession in some way, whether they walked an aisle, were baptized or whatever, when in fact, the reality is God is their enemy. There are multitudes today who go to church supposing that just being part of a church will keep them from the judgment of God.

Surely they think being in a church must put God on my side. God must be pleased when He sees me going to church. They'll freely talk about their churchgoing, how it makes them better people.

I'm better because I go to church. Or it reminds me of higher things. It makes me feel connected with God.

The truth is, when you boil it down, many people go to church for nothing more than selfish reasons. They don't belong to a church because it's the family of God who has God as their Father, because they desire to hear from Him and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, because they desire to bow their knee to the Savior in worship, or even because they consider salvation to be that important and living for Christ to be that important. The church is just part of many people's lives because it makes them feel better about themselves.

It appeases their conscience. It gives them a place to display their good works before other men. And listen, to ignore this or to deny the certainty of this is to deny the Scripture that says, many will say, Lord, Lord, while they're damned through the church.

When Jesus says it's better in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than the Jews of His day, He's saying that Sodom and Gomorrah will be punished in the judgment for their sins. But, He's also clearly saying that the visible people of God, what we can say today, the church, who hear much of Christ, but refuse to follow Him will be judged more severely. And so we arrive today at verse 13 of Amos 3. We've come in the covenant lawsuit now of God against Israel to the place where now the testimony is being brought forth concerning the guilt of the accused.

concerning the guilt of the accused. As we go through the text, you will see how Israel had become complacent, relying on the security of their houses in two ways, in two realms. First, their religious houses of worship on the one side, but also, their secular homes, their material homes.

These were the two towers. Their religious homes and their secular homes. The two towers to whom Israel ran.

Their homes and their temples. Their prosperity and their religion. And they went merrily on their way, running into these two towers, climbing the heights of prosperity, never imagining that in the end, all that they had attained was going to come to an end just around the corner.

As we've seen within 40 years, less than 40 years, less than one generation from the time Amos is prophesying, the people of Israel will be hopelessly dragged off to serve as slaves of the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C. God would not be mocked. What Israel has sown, they will soon reap. So turn to Amos chapter 3, where we'll read, beginning in verse 13, "'Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,' says the Lord God, the God of hosts, that in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions, I will also visit destruction on the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.

I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house. The houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end.'" Chapter 4. "'Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who have on the

mountains of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, bring wine, let us drink. The Lord God has sworn in His holiness, behold, the days shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.

You will go out through broken walls, each one straight ahead of her, and you will be cast into Harmon, says the Lord. Come to Bethel and transgress at Gilgal. Multiply transgressions.

Bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven. Proclaim and announce the free will offerings.

For this you love, you children of Israel, says the Lord." Again, we've come to the place now where God's covenant lawsuit against Israel has come to the place where the testimony of the guilt of the accused is announced. And that's what we see in these verses. "'Hear and testify,' verse 13.

"Hear and testify against the house of Jacob." And perhaps God uses here the word house of Jacob to describe Israel, maybe to remind the people of the glorious event that took place in that very city that He's prophesying. Remember where He's prophesying? Bethel. Well, Bethel, recall, received its name when the patriarch Jacob found a stone pillow and fell asleep and had a dream of a ladder from heaven.

And God spoke to Jacob in that dream, reiterating His covenant with Abraham. And when Jacob arose, He proclaimed, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." And then He took that stone pillow and He made a pillar and He called the place Bethel, meaning house of God. But, as probably always happens, places associated with God's glory and God's name, when placed into the hands of generations of men, end up becoming harlots and dens of thieves.

And that's exactly what happened around 930 B.C. when Jeroboam built that temple in Bethel and erected the golden calves. Now, I alluded to this in the introduction, but be assured, when Jeroboam was building these golden calves in the temple of Bethel, he was not advocating the worship of false gods other than Yahweh. What he was doing was trying to reduce God down to a form that people can see and understand.

An understandable form. Something with which people could relate. So they forget about the second commandment and they're more concerned about relevance.

