

The God Who Roars

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All right, take your Bibles and let's go to Amos, Amos 1. If you go to Matthew and go back about quarter of an inch, a little less, maybe half of that actually, you'll find the book of Amos in there. We began it last week. If you missed the introduction, you really need to get the introduction as we go along. As a matter of fact, if you'll just go and get it, we'll give it to you. So if you work in the bookstore, give it to them, okay? Go get you a copy of the introduction. There is so so much. It's just very weighty and encompassing what we're dealing with here and Amos, the country preacher, the shepherd and gatherer of Sycamore figs has been called by God to leave the farm and go into the city. Actually, his primary ministry is in the northern kingdom. You know, Israel is split into two kingdoms right now and there is a southern kingdom, Judah, and a northern kingdom, Israel, and his ministry is going to be the northern kingdom. They were the most rebellious and they were most backslidden, if you will.

Let's just read verses 1 and 2 again as we continue this morning.

1 The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. 2 He said, "The LORD roars from Zion And from Jerusalem He utters His voice; And the shepherds' pasture grounds mourn, And the summit of Carmel dries up."

Now, to understand verse 2 which is where we're going to focus this morning, you need to understand the balance of the book and that is when you look at the balance of the book, all that Amos is preaching and saying to the northern kingdom, Israel, what you find is there is a centerpiece rebellion; there is a cornerstone of wickedness which all the others sort of connect to like tentacles, if you will. He's going to pronounce judgment for a number of sins and rebellions but there is one thing that is the primary issue that's going to bring the roaring judgment of God against them and that is that Jeroboam in the name of true religion, Jeroboam, king of the northern kingdom, Israel, in the name of true worship, developed false worship. He synchronized carnal pleasures and carnal amusements that were associated with the Baal worship of the day and all the pagan countries around Israel worshiped idols and primarily the Baal idol which was a calf or a bull, and it was associated with fleshly indulgences: sexual immoralities, sexual

perversions; a static expression of worship, just getting wild and letting your emotions and your feelings just run amok. And Jeroboam in the northern kingdom decided, "I'm going to take some orthodoxy, some true Jehovah worship and I'm going to mix with it some of the carnal pleasures and amusements of Baal worship and then we're going to have a new contemporary thing and it's going to work great and people are going to love it." And that is the primary reason God's wrath is going to come against Israel in severity and in entirety.

Now, I. the title of this morning is the same as the first Roman numeral: "The God Who Roars," and the question is, who is this God? Or what kind of God comes against his people with the voracious violence of a roaring lion? And that's what he says in verse 2 as he's writing to these people and, of course, in real time he's proclaiming these truths to them, he said, "The LORD roars." Now, the picture here is the lion who after he has risen to his feet, he roars because he's about to pounce on his prey and his roaring is to inflict paralysis and terror into his prey. Now, this roaring is both a warning and a declaration in Amos's context. He's warning them of what's coming but he's also declaring to them it is coming. I mean, the pronouncement has been made by God.

It makes my mind go back to those National Geographic specials on TV. We have so many of them now where they will do a documentary of a pride of lions and I find it rather amusing, the commentary they have on there. "Well, this lion, she's thinking this because she went there and her sister is thinking that." They don't know what those lions are thinking. You'd think they're people or something. Look, all they want to do is kill something and eat it and be safe and breathe. That's all they want. They are animals. They are beasts. But anyway, hyenas are the arch enemy of the pride of lions and to some degree the lions just kind of tolerate it because hyenas can be difficult to deal with. But every now and then when those hyenas, a cackle of them, will get too large and too threatening, the big male dominant lion will get up. I remember the video. We might put it on the screen. It's not funny because this is what Amos wants you to view your God like. This ain't happy church, this is Grace Life Church and we preach the word. Sometimes it's happy but sometimes it's terrifying. The male lion finally gets up and he quickly spots the matriarch because they are a matriarchal animal, the dominant female leads. He springs to his feet after giving the roar. He quickly runs her down, traps her on the ground and with one chop breaks her spine or her neck and it's over. That's the picture Amos is drawing. That's what he wants you to think. God has already gotten up. That male lion kind of laid around there, he tolerated the noble hyenas. They would get their prey sometime, he had been patient but all of a sudden he said, "I've had enough," and he gets up and gives that pre-attack roar and I'm telling you, from that moment on, it's over. What kind of God is like that? So Amos uses this roaring of the lion metaphor to speak of this impending judgment coming against Israel.

