

A Famine of Hearing

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Now let's look at the book of Amos chapter eight. The title of this message, as I said, is "A Famine of Hearing." And I took that title from verse 11 of Amos chapter eight where the prophet Amos is speaking to the people of Israel.

It says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, [that is physical bread] nor a thirst for water."¹ That is physical water. In fact, this land was prospering economically at this time, agriculturally. But he says, a famine "of hearing the words of the LORD."²

Now this eighth chapter is the fourth vision that God gave to Amos. Remember I said last time beginning in chapter seven that there were five visions that the Lord gave to the prophet Amos for this nation. And the first three visions were recorded in chapter seven. But here is the fourth vision. And it begins first of all with showing in this vision how Israel is a nation that is ripe for God's judgment.

Look at verse one.

He says, "Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit."³

Now that means it is ripe fruit. That means it is fruit that will not keep long. It is... this is indicative of a time that is short for summer fruit. That is what Israel is, not able to be preserved. If it stays around any longer it is going to rot. It must be consumed immediately.

So whatever he is talking about in this vision, this nation is ripe for something.

Well, look at verse two.

¹ Amos 8:11.

² Ibid.

³ Amos 8:1.

“And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the LORD unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more.”⁴

Now that is what they are ripe for, the judgment of God, God’s just wrath against their sins. And he says in verse three, he says, “And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord GOD.”⁵

Their religion will not save them. Their songs in the temple will not save them. Their prayers will not save them. Their sacrifices will not save them. Their ceremonies will not save them. Their zeal will not save them. Their sincerity will not save them.

He said it is going to be a devastating judgment. He says, “There shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.”⁶

In other words, they will be silent. There will be no more crying. It will be silence.

Notice how he says, “I will not again pass by them anymore.”⁷

When I think of that, God passing by, the first thing that comes to my mind is Israel in Egypt in their bondage. And when God sent the plague of the death of the first born of Egypt, you remember he said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.”⁸

In other words, judgment will not come to you if there is the blood on the door. And, of course, as you know, that blood represents the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who shed his blood on Calvary as the payment for the sins of his people. The judgment of God came down upon him so that God could and would pass over his people.

But here God says, “I will not again pass by them any more.”⁹

This passing by is not a passing over. This passing by is a passing by in judgment. He says, “The end is come upon my people of Israel. This is it. This is the end. They are ripe for judgment.”

And so nothing they do, nothing they attempt, nothing they try will save them from the wrath of God. And, of course, the lesson here in Technicolor and in graphic description is that the only way that any of us, any sinner is going to escape the wrath of God, the judgment of God is in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, by his grace. That is it. Looking to, resting in the cross of Christ so that the Lord would pass over us.

⁴ Amos 8:2.

⁵ Amos 8:3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Amos 8:2.

⁸ Exodus 12:13.

⁹ Amos 8:2.

Now in verse four through six he begins showing how they despised the things of God. Listen to verse four.

He says, "Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail."¹⁰

He is talking about dishonesty, cheating the poor in Israel. And it was under a religious guise. You remember we read this last week in Matthew chapter 23 and verse 23 whence he talked about the Pharisees and the scribes being so meticulous to be careful to take care of the smallest details of religion and tithing. But they neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment or justice, truth and faith.

And he says in verse five, "Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn?"¹¹

Now, are you listening to this? Listen as I read this. I want you to think about this, because it is so reflective of what we see today.

"Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn?"¹²

Now what is the new moon? That was a religious observance. That was supposedly to be a worship experience.

He goes on, "And the sabbath."¹³

They were to keep the sabbath. And, of course, you know that sabbath and those feast days and the new moons and all of those, they were types of God's grace of salvation in Christ and they were observances that they were to observe in solemn sincere worship to God. And they were to see those thing as a privilege, as an honor.

It is almost like somebody said one time, said, "Well, we don't have to go to church on Sunday night."

And the first thing that popped into my mind was to say, "Well, the fact that you don't have to go church on Sunday night is a good thing."

Surprising to hear me say that? The fact that you don't have to is a good thing. The fact that you don't want to is a bad thing. And that is the problem.