Jeroboam's rationale is this, that if the people just had an image with which they could relate, then they can actually enhance the worship of Yahweh. This is no different than when the children of Israel came through the wilderness, and Aaron built that first golden calf in the wilderness. What did he say? He didn't say, behold the golden calf.

He said, behold Yahweh, the Lord your God, who delivered you out of the land of Egypt. Sometimes people think idolatry is just the worship of multiple images or other gods. The sin of idolatry is actually part and parcel with the reduction of God into an image of man.

It's the dumbing down of God. It's making Him more understandable, more relatable, more relevant. And that was what Jeroboam's intention was.

The seeker-friendly church is notorious for this. Set aside doctrine. Dumb it down.

Make people comfortable. I mentioned last time how the seeker-friendly churches have recently come to the revelation that realizing the error of their folly, so to speak, that their methodology had not produced any mature disciples in their own words, and that they were going to now sit down in their own words with a blank sheet of paper and rethink the way to do church. But I have it on some pretty good sources that instead of repenting and turning to a Scripture-based reformation of the church, rather the new way to do church now is going to be based upon the post-modern idea of the emergent church.

What is the emergent church? Some of you are familiar with it, but it's based very much on atmosphere. They may even use the term old paths because you'll find the resurrection of holy beads and icons and incense all to create an atmosphere that's conducive for worship. Proponents of the emerging church emphasize the need to reach generation Y because generation Y craves authenticity and they want to return to an ancient faith.

So one will find in the emergent church, among other things, ancient artwork projected on the walls to help set a mood. Pictures of Jesus all over to keep things Christ-focused. That's in their words.

Tapestries in the room to give the feeling of a tabernacle atmosphere. Looping photos of nature scenes. And above all, non-authoritative and conversational preaching.

This is a modern Bethel. Changing the way God prescribes in His Word in order to please people. This is modern Bethel.

Let the modern evangelical church take heed. You know, the very ones who would accuse the Catholic church of idolatry because of the many images and as much as an abomination as that is. You too, evangelical church, are creating a God who is palatable for your people.

You who have denied the transcendency of God, spurned His holiness, made Him into your homeboy. You who would quickly denounce the worldly teachings of evolution as wicked as that teaching is. They are in the same way exchanging the truth of God for a lie and worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator.

Why should, I ask, why should God not sweep away the western churches that have not upheld the Word of God alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, to the glory of God alone? Why should our pseudo-Christian culture with its mindless worship and endless obsession with sensual pleasure and money and numbers and buildings and entertainment and atmosphere be any more durable than Israel was? Church of God, listen to me. The message comes to you first. Judgment, we are told in the Scripture, begins in the house of God.

Before the final judgment of the world, there is going to be, the Scripture says, an apostasy of the visible people of God. A judgment in the house of God. Can we not see it happening? Let not the security of western Christianity fool you.

Let it not lull you to sleep. There is a lion roaring. That trap is about to snap shut on the modern church.

Listen again to the words of God. The solemnity with which He says in v. 13, Hear and testify against the house of Jacob, says the Lord God, the God of hosts. Three repetitions of the name of God.

See how Amos, he first uses the name of God, Yahweh. The God of Moses. The God of Sinai.

The God of Abraham. The God of Covenant. But He's also Elohim subaoth.

The God of hosts. The Captain of the heavenly armies. Hear what He says.

That in this day, I punish Israel for their transgression. I will also visit destruction on the altars of Bethel, on the horns of the altar. And the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.

God here is pronouncing first. We're going to see the judgment coming upon the material, the nation. But He's judging first the house of the Lord here.

The horns of the altar. Remember what they were? The four points of the flat altar, which is where the animal was slain and the blood was spilt out over that altar. That flat top.

People, when they were seeking refuge, would run into the temple and they'd grab the horns of the altar. Well, the horns of this altar that He was talking about, the altar that He was destroying, that God was pouring out judgment upon, was never an appropriate altar. Anyway, the horns of the altar at Bethel never legitimately bore the blood of any legitimate, truly atoning sacrifice.