Now, this is not unlike the other metaphors we find, especially in the Old Testament. God in his wrath is like thunder, and we see like darkness, and we see fire, and even some other things to give us a picture of the greatness and the severity and the ferocity, if you will. But here where he uses the word "The LORD roars," this is a savage and a vicious word.

Now, the God Amos is writing about is not some God of ancient mythology from millennia gone by somewhere, he is the God that you and I know and he is the God that you and I worship. Now, we have to combat the lies and I'm going to talk a lot about this at the end of my sermon. If you're a pastor in today's world, you can't rest. I mean, the very moment you think you've patched up one area of your church from the lies, the twisting, the deception, the false doctrine, there is another area you've got to face and there's another area and another front you've got to fight. But in our world, we have this overwhelming dominant teaching that secular men and liberal pastors and liberal theologians teach us that God is some sort of tame kitty cat and he's just wants us to feel and desire whatever we want to feel and desire and whatever we feel is right for us, he's just good with that. He is just good with our desires, he's good with whatever behaviors we have. He just wants to cuddle up with us from time to time and give us comfort. That's the way they would like us to view God. Now, there's only one problem about that, it's not true. It's a lie. It's not what the Scriptures say about God. We've learned at Grace Life, we're going to let God be God and when that is uncomfortable, we're going to be uncomfortable, and when that's wonderfully comforting, we're going to be comforted. When that stirs some terror in our souls, we want terror in our souls. When it gives us immense joy and confidence because he is faithful to us in his covenant, then we'll have immense faithfulness and confidence in our hearts. But we're going to let God be God here.

No, he's not a tame kitty cat, he is indeed a wild and untamed lion. That's who this God is, the God who roars. He's the one true God, and let's remind ourselves that he is intrinsically holy. In other words, God is who God is and everything God does is absolutely perfect and absolutely right. He's utterly and infinitely unlike us but he is utterly and infinitely right and we're not, that's the God the Bible gives us.

Now, there is a sense in which you can say that our God is completely self-serving. Did you get that? He is completely self-serving. Now, think about it: if you are intrinsically holy and only perfect and righteous, then the only thing you can do is what you want to do because that's the only thing that's really right because of who you are. You can't do that and I can't do that but God can be completely selfish and self-serving, if you will, and it's always perfectly right for him to do it according to the high dictates of what is right and he is the high dictator of what is right. He defines it from himself. He does what he pleases. Did you hear me, church? God is a God who does what he pleases. He is not waiting to hear from the Supreme Court. He's not waiting to hear from the halls of Congress. He's not waiting to hear from a loud mouth named Donald Trump or radical liberal screaming in the street demanding that we not dismantle their God, the federal government. He's not waiting to hear from any of those. He is God. He does what he pleases.

A few verses here that I think are interesting. We'll not look these up but just listen to this from 1 Corinthians 15, the Bible says he made the plants the way he made them because it pleased him to do so. In 1 Samuel 1 and in Numbers 24, the Bible says he made Israel his people and he blessed them because it pleased him to do so. In Ephesians 1:1-5, the

Bible tells us he chose us and predestined us to be his children and to be saved because it pleased him to do so. In 1 Corinthians 15, it says that God saves men and allows them to know him through the foolishness of preaching. He could have done it a million different ways but primarily through the foolishness, what the world would say is foolish, that is, the foolishness of preaching because, the Bible says, it pleased him to do so.

Then something very interesting, the Bible says in Romans 15:3 that Christ Jesus, the Son of God, when he was here, pleased not himself. What that means in a human sense: he didn't do what was easy or painless for him. But the only reason he did not please himself was, Isaiah 53:10, the Bible says, because the Father was pleased to crush him. It was the Father's good pleasure to save the children, to crush on the cross his only begotten Son. So aren't you glad in the dictates of the Godhead, the Father's pleasure was in the great wisdom of developing a plan and then his Son executing that plan to save the children, even though it took the crushing blow of judgment and death upon Christ on the cross. He does what he pleases. The Psalmist says in Psalm 111:3, he does whatever he pleases. That's not it, is it? No, that's not it. I've written it down wrong. He does whatever he pleases.

