

February 18/19, 2012

Seek Me
Let Justice Flow
Amos 5:1-17
Pastor Bryan Clark

This past week I read a letter, and I'd be interested to know what you think about this letter. It says:

Our orders are to refuse to have anything to do with those among you who are lazy and refuse to work the way we taught you. Don't permit them to freeload on the rest. We showed you how to pull your weight when we were with you, so get on with it. We didn't sit around on our hands expecting others to take care of us. In fact we worked our fingers to the bone, up half the night moonlighting, so you wouldn't be burdened with taking care of us. And it wasn't because we didn't have a right for your support. We did! We simply wanted to provide an example of diligence, hoping it would prove contagious. Don't you remember the rule we had when we lived with you? If you don't work, you don't eat. And now we're getting reports that a bunch of lazy good-for-nothings are taking advantage of you. This must not be tolerated. We command them to get to work immediately—no excuses, no arguments—and earn their own keep. Friends, don't slack off doing your duty. If anyone refuses to obey our clear command written in this letter, don't let him get by with it. Point out such a person and refuse to subsidize his freeloading. Maybe then he'll think twice, but don't treat him as an enemy. Sit him down and talk about the problem as someone who cares.

Interesting letter, as a matter of fact it was written about two thousand years ago by the Apostle Paul to the church of Thessalonica. It's remarkable to me that a book written two thousand years ago seems to be so relevant; it's as if it was written yesterday. We reminded ourselves last week that doing justice is the responsibility of all of us, no matter where you find yourself in life. We're in this together. But things are complicated. There are no simple, quick-fix solutions. These things are complex; they're complicated. They have issues that are systemic, that go to the core of what defines us as a nation. I trust you understand that just because we elect a few new people doesn't mean we're going to fix the problem. To think that's the case is rather naïve. These problems are complicated and they are systemic that go all the way to the core of who we are as a nation.

You know, actually, our form of democracy was copied from God's organization of The Church. It's got biblical roots. It was really a system that would empower the people. But you have to remember when God laid out this governance to the church, He was assuming that the people would be people who had been radically changed by the power of Jesus. For a democracy to work, the people must be good; the people must have a strong moral compass, strong values of understanding, "This is right and this is wrong; this is good and this is evil." It must be internal. It must come from within the convictions of the people for democracy to work. And for generations this system held up fairly well because we embraced Judeo-Christian values. But most culture-watchers would say something dramatically changed in the 60's, and we have become a different nation. We have lost our way and when the people cease to be good, the system will not work. We are a long way down the path of becoming a secular nation and, as we've become more secular, our immorality has increased; our selfishness has increased; our corruption has increased; our greed has increased. The question is: Is it possible to turn the ship back? I don't know. I'm not a prophet. I work for a

non-profit organization (laughter). But I think it's a very serious question, which leaves us with the question: So what do we do? Do we just throw up our hands and say, "All is lost!"? Or worse yet, do we just go with the flow? Is it really hopeless?

Our text this morning reminds us that for the people of God, there is always reason for hope. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Amos, Chapter 5. This is the third week now where our text has opened with the words—kind of the formula—**Hear this word**, which reminds us that the Hebrew people were not listening. So the message gets more intense; the images get more graphic—because the people simply won't listen to what God has to say.

**Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel.
She has fallen, she will not rise again—
The virgin Israel.
She *lies* neglected on her land;
There is none to raise her up.
For thus says the Lord God,
"The city which goes forth a thousand *strong*
Will have a hundred left,
And the *one* which goes forth a hundred *strong*
Will have ten left to the house of Israel."** (*NASB, Amos 5:1-3)

He starts in verse 1 saying that he is singing to them **a dirge**, a lament. A dirge would have been a song or a poem that was primarily sung or written at the death of a family member or the death of a close friend. He's saying, "I am singing you a dirge because the nation has died." He pictures her as a **virgin**. The idea of that is: in that culture a virgin would have been like a flower just ready to blossom. A virgin would have been full of life, full of hopes and dreams, just ready to enter into all that life has to offer. Israel views itself that way. You have to remember, this would have been shocking to them. They were living in a time of prosperity; they were living in a time of luxury. They were living in a time where their military was dominant. They thought they were on the verge of fulfilling their hopes and dreams. But what Amos is saying is: *The virgin will die on the battlefield; you will fall on the battlefield and nobody will help you up. The armies from the cities will go out to fight, but only ten percent will live and return.* It paints a very bleak picture.