Because God never ordained that altar to be used for that purpose. So it was a counterfeit altar. An altar that was not prescribed by God that God was judging finally.

After now, well, it's 170 years, another 40 years. It goes to show the patience of God. The sacrifices made on that altar had no effect.

They did not truly atone. At best, they made the people there feel better about themselves. It gave them a false sense of security.

And I ask again, is this not what has happened in the modern church? The modern secret-friendly, purpose-driven, whatever you want to call it. Have they not built an altar which God has not prescribed? And so, as they examine the fruit of their salvation, which they're doing now, no wonder there's no fruit. No wonder there's no mature disciples.

Because it was ineffective because it was not what God prescribed. In the destruction of Bethel's altar, a counterfeit was being destroyed and God will destroy all such altars that provide a false assurance of atonement. Even to this day.

Their altar's destruction, what does it mean for the people? Well, people no longer have a place to go. Even that which was a false security is being taken away from them. Even the false security is being removed.

And also, they have no longer a place to grow, to get refuge, to grab hold of, no place to go. And these images forewarn the impending doom upon Israel's religious security. Remember the two towers.

Well, now one is down. One is fallen. Likewise, today we see the judgment of God upon many churches as Bibles are taken out of churches.

They publish the Scripture verses in the announcements for convenience. We want it to be convenient. We don't want you to have to lug around this heavy thing.

So we'll put the Scripture verses we're using right here for you. Convenience. Just like Jeroboam.

Pulpits are now being removed and replaced with stools. So that the man of God sits on a stool in front and has a conversation with you all. Sermons replaced with conversations.

Pulpits with stools. I ask, is God stripping the altars? Is He taking away from the church the only refuge and place where the atonement can be found, namely, the Word of God? Just like 28 centuries ago, the church today is a bustling place, isn't it? There's much activity. When you read about here in Amos, you see a lot of activity.

Much excitement. Much entertainment. But no heart for God and His Word.

Understand, these are church-going people. Look at Amos 4, verses 4 and 5. And that's kind of the way we're attacking the text. We'll look at the religious tower first, which are the first two verses.

And the last two verses of the text. And then we'll go to the secular tower second, which are the middle four verses. But look at Amos 4, verses 4 and 5. Come to Bethel and transgress.

And God is being intentionally sarcastic here. Come to Bethel and transgress. At Gilgal, multiply transgression.

Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven. Proclaim and announce the free will offerings.

For this you love, you children of Israel, says the Lord God. See, they're flocking to the churches. They're flocking there.

They're more than paying their tithes. They're paying their offerings every three days. There's much ritual, impressive shows, but there is a complete lack of sincere and heartfelt repentance.

There's no righteousness here. They use God's name in vain by living and standing for things that He hates, not caring for that which He cares for. And the world might as well be their teachers when it comes to mercy and justice.

Forget about it. Listen how extravagant, listen how over the top. This is a worship experience here that they're experiencing that the biggest mega-church would covet this kind of worship experience.

The tithe, which under God's instruction was to be brought every three years, is brought every three days instead. And by the way, some of your versions say three years in verse 4. This is not a variant in the text. The text is exactly the same in Hebrew, but it's a variant of translation.

The best translation, yamim, is days. Three days, not three years. So they're multiplying their tithes.

They're having three offerings of service. They also offer individual sacrifices more frequently than the law. Every morning bringing their sacrifices.

But the individuals were told, once a year bring your individual sacrifice. They're doing it every morning. And this only served to increase their rebellion because they didn't obey the heart of the law.

There was no love for God. And as a result, there was no love for their neighbor. And to this day, it's the same thing.

People love religious activity. They're hoping it'll be a smoke screen for sinful hearts. They're hoping it'll be a smoke screen for sinful hearts.

Loving religious duty. And you know what? They may fool others, and they may even fool themselves. Because you know what? Such activity does make one feel better about himself.