Now, so Amos here says in chapter 2, "The LORD roars," and you might ask: what kind of God would picture himself as such a vicious savage beast? Well, he's that kind of God because it pleases him – listen to me – to uphold his holy justice and come against the nations and particularly Israel with fierce and violent destruction because it is the perfect and right thing to do according to holy justice which is immutable and will not change. Listen to me: there are some things God cannot do. God cannot act contrary to God. He cannot cancel out justice because justice requires the swift and thorough destruction of evil. He is God and he is just.

There is another interesting note here about this Lord who roars, this God who roars, and that's in the Hebrew like a lot of other languages other than English, the verb comes first and the subject always follows. So typically you'd expect when a Hebrew writer would write this phrase, instead of saying, "The LORD roars," subject then verb, he would say, "Roars the LORD." Except Amos here violates Hebrew grammar and he reverses it so it would read like we would write it in English, "The LORD roars." So why is he going against the common rules of Hebrew grammar to reverse it and put the subject first when in Hebrew grammar the verb comes first? Here's why: because he wants you to think about who this is that's doing the roaring. "The LORD roars."

The word LORD there, of course, the name Jehovah or Yahweh and this is the name that God gives himself as he revealed himself to his covenant people, Israel. You see, God's name says something about God's character and that name Yahweh, Jehovah, that we have translated LORD speaks of this covenant God, this God who has chosen Israel to be as his own; this God who is holy; this God who has chosen his people Israel and this God who judges all sin and wickedness. In the name Jehovah, this LORD, he is both the God of justice and wrath but he is the God of grace and mercy. And only the Hebrews could fully grasp at that because only the Hebrews had God revealed to them the way he was

revealed to them; the other nations didn't have the prophets, they didn't have the temple, they didn't have the rituals which taught them the nature of God.

For example, when you went to the altar as a Jew and they had all kinds of sacrifices they were required to bring and turtledoves and bullocks and then, of course, on the day of atonement they had to bring a spotless lamb for each family. So every time they brought that sacrifice, they learned of God. They would see that sacrifice get slain and the blood poured on the altar. They would see the priests burn the sacrifice in the fire. But they would also know because of the wrath that came upon the sacrifice, that holds back God's wrath from coming upon me because our God is a God of holy justice but he's also a God of grace and mercy. So who is this God? He's the God of Scripture. He's Jehovah. He's the God who walked the earth in the person of Jesus Christ. That's who this roaring God is. "The LORD roars."

Now, another important point and I'll just have to be honest with you, I probably consulted 12 I think are the best scholars you can find on the book of Amos. No one really pulled this out but I think it is so utterly clear and strong, we need to think on it for a good while and we'll even conclude the rest of our time with this. He continues on, "The LORD roars," but what does he say in verse 2? "From Zion And from Jerusalem He utters His voice." So I. was the God who roars. We talked about him. Number 2 is: the exclusive nature of God's word and of true worship. The exclusive nature of God's word and of true worship. That is, that God has an exclusive way he wants people to worship, he has an exclusive way he reveals his truth, his word and no other ways are acceptable. And all that is contained in Amos writing, "The LORD roars," but guess where he's coming from? He's coming from Jerusalem. He roars from Zion.

Now, deal with those two words. It's really hard to pin down the difference between Zion and Jerusalem. Actually, Jerusalem, of course, is the seat of the divinely ordained theocracy of the nation of Israel. Zion can be termed or viewed, rather, as another name for Jerusalem. But perhaps more often Zion speaks of the spiritual implication of that land, not just the geographical spot. Jerusalem is a little more the geographical spot, Zion a little more the spiritual truth of what's contained in that place. And in this day, Jerusalem is the city where God has ordained he would make himself known; where his truth would be set forth; where the sacrifices were made; where worship would be performed, and all Jews would travel there at least once a year on the day of atonement to offer their sacrifices because God had ordained exclusively, "I will be known and worshiped in Jerusalem."