And he says, "And the sabbath..."¹⁴

¹⁰ Amos 8:4.

¹¹ Amos 8:5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Look at verse five.

“And the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small.”¹⁵

That was a measure of balance in merchants.

And he says, “And the skekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?”¹⁶

You are getting the picture here now.

What are they saying here? They kept the new moons. They kept the sabbath, but only outwardly. Their heart wasn’t in the worship. Their heart was somewhere else. Inside they rejected these special days appointed by God and they couldn’t wait till they were over so they could get back to what they really wanted to do. That is what the problem is here.

Hurry up and get this done so I can get on with what where my heart really is. That is what they are... I want to... I need to make some money. So let’s hurry up and get this over with. I know we got to do it. Let’s get it over with.

And that was the attitude in Israel in that day. They didn’t have a heart for worship.

It is like the Lord said, “This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me.”¹⁷

So what have you got here? You have got a picture of religion, tradition, ceremonialism. No heart. No truth. No grace. No Christ. That is the problem.

And so because of that we see the certainty of God’s judgment.

Look at verse seven. He says, “The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob.”¹⁸

Now the excellency of Jacob there is the pride of Jacob. And what that literally means is this. The Lord hath sworn against the pride of Jacob. He has sworn against it. In other words, he has declared an oath. And that oath is... and any oath that God swears he engages himself behind the keeping of that oath. And so God has engaged himself, everything that he is in his deity against the pride of Jacob.

What is the pride of Jacob? Again, it is religion without grace, without heart, without truth, without Christ.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Amos 8:5-6.

¹⁷ Isaiah 29:13.

¹⁸ Amos 8:7.

And so they can be as sincere and jealous as they want to be, but it is just not going to work. The Lord hath sworn against the pride of Jacob and here is what he says. Look at this.

“Surely I will never forget any of their works.”¹⁹

What are their works? Their works are sin. It may be moral. They may be religious and they may not be, but it is all sin. It is all fruit unto death. And God says, “I will not never forget it.” God is going to keep account of it. And that is the way it is without Christ. That is the way it is without salvation by God’s grace. Any sinner who stands before God without Christ, without being washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness, you can rest assured God has kept a running account of every word and it all falls short. It can be the best works that you can present. It can be the most moral, religious, sincere dedicated works. It can be preaching in his name. It can be casting out demons. It can be what men call wonderful works, but God won’t call them wonderful. He will call them iniquity.

“Depart from me ye that work iniquity.”²⁰

You may impress me, but it won’t impress God, because the only thing that is going to impress God is his Son.

“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.”²¹

That is the only thing that is going to impress God. That is the only thing that is going to glorify God, Christ and him crucified.

I stand before God in Christ. Now that will impress God. Nothing else will. And any work, any work that I have done or do better be a testimony to the glory of God in Christ. And that is it. I stand before God holy, righteous, forgiven in Christ and that is it. Otherwise, God says this. He said, “I will never forget any of their works.”²²

“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.”²³

“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”²⁴

None of us.

“But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Matthew 7:23.

²¹ Matthew 17:5.

²² Amos 8:7.

²³ Romans 4:7.

²⁴ Psalm 130:3.

²⁵ Psalm 130:4.

Worship, trust him, follow, love. There is no hope without him.

And so he says in verse eight, “Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt.”²⁶

It is like the bondage of Egypt overtaking them again. All that... all of their prosperity in the land of promise, in the land of milk and honey will be gone and it will be just like Egypt has overflowed them again, like they are in bondage because they are in bondage. They are in bondage to sin, to Satan under the curse of the law. You see, the only freedom from that kind of bondage is that which we have by the grace and mercy of God in Christ. There is no freedom elsewhere.

That is why Paul told the Galatians, “Don’t get diverted, now. Don’t get off track.”

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”²⁷

Don’t do it.

Look at verse nine. Now here is the extent of God’s judgment. He says:

“And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: And I will turn your feasts into mourning.”²⁸

Your religious festivals, which should be a time of joy. They will be mourning. They will be like funeral dirges.