Now one of the interesting techniques here is—even though this battle is yet future—the verb tenses make it sound like it has already happened. It sounds like past-tense verbs. The technique is saying: This defeat is so sure that I'm going to write it as if it's already happened. It's a very bleak picture. Verse 4:

**For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel,
"Seek Me that you may live."**

These are words it would be very easy to just skip over and move on. But we need to stop and think about what God just said, that after all the ways the people have offended Him, after all the ways that they have rebelled and turned their back on Him, God is still saying, "If you just come home, if you just return to Me; if you just **seek Me**, I'll take you back. I'll love you; I'll pour out My blessing on you." When He says **live**, He's not talking about you'll just live rather than die. He's talking about **live**—to experience the goodness of God and the favor of God and the blessings of God. God longs to pour out His blessings on His people. Israel has prostituted herself. God is the husband; Israel is the bride, and they have prostituted themselves. They've played the harlot one

lover after another. God remains home and says to His bride, “If you’d just come home; if you’d just come home, I’ll take you back. I’ll love you; I’ll pour My favor on you. We can pretend like this never happened if you’d just come home.” It reminds us of this scandalous grace and mercy of God. In the midst of all this intensity, in the midst of these judgments, there is God saying, “All you have to do is come home. All you have to do is return to Me. I’ll take you back; I’ll love you and I’ll pour out my favor upon you.”

We are reminded that if you were among the poor, among the oppressed, among the abused, and you heard these words of God, you would be outraged. You would say, “God, after all they’ve done to me to inflict so much pain on me, how dare You invite them back home and how dare You promise to love them and pour out Your goodness on them!” We’re reminded that’s the scandalous nature of grace—that even when they’ve done all that, God still invites them home.

It is true that God loves the oppressed. He loves the orphan and the widow and the poor. It breaks His heart that they are used and abused. But God also loves the oppressor; God also loves the abuser; God also loves the pagans. God loves them all; that’s why He’s doing what He’s doing. All of them are on paths of destruction. He cannot just sit passively by and watch this happen, so He must step in. But it’s because He loves them, because they’re on a path of destruction and He’s got to get their attention and He’s got to turn them back and invite them home.

It’s interesting to think about that concept that, “If you seek Me, if you come home, you will live.” Why do people become greedy? Why do people become oppressive? Why do people become selfish? Why do people abuse and use people if it isn’t ultimately to find what they’re looking for—somehow to find life, somehow to find that which makes them happy, somehow to find that which satisfies? But what God is saying is, “You’ll never find it down that path! The only place you’re going to find it is if you return to Me, if you seek Me, and I’ll give you what you’re looking for.” It’s a beautiful appeal of a husband waiting for his bride to come home. Verse 5:

**“But do not resort to Bethel,
And do not come to Gilgal,
Nor cross over to Beersheba;
For Gilgal will certainly go into captivity,
And Bethel will come to trouble.”**

God says, “Seek Me, but don’t look for Me in the places of religion.” We talked about this last week—Bethel was a place of religion; it’s where the movers and shakers went. But they didn’t really go to worship; they went to be noticed. They went to do their religious thing; they went to convince people that they were really good people. But the system was corrupt; the religion was corrupt—it was full of idolatry. And so God is saying, “When I say, ‘Seek Me,’ I’m not asking for more religion. You’re not going to find Me in those places.” Verse 6:

**“Seek the Lord that you may live,
Or He break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph,
And it will consume with none to quench it for Bethel...”**

The idea of a **fire** there is God’s judgment. When it says He will **break forth**, it could be translated, “He will *roar*.” If you have ever been around a big fire, like a forest fire or something like that, it just roars—and that’s the imagery. You can hear the sound of this fire roaring through Israel as God holds them accountable for their behavior. Verse 7:

**“For those who turn justice into wormwood
And cast righteousness down to the earth.”**

The second week of our Amos series we tried to defend the term *social justice*. We acknowledged the fact that people on the left think that the people on the right use the term for a political agenda, that people on the right think people on the left use the term for a political agenda. The fact is they both do! There’s plenty of corruption on both sides. But we’re not defining the term politically. We’re seeking to define the term biblically, and biblically it revolves around two very important Hebrew words that show up again in this verse: the term *justice* and the term *righteousness*. Typically when you see those together, you can just insert the words *social justice* and you have a good biblical definition for that concept.