It was, if you will, the seat of true religion. Isaiah, the prophet, comments in chapter 22 that Jerusalem was the valley of vision; that the God of Jerusalem and from that region, God's prophets were sent out and God's truth was made known. Now, it was not always just geographically Jerusalem where God's word was made known, but it was the God who made Jerusalem the centerpiece of his theocracy from which truth was known. And that's what Amos is saying here. What he's saying is: man does not dictate from where God speaks or what God says. Are you listening to me this morning? Man does not dictate the means by which God speaks or what God says, God dictates that. That's what

Amos is getting at here. "You backslidden countryman, you're telling us God told you this and God told you that and God revealed this and God revealed that and God blesses this behavior and God is okay with that behavior." He said, "I want to tell you something, God is the God who speaks from Jerusalem."

Let me give you some background. As we said in the introduction, the kingdom of Israel is now divided into two separate kingdoms. There is the northern kingdom, Israel, that's primarily who Amos is preaching against; the southern kingdom, Judah, which on balance had its sin and rebellion but was more of a righteous remnant. Israel was more the rebel faction, the northern kingdom. But Jeroboam is the king of the northern kingdom and Jeroboam grew very concerned that his people at least once a year would leave the northern kingdom, travel to the southern kingdom to offer their worship and their sacrifices in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is in the southern kingdom. And for purely political popularity and power broking reasons, he thought, "Ah-ha, I think I can fix this because if these people keep leaving my country to go to another country to the city of Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, they are eventually going to think, well, why are we separate, and they're going to eventually perhaps move their allegiance from me to King Uzziah of the southern kingdom, Judah. I'm going to lose them if I don't do something."

So Jeroboam decides Israel loves sin. "She has grown to love the carnal fleshly pleasures and amusements associated with the idolatry of Baal worship and the pagans we've been intermingling with so she has just come to love sin, but," Jeroboam thinks, "but they are also Jews and it is ingrained in them that they must be faithful to the ceremonial law." Now, they're not doing real good at keeping the moral law at all. They have done decided the moral law is out of date. "We've got to be open-minded. We need to get in on some of this pleasure and lust and excitement that Baal worship can give us, this worldly pleasure." So they weren't doing good on the moral law but Jeroboam knew they were not going to give up on the ceremonial law. They needed to go somewhere and do their rituals, bring their sacrifices, have their feast days, bring their offerings. And by the way, they were faithful, that's orthodox, that was sound, that was true. They were to do those things. So Jeroboam says, "They love sin and worldly pleasures but they're going to keep the ceremonial law, so here's what I'll do, I'll create something where we put all of that together in one and I'll just create for us our own Jerusalem in the northern kingdom. I will be able to give my people everything they can get in Jerusalem and a whole lot more." Never done church the way Jeroboam does church. It's a new day and a new thing and a new excitement and new pleasures.

So he decided, "This is what I'll do. I'll take a place in the northern part of my country, the city of Dan, and I'm going to build a place to worship in Dan. Then I'm going to go down into the southern part of my northern kingdom, Israel, and I'm going to go down to Bethel and I'm going to build an altar and a place to worship down at Bethel, and I'm going to be more broad and open-minded and the people will love it. They'll still get to check off their orthodoxy, we brought the sacrifices, the offerings, we did the fast days, but they can also embrace the fleshly carnal pleasures of Baal worship all at the same time." So he builds these altars, these temples to Jehovah in Bethel and Dan – now listen what he does – and he gets one Baal bull idol, golden idol, and he establishes it in Dan.

He gets another little golden calf and he puts it down there in Bethel. So they have, in effect, kept Jehovah worship cosmetically but have brought the world into the church. You can have it all.

Is it not amazing how 2,800 years later, nothing has changed? Church, are you with me? This is not hard to see, folks. It's as plain as... That's why this book was written by God, it's applicable to all generations. Jeroboam knew he was hitting a homerun. If you pinned Jeroboam down, he probably would say, "Well, I know but, look, there's some good stuff here too." It was good to bring the sacrifices. It was good to bring the tithes and offerings. It was good to observe the feasts. They did all of that so he could say, "That makes it okay." Here's what Amos had to say, "Do you know what that does? That causes God to come after you like a roaring lion, that's what that does. Do you think it's okay? God does not think it's okay. God does not," Amos says. Well, he set up his bulls. He's got the carnal pleasures and amusements of Baal worship in there, he's got some orthodoxy of Judaism there and the people really like this new wave of doing church.