But it will never, never fool God. They did what they did under compulsion to be seen by men, to be seen by God, to get a pat on the back from men, a pat on the back from God. They acted under compulsion when they should have been acting from a grateful heart.

They did what they did just to be involved in religious activity. And let me caution you, brothers and sisters, service is not religious activity. Not mere religious activity.

Giving should never be mere compulsion. Religious activity. I'm dropping my tithe in the box.

I'm doing what I do because this is what I do. What you give and what you do as a Christian is not as a slave. And I would caution you.

I would say, even go to far as to say, stop serving rather than serve with any other motive but the gratefulness, being grateful to God. You say, isn't it my duty? Don't I have a duty to serve? Yes, we do have a duty to serve. But that duty is one of delight.

For the Christian, it's not an obligation to have to serve. Oh, I've got to get up and serve. I've got to get up and do my thing now.

If you're serving out of obligation or guilt, best to stop. You say, well, aren't we obliged to God? Yes, we are obliged to God. The Scripture says in Romans 12.2, but it makes it clear that it is your reasonable service.

It's your reasonable response in light of all that Christ has done for you. Offer your bodies a living sacrifice. It's your reasonable act of love because of everything that Christ has done.

So, our response is to serve Him out of love. Yet the church considers holiness and service a compulsory act rather than a flowing out of a grateful spirit. And understand this, brethren, about holiness.

Holiness is a fruit of being in the presence of God. It's not about what you do. It's about who you are.

Likewise, your service is not about what you do. It's who you are. As a Christian, you want to serve.

It's your greatest delight to serve. In fact, there's little else that you wish to do. Now, Israel loved their religious activity, but they did not love the Lord.

So they couldn't love their neighbors. They loved their traditions. They loved their gatherings.

But they did not love the people around them, the poor, oppressed neighbors. Also in verse 5, it says, they bragged about their free will offerings. They bragged.

That was their act of righteousness to be seen by men. Look at verse 5. Proclaim and announce the free will offerings for this you love. Again, how similar to today, isn't that? How little things change as you find the quite regular practice in churches of publishing the name, of its giving members on plaques, or on the ends of pews.

There are churches that are actually raising money by capitalizing on people's covetousness, or their desire for fame. I want my name. I want to see my name up there.

They promise to engrave the donor's name on a plaque or a part of the building if they donate. And you know, I turn to Matthew 6 because this is so clear in Scripture. Jesus could not make it more clear than He does.

And I was driving in Newark just the other day and I passed a church, and right there engraved in stone is the church's name. And right there in stone, no one could remove it, is the name of its founder, reverend so-and-so founder. Right next there.

Well, that tells you that it's not Jesus Christ who is the founder of that church. You know, all this is just a way of bringing self-glorification to Christian piety. It's good to give.

We should want to give. But for the glory of God, not for the glory of ourselves. And I don't know how it could be more clear than this.

Look at Matthew 6, verses 1-4. Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in Heaven.

Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound the trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be done in secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. Secret leaves little leeway, whether it be an attitude of heart or an act of the hand. Secret means secret.

But pride craves recognition. Pride craves publicity. But the readiness to be unseen and unsung is the mark of true Christian service and good works.

Let me throw out a question for you to ponder. What good work have you done recently that no one else knows about? And I don't do this to give yourself a pat on the back. Because you know what? The reality is even if we've done something anonymously, how many of us really wish that someone would find out about it accidentally, of course? I can tell by your laughing.

You can say amen to that. That's me. Having seen God's judgment upon the houses of worship in those outer verses, chapter 3, verses 13 and 14, and chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, now let's look at the second tower.

Let's turn to look at God's judgment upon the secular houses beginning in chapter 3, verse 15, through chapter 4, verse 3. If the tower of false religion has fallen and is no refuge, neither will be the tower of secular materialism. Be sure that if the judgment has come upon the churches of our nation, it will soon be followed by the judgment of the riches of our nation. You know, sometimes the world just loves it when the minister is caught in some transgression or some sin.

