

Devotion: June 24, 2020

Amos 7:7-17

7 This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. ⁸And the Lord said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb-line.' Then the Lord said,

*'See, I am setting a plumb-line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;*

*⁹ the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'*

10 Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹For thus Amos has said,

*"Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land." '*

¹²And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; ¹³but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.'

14 Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

¹⁶ 'Now therefore hear the word of the Lord.

*You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac."*

¹⁷ Therefore, thus says the Lord:

*"Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be parcelled out by line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land."*

Sounds like old Amos and Israel were having a real bad year.

How's 2020 going so far for you?

One of my friends wrote on Facebook:

Let's just get this over. Let's put on our masks, give out candy, have a turkey dinner and open the presents so we can get this damn year over with.

Totally agree.

So, how can we adjust our attitudes and/or change behaviors to create "good years," and not "years that the locust has eaten" as the Hebrew Bible states?

The following assumes we all know it is vitally important that we not make bad choices placing our lives and the lives of others at risk. You're probably headed for disaster if you're caught in

some nasty, bad stuff. It's going to come back to bite you — you know where. Life is not going to be good.

That said, here are some suggestions that may help us understand how to create a good life:

1. Remember, it's not about you. Even in years when all things material go well for us, we can have a sudden feeling of life flattening on us. Such feelings can come upon us anytime, but we are especially susceptible when some event happens that changes our routine, like the Covid, or our last child leaving home, some huge goal finally accomplished or our arrival at retirement. When things of that nature happen, we may feel as though our life purpose has been yanked out from under us. We may find ourselves at loose ends, feeling aimless and wondering what the meaning of life really is, if, in fact, there is any meaning at all. It may seem like a bad year.

We know that God has a purpose for our lives — to give glory to God — and that by doing that, daily meaning comes to our lives as well.

2. Remember to shift the focus to others. It's hard to be happy when we focus too much on ourselves. We are likely to be happier and feel closer to God and have a good year when we reach beyond ourselves to help others — to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, as Jesus put it. And when the motive for helping others grows out of a commitment to Christ, the meaning of life becomes clearer.

There's an old saying: "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

3. Remember, it's about living for Christ. These are the apostle Paul's very words. He wrote them while in prison: "*For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.*"

That sounds like a meaningless drivel.

It wasn't for the apostle Paul.

Why would we say such a thing?

Is it possible that very few of us understand what "living is Christ" is all about? We've never signed on for that sort of commitment. We have never really put it all on the line.

In my case, I have never met an unhappy, unfulfilled and restless person who at some point started "living is Christ".

Do you think the apostle Paul, in spite of shipwrecks, floggings and disease, ever felt he was going through a period of his "worst" years?

No.

Here's the secret to avoiding the worst of years and experiencing the best of years: When Christ calls us, go all in.

Let us pray:

As we come to you in prayer, O God, we offer our thanks that you are always present to us even though there are times when we are not present to you.

We thank you that you call us by name, even though there are times when we take your name in vain.

We are sorry for the times when we have not been present to you, and for all the times when we have looked for you in all the wrong places.

We ask that you would instill in us a sensitivity to your presence as we find your glory in the majesty of a sunset and in the smile of a child.

We are thankful that when we find a human need and fill it, you are there.

We offer gratitude for the courage of martyrs who confront conflict with nonviolence. Help us likewise to search for options for a better way.

Awaken us to the opportunities for ministry. Inspire us to pray for peace and for healing of our broken world and our broken relationships.

Expand our horizons that we might know that wherever we are, you are there, for even as we seek you, you have already found us.

Help us to so live that when we meet you face to face, we might hear you say, "You are my beloved child. With you, I am well pleased." Amen.