Now, I want you to turn over to Amos 4:4 and 5 to get a cross-reference here. Amos 4:4 and 5. Notice what he says, Amos 4:4, "Enter Bethel and transgress." Here's what Amos is saying, "The moment you go to your church in Bethel, you sin. The moment you walk in the door, you're in rebellion against me." "In Gilgal multiply transgression!" Another place of worship. "Bring your sacrifices every morning," because they were faithful, they kept that part of the law, "Your tithes every three days," they were faithful, they kept it. "[Also] a thank offering also from that which is leavened, And proclaim freewill offerings, make them known." They were disciplined, diligent, obedient to all of these laws about serving Jehovah. "'For so you love to do, you sons of Israel,' Declares the Lord GOD." You just love you worship, don't you? You just love to show, "We are keeping all the ceremonial law. God has to be pleased with us." To an ancient Jew, they kind of, especially the sacrifice, if they faithfully brought the sacrifice, they thought that was the ritual that soaked up the sin of the week. Not many of you but there are a few of you sitting here this morning that you feel like, "If I endure Jeff Noblit's preaching, I've done my penance for the week." No, you don't understand, this is a blessing. This is a gift. The Bible says pastor/teachers are the gift of God to the church. Your stewardship is to take care of me which you do a good job of. No, no, no, the Jews were wrong on that front and if you think coming to church once or twice a week kind of gets your work in, you're wrong. This is a privilege. It's a blessing.

Now go back to Amos 2:7, "These who pant after the very dust of the earth on the head of the helpless Also turn aside the way of the humble," that's how they were unjust toward their fellow men. Now look at the sexual perversion and immorality, "And a man and his father resort to the same girl In order to profane My holy name." Well, where does that come from? It comes from Baal worship. Baal worship was commonly associated with sexual immoralities and impurities. So they've got orthodox Judaism along with fleshly indulgence and pleasures of Baal worship all-in-one. You know, it's interesting to note that it seems like when those who have the most light, and in the ancient world that was Israel, they had the most revelation from God, somehow they seem to fall the furthest in their perversion and rebellion.

Now, back to Amos 1:2, "The LORD roars from Zion, from Jerusalem," and the point is God's word, God's truth and true religion or true worship, does not originate in Dan and it does not originate in Bethel from your combination of bull worship and Jehovah worship, temples that you set up. No, God's truth and God's word comes through God ordained means. Period. And that's why he says, "The LORD roars from Jerusalem." You're not learning the truth at Bethel. You're not getting the truth at Dan. All you know is a counterfeit and a compromise and a wickedness. The moment you walk in the door, it's a sin. God speaks God's way and it's not through Bethel and it's not through Dan, it's from Jerusalem. Now, again, not necessarily geographically but from the God who has made himself known in Jerusalem and made it the seat of religion.

So when Amos begins his book, now in an unrighteous way, I can't say that absolutely, but in a seemingly unrighteous way, our President comes out of the gate guns blazing, and there might be a time for that and a place for that but, by the way, so does Amos. When Amos comes out, you see, you didn't know the context, when Amos comes out and said, "The LORD is roaring from Jerusalem," everybody in Israel said, "Uh-oh," and if not "Uh-oh. Well, how dare him? How dare that country preacher? He doesn't even have any education. He comes in here, he doesn't even know how to speak the grammar of the day. He's unlearned and uncouth and brazen and still speaks like the sheep. How dare him come to the sophisticated temples and altars of Bethel and Dan and tell us God is not speaking to us here and God is not worshiped here?" I mean, out of the gate he doesn't just say, "We need to talk about how you are trending and how you're doing church." He didn't do that. He ran out of the gate and said, "God's roaring judgment is against you. Period." You say, "Brother Jeff, that's hard preaching." I can't get hard enough to match this. Right out of the gate.

Now additionally, not only does he say he roars from Zion but he adds that phrase in verse 2, "from Jerusalem He utters His voice," and that should remind us in this New Testament era that God's chosen means – listen to your pastor, stay alert – God's chosen means for revealing his truth and his will to the people is the preaching of the word of God. That's the parallel to what he's saying when he says, "He sends forth his word from Jerusalem, his voice from Jerusalem." So God has a way of doing it and it's his way of doing it and we're to yield in honor to that way.