Let’s review a little bit: The word *justice* is the Hebrew word *mishpat*. It means to give someone their due regardless of race, regardless of socioeconomic status, and I would add regardless of political affiliation. It’s just being fair; it’s giving someone their due, and it involves three basic areas in terms of punishment. So it’s saying that people before the Law are equal, regardless of your race, regardless of your socioeconomic status. The system is fair. In terms of protection it’s not just from the bad guy mugging you in an alley, but protection from those who would take advantage of the vulnerable and the weak. Typically in an ancient culture it would have been the orphan and the widow and the immigrant and the poor. And for care, it’s just the basic needs of life—relief, food and shelter and basic care. That’s the term *mishpot*—justice—so that’s what it means to do *justice*.

The word *righteous* is the word *tzadeqah*. It’s a word that is primarily a relational term. It refers to someone who is rightly related to God. But the outflow of that relationship is a desire to put right all other relationships, again, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of socioeconomics, regardless of political affiliation. It’s a passion to put all relationships right. One Hebrew scholar, after spending years trying to understand the concept of *tzadeqah* in an ancient culture contrasted with the wicked, concluded that the righteous—the *tzadeqah*—is one who is willing to disadvantage himself in order to advantage the greater community, whereas the wicked is someone who will advantage himself at the expense of the greater community—and we’ve made reference to that several times in our study of Amos.

What the text is saying in verse 7 is: Those who are in charge of justice actually turn it into a bitter experience. **Wormwood** was basically a wood from which they extracted a bitter poison. So if you think of it this way—justice was meant to be healing; justice was meant to be water to a parched and thirsty land but, instead of doing justice, they had turned justice into a bitter poison. In an ancient culture the poor, the orphan, the widow, the immigrant, they had nowhere to turn but to the justice system and, if the justice system let them down, they had no protection. They were extremely vulnerable. The very system that was meant to protect them had become a poison to them and was destroying the social fabric of the community. He says, “You cast the righteous—the *tzadeqah*—down to the earth, those who stand up and say, “This is wrong!” You don’t want to hear it; you cast them down to the earth and you trample them in the dust in order to silence them. Verses 8 and 9 are kind of an interlude, kind of a poem. Some refer to it as a hymn where Amos is simply reminding the people that the One you’re picking a fight with is God Himself, and he does it in kind of a poetic fashion.

**He who made the Pleiades and Orion (which are constellations)
And changes deep darkness into morning,**

**Who also darkens day into night, (so He's in charge of day and night)
Who calls for the waters of the sea
And pours them out on the surface of the earth,
The LORD is His name.
It is He who flashes forth *with* destruction upon the strong,
So that destruction comes upon the fortress.**

Simply, Amos is presenting this hymn, this poem, this song to say, “Hey, the God who made the universe, the God that hung the stars in space, the God that changes day to night and night to day, the God who brings the rain is the God you’re picking a fight with, is the God you’re at war with.” And what’s implied in that is: Do you really want to do that, because you can’t beat this God? Verse 10, he gets back to his oracle:

**They hate him who reproveth in the gate,
And they abhor him who speaks *with* integrity.
Therefore, because you impose heavy rent on the poor
And exact a tribute of grain from them,
Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone,
Yet you will not live in them;
You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. (Vs. 10-11)**

Again his reference is to the justice system, to those whose job it was to protect the vulnerable. He says **They**, meaning the oppressors, the movers, the shakers, the wealthy, the abusers; **they hate him who reproveth in the gate**. In other words when somebody shows up—a poor, a vulnerable, an orphan, a widow—to the justice system and the judge actually advocates for them, it says they hate him; they eliminate him. They own the system and they don’t tolerate judges that do the right thing. That’s what he’s saying. **They abhor him who speaks with integrity**. They absolutely abhor those who tell the truth. They just don’t want to hear it and they certainly don’t want to hear it at **the gate**. They **impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute**. We talked about this in the first week—that the rich oppress the poor by having ridiculous costs, ridiculous rentals, extracting this tithe from them that they can’t possibly pay. And when they can’t pay, they take them to a corrupt judicial system; the judicial system turns them into slaves and they sell these people, continuing to break down the social fabric of the community. All so they can build bigger houses, so they can have this mansion—this stone-hewn mansion. It’s basically just saying a custom mansion with all the finest of materials.

