

**Amos 8:4-6**

Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat.'

**Amos 8:9-14**

On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day.

The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. 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 they shall not find it.

In that day the beautiful young women and the young men shall faint for thirst. Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say, 'As your god lives, O Dan', and, 'As the way of Beer-sheba lives' — they shall fall, and never rise again.

**“A Famine in the Land”**  
**Retired Bishop Dick Wilke**  
**May 17, 2009**

What a joy it is for me to be with you this day. For a Kansan to see the mountains makes the heart bounce faster. To hear the magnificent music of the choir, to be with David, whose parents guided me, and they tried to guide him, but it was a hard task... friends for a long time, to be with your pastor Chuck, and to have a time yesterday with some of the laymen, to be with some of you before the service and after.... Cokesbury was kind enough to come up from Denver and bring my new book, and I'll be glad to talk to you about it, sign it for you...but anyway, what an opportunity this is for me to be here, and on a special day. You honored Disciple graduates at the middle service. I'll bet some of you have taken Disciple. Anybody here that's been.... oh yes, wonderful.

You see, I chose one of the toughest passages of Scripture. I mean, this one's tough. You'll notice the choir sang Handel's "Awake, Awake" for you this morning. That's what the prophet's trying to do, in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter, he's saying, "If you don't wake up, you're going to have trouble in your country." He says, "There's going to be people who cook the books." Have you ever heard of such a thing? In *our* country? He says, "There's going to be people who put their thumb on the scales when they weigh. There's going to be people who lie to you. There's going to be governors who sleep with prostitutes. There's going to be trouble in your land." Oh? "There's going to be so much trouble," he said, "people won't know the Word." He said, "There will be people who come down from the north and go to the east." When I read that, I said, "That doesn't make any

sense. We don't say that. We say, go from the north to the south or from the east to the west. Then I remembered going to the Holy Land. Oh, some of you have been there, and you've see the snows on Mount Hermon in the north, and you've seen the waters of the Jordan come down where Jesus was raised in the Galilee. Then go to the east? If you go to the east, you go into the desert of Syria, and then into the area of Iraq, and then into the wastelands of Saudi Arabia, and according to Amos, you die. Oh. Why? Because a famine for the word of the Lord. A famine for the knowledge of the faith. A famine for knowing about Jesus the Christ, knowing the message of salvation. A famine. "Well," you say, "what are you talking about?"

Did any of you ever watch Jay Leno, late at night? Yeah, some of the choir do. If I can't go to sleep, sometimes I turn it on. He's getting ready for a new format, I understand, but sometimes he'll go out on the street and interview people, you know? One night he did that, he interviewed a whole bunch of people out on the street and he said, "Let's do the Bible tonight. Let's do the Bible. Okay, name some of the ten commandments." And there's a silence. Nobody says anything. Finally, one guy raises his hand: "God helps those who help themselves." Leno says, "Let's make it easy now. Let's just name the four Gospel writers." (I always remind David; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.) Anyway, silence. Silence. Jay says, "Well, can you name the Beatles?" and oh, like *that*, they come on. "John, Paul, George, Ringo...." from the whole crowd. That's the world we live in, eh?

Now, there have been a little more scientific studies than Jay Leno, of our population. George Gallup and George Barna say that 70% of college freshmen cannot name four of the ten commandments. They in their scientific study say that three out of four college students cannot name the four gospel writers. I tell pastors, "No longer can you .... reading this familiar passage from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Corinthians, or to say well, now, you know when Jesus told the parable of the brides maids, or Abraham...." you can't preach that way any more, not to people under 50, because they don't know. They do not know the Word. There is a famine in the land, they do not know. And I ask you, where would they have learned it?

I'm a great supporter of the public schools. I believe everyone in my family was in the public schools, my father on the school board, my daughter-in-law on the school board, everything..... Every American ought to have the finest education possible, but, for two generations, we have not been able to teach the Scriptures in the schools. "Well," you say, "we have the Sunday School." I guess, we have the Sunday school. I wrote a book twenty years ago, *And Are We Yet Alive?*, where I showed the decline of the Methodist Sunday school. Now I've written a new book, just out, called *The Tie That Binds*, that shows that continues now for forty years.