Now, III. A solemn exhortation for today's church. I had to do that because that's the centerpiece of who he's talking to, the church of Jerusalem, the congregation of Israel and that parallels over to the New Testament congregations of today. There is a solemn word for us here. You say, "Pastor, I'm really glad that in our congregations today we're not bringing in golden bulls and worshiping them and calling it worship unto Jesus." Well, let me ask you this: if what Amos is showing us and is going to show us thoroughly, that when they established false worship, that means worship with God's name on it but you're doing stuff in there that's carnal and worldly, if that brings God's roaring judgment, then you and I must earnestly endeavor that we stay true to God's word and to God's means for revealing himself and knowing him and worshiping him, especially as the gathered congregation of God because, you see, everything flows out of the church family proper.

This is where we primarily are preached and taught and edified and encouraged. Then we go out and live it out in our families, in our marriages, in the community, in the school, in the society. So if it gets bad here, it all goes bad. If it gets weak here, it all gets weak. If it's false here, it all begins to be false. So that's where Amos is focused.

No, I am convinced that what was happening in Amos's day, the Jehovah bull cult, is alive and well today in congregations, even some that profess to be Bible believing churches. Just as the Jews were mixing some sound things with carnal amusements and pleasures through Baal worship and then congratulating themselves for being so effective – are you listening to me – then they boast, "Look how it's working. Look how wonderful. People love this." Of course they do. Of course they do. "The prophets prophesy falsely and the priests rule on their own authority." What else did the prophet say? "And my people love it so. But what will you do in the end thereof?" Raise your children on that nonsense and see what they do when they are 18, 21, 25 and 35. If you raise them on Christianity with a good dose of Baal worship in it, they're not going to follow God when they get older. Now, some kids go astray. I understand that and I have sympathy because in my opinion the best parents I know had kids who went into seasons of rebellion, but there is no need in helping it.

Two thoughts here. 1. We've got to be intentional. We must be very intentional. Notice how the New Testament tells us to be very intentional to guard against this happening. Jude 1:3, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was," listen, "once for all handed down to the saints." God has revealed his truth, his doctrine, including the means by which he wants his work to function, and you are to contend earnestly to maintain that and keep falsehood out of it. What you believe and how you minister and worship has been once for all delivered and we are to contend earnestly. That means we've got to be very intentional. I want to tell you as your pastor: I am fiercely intentional about guarding you from falsehood in this church, and I do miss some and I do blow it some, by the way, but God help the pastors who are not intentional to guard the church.

Titus 1:9 as Paul instructs his young associate, Titus, he says, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching," definite article, the body of doctrine that we hold to, "so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." He says, "Titus, you be ready to teach the truth of what we're to believe and how we're to function and be ready to refute any that contradict that." Very intentional. You've got to be intentional.

In the day you and I live in, as in any day, we cannot afford to be mildly biblical in our work at Grace Life Church. Jeroboam might have argued, "We're biblical, we're just kind of mildly biblical." And Amos says, "Yeah, and that's why God is coming as a roaring lion against you." Without intentionality or rather with utmost intentionality, we must look to and submit to his word to know the truth and to worship properly. Now, closely connected to that word, the final word, is "vigilant." We must be vigilant. It's been said many times but, boy, it's true in this context: eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. If

we're going to stay in the great liberty of the Gospel of Christ, we must be eternally vigilant. We can't let our guard down. You know, one of the things that Amos tells the Jews here as you go through the book – listen, listen – "you were at ease in Zion. You quit being vigilant. You got lax." He said, "We're good now." That's why Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:7, Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." Now listen, Paul did not say he finished the fight. No, no, no, the fight keeps going. He said, "I finished my course in the fight," because he made it very clear to Timothy and Titus and his younger associates, "Now you take the mantle and you keep fighting until you finish your course of the fight." And it has been handed down through the generations and now you hold the baton. You, Grace Life Church, you, church member, and especially you fathers. You must take the baton and be intentional and vigilant to fight the good fight that we maintain sound doctrine and sound purposes and methods in God's work.

2 Corinthians 10:4-6 is an illustration of how Paul thought, how he warred, if you will. He says, "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses." Now here's the verse I want to focus on, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete." Now, breaking this down, he says, "We're here, we're destroying speculation." That just means thinking. When men start thinking, "I think this is good. I think this is the right way." He's saying, "We're destroying thinking." Then he says, "We're destroying thinking that is high sounding thinking" he says, "lofty thoughts." Now, he's not saying it is high thinking, he says it sounds like high and lofty thinking.