“And all your songs into lamentation.”²⁹

All your worship songs will be turned into laments, songs of sorrow.

“And I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.”³⁰

Everything that they rejoice in will be turned into sorrow and death.

Why?

²⁶ Amos 8:8.

²⁷ Galatians 5:1.

²⁸ Amos 8:9-10.

²⁹ Amos 8:10.

³⁰ Ibid.

Because, my friend, there is no hope for sinners except that we rejoice in Christ Jesus. We are the circumcision. We worship God in spirit and rejoice in Christ and have no confidence, no rejoicing in the flesh.

And so, you see, the extent of the judgment, it will reach unto every walk of life. It will be a bitter end, a bitter day.

And so beginning at verse 11 to the end of the chapter he gives us the nature of God's judgment. I want you to pay special attention to that.

He says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water..."³¹

See, it is not a physical famine. This is not a famine of the crops or the rivers.

"...but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD."³²

Do you see that? "A famine of hearing."³³

Now hold on to that thought.

Verse 12.

"And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it."³⁴

Now men will seek for answers in this day. They will want to know why. Why me, Lord? Why us?

You know what Israel how they thought, you know, we are the seed of Abraham. How can you do this to us? We have been circumcised. How can this come upon us? We have Moses and we keep the law of Moses? How can these things be happening to us? We are American. We are Baptist. We have been baptized. We read our Bibles. How can this be happening to us, you see?

And they will go on. They will encompass sea and land, go from sea to sea, from north even to the to the east trying to find an answer. But the problem is they won't hear the answer, because there is a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord.

The Lord gives them the answer. Amos the prophet is telling them why this is happening, but they won't hear him. And then there is a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord.

³¹ Amos 8:11.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Amos 8:12.

So he says in verse 13, “In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.”³⁵

In other words, the purity, physical purity and the energetic youthfulness will not save them in that day. You know they say when you get older you can’t hear as well. When you are younger you hear a lot better. But that won’t do you any good. Physical hearing in this time will not do you any good.

And so he says in verse 14, “They that swear by the sin of Samaria...”³⁶

Now Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel and that is where they had their temple. In fact, you might remember in John chapter four when Christ was speaking to the woman at the well that is what he was referring to when he said, “You say we should worship in this mount, we say in Jerusalem.”

The mount that he was talking about that she worshipped in, the Samaritan woman, was in Samaria.

And so he says, “They that swear by the sin of Samaria...”³⁷

Well, what is the sin of Samaria? It is false worship. It is idolatry. You see, God’s presence in that old covenant, the shekinah glory was in the temple in Jerusalem where the mercy seat was.

And so he says, “They that swear by the sin of Samaria,”³⁸ that is it, idolatry.

“...and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth.”³⁹

That is one of the tribes up there.

“...and, The manner of Beersheba,”⁴⁰ another place of worship, “...liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.”⁴¹

And notice that again. He says that again. “They shall... never rise up again.”⁴²

There is not going to be any reestablishment of this nation. They will never rise up again.

All right, now let’s go back to this famine of hearing. Now notice verse 11 again.

³⁵ Amos 8:13.

³⁶ Amos 8:14.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.”⁴³

Now do you notice how that is put? Now there are two ways that you can apply that, you can take that. First of all you can speak of a famine of the Word itself. In other words, no word from God in the land, no word of preaching, no prophet. That seems to have come upon the nation some few years after this. You might say the intertestamental period between Malachi and Matthew. There was a time of darkness. No gospel preached.

Think about that.

Do you know where there is no gospel preached, there is no salvation? Now I know there is a lot of people who argue with that because they are trying to exalt what they say, the sovereignty of God and they say, “Well, cannot God save any way he wants to?”

Well, let me tell you something. What we need to do whenever we hear things like that is climb into this Word and find out what God wants to do, what he is pleased to do.

Now the Scriptures says that, “The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,”⁴⁴ Romans 1:16.

1 Corinthians one says, “It pleased God by the foolishness of [what?] preaching to save them that believe.”⁴⁵

So it is a moot point for us to sit around talking about what God can do. We need to talk about what the sovereign God who does whatever he pleases, what he says he is going to do.