But God says, “You have done that; you have built that by oppressing the weak and the vulnerable, so I’m not going to let you live in that mansion. If you think you’re going to flip up your La-Z-Boy and grab a Diet Pepsi and ride out your retirement in the mansion you’ve built by oppressing people,” God says, “I’m not going to let you live in it. I’m going to shut it down. You’re not going to enjoy that.” You’ve built this big, beautiful vineyard—typically vineyards were thought of as places of joy. He said, “I’m not going to let you drink the wine in that vineyard; I’m not going to let you have a party; I’m going to hold you accountable for what you have done.” Verse 12:

For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great...

We’ve talked about this several times, but it’s very important to remember that doing justice is not charity. It’s not generosity. It’s an issue of right and wrong; it’s an issue of morality and to fail to do it is to transgress the Law. That’s what he’s saying. “Your behavior is sinful.”

**...You who distress the righteous (*the tzadeqah*) and accept bribes,
And turn aside the poor in the gate.**
(in other words the whole system is corrupt, to oppress the weak and the vulnerable).
Therefore, at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time.
(Vs. 12b-13)

In other words, the times have become so evil; the system is so corrupt; things are so bad that, if someone has any common sense, they won't speak up on behalf of the poor and the immigrant and the orphan and widow because of what will happen to them. Now even the most well-intentioned people won't speak up because the consequences are so severe. That's what he's saying in verse 13.

**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!
Hate evil, love good,
And establish justice in the gate!
Perhaps the LORD God of hosts
May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.
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.** (Vs. 14-17)

Let's take verses 16 and 17—there's a **therefore**. Therefore—because of what has transpired, because of what is being done—God is going to pass through their cities and will mediate out judgment. This is so sure that it was spoken of in past-tense terms. Last week we saw that God actually put up His character, His holiness, as collateral to say, “This is guaranteed; I'm going to do what I say. *It will be so devastating there will be wailing in the streets. There will be weeping in the streets. It will be so devastating that we'll run out of professional mourners. We're going to have to go out to the fields and invite the farmers to town, and we'll have to have them be professional mourners just to keep up with the heartache.*” As I said, vineyards were thought of as places of joy, but they're going to be places of weeping. It's a very graphic imagery of what is to come.

Part of what we process, then, is if this judgment is so sure, if they're so far down the path there's no turning back, then why does God keep saying, “**Seek Me! Seek Me!**”? And the answer is because God has always called out a remnant who would trust Him and would do the right thing. When you go back through the study of the Hebrew people, God has always called out a remnant. Even in the worst days, even in the darkest days, God called out those among His people who would say, “I'm still going to do the right thing. I'm not going to go down that path. I'm still going to choose to trust God.” What does it mean to seek God if it doesn't mean going to the religious centers and adding more religion? What does it mean? In the context of Amos it means what it says in verse 14. It means to **seek good and to hate evil**; it means to do justice. It means to do the right thing. Righteousness—as defined in the book of Amos—seeking God means doing justice, doing the right thing, hating that which is evil and loving that which is right. It's a concept of action. He says in verse 14:

**Seek good and not evil, that you may live;
And thus may the LORD God of Hosts be with you.**

That's a very important statement, because what he is saying is: "When you seek Me, when you love what's good, when you choose to do the right thing, I'll be on your side." Whenever it refers to the **Lord God of Hosts**, it's talking about the General—the General of the Armies of Heaven—and He's put on His uniform and He's ready to lead the troops. And so what he's saying is: "Even though you may feel like a remnant, a minority, when you have Me, you're a majority. You don't need anything more than Me. So just seek Me; do the right thing and I'll be there. I'm the General of the Army and I'll take care of you." It's a very powerful statement. Verse 15:

**Hate evil, love good
And establish justice (*mishpat*) in the gate. (Do what's right in the streets.)
Perhaps the LORD God of hosts
May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.**

So what do we do with this text? It's easy to get discouraged in a world with so much heartache, a world with so much corruption, with so many problems. Many of you have said, "I see all the injustices and the corruptness in our industry, in our business, in our streets, but it's overwhelming. There are so many things I can't control. There are so many things I can't do anything about. What am I supposed to do when the whole industry is corrupt?" First of all you have to understand: you know that and God knows that. There are a lot of things we simply can't change. The system is corrupt to the core. The problem is: when we look at the big picture it's overwhelming, and when we get overwhelmed, we get paralyzed and when we get paralyzed, we do nothing. And so you have to look at it differently. Mother Theresa once said, "When I look at the mass, I will not act. When I see an individual, I will." I think she's right about that. Instead of being overwhelmed by all the corruptness in the system, we need to think in terms of people and individuals—in my neighborhood, in my school, in our community, in my business, in our industry. What *could* I do? Instead of looking at everything that *can't* be done, what *can* I do? And start to see people—if this made a difference in the life of just one person, wouldn't that be worth it?