I'm in a Houston, Texas motel, getting ready to preach in a church. I get up and get a free breakfast at 7:00, you know how it is, and there the room is full of young ladies, girls lets, say, 15 years old, all in soccer uniforms. I said, "What are you all doing here, Sunday morning, 7:30?" "Oh, we're in the state playoffs." "Oh, well." My daughter had to drop out of the swim team because they had swim meets Sunday morning. In the brokenness

of our families, little Johnny has to go be with his dad this weekend, or with his mother that weekend. People travel. The Sunday school, they're not learning. I might just say parenthetically that in the book it tells that some churches are starting a school after school, a parochial school beginning at 3:30 every afternoon, to teach the Scriptures. We've got to find new ways. New adult classes. New groups. Disciple Bible. To help people. How can they give their hearts to Jesus, if they don't know beans from apple butter? They don't know Matthew from Malachi. They don't know. They don't know *nothin'*.

But I tell you, I'm a grandpa. Some of you are grandpas and grandmas now, you can read the Scriptures by the fire at night with your grandkids, yeah. I have to make an appointment to see my grandkids, and even when I'm with them, they're busy, on their cellphone or texting some friend. No, not a half hour Bible study every night by the fire. No, no. Not in our society. And so, the prophet Amos, his "awake" is being fulfilled. They do not know. And then he says these harsh and terrible words. "There will be trouble." Trouble, right here in River City. Trouble. Sun will go down at noon. The people go from the north into the desert, they'll go from the waters of the Jordan into the desert. They'll go from a nice middle class family to sleeping under the bridge. They'll go from a creative family to a broken home.

Take integrity, for example. Were any of you raised, like I was, by a dad who said you ought to tell the truth, and who did? I told this story in the second service, but I'll never get over being 14, my dad bought 68 acres we planted in alfalfa and he said, "You can farm it, Son." So I farmed that alfalfa, but I didn't have any cows, so I had to sell the hay. One day after we baled all those old 80-pound bales, you know, a Mennonite farmer came into the field with a pickup truck and he, naturally, pulled out a straw and bit it to see how much moisture there was in the hay, whether it was cured properly, and he lifted a bale, looked out over the field, and he came up to me and said, "I'll buy your hay." So I put myself through SMU and Yale with selling that alfalfa hay. "Now then," he says, "twenty dollars a ton." I shook his hand, as Dad and I had agreed that was a fair price. And he gets ready to get in his truck, and he says, and I see this little puppy dog running beside, he said, "And the dog will be in the cab."

So I go home. I'm 14 years old, pretty sophisticated, you know? I go to my dad, I say, "Dad, I sold the hay. Mennonite farmer shook my hand, twenty dollars a ton." Dad said, "That's good, that's a good fair price." We'd agree on that. Then I said, "Dad, this guy said the dog would be in the cab." Dad thought for a minute, and he said, "Oh Son, you know, when a driver comes in, he pulls the empty truck on the scales, the operator of the scales notes whether the driver stays in the cab or gets out. Then when he comes in with the load of hay, he notes that the driver is out again, or still in the cab." He said, "He's telling you that the dog, both times, will be in the cab." I'm pretty smart, I get out my pen, I figure twenty dollars a ton, a pound, that's a penny a pound. I said, "Dad, I saw that dog, it weighted about 17 pounds." And my dad got very serious. "That man was telling you, he is a Christian man, that he will not cheat you out of one penny."

Is that what you read in the morning paper? I mean, is that what Medoff did? You know, they've moved him out of his luxury homes into the prison. What's 48 billion dollars among friends? Or how about the former CEO of World Com.? He only cheated out of 11 billion. Not long ago I drove by the Enron building in Houston, beautiful, it is a magnificent building, wonderful architecture. It stands naked and alone, nobody in it. Leaders are all in jail because they did exactly what Amos said they would do, that people would cheat and steal and act as if they never heard, "Thou shalt not steal" from Moses, "Thou shalt not bear false witness" from the commandments. Or Jesus, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no." Oh folks, it's in the Book, and in the Book we find the Lord, and the Lord speaks to us, but our society doesn't know, and it's your job to tell them.