But now you think about that. Being in a place... and that can happen to a nation. It can happen to a group. It could happen to an individual where you can find no word from God. It is gone.

Someone said that the greatest blessing that the Lord could ever send to a community is a man who preaches the gospel, a group, a church, a local body, a believer where the gospel is preached. And the greatest curse that God can set upon a people is to remove that. No place to go to hear the gospel, a famine of the Word of God.

But I want you to notice how this is put. It says here that there will be a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. It is not necessarily that the Word of God is not there and is not preached. But the famine will be right here in the heart. People won’t hear. They won’t hear.

⁴³ Amos 8:11.

⁴⁴ Romans 1:16.

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:21.

In other words, they will be deaf to God's Word. In other words, the problem is not that there is no gospel preached, there is no Word of God preached, but the problem is with the hearer.

Turn to Mathew chapter 13. It is very similar. The situation here is very similar to what our Lord said to his disciples here when they asked him this question: Why do you speak in parables?

And look at it in Matthew chapter 13. He had just spoken then parable of the sower and the seed. And in Matthew 13 look at verse nine, first of all. After he spoke the parable, and, you know, that parable is about the Word being preached and falling on to different kinds of hearers. You had the hearer, the wayside hearer. That is when the Word is preached and immediately they don't give it any thought. They are indifferent to it, have no desire for it and they... it is... the Word leaves them.

And then you have the stony ground hearer. That is the one hears it and sees some good in it and rejoices in it immediately. But then when persecution comes over the Word they leave it. And then you have the thorny ground hearer. That is the one who receives it for a while, but then the cares of this world and the deceptiveness of riches takes over and they have got better things to do. They are like those people that we just read about in Amos chapter eight there who say, "When will the new moon be gone that we may go sell corn?"

I mean, it is ok. You know, religion has its place, you know. We will go to church some, but we have got to get out here and do these really important things. That is the thorny ground hearer. The Word was choked out.

And then you had the good ground hearer. That is the born again person. That is the one in whom the Spirit of God has done his work of conviction.

And so in verse nine Christ says in Matthew 13, he says, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."⁴⁶

Now he says:

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.⁴⁷

Faith is a gift from God. The hearing ear is a gift from God.

⁴⁶ Matthew 13:9.

⁴⁷ Matthew 13:10-11.

He says, “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not.”⁴⁸

They have physical eyes. But they don’t have spiritual eyes.

“And hearing they hear not.”⁴⁹

There is a famine in their ear. You might put it that way.

“Neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias.”⁵⁰

You see, it was the same in Isaiah’s day in the southern kingdom.

“...which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.”⁵¹

Verse 15, “For this people’s heart is waxed gross.”⁵²

It has grown hard.

“...and their eyes they have closed.”⁵³

This is willful rejection of seeing the glory of God.

“...lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be [what?] converted.”⁵⁴

What is this conversion? It is when a sinner is brought by the Spirit of God under the preaching of the Word to faith in Christ, submitting to him and his righteousness and his blood and repentance of dead works and idolatry.

They have confidence in Christ and no confidence in the flesh. And when they hear that they don’t want it. They don’t want that conversion.

I don’t mind getting religion. I don’t mind turning over a new leaf. But I don’t want to go that far. I don’t want to commit my whole soul, my whole life to Christ and his glory. That is what the problem is.

And so he says, “And I should heal them.”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Matthew 13:12-13.

⁴⁹ Matthew 13:13.

⁵⁰ Matthew 13:13-14.

⁵¹ Matthew 13:14.

⁵² Matthew 13:15.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

But look at verse 16.

“But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”⁵⁶

I wonder sometimes if we don’t take this all too much for granted. Do we really understand how blessed we are if there is not a famine in our ear? How blessed we are.

He says in verse 17, “For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”⁵⁷

And what he is talking about there is how the prophets looked forward to the day of the coming of Christ. They heard the gospel and they saw the glory of God. But they didn’t experience like these disciples did and even like we did today in their day.