But we still have to look at the bigger picture. What is it that we could do together that would make a difference in a community like Lincoln? We're going to end this morning by showing you a little footage and talking to you a little bit about the darker side of our city. It's a little bit disturbing; actually it's *very* disturbing. It's very easy to live in south Lincoln, do our south Lincoln thing and live a lifetime and never be exposed to this stuff, and convince ourselves it's really not happening. But as you watch this, you need to ask yourself, "How do you suppose God feels about this?" And if it breaks the heart of God, shouldn't it break our heart? Shouldn't we grieve with God that this is not the way it's supposed to be? This is unacceptable. If you can be exposed to what you're about to be exposed to and just go to bed tonight and roll over and convince yourself that this isn't happening, and just go on with our nice lives, I'm sorry for you. But I don't think that describes the overwhelming majority of people in this room. I think the overwhelming majority of people in this room would say, "This is unacceptable. This breaks my heart." And if it breaks our heart, if this is unacceptable, here's the question we're all wrestling with: ***Then what are we going to do about it?***

(Video Interviews)

(First interview)

Bryan Olesen: So we've been focusing in on the needs in our city and hearing all sorts of statistics that have been really eye-opening. And today we kind of want to focus in on maybe some of the issues with children in our city. And, Brad Bryan, I was wondering if you could just shed some light on what it's like growing up in the middle of our city as a young person?

Brad: Well, what's amazing is that for children that come from a working-class family or a professional family, those children come into school at age 5 with a vocabulary of between 3,000 and 5,000 words. And for children coming in from a family living in poverty, they come into school with about 500 words in their vocabulary. So that makes a real big impact on their life.

Bryan: So, Brad, if my child has a 500 word vocabulary, what does that mean? What does that lead to?

Brad: Well, often it just means that they're starting behind their peers in school and, once a child gets behind in reading in school, that impacts their education forever. If you look at statistics and a child is finishing 4th grade, if they are two or more grade levels behind, they have a sixty percent chance of being incarcerated upon graduating high school.

Bryan: So you're basically saying over fifty percent of kids that fall a couple of grades behind in reading are likely to end up in the criminal justice system, and that's even here in Lincoln?

Brad: Yes, it's happening right here in Lincoln, Nebraska, and one of the things about families living in poverty in Lincoln is the instability of many of the families. So we're seeing moms working three or four jobs but, when one of those jobs doesn't pan out, they have to move because they can't pay rent. And once they start to move, then a child has to move from one school to the other. That tremendously impacts their education. So we're seeing these families that love their kids; they want to support their kids; they want to see them do well in school but there are just many factors that are against them. You know, it really impacts their life and they're getting behind.

(Second interview)

Bryan: I've got a very warm coat on and I can barely talk to you. I'm freezing. So, Mike, right now we're literally under a bridge on west South Street and you're telling me that people will call this home.

Mike: Yeah, I mean, at any given time there will be people that will dig holes in sleeping bags and they'll put cardboard down and they'll just literally live down here. They may go downtown to beg for food, and it's a lot of the guys that you see walking around downtown. This is where they call home.

Bryan: Sometimes you think you maybe get a picture in your mind of what a homeless person is. Maybe they're old or they're a drunk person, but it's more than that, right? This affects kids too?

Mike: Yeah, I mean you may have a kid who was in the foster care system and they wanted to get out of it, so they went on run, and they ran away. Or, you know, they were nineteen years old and the State said, "You're an adult, so good luck." And they kind of transitioned from there. And so you have kids who had a teen mom who didn't know how to raise them, so a family member was

raising them and they decided they'd be better somewhere else. Or they have been abused or sexually abused or physically abused, and they decided that this is better than that.

Bryan: So if kids don't want to live on the street or on the run, what are their options? What do they do?

Mike: You know, we see a lot of young girls having what we call survival sex, where they'll maybe find an older guy who's got a house and is more established and that's something that they can offer to him. Their offer is kind of a service and so they're sleeping with these guys, living with these guys who are a lot older than them. And you have kids who couch-surf and they'll literally bounce from house to house to house, from place to place to place. The reality is that there are a lot of those kids in Lincoln. There are a lot of apartments in Lincoln that are filled with kids that, you know, it's not their family and it's not the ideal situation, but they're really just trying to provide a service for a warm bed. So yeah, people live here. They sleep here. You can see you've got anything from blankets to coats. It looks like this is a little lotion and makeup and, I mean, there's just tons of different stuff. But a lot of these young kids don't have one positive loving relationship that they can look to, and so they end up here. But this is where they dwell and this is two minutes outside of downtown Lincoln. We're five minutes from the Stadium right now.