Oh, you came this morning to talk about sex? Well, we won't go into a lot of heavy detail, but one half of all the marriages in America end in divorce. 65%, according to the sociologists, of children under 17 have sexual relations. Under 21, 80% have sexual relations, and not necessarily with one person. "Do not commit adultery," said Moses. And Jesus said, a married man who looks on another woman lustfully is committing adultery in his mind. To ponder this word... not to be negative, I was speaking to a college chaplain not long ago, and I said, "Don't think that religion is "no no no, don't do this, don't do this, no no no." Jesus says yes, yes yes, yes integrity, to tell the truth, yes in integrity to have a sexual life that's built on the rock of commitment, where a man and a woman can have a home and have children and have grandchildren. Oh, praise the Lord. No no, sex is God's idea. But he has a plan. Drugs and alcohol? Our society is saturated with alcohol. My brother-in-law is a doctor, he says you use certain drugs one time, you're addicted. Meth, for example, you're addicted. Really hard to break. Our college campuses, a lot of alcohol. Recently at the University of Kansas, a guy was so drunk on the fourth floor, he just fell out. Ever talking about an active, healthy guy, he falls off, four floors and is killed. Amos said, "Your young men will fall down and they won't get up."

But we're not negative. God says in the holy Scripture, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly." Oh, he wants us to be healthy. Some of you are working out at the gym. Some of you are eating certain foods that make you more healthy. Some of you are avoiding drugs and overuse of alcohol in such a way that your body is healthy, because you want to live to be ninety. I'm working on it, but I'm not there yet. I'm close. It's a "yes." The Bible says Jesus is not "yes and no", he is "yes." For health. But they have to know that. What's the cause of death among people under 25? First cause of death is accidents. We understand that. I grew up in a funeral home, my dad I mentioned had the emergency ambulance. Even then, some young guy getting in a car for the first time, drove too fast, drank too much, crashed his car. That's cause number one. But cause number two, I couldn't believe it when I read this. Cause number two of death among people under 25 years of age is suicide. In America? Where everything? To become depressed, blue, depressed because of drugs and alcohol, become discouraged to the point, or angry, or disenfranchised, or broken relationships, whatever the reason, to take your life? The second cause... "and

they shall fall down,” said Amos. We’re not playing games here, folks. They will fall down, and they won’t get up again.

I’m right now working hard to get Disciple into the prisons of America, and to get folks like you, now, you’re pretty far away from the major prisons, but across this country we have one out of every 100 Americans is in jail or prison or under the supervision of the courts. One fourth of all the prisoners of the world are in American prisons. Jesus said, “I was in prison and you came to me,” so we’re going to them. John Wesley went to the prison. John Wesley would get on the cart that was taking a man who’d stolen some bread, taking him down to the gallows to be hung, or hanged, whichever you want to do, and John Wesley would jump into the cart and open the Bible and introduce him to Jesus, to try to let him find salvation on the way to the gallows. And then Wesley started going into the prisons themselves. And then Wesley started going to the families, the wife and the children of the prisoners, and then he started asking questions about prison reform, we’ve got to do that. But my point is, this is what’s happening in our society. And my pleading for you is, hey, could you guide a few children in a Sunday school class?

There’s a new Sunday school movement happening called rotation, where instead of teaching just verbally, the way I was taught algebra a hundred years ago, now they have different groups for different sensual learning. They do a drama, or put on a little television skit here. Over here, they sing songs, for another month, to learn Scripture. They have six or seven different ways of learning Scripture using the different senses, and they draw upon lay people like you for just one month. Not to teach all the time, but for one month, you maybe do the music, teach the junior highs Christian songs, where they learn the Scripture through music. Next group, they’re doing art, and they’re learning Scripture through art. The next month, a TV show where they produce it. Saint Luke’s Church in Oklahoma City has tripled its Sunday school, tripled, with that new plan. “Oh,” but you say, “well I can’t do anything.” Some of you ladies, some of you, like me, have a little gray in your hair. Thursday mornings, Tuesday mornings, you have six ladies over, have a cup of coffee and you study the Scriptures together, talk about it, share one another’s experience in life and pray for one another. It can happen, and it’s got to happen. Start a new adult Sunday school class.