And so he says, “Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.”⁵⁸

Think about it. The greatest curse that God could ever lay upon me or any other person is to leave us without a hearing ear, to leave us to ourselves and to our own ways and to our own word and to our own pity parties. And we do.

I was listening to brother Mahan’s message on this about a famine in the Word of God. He had this outline. I want to share it with you. Some of you may remember this. But here is what takes place.

Go back to Amos chapter eight. In this famine of hearing preachers can go on preaching. They may go and they do, but without the power of the Word and the Spirit of the Lord. What an awful thing.

And I want you to see something about that. When a preacher goes on preaching without the power of the Word and the power of the Spirit of the Lord, I will tell you exactly what is happening there. It is not mystical. It is not a feeling. It is not emotion. It is simply that that preacher, he is reading the Bible. He is memorizing the Bible. He is talking about the Bible. He is looking at the Bible and even studying the Bible, but he is not preaching Christ.

Now that is the problem. He is not preaching the simplicity of God’s grace in Christ. That is the problem. He may say a lot of things about Jesus. But he doesn’t leave his hearers with no hope of salvation, no hope of righteousness, no hope of holiness, no hope of glory and eternal life except in and by the person, the glorious person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Matthew 13:16.

⁵⁷ Matthew 13:17.

⁵⁸ Matthew 13:18.

Now that is so. It is not mysticism. He will complicate it. He will add things to it. He will give his opinion. But not the simple message of Christ.

Somebody said one time, "Any idiot can make things complicated. But it takes an enlightened God, Holy Spirit enlightened sinner to preach the simple things of Christ."

How all of salvation is wrapped up in his glorious person, the God man mediator, God in human flesh.

I can make that simple to you in this sense. I can tell you he is God in human flesh. I can't explain that to you and I don't need to, but that is who he is. He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, but declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given."⁵⁹

His name shall be called Jesus. He shall save his people from their sins. His name shall be called Emmanuel which, being interpreted, is God with us.

It is just as simple as that. Who is Jesus Christ? He is God in human flesh. He was made sin as a substitute, as a sin bearer, as a sin offering. He didn't become contaminated. He wasn't made a sinner. I am not going to complicate your minds or my mind with that kind of junk. He was the atoning, sin bearing sacrifice who went under the judgment of God for the sins of his people and he drank damnation dry. And I am going to tell you something. Every one for whom he died shall be saved.

That is as simple as I can give it to you.

Salvation is by the grace of God and not by our works at any stage, at any degree, to any degree at any time.

When we come to Christ we come to him submitting to who he is and what he has accomplished. He is the Lord our righteousness. I have no righteousness before God but Jesus Christ and him crucified. That is simple.

And when men get away from that they will do a lot of preaching, but there is a famine of the Word of God.

Here is the second thing brother Mahan said. He said, "Assemblies are permitted together, but Christ is not present."

Christ said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name,"⁶⁰ that is, for his

⁵⁹ Isaiah 9:6.

⁶⁰ Matthew 18:20.

glory and preaching the truth concerning him, he says, “there am I in the midst of them.”⁶¹

Again, what was their problem back here? Religion with no truth. Religion with no heart. Religion with no grace. Religion with no Christ.

And I fully recognize that a person can grab hold of the truth and logic of the doctrine and not love Christ. But I want to tell you something. Those whose hearts burn within them to hear the fullness of the Son of God incarnate and the work that he accomplished on Calvary, I can tell you right now the Spirit of God has done a work in their hearts.

Brother Mahan went on to say, in his third point he said, “The Word is preached, but no application to the heart.” And he quoted this verse. This is Luke chapter 24 and verse 32.

Now picture this. Here is the risen Lord of glory, the risen Lord of glory. He has been... he walked this earth for 33 and a half years and for three and a half of those years he had a public ministry. He went about preaching the gospel, the gospel of the kingdom. He went about doing miracles, great miracles. And then he was arrested. He was lied upon and he was crucified. He was buried and he arose again the third day and here he is walking the earth and he comes upon the road to Emmaus to some of his disciples and they didn’t even recognize him by physical sight.