Oh, there's that evangelical leader. Ha-ha, because then they get to point the finger at all of us. But you know what? Time is coming.

Yes. Yes, that religious tower is falling. But you know what? That other one is on its way down as well.

Right around the corner. 3.13, Amos. I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house.

The houses of ivory shall perish. The great houses shall have an end, says the Lord. The days of Israel's ease and prosperity are going to be brought to a catastrophic end.

And once any people, any group of people, whether it be a nation, whether they call themselves the people of God or whatever, once any people begin to amass expensive homes, power over people, large incomes, it's easy for them to find their identity in those things. There's a natural tendency for people to count security in that tower of stuff that they have. And as a result, they'll even go to great extremes to protect it.

Protect that which they've imagined themselves to gain by right. Anything that would then threaten that tower, anything that would threaten the power, the status, the income, they will even act in immoral ways to maintain what they presume they rightfully own as their own. Chapter 4, verse 1. Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, bring wine, let us drink.

Now Amos here is using again purposely vivid language. He is again talking about the church folk, the society wives, the high and mighty in their flashy dresses and their big hats, who are gluttonous eaters of meat and wine-bibbers. The cows of Bashan, bring us wine, they tell their husbands, so that we can drink.

Those who are quick to raise their hands in the air and shout hallelujah and then get out the door of the church and quickly into their BMW and drive by and curse the homeless man on their way to the all-you-can-eat buffet. The cows of Bashan are sleek, they're well-fed, they never stop chewing the cud of luxury. They crave more and more and more stuff.

They like to hear about stuff in their sermons. They love their pastors to be consumed with stuff. They want their pastors to have stuff, so they give them a lot of stuff.

In fact, they even like their pastors fat. Now listen, I know I could lose a few, ok? But, and I will preach to myself first here, why are there so many fat pastors? In the language of Amos, are they not the fat cows? You know, I heard from a good source last week that pastors are the greatest risk for health insurance companies to insure. Why should that be? Why? Some consider overeating a peccadillo, a small sin.

That's why we laugh at it. If I was talking about many other sins, we wouldn't be laughing at it. But that's why we laugh at it.

But it's no less sin to lust after food than any other lust. Why is it that we refuse to face that sin? You know, it's the result of self-indulgence, a lack of self-control in most cases. And I won't go on.

Verse 2, The Lord God has sworn by His holiness. Consider those words for a minute. The sobriety.

The Lord God has sworn by His holiness. Behold, the day shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. You will go through your broken walls, each one straight ahead of her, and you will be cast into Harmon, says the Lord.

God is swearing in His holiness. The Lord's holiness is His guarantee of this oath. God cannot violate His holiness.

He cannot lie. He cannot forsake His promise. And sure enough, even today, archaeologists have uncovered Assyrian reliefs, drawings, which show their captives being led away by ropes, fashioned to a hook, piercing the nose and lower lip.

Even the writings that have been found, the papyrus from that area, describe this form of Assyrian torture. God has sworn in His holiness to do this. And now in our text, we find here the rebellious women of His people, along with their husbands, being pulled away straight into exile.

No longer to enjoy that lofty life, that lofty authority which they had abused, but now being pulled away to serve as slaves in Assyria. Israel thought they were okay. They trusted in their homes, their citadels, their summer house, their little place they can go to on the weekend to go fishing and forget about life.

They had that. They had their winter estate that they could go skiing. And God says, I am pulling down every last one of them.

Where are you going to run? Are you going to run to your houses of worship? Are you going to grab the altar? No. That's gone. What are you going to do when Assyria comes as My chastening rod, He says? Are you going to go Temple of the Lord? Temple of the Lord? He says, I'm going to remove those altars.

When you turn around and run to your houses now, where are you going to run? You can't run. You can't hide. Religion and real estate mean nothing anymore.

How relevant is this? Well, you want relevance in a sermon. You want timeliness in a sermon. Well, listen to this news report from just a couple of weeks ago.