When David was there, we started a class for singles. We had so many come, we had to start another class for a different age, and then another group for those who had lost their spouse by death, and we formed several, because they were hungry for the word of God, for the saving grace of Christ and for Christian fellowship. You can do it. If you think I’m here this morning to ask you study the Scriptures more, you’re only half right. I’m here this morning to tell you you can lead others. You can help others find, through the Scripture, the truth of God.

Three years ago I got a phone call that said, “We want to have Disciple in Russia.” Former Communist Russia? Russia, with the great old tradition of the Orthodox Church with the great cathedrals, some of which were still standing. They said, “Yes, the Russian people are open to Methodism, and to the Wesley class meeting, and to the study of the Scriptures, and to conversion to Jesus Christ. Well, I raised a little money and I found out

that there was a man in prison in Russia who was brilliant, in there for life, I think he killed his mother-in-law, I hate to mention that. But killed somebody. I said that when my wife was present, and she didn't like that. But anyway, he was there for life, but he translated Disciple and the Scriptures...well they had the Scriptures in Russian, translated into Russian. We went over there for the training event, and 75 Methodists, mostly lay pastors, came together for the training to go into the homes where six or eight or ten people could come together and study the Scriptures in former Communist Russia.

And a few years ago two men in Winfield, Kansas, where I live, one named Schuster, by the way, no relationship to Chuck I suppose, a landscape gardener and one a general electric engineer, they said, "You know, we have a prison right near you, half a mile away." I said, "I know, a state prison." They said, "Why don't you go, Dick, with us out there and we'll have Disciple Bible study among those inmates who are willing?" I said, "I'm pretty busy." They said "You'll have to take training from the chaplain, three hours, not to bring a pocket knife or lock your car and show your ID card..." So I said, "Okay, I'll go." I went, and I began to pray every day for those inmates. Some of them were black, some were white, some were Hispanic. One was 19, one was 53 years old. Every Monday night, week after week, then it came January. I don't know how many of you have ever been in Kansas. Any of you ever been in Kansas? Any of you ever been in Kansas in January? Any of you ever been there when the wind starts in Canada, comes down from the Dakotas, and blows cold? One January night it was so cold, the snow was blowing, the wind... and I put on my coat and I got in the car and turned the heater on, and drove that half a mile out to the prison, and I thought, "What in the world am I doing?"

Locked the car, went in with the clang of the doors behind me, and I went into the room where we'd been meeting, and there they were, television set and the 14 guys, and I sat down, and we had a little prayer and started. All of a sudden, one big black man, six foot four, like he could play professional football, anyway, "He looks at me and he says, "Why are you here?" Caught me a little off guard. I took a deep breath. He had a certain glare in his eyes. Then he helped me. He said, "Why are you here? Couldn't you be home by your fire, with your wife, on a winter night like tonight, and watching television? Why are you here?" And I believe God spoke to me, through me. I said, "Well, I love the Scriptures. They're God's word for us. I love Jesus. He is my Savior and he wants to be your Savior." And the, I don't know why I said it, but I said, "And I love you guys." And he said, and I'll never recover from this, "No one in my whole life has ever said that they loved me until now."

I don't know how many people there are in this town, you have a huge university, you have people who don't know, don't know nothin'. You have people who are lonely. The church seems like a family reunion that they don't belong to. If you can help them find the Lord through the Scripture and the ways of God, so that they can tell the truth, so that they can have sexual integrity, so they can avoid harmful things to their bodies, so that they don't take their life, so they don't fall down and never get up, if you can help, you will be one of God's ministers in today's world, and you will be a part of "Awake,

awake.” The Gospel is there, and you will be a minister of the Gospel, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.