But they did recognize him in a way and here is how they recognized him. It says in Luke 24 and verse 32, it says, “And they said one to another...”⁶²

Now this is talking about he had already left them, now, and he had been speaking to them. He had been talking to them about his person and his work, the gospel. And it says after he left, “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”⁶³

“Didn’t our heart burn within us?”⁶⁴

Now they are not talking about acid reflux there. They are talking about a love and a desire to hear and feast upon the bread of life. Eat his flesh and drink his blood. That is what he told his... he wasn’t talking about cannibalism. He was talking about I hunger and thirst to hear the Word of God. I must have the Word of God.

And when those disciples... you see, many of them were offended. Many of them were offended. You see, this is the... are you offended at the Word of God, at the words of Christ, at the gospel of God’s grace?

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Luke 24:32.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

And they were offended. And many of them turned and walked away and he turned to his disciples and he said, "Will you go away also?"

And Peter said, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of life. You have the words of..."

Are they words of life to me? Are they words of life to you or are they just something you just need to go through the motions and get it through so you can go back to doing what you really want to do? I am serious now.

That is what was happening in Israel.

Do you realize we are here tonight to worship God? And I will tell you what. That is a struggle within each and every one of us. Even this preacher. I have thoughts, too. I have things that upset me, things that make me happy, things I feel good doing and all that. And now you have... it is a warfare, isn't it? And you have to pra, "Lord, cleanse my mind to be open to your Word and let my heart burn within me to hear your Word."

Feed upon. I am hungry for his Word.

Stephen stood up to preach and preached a glorious gospel message identifying Jesus of Nazareth as that Messiah and after it was over they rejected him and he said in verse 51 of Acts chapter seven, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears."⁶⁵

You have got a famine in your ear. That is what he is saying.

"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."⁶⁶

Brother Mahan's fourth point on that message he said the ordinances, the gospel ordinances, baptism and the Lord's supper, they go on but without the presence or power of the Lord. In other words, they become meaningless rituals, something that you just go to do because everybody does it. And if you don't do it everybody looks at you and says, "What is wrong with that person?"

No, no, no, no. That is not what they are. Baptism is a public identification with my Savior and my Lord.

I want to tell you in the way that God tells me to tell you that he is my only hope and Savior. He is my... my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. And that is through baptism.

And I want to tell you that continually. That is the memorial [?]. It is not just ritualism.

⁶⁵ Acts 7:51.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Well, as I said, a famine of hearing may come to a nation as it did here. It may come to a group. It may come to an individual.

Let me close with this. How do I know when this is happening to me? If it is happening to me?

Well, we have already said it. First of all, when the Word preached does not speak to my heart, when it doesn't feed me, when it doesn't inspire me to grow in grace and in knowledge, when I become offended or even indifferent to it, that is when I know that it is happening to me.

Another way is when other things take precedent over the Word. I mean, let's just be honest. When we can take it or leave it and that is it, isn't it? There are people who can just take it or leave it. It is ok if I am there, you know. I can leave it.

What did the Lord? When he confronted Satan in that great temptation he said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."⁶⁷

You know, that is our spiritual life. This is our spiritual life. Read, study, hearing his Word.

And then when we begin to have a sense of satisfaction to the point that we really have no more hunger and thirst for his Word as the Church at Ephesus in the book of Revelation chapter two. They have lost their first love.

Well, when the Word of God becomes a source of controversy and not a means of grace, let's not do that. Let's pray, "Lord," like David in Psalm 51, in that psalm of repentance he prayed basically this.

"Lord, continually keep me seeking for your mercy. I need God's mercy always. Continually acknowledge my sin. I have to have God's grace. I am a sinner saved by the grace of God."

Continually justify God in his holiness. God, whatever you do is right.

Continually acknowledge the source of all holiness and all righteousness and all glory and all grace. God is that source in Christ.

Continually seek the joy of salvation in God's upholding grace. Lord, keep me. Keep me and continually use the means of grace. Don't fall into the sickness. Actually, it is a death, isn't it, of a famine of hearing the words of the Lord?

All right.

⁶⁷ Matthew 4:4.