CBS News reported Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, the ranking Republican of the Senate Finance Committee, is investigating six prominent televangelist ministries for financial misconduct. According to Grassley's office, the Iowa Republican is trying to determine whether or not these ministries are improperly using their tax-exempt status as churches to shield lavish lifestyles. The six ministries identified as being under investigation by the committee are led by Paula White, Joyce Meyer, Creflo Dollar, Eddie Long, Kenneth Copeland, and Benny Hinn.

And we talked about last time the publishing it in Ashdod. Well, this is it now. Now it's before the world to see.

Now it's like back in the 1980s when all those debacles, one after the other, Baker and this guy and Swagger. Well, now one after the other they're coming down. And now for everyone to see are Copeland's three jets and \$2 million personal gift.

And this is all on the internet for everyone. Meyer's \$23,000 toilet and \$30,000 conference table. Long's \$1.4 million annual salary and sole authority over his ministry.

Hinn's \$10 million seaside mansion. Or White's ministry funds for plastic surgery and Rolls-Royce gift to T.D. Jakes. And I read just this week Creflo Dollar doesn't even plan on doing this.

He rather plans to fight against this request. Why? Because they stand to lose a lot, people. They are doing exactly what they're being accused of.

They're fleecing the flock. I'll tell you, God has a lot more patience than I have. I mean, these guys have been around a long time.

A long time. But then when you see God's patience with Israel, and you see how long. 170 years, remember, from Jeroboam I to Jeroboam II.

How long is he going to put up with the false teachers of today? How long? Well, consider how long he's already born with it. We can trace the roots of what is today the modern day Word of Faith movement to Papa Hagen. Papa Hagen began preaching in the 1930s.

Papa Hagen was the one to formulate the Word of Faith theology, thus his name, Papa, around 1949, which was 60 years ago. But, as it turns out, Hagen, we find, was only parroting that which came before him in the writings of E.W. Kenyon, who, by strange coincidence, founded Beth-El Bible Institute in 1898. Kenyon, along with other revivalists in Britain and America, including Charles Spinney, were greatly influenced by Nicholas Boardman, who essentially was the founder of the Higher Life movement when? 1858, 150 years ago.

And Boardman's ideas stem from the American Holiness movement of the 1830s, which not only spawned what we have today in modern evangelicalism, but also Mormonism. So here we are in America in 2007, 170 years after the beginnings of apostate Protestantism in this nation. And just like ancient Israel, God has sent His men to prophesy.

God sent men the likes of Achael Middleton and Archibald Alexander and Charles Spurgeon to prophesy, to warn. Spurgeon put out his publication, The Downgrade Controversy, which, if you've read it, sounds like a critique of the megachurch of the 20th century. The end of the 20th century.

When did he write it? 1878. God sent men like B.B. Warfield, John MacArthur in our day, Paul Washer, to carry that prophetic torch to say what the church is doing. They're the Elijahs.

They're the Elishas. They're the Micahias. They're the Amos's of their time.

And for the most part, the church is saying, psh, shut them out. They're troublemakers. Get rid of them.

They prefer their revelry to the holiness of God and truth. And God has warned and warned and warned and warned to repent, but people just want their stuff. They want their stuff too much to take it seriously.

But God says, I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house. The houses of ivory shall perish and the great houses shall have an end, says the Lord. What's the obvious sin here in Israel? Materialism.

And we certainly face this in our society today. We see how the Israelites compromised God's law to achieve success and have we not fallen into the same trap? They've pacified their conscience saying, surely God's favor is upon us. We're prosperous.

Isn't the prosperity proof of God's favor? But prosperity was no sign of approval, but rather of the sign that God was turning them over to reprobation. That was the final sign. It's amazing.

Here we are now in the 21st century. What are the words of this little book of nine chapters written by an unknown sheep breeder, farmer, to a population that no longer exists? How relevant we find ourselves in these weeks going through it and looking through it and finding it describes our day and age with precise accuracy. It exposes the follies of our day.

