

Amos: Re-planting Hope

Sermon 5-20-18

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Amos 9:11-15

¹¹On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old;¹²in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the LORD who does this. ¹³The time is surely coming, says the LORD, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. ¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the LORD your God.

Message:

(Play video at <http://www1.cbn.com/ready-die-woman-finds-new-life>)
There's nothing that's too much for Christ to heal. Elisa thought that she was beyond redemption. She thought that the sins of her past would never be forgiven. She lived a life of drinking and drugs to wash over the pain she was experiencing. What amazes me about Elisa's story is how God chases after us. Even when we're not listening. Even when we say "no." God is still chasing after us. We heard that theme last week from Jen in her testimony. If anything is true from Elisa and Jen's testimonies, it's this, nothing is beyond the redemption of God. Nothing is beyond the love of God. We can run and run and run, and Jesus will still be there right next to you, waiting to talk to you. Elisa finally found hope.

And as we turn to our passage, FINALLY, we have some hope from Amos! Can you believe it?!?! Hope! "What's that?" you say, well you're about to find out. After weeks of hearing about judgment, brokenness, endings and denial, this is the week you get to hear about hope from Amos. "¹¹On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen..." A "booth", if you're wondering, is a shelter or a tent in some cases. In other words, God will restore the Davidic Kingdom. The "glory days" of Israel. "...and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old;¹²in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the LORD who does this." Notice that this rhetoric moves away from just claiming Israel as the Lords.

God will possess all the nations. This is a very warrior-like depiction of God. Something that was very prevalent among religious belief in the ancient world. This is a hint of what is to come, that all the nations will be unified under one banner one day, the name of Jesus.

“¹³The time is surely coming, says the LORD, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.” Now you may or may not get this imagery. When you hear “overtake” you may think of dominion over “the one who reaps.” But that’s not the case here. The Lord is saying that there will be such a great harvest of fruits and vegetables that people will be tripping over each other. There will be an overabundance. It will be the time of year to plow the field, BUT they will still be collecting the previous harvest because it’s so bountiful. Likewise, they will still be collecting grapes and mashing them into wine, that those who plant the grapes can’t plant because they’re still collecting grapes from the previous harvest. God’s restoration will bring such great things to His people that they’ll be befuddled with joy and overabundance. A good problem to have after experiencing judgment, punishment and hardship.

“¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the LORD your God.” Hear the beginnings of verse 14 and 15 very carefully. Verse 14 and 15 starts with “I will...” Think about that. It may not seem all that significant, but it is. The Lord will “...restore the fortunes of [His] people...” The Lord will “...plant them upon [the] land...” Notice who’s not the one taking charge or making this happen. It’s not us. It’s the Lord. Our restoration. Our being made into something new and abundant, is by the Lord’s hands. This is a very common Biblical theme. God makes all things new. God restores the broken. God reconciles His creation with His people. God heals the wounds of people. God gives food to the starving. God blesses those who seek after Him and obey His Word. If there’s one thing that Amos was trying to tell the people of Israel, it’s this: you’re not the one in charge. The Lord is the one in charge.

One of the many lessons over the past six months, for me, has been that beautiful things happen when you let the Lord lead. Sometimes I can be like a child in the worst sense. “I want this. I want that.” Demanding what the Lord is supposed to give me. What maybe I’ve earned or deserve. I try to manipulate the will of God into my making. Into what I want. But as I said in a previous sermon, my childish will was broken so that I could be reminded that I’m not the one in charge. And in the brokenness, I found what God wanted for me and for us, as a