Carrie Underwood, the country music superstar, quoted to a British, I think it was a magazine or newspaper, that she doesn't see what's wrong with people being able to love who they want to love. That sounds pretty good. What could be wrong? I mean, people just loving who they want to love, but then you think, "Now, wait a minute. No. No. Whoa, that sounds like high and lofty thinking," but God has never allowed people to love just who they feel like loving. You can't love your own children in a sexual intimate kind of love. You don't get to love whoever you want to love. You don't love another woman's husband the way you love your husband. "Well, wait a minute, I feel it. It's so strong. You don't get to.... Sorry. Out." No. You don't get to love who you feel like loving. Who told you that? That needs to be destroyed. It is high thinking and sounds wonderful and inclusive and acceptable and tolerant but it's not in agreement with God's word. We've never been able to love just who we want to love. You can't love an animal in a sexual intimate context. Mark my words, mark your pastor's words, both bestiality and incest are right around the corner. When you start down the funnel of filth and vile, it never stops except for a spiritual revival because 20 years ago you would have never dreamed, dreamed we'd be seeing what we're seeing today. You don't get to do what you want, God tells you what to do. He is Lord.

Vigilance. So Paul says, "When we find thinking, even if it seems like, it sounds like high, lofty thinking, we are tearing it down. If it's not in accordance with the knowledge

of Christ, i.e. biblically sound, then we are tearing it down." So Paul's fight, Paul's war is to demolish all that is opposed to Christ, to take all that is opposed to Christ captive and to bring it into obedience to Christ.

Now I'm going to close with this illustration. There is a conference in America, maybe overseas too, called the Passion Conference and through the years the Passion Conference, which is focused on college students, has had a lot of good stuff in it, good preachers, preachers I would probably let preach here. So there is a lot of good but it seems like through the years it has gained enormous popularity and I understand they had 60,000 at a recent Passion, 60,000 mostly college students, and they have turned to a sensationalized, if not extravagant, multimedia, light, sound, visual, song service. I understand this year they had five stories tall screens that formed an X in a huge auditorium. And I looked at some of it on video and I'm going to tell you, it's stimulating. You can be an atheist and get stimulated and excited in that. My point is its powerful on the emotions. Now, thank God that most of the singing is probably very sound and I don't want to draw hard lines, I don't want to get into legalisms, but college students, forgive me college students, I love you, they are immature. The great majority of them do not come from sound churches or sound Christian homes and far too many of them, if you put that kind of extravaganza on and call it this is great worship, they come home and look their moms and dads and their pastors in the eye and say, "We need to do it like that or we're not doing it right," when there is not three churches in America who's got the money to do that. Surely God didn't intend that. So though I'm not going to categorically say all that is evil, it's going down a wrong road. I mean, Vegas shows are not better than the light and the sound shows at some of these conferences.

Then while the Passion Conference is going on, Carrie Underwood, the country music superstar comes onto the stage to help lead the singing. She wasn't there long, I understand, and she sang the song, "There is something in the water." False doctrine. Just false doctrine. Now, a lot of the people there, we had a few church members there, immediately were quenched in their spirit, saw the error of it and that blesses me as your pastor because you get it and I thank God that you did. Listen, brothers and sisters, in Christian worship, words matter. Are you hearing your pastor? We function according to the knowledge of Christ. If you're going to have the right knowledge, you've got to have the right words. Words matter, whether it's a testimony, a song sung, and absolutely the preaching, words matter because words are necessary for sound doctrine and sound doctrine is essential for true worship. "You mean to tell me I'm going to have a conference extolling salvation is by grace alone through Christ alone and I'm going to let somebody sing a song that says there was something in the water?" One of our church members said they were screaming, "There ain't nothing in the water." And thank God for that.

Now, this may shock you a little bit: John Piper is on the board of this conference. I love John Piper. We're not personal friends. I've benefited from his ministry greatly, I thank God for what he does, but I cannot fathom that John Piper and the founder of the conference, Louie Giglio, who's a good man generally, did not immediately get up and ask forgiveness and correct that error. Are you hearing me? Intentional and vigilant to

guard against carnal pleasures and amusements calling it Jehovah worship. Church, are you with me? We can't go down that road. Not to mention that Carrie Underwood on the record has embraced the practice of sodomy, sodomy marriage, and says she attends a church that endorses those things.

