

The Greater Famine

By David McCrory

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Zion Baptist Church
3428 Hwy 13
Polkville, Mississippi 39117

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Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we do ask thy blessing upon the preaching of thy word today. I ask, O God, that You would give this earthen vessel utterance, that You'd anoint Your speaker this morning that Your word would go forth with power and authority, that, O God, You would enable us by giving us ears to hear and eyes to see the beauty, the glory and the grandeur of our Savior, Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we break open the bread of life today, I pray, O God, that You would feed us, fill our hungry souls that we might be satisfied in thee for we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

I do appreciate the privilege and the opportunity to come and preach today at your fellowship. It's always a blessing to be able to preach God's word to any people, at any time, and I do agree with my brother, as he said, we are very like-minded and it's always an encouragement and a blessing to find like-minded men in the faith that you can share with and be blessed by. And pray for your pastor because he's a good man and I appreciate his labors in the ministry.

From about 1845 to 1852, there was in Ireland a period of massive disease and starvation known as the Great Irish Famine. It was also recognized primarily outside of Ireland, as the Great Irish Potato Famine. In the native tongue of the Irish citizens, this ethnic period in their history was called Gorta Mor, it's in the Irish tongue, or the Great Hunger. During the widespread famine there in Ireland, approximately a million people died and over one million more fled from their homeland of Ireland, causing a rapid decline in the population about 20 to 25%. The proximate cause of the costly famine was a disease which struck the potato crop, a staple food of the Irish people and of their diet. And although the blight and disease ravaged the potato crops of Ireland and Europe during the 1840s, it specifically sent suffering in human cost to the island of Ireland, where one-third of the population was entirely dependent upon this potato for food. The Great Famine in Ireland was a watershed moment in their history that the people of that great nation suffered under, and its effects permanently changed the island's demographic, political and cultural landscape.

Now famine is a concept, a reality, an experience which historically people from any part of the world could relate to, yet by God's grace and tender mercies, famine is one calamity which modern Americans know little to anything about. In fact, there are

famines taking place right now in the world in other parts of the world, in other regions of the world; men, women, children starve to death every day somewhere on this planet. For the most part, famine continues to be an ongoing struggle for millions of people, though again, overwhelmingly we here in this country are truly blessed to not have to endure it.

Biblically, the issue of famine was a looming threat. As we scan the pages of the Old Testament, for example, just a cursory examination finds several instances of famine. Genesis 12:10 reads, "Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land." Genesis 26:1, "There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham." Genesis 41:56, "The famine was over all the face of the earth." Remember, beloved, it was a great famine which drove Isaac's family originally into Egypt to seek refuge. In 2 Samuel the Bible says now there's a famine in the days of David for three years. Year after year and David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered, it is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites. There was a famine in the land in the days of David. Psalm 105, the 16th verse, indicates that the Lord himself inflicts famine upon his people. It says, "Moreover He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread."

So even the Lord, at times, would bring famine upon his people, and if we were to examine the words of the weeping prophet of Jeremiah himself, we could count almost 30 usages of the term, or the idea of famine in his book. A gross shortage of edible food, people wasting away and starving, dying for a lack of good sustenance is a reality even from the earliest pages of Scripture down through history, and even up to upon some people groups even today. So whether it's a potato famine in Ireland or many of the recorded famines in history, the abject suffering, disease, death associated with this unpleasant plight makes it a difficult and uncomfortable topic sometimes to discuss. Yet for all of this, I'm here to tell you there's a much greater famine than all of these. As bad, as disheartening, as devastating as we know physical suffering can be, as we know famine can be, there's a famine of a great, much greater magnitude and implication taking place even now and besetting the people of God in this generation.

Please look in your Bibles, if you would, my text today is taken from the Old Testament prophet of Amos. Amos, the 8th chapter, and I'll be looking at verse 11. Amos the 8th chapter, verse 11. These are the words of God.

11 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD.