It exposes what's being embraced by Israel 3,000 years ago and the church today. And what better illustration is there of divine inspiration than that? That there's a permanent relevance in the Word of God. That there is an unchanging and unchangeable authority in the Word of God.

That what He could say 3,000 years ago can apply just as well today. Let me close with some words of application to the individual. What are we going to do in these days of Amos? You who have heard the words of Amos, what are you going to do? Are you going to run into one of those two towers? Are you going to protect yourself by investing in real estate? Are you going to be as Israel, thinking they were okay because they had their summer houses to go into? God says, I am going to pull them down.

Are you going to run into your religious houses, grab the four corners of the altar of Bethel? God is saying, I'm going to remove that. You can't run. You can't hide.

We are fast coming upon the time in this nation where real estate and religion mean nothing. Where will you run? Where will you hide? Some of you young folk, you know, you think, well, every generation has gotten better. You know, my parents are better than theirs, and theirs are better than theirs.

Each generation in the United States is getting more successful than the last one, and you presume the same thing is going to be the case. But don't presume that. For the first time, it's leveled off or even reversed.

What is the future of this nation that once led the world in industry? What future do you face? What are you following after? What are your goals? What are your aspirations? Listen to the words of William Plumer. He writes, God generally gives the great amount of wealth and honors and pleasures of this world to His foes. I'll repeat it.

God generally gives the great amount of wealth and honors and pleasures of this world to His foes. No wise man should care much for that which God habitually bestows on those who have no share in His saving mercy and shall never see His peace. He goes on, It requires no virtue to build up a great fortune, to have many praising you and call you a man of pleasure.

If a man will but agree to flatter and deceive, lie and defraud, if that's what your plan is, if you're going to flatter to get what you want, if you're going to deceive, if you're going to lie, if you're going to defraud, if He allow His selfishness to reign supreme, if He will harden His heart against the demands of justice and the dictates of equity and the urgencies of charity, if He will hold fast to what He gets and to all that He can, He may become rich. And, if He can once acquire wealth, there are always someone who will sound His praise. And so He may be, by money and flattery, by His way into power and notoriety.

You can get it, is what He's saying. You really want to do it? You can do it. Flatter, deceive, defraud, lie, hold on to your stuff, you'll get it.

William Gooch writes of covetousness, It is a deceiving sin. It blinds the understanding and corrupts the judgment. That's what's happening.

Your covetousness is causing you to be blind. He says it's an insatiable sin. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase.

The Scripture says. You know, don't think that covetousness is a sin of the rich. It's more a sin of the poor who want what they don't have.

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver. Gooch continues, it is a galling sin. It works a continual vexation and takes away all the comforts of this life.

They which covet after money pierce themselves through with many sorrows, 1 Timothy 6.10 says. He writes, there's a threefold woe that accompanies covetousness. One, a woe of labor and toil to get the wealth.

Second, a woe of care and trouble in keeping it. And third, a woe of grief and anguish in parting with it. He says it's an ensnaring sin that the rich will fall into temptation, 1 Timothy 6.9. Jesus said in Mark 10, how hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God.

And He writes, it is a mother sin. The love of money is the root of all evil, 1 Timothy 6.10. A covetous man will lie, for gain he will profane the Sabbath. It is the cause of much rebellion, many treason, murders, thefts, robberies, deceit, lying, false witnesses, and breach of promise.

And lastly, it's a devouring sin. The deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, Jesus said in Matthew 13. Covetousness is a curse.

Paul says the covetous in 1 Corinthians 6.10 shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Now, let me suggest to you some good news in all of this. I don't want the... It's not my desire, nor is it God's desire, that all of this talk of judgment should depress you or put you into despair.

God forbid, brethren, that we talk about these issues of God's justice, that we forget that it is always undergirded by His mercy. That God's purposes are primarily grace. Even in warning, His purposes are for grace and mercy.

God, in this view of His holiness, reveals to us that He will not leave us alone. And we should praise God that He will not leave us alone. Because if He leaves us alone, we're going to destroy ourselves with these things.