people. I was unnerved by this word from the Lord. I didn't know what to do with it. But over the past six months it's been beautiful just to witness how the Lord has opened doors and hearts to bring forth this Kingdom-size vision with Abundant Life. Which, by the way, isn't it crazy that they're named "Abundant Life." You may recall a sermon that I delivered in late November of 2017 where I talked about how much we crave things of life. And that to keep doing things that don't give life to us, is in opposition to the Gospel because Jesus is the giver of life. Many of you commented that this sermon in November resonated with you. As Providence Church, we've said in so many different ways over the years how we crave life. "We want young families." "We want to have more children." "We want more helping hands." We've said these things in so many words. All boiled down to, "We want life." And here we have a church coming in that's named "Abundant Life." No pressure "Abundant Life," if you're listening. But I see this as an answer to our prayers. Our crying out. I see this as God's blessing upon us as a people. That even though it's not life for Providence Church per se, that we can experience life from another church that is full of life. And by mingling with Abundant Life, we may also experience new life in our hearts and in our actions. But it wouldn't be possible if we didn't relent or surrender to the one who's truly in charge. I see reconciliation and restoration in this move. I can't fully explain it, but I think God has some great things in store for us. I don't know what that's going to look like. But get ready, because life in abundance is coming.

What I love about this final section of Amos is that judgment and punishment is not the last word. Yes, the people may have deserved such a verdict. And yet, it's not the end. Even as the Lord spoke about the end of Israel in last week's message. When the Lord calls something the end, it's not truly the end. The Lord exists and works outside of our understandings of space and time. Death doesn't hold our Jesus back. Because He is the resurrection and the life. Jesus took on the judgment and the punishment so that we may be restored to our God in heaven. There's another beautiful story of restoration, redemption and grace that comes from a 2016 NPR article titled, "How A Danish Town Helped Young Muslims Turn Away From ISIS" by Hanna Rosin. "One day in 2012, a group of policemen in a Danish town were sitting around in the office when an unusual call came in. This town, called Aarhus, is a clean, orderly place with very little crime. So what the callers were saying really held the cops' attention. They were parents, and they were 'just hysterical,' recalled Thorleif Link, one of the officers. Their son was missing. They woke up one day and he was gone. The officers put together whatever clues they had about the missing person: He was a teenager who went to a local high school, and he lived in a largely Muslim immigrant neighborhood just outside town. But before they got any further with their investigation, they got another call, from another set of parents. Their son was

missing too. ‘Why is this going on?’ asked Allan Aarslev, a police superintendent. After talking to the parents and snooping around the neighborhood, the police figured it out: These young men and women had gone to Syria. They were among the exodus of thousands of European citizens who were drawn to the call put out by ISIS, the Islamist terrorist group, for Muslims worldwide to help build the new Islamic state. Link and Aarslev are crime prevention officers. They usually deal with locals who are drawn to right-wing extremism, or gangs. The landscape of global terrorism was completely new to them. But they decided to take it on. And once they did, they wound up creating an unusual — and unusually successful — approach to combating radicalization. The rest of Europe came down hard on citizens who had traveled to Syria. France shut down mosques it suspected of harboring radicals. The U.K. declared citizens who had gone to help ISIS enemies of the state. Several countries threatened to take away their passports — a move formerly reserved for convicted traitors. But the Danish police officers took a different approach: They made it clear to citizens of Denmark who had traveled to Syria that they were welcome to come home, and that when they did, they would receive help with going back to school, finding an apartment, meeting with a psychiatrist or a mentor, or whatever they needed to fully integrate back into society. Their program came to be known as the ‘Aarhus model.’ It’s been called the ‘hug a terrorist’ model in the media, but this description never sits well with the cops. They see themselves as making an entirely practical decision designed to keep their city safe. As they see it, coming down hard on young, radicalized Muslims will only make them angrier and more of a danger to society. Helping them is the only chance to keep an eye on them and also to keep the peace in their town...”