How devastating in a conference where tens of thousands of immature, vulnerable, emotionally based college students to be exposed to that so that they can come home with at the minimum, a little check in their spirit about the absolute morals taught in the word of God. Do you know why? Because it was a powerful stirring conference and some will say, "But the preaching, the Bible preaching was powerful and solid." That might make it all the worse because in Amos's day when he was dealing with Israel and was commanded by God to confront Israel and proclaim judgment, the centerpiece of that judgment was against the fact that the people had mixed some sound components with some clearly false things and God says, "I don't want my name mixed up with that crap." You cannot say, "I love and worship Jesus but I embrace sodomy." Can't do it. Can't do it. Cannot do it. Our God is holy. The only way you can worship and embrace immorality is to pledge allegiance to Baal. That's it.

So in reality, Israel, they weren't worshipping Jehovah with a little carnal pleasure and amusements of Baal worship tied in. No, no, no, they were worshipping Baal with a little façade of Jehovah on the outside to clear their conscience. And my friends, now, by the way, I don't think the Passion Conference is there but they sure made a grave grave error and I'm still waiting for Louie Giglio, the head of this ministry, to come out and tell me just what is in that water Carrie Underwood is singing about. Words matter in Christian worship.

I don't mean to stir up anything but do you remember years ago we had a man leading the worship and he got up in this pulpit, and I was sitting there, I think, and he said, "You know, I've learned it doesn't matter what you preach as long as you love the people." Do you know what happened 10 seconds later? I sat him down and I got in the pulpit and corrected that because that wasn't just a little, that was way outside. Brother, what you preach is absolutely essential and it matters because words matter. If every one of you go home with goosebumps and enthralled and blessed and squalling like babies but I have not preached to you the truth, that was a failure and it was not worship. Jesus said, "I will be worshiped in spirit and in truth." Truth. I don't want a third of a thimble of false doctrine in my worship in testimony, song or preaching.

Now, there are things that people can disagree on and they are not foundational things but I'm going to tell you, the morals God has ordained for sexual conduct are essential things and whether or not you are saved by grace through faith or through the waters of baptism is an essential foundation. It's not a small thing. What's my point? Good brothers with good ministries when it gets happening and it gets going and it gets big, if they're not intentional and vigilant, can really open the door to Baal worship in their ministries.

The last part of verse 2, "And the shepherds' pasture grounds mourn, And the summit of Carmel dries up." Here's what he's saying: the shepherds' pasture grounds were more the

lowlands, pretty much just grass through there. It wasn't a real fertile region but the grass grew there. Carmel's summit was a place that got more rain and it was more of a lush garden. Here's what he's saying: the Lord comes in roaring judgment primarily because you're mixing Jehovah worship with Baal worship, and he's coming with severe judgment and thorough judgment all the way from blighting the lowlands of the shepherds' grounds all the way to the lush gardens, the high up Bethels and Dans of your country. God is coming to destroy it all so we must be – and can I be balanced, I like the word balanced – we don't want to get on a high horse and start running around here and forming a bunch of laws and legalism's but, brothers and sisters, be vigilant and be intentional about how you serve God and worship God, especially in the church.

Aren't you glad that at this end of all given revelation after the New Testament, we have what the Bible calls a more sure word. Not that the early word wasn't sure, we just have it developed on out, and all the judgment God should bring on us, he put on Jesus. He put on Jesus. What you need to do with God this morning is to look at God and from your heart say, "God, I am a filthy amusement, carnal amusement, carnal pleasing, loving, Baal worshiper and I hate myself for it. And again this morning I repent of my tendency to want that stuff and I turn again to find my treasures and my joys in you, the Lord Jesus Christ." And then an hour from now you need to do it again, and 10 minutes from that you need to do it again, and Monday morning you need to do it again. That's why we are called repenters. We're not going to let Baal worship get set up in our hearts or in our church, we're going to stay intentional and vigilant because it's very very very serious to the God who comes in judgment like a roaring lion. And all of God's people said. Amen.

Let's stand together in prayer.