What is God's inerrant and infallible word telling us here? God's judgment was coming. for the Lord's people of old a time was coming, and I would suggest for us today is here when a great and mighty famine would be upon the people of God. Yet this famine would not be like other famines. The famine will not consist of a lack of bread to eat. We will not feel the pangs of hunger in our stomach upon our bodies. There may be plenty to eat. Abundance may fill the land. Nor will this famine be of such a nature that the Lord's

people will lack good, clear, crisp drinking water. Our throats will not grow parched. Our lips may not dry and crack under the unquenched thirst for water. God, in speaking to his people, declared to them saying, "I will send a famine on the land not of bread nor thirst of water, but of the hearing of the words of the LORD." Oh, that the famine God was to send was only of bread and water. Oh, that God in his mercy was only going to afflict our physical constitution with lack of food and drink. Yet this would not be the case. The Lord of heaven and earth through the prophetic voice of his servant, Amos, brings a much more severe judgment upon the people, a most dread and deadly judgment. He's going to starve them but, again, this would be no ordinary famine. There may very well be food and drink. The famine that was to come upon the Lord's people was a more serious famine, an inner starvation, a spiritual deprivation which would eat away and deteriorate them from within and starve their very souls.

Look at the scope of the severity. Look at Amos the 8th chapter, the 12th verse. Look at the scope of the severity of this famine. He says there in the 12th verse,

12 They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD [but what does it say?], But shall not find it.

The prophet Amos was sent to the northern kingdom of Israel during a time when they had come out of great victories and battles and success. The northern kingdom at this time in Amos's history was at a climax of prosperity and wealth, power and affluence filled the land with all the attendant fruits and blessings that went with that, the luxuries in excess. It was a land of abundance, much food, much to drink, much material wealth. Sounds familiar to today. And so the Lord, in judgment of his people for forsaking him to seek these worldly treasures, chooses to remove from the midst of them something which gold and silver could not buy, something which their money could not possess, he was to withhold his holy word. He withheld the hearing of the word of the Lord.

The great commentator and expositor of Scripture Dr. John Deal, writes in reference to this passage here in Amos. He says, "In a literal sense, famine is one of God's arrows He has in His quiver and sends out when He pleases, or one of His sword judgments, which He sometimes orders to come upon a people for their sins. But here is meant a famine of the word of prophecy and the preaching of the word or the explaining of the Scriptures. The words of the Lord are the Scriptures which come from Him and concerning Him, the doctrines of grace contained in them, the wholesome words of Christ." He goes on to say, "Hearing them signifies the preaching of them by which hearing comes and is a great blessing and should be attended to as the means of conversion, as the means of regeneration, the knowledge of Christ, faith in Him and the joy of it. Now to be deprived of the hearing of the gospel is a spiritual famine for it is that food, the bread, the meat, the milk, honey, yea, the feast, it is a food that is savory, wholesome, nourishing, satisfying, strengthening, comforting, and when this is taken away, famine ensues."

Consider this, my friends: one of the greatest blessings all of Israel possessed, one of their greatest treasures that Israel had in the Old Testament was to be carriers or

ambassadors of the word of the Lord. Look at Romans the third chapter. They were privileged to have the word of the Lord. Romans, the third chapter. Paul, in this unparalleled epistle explains one of the many blessings of God's old covenant people. Romans, the third chapter. I've got to find the verse myself. Let's see. It's Romans the third chapter. I've lost my place. Let's see. There we go. Verses 1 and 2, "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?" He says, "Much in every way!" verse 2. Why? "Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." The word of God. One of the greatest blessings all of Israel possessed was to be ambassadors of the word of the Lord. What advantage did they have? Much in every way. How so? Because to them, was given the words of life. To them was given the word of God.

The Lord entrusted his word to the care and the oversight of Old Testament Israel. They carried that word with them and brought it to us in the New Testament. What a wonderful privilege. What an honor to be able to regularly and continually be under the means of grace which is the preaching and the teaching and the hearing of the words of the Lord, the only nation on earth that had such a privilege at the time. Yet consider this, my friends, if it was such a blessing and it was to come under the regular preaching and teaching and hearing of the word, to have the word ringing in their ears regularly, then the opposite is also true, it is a curse, a judgment, to have that self-same word removed from them, from the midst of the congregation. It is a curse not to hear the word of the Lord faithfully expounded and applied in the midst of God's church. It is a curse not to have the words of life, the words which bring repentance, beloved, the words that bring conversion, delivers from sin, nay, the salvation of your very soul. The word of God nourishes man, it feeds our soul, therefore, what a tragedy it is to feel the hunger of famine, the want of the words of the Lord.