“How did it unfold in real time? Consider the case study of a young man we call ‘Jamal.’ He doesn’t want to be known as a person who almost became a terrorist. He wants a job and a life now. But that didn’t seem possible for a while. Jamal was born in Somalia; his family moved to Denmark because Somalia was in the middle of a civil war. His was the only black family in the neighborhood and the only Muslim family, and his childhood wasn’t easy. Kids called him names, asked him if he had the same blood as they did, and teased him. For a long time he just would fight back, but he knew he was disappointing his father. When he was a little older, Jamal decided to take a different tack. He tried to be the good kid. He studied and made jokes in class, and his stress eased. The teachers liked him, his classmates liked him, and he began to make Danish friends and even to feel more Danish. Then one day in high school, his teacher organized a debate about Islam. Jamal had just been on the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, with his family, and he was infused with a newfound religious identity. And during the debate one of the girls started saying to the class that Muslims ‘terrorize’ the West, and kill people

and stone women. Jamal argued with her and eventually lost his temper, saying, 'People like you should never exist.' After that moment, Jamal's life went off the rails. The teacher told the principal, who told the police, who questioned Jamal about being a terrorist. Jamal had to stay home from school and miss his final exams. The police cleared him, but it was too late for him to redo his exams, so he had to redo some of high school. He was furious about it. Soon after the investigation, his mother died, and he blamed her death on the stress caused by the investigation. He began to feel rejected by the West. During that year, he ran into a group of fellow Muslims who had experienced some of the same discrimination. One of them had an apartment, and the group spent a lot of time there talking, praying and watching videos of Anwar al-Awlaki, a famous English speaking imam. The friends talked a lot about jihad and making the trip to Syria. Two of the guys in the apartment began planning their trip. While he was living in that apartment, Jamal got a call from Link, who had heard about his case. Jamal cursed him out and tried to hang up the phone, but then Link did something Jamal didn't expect: He apologized, for the ordeal his fellow officers had put Jamal through. Hearing a policeman take responsibility for his life getting derailed really moved Jamal. He agreed to come into Link's office. When Jamal got there, Link introduced him to Erhan Kilic, one of the first official mentors hired by the program. Kilic was a fellow Muslim who had also faced discrimination in Denmark as a child. But he had taken a very different path. He had decided to embrace Denmark as his country. He now had a wife and two daughters and a successful practice as a lawyer. Kilic relayed to Jamal the main message of the Aarhus program: If he chose to, Jamal could also find his place in Denmark. This is what sets the Aarhus program apart. It didn't use force to stop people from going to Syria but instead fought the roots of radicalization, Kruglanski says. 'There are strong correlations between humiliation and the search for an extremist ideology,' he says. Organizations like ISIS take advantage of people who, because of racism or religious or political discrimination, have been pushed to the margins of society...What Link and Aarslev were doing was so unexpected that it created an opening for people to think differently about their ideology. 'They expect to be treated harshly,' Kruglanski says. Instead, they got the opposite. 'That kind of shock opens people's minds to maybe they were wrong about their society that they perceived as their enemy. It opens a possible window into rethinking and re-evaluating.' Starting in 2012, 34 people went from Aarhus to Syria. As far as the police know, six were killed and 10 are still over there. Of the 18 who came back home, all showed up in Aarslev and Link's office, as did hundreds of other potential radicals in Aarhus —about 330 in total. But the program is admired for another accomplishment: Since the initial exodus of young people, very few have left from Aarhus for Syria, even when traffic from the rest of Europe was spiking.

In 2015, it was just one person. The program is still precarious, though. One terrorist attack in Aarhus could undo much of the work that has been done. But the officers are willing to keep trying. As Link put it, there are still ‘strong forces’ out there tempting young Muslims to leave their lives in the West and join the battle. And Jamal? He and his mentor met for two years, exploring parts of Aarhus Jamal had never seen. During that time, two of his friends from the apartment did leave for Syria. One was killed by a roadside bomb, and the other, a fellow Somali, is still over there. Jamal, by contrast, can definitely and confidently say, ‘I am Danish.’ Reflecting on his path, he concludes, ‘I’m lucky I got that phone call from Thorleif.’”

These Danish police officers “flipped the script” when it came to handling young men who were trying to join ISIS. They welcomed them when many would have rejected them, and even knowing that they were possibly involved with terrorist activity while in Syria. They extended a courageous and confident grace to them instead of punishing them. Our sin is not a mystery to God—He knows and sees it all. But because of Christ dying in our place, we are forgiven and can live in light of His marvelous grace.

Our