If He's given you ears to hear today, if there's been conviction today, it's due to grace and mercy and pity. The fact that you hear this today means that God is not leaving you alone to your own devices, to fall in love with all your stuff. His mercy endures forever.

And that same God, that same God who said, I'm coming to plunder Samaria, that same God is the God of Golgotha's hill. The message of Calvary is that God has plundered and looted His Son in divine, covenantal justice, so that we in Christ may not know of that plundering and looting in eternity, but that we may know of His mercy in the life to come. That's what the cross is about.

He bore your covetous desire. Today, if you were convicted of covetousness, know that if you are in Christ, He bore that sin. And if you are not, I plead with you to come to Calvary and be cleansed.

You see, you look at the cross, that's what it's about. That's what the message of Calvary is about. Some people look at the cross and they feel sorry for Jesus.

Jesus said, don't weep for Me, weep for yourselves. It's our rebellion, our sin, our plundering, and our looting that put Him there. So come to Calvary.

Be cleansed. The towers of materialism and false religion are going to be completely struck down. Because why? There's one strong tower.

There's one strong tower, Jesus Christ. The one into whom the righteous run and are saved. So flee.

Flee from the wrath of the falling towers. Flee from the wrath to come. There is still hope.

Repent. Repent of your sin. Turn in faith to Jesus Christ.

You know, no matter what a wretch you think you may be, no matter what a wretch, He will utterly save you. And lastly, a word to exhort the brethren. Brothers and sisters, hold on to the things of life lightly.

You know what? If even the flowers fade and the grass withers and the flowers fade, and those are things created by God, how much more are the things of earth going to fade? You know, nothing can make you happy if you're restlessly grasping after things. Colossians 3.2 says, set your affection on things above, not on things of earth. That will keep you from... If you have your affection set on above, it will keep you from coveting the things and earth's trash.

If you are experiencing the joy and peace, if your treasure is in heaven, you're going to lose your appetite for the trash of earth. That's why Paul was able to say, I count it all but done for the excellency of knowing Christ. Place your confidence in God and His providences.

He orders every detail of your life. Every hair of your head is numbered. Whatever lot He has given you, receive it as a blessing.

Everything is from Him. Everything. And if His providence says no, if His providence denies you of something that you desperately want, be satisfied without it.

Whatever He should take from us, let us be as Job who did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. Let us part with it without complaint. He's taken something from you? Part with it without complaint.

He knows best. What has God denied you of? What things in life would you like but providence has kept from you getting? What has He taken away from you? Don't you believe in all these things that He's a good God? Don't you believe that He has your best interests in mind? Maybe that's it. Maybe you don't really believe that.

Be fully resolved, brothers and sisters. Your God will provide for all your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus. He is too wise a God to err, too good a God to be unkind.

John McDuff writes, Others may mourn when some part of their earthly good is taken away. Poor miserable creatures, their only portion is this life. But I am a child of God.

The consideration of what I have in hand and what I have in hope should keep me from complaining even in the midst of the greatest temporal hardship. May that be our attitude, brethren. There can be no competitors in our heart.

It's impossible to serve God and money. If you today have identified any competing loyalty in your heart, whether that be money, things, food, people, relationships, time, anything that you think is yours by right, deal with it today. Don't show that sin the slightest compassion today.

As Jesus said, cut it off, pluck it out. And thank Him for those circumstances. Lastly, Paul Washer observes, Any attempt at divided loyalty betrays not partial commitment, but deep-seated commitment to idolatry.

Any attempt at divided loyalty. This is the problem in Israel. Divided loyalties.

Any attempt at divided loyalties betrays not a partial commitment, but a deep-seated commitment to idolatry. That was the bottom line with Israel. They believed it was a partial commitment, but it was a deep-seated commitment to idolatry.

He writes, You will never be able to truly serve God while these things are hanging around your heart. Will you allow God today to crush your sacred altars and your ivory houses? Don't be as Israel is old, listening and listening and listening. May the Lord deal with us today as He wills in this area.

Amen.

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