(Third interview) (riding with police officer in patrol car)

Bryan: Charity, we've been talking a lot about poverty in Lincoln, and I was wondering if you could answer that for us, "Is there really poverty in Lincoln and where do you see it on a day-to-day basis?"

Charity: Yeah, there's absolutely an existence of that. I think, until you get into a job like this, you don't see it. A lot of times when I go into the houses or the apartments, there's just nothing inside. The mattresses will be on the floor. The kitchen tables—they don't have them—or there's nothing in the fridge, nothing in the cabinets, no food. Even tonight, an officer got a call about an eight-year-old and a ten-year-old left unattended at this hotel. It turns out, he works night shift and he's a single dad; nobody else can watch them, and he was just real up-front about it. He said, "I don't really know what else to do." There's just a ton of tension in the houses that are struggling with poverty. When I go to these houses and I talk with these families, I just see a sense of either frustration or hopelessness with their situation. I talk to the fifteen-year-old girl that tried to commit suicide and is in the hospital and she just has this look of desperation. And then I talk to the twelve or thirteen-year-old boy that I picked up three or four times, maybe five times, for theft or for fighting or even vandalism, and he just loses his sense of worth, I guess. And I go to these domestic situations where it's just violent in the house and you look in the bedroom and there's the two-year-old that's bawling, and I see the fear, and I'm just so thankful for the support in my life. And these kids just don't have that. Poverty shouldn't be the thing that takes that away from them. It just shouldn't be like that.

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Opening Discussion

1. Based on the following text, what would it mean to “do justice” today?

“Our orders, backed up by the Master, Jesus, are to refuse to have anything to do with those among you who are lazy and refuse to work the way we taught you. Don’t permit them to freeload on the rest. We showed you how to pull your weight when we were with you, so get on with it. We didn’t sit around on our hands expecting others to take care of us. In fact, we worked our fingers to the bone, up half the night moonlighting so you wouldn’t be burdened with taking care of us. And it wasn’t because we didn’t have a right to your support; we did. We simply wanted to provide an example of diligence, hoping it would prove contagious.

Don’t you remember the rule we had when we lived with you? “If you don’t work, you don’t eat.” And now we’re getting reports that a bunch of lazy good-for-nothings are taking advantage of you. This must not be tolerated. We command them to get to work immediately, no excuses, no arguments, and earn their own keep. Friends, don’t slack off in doing your duty.

If anyone refuses to obey our clear command written in this letter, don’t let him get by with it. Point out such a person and refuse to subsidize his freeloading. Maybe then he’ll think twice. But don’t treat him as an enemy. Sit him down and talk about the problem as someone who cares.”

2. As a nation becomes more secular it will become more corrupt. Where do you see this in our culture today?

Bible Study

1. Read Amos 5:1-3. Describe the picture Amos paints of the future for Israel. Why does he use a verb tense that sounds like it's already happened when it's yet future?
2. Read Amos 5:4-7. What are the options Amos lays out for them? What does it say to you about God that after all this in Amos He still offers blessing ("you may live") to those who seek Him? Imagine you are among the poor who have been abused and oppressed and you hear God's offer to bless the oppressors if they just seek Him? How might you respond? How does this confirm our belief that grace is scandalous?
3. Review our definitions for "justice" and "righteous." What is "doing justice" and what would be "injustice".
4. Read Amos 5:10-13. When people are driven by selfish greed and an insatiable appetite for more, how do they treat others according to this text? How do they treat those who try to "do justice"? How do you see this in your business, industry or life? Is "doing justice" likely to be applauded by the majority? Why or why not?
5. Read Amos 5:14-17. The nation of Israel will suffer the discipline of God and wail. Does that mean all is lost for all or is there hope for those who seek God? Summarize 5:14, 15 in your own words.

Application

1. Share with the group some of what you've been seeing lately? What are some of the injustices around you in your job, your business, your school, your neighborhood, your community?
2. While we can't change everything or even most of the injustices around us, what could we change if we trusted God to empower us to "do justice"?
3. How does God feel about what you've seen? How do you feel about it? What are you going to do about it?