Let's turn back to Ezekiel the third chapter. Ezekiel 3. Let me read for you, if I can, verses 1 to 4. Ezekiel 3:1 to 4. Ezekiel says, "Moreover," God, the Lord, "He said to me, 'Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. And He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.' So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness." Look at verse 4, "Then He said to me: 'Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.'" Kind of a contrasting picture here between Amos and Ezekiel that in what is most likely figurative language, I don't imagine that Ezekiel actually ate the scroll, he may have through divine assistance been able to literally eat the scroll, in any case, the prophet Ezekiel is commanded by the Lord to eat the word of God, to digest the scroll, to be full of the word of God and then what is he told to do? He's told to go to the people of Israel and to share, to speak the words of life, God's word over them, "To speak My words to the house of Israel."

Now notice this: what the Lord blesses the people with under Ezekiel, he withholds and curses them under Amos. Remember the people of Amos's day were fat on their material wealth and abundance, they were comfortable, they were at ease in Zion, and in judgment upon them rather than causing a famine which would merely and graciously remove these idols from the land, a famine of the hearing of the word of the Lord was to come upon them. There's a famine in the land. The people are going to be starved. Now there may be

plenty of food, they may be able to sit down to a feast, but they're lost. They're depraved. They're fallen. They're wallowing in their sin and they know not the offense that they give to the God of heaven and earth. They know not the word of God, for they have not the word of God. God has removed his word from their presence in order to draw them back to him, in order to show the empty void life that comes from leaving the word of God and embracing the idolatry that they had fallen into.

Now, as the Lord impressed this passage of Scripture upon me, Amos 8, the 11th verse, to bring to you today, he did not leave me without what I think is important and significant application. Again, the situation in Amos is not isolated to Old Testament Israel. I believe and I'm convinced that today it is indicative of the church in our time, that the situation in Amos is indicative of our day, that though surrounded by material wealth, that though surrounded by prosperity, by food and drink, and cars, and homes, and cell phones, and computers, and internet, abundance on every side, could it not be said that truly there's a famine in the land? That we are blinded by our opulence to the true famine that exists right here in the midst of us today? That there's a famine in the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it not the case that overwhelmingly the hearing of the true word of the Lord is missing today? That there's a want, a lack of pure preaching and teaching of God's holy word from his pulpits? I'm not speaking about the multitudes of churches out there that take something and sprinkle the word of God on top of it, dabble in the things of God. The Apostle Paul there says it says to get into the deep things of God, to leave the elementary principles and to study and examine the Scriptures in-depth, to be those noble Bereans of the New Testament that searched the Scriptures daily to see if the things that were being said were true. Again, I'm not speaking of the multitude that stand in front of God's people each week and sprinkle their talks with a few Bible verses. I'm talking about a lack of preaching of the word of God in substance that leads to conviction, passion for the Lord Jesus Christ, rightly dividing, as Paul would tell Timothy, the word of truth and the hearing of the word of God which feeds our souls, strengthens our spirits, and encourages our hearts.

You know, at one point in the Psalms, the psalmist declared there's no prophet in the land. There's no prophet. There's no one to speak the words of God to us. There was absence. There was no prophet in the land. Granted, today there may be a few faithful men who preach his word today, but dear friends, in so many cases, in too many cases, the Evangelical church is being starved to a slow, painful death due to a lack of the word of the Lord and the hearing of the word of the Lord. Is this not a judgment of God just as it was under Amos? Is this not a judgment of God in an indictment upon his people of the hearing of the word of the Lord? There's a great famine, a starvation, a deprivation in the land. Thanks be to God that he has raised up a few godly men, men that I know, that you know, that I know, men that we can fellowship together with, but overwhelmingly we're in a desert. We're in the wilderness. There's no hearing of the word of the Lord. We are lost again.

Christians are dependent upon the word of the Lord. What does Paul say in Romans? I know you've been studying Romans. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." If we don't have the word of God, we have no faith. We have no faith, we have no

hope. We have no hope, we are destroyed and doomed in our sins. That's the gospel. That's the truth. We are utterly dependent upon the words of our Lord for spiritual nutrition, spiritual growth, and our well-being, and one of the most brutal, one of the most harsh, one of the most wretched judgments of God that can come upon his people is when he removes that word from us. As a result of this, as a result of the fact that God can remove his word from us, that we can starve and be deprived of his word, my thoughts immediately turned to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, of our dear Lord and Savior who said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of our God." We must live by every word from the mouth of our Lord. Our spiritual life depends upon it. Depends upon it.

The words of life come to us through Christ. He is the word of life. He is the bread of life. He alone is the words of life. Man cannot live by bread alone. We cannot live simply by the physical means, that that road leads to death, to perishing in our sins, to utter destruction, to the point that every man would die one day then the judgment, that judgment, every man will give an account for every idle word, for every insignificant deed, and either in that day you are covered under the blood of Christ and forgiven of those transgressions, or you will stand bare and naked before that throne, and you will give an account of which you will have no excuse and you will perish in your sins. Again, man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. We must live by every word from our Lord's mouth. We're dependent upon his utterances, his speaking, his words, his voice. Our spiritual life depends upon it.

So as I conclude today and I want to stop here, it is my contention we are in a famine today like no other. We are in a famine, not one of food, not one of water, but of the hearing of the word of the Lord. Despite the apparent opulence of our society, despite the prosperity and wealth of our society today, people are dying, people are being destroyed, they are being gradually famished to death. There's a greater famine than those of old, than those of Ireland, confronting this generation, confronting that generation. Men, women, children are perishing in their sins for want of the words of life. Souls are entering into eternal perdition, hellfire condemnation, final separation from God. Why? There's no hearing of the words of the Lord in the land.

What, then, is our remedy? From whence comes our salvation? Who will be our deliverer? Thanks be to God for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone who can break this great famine, who can feed our souls and nourish our spirits. What does the Lord Jesus tell us? What does he say in his own words? Are you famished today? Are you hungry today? Listen to his own words. He says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger and never thirst. He who believes in Me shall be satisfied."

This is how the Lord Jesus Christ presents himself to the hungry and to the thirsty soul. Is there an emptiness in your spirit? Come to Christ. Is there an inward thirst which cannot seem to be quenched? Come to Christ. Are you famished for spiritual food? Jesus is the bread of life. Salvation from the great famine is only one call upon the Lord away. He can save you. He can fill you. He can redeem you. Call upon the Lord Jesus Christ, for he

is our Redeemer. May God have mercy on us. May he not altogether remove the hearing of his word from us. Souls are at stake. Lives are at stake. Eternal destinies hang in the balance, my friends. This world will fade away, it is not everlasting, but there is one that is and either you have come to that bread of life, you have partaken of the blessed partaking of the Lord Jesus, and you are filled with him, or you are lost. May the church, may the church repent from the failure of its ministers, of its pulpits, of its leaders, from withholding the word of life for the opinions of men. I don't come to church on Sunday to hear opinions, to hear statistics, to hear ideas from men. This is the word of life. This is salvation. This is deliverance. That's what we need to feed upon week-in and week-out. So again, may God have mercy upon us. May he not altogether remove his word from our hearing. Souls are at stake. And may the church repent for forsaking God's holy word. May we never lose the hearing of the word of the Lord, for the word speaks life. It directs us to the bread of life even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank thee, O Lord, for that bread of life that is thy Son. I pray that You would have mercy upon us, that You would not withhold Your word from Your people but that You would feed us and fill us. We know there's a famine in the land. We know, O God, that You have withheld Your word from us for our unrighteousness, our depravity and our wickedness. O God, despite these things, have mercy upon Your people. Restore Your word in the land that we can find salvation, that we can find redemption and forgiveness of our sins through the precious blood of Jesus. For we ask these things in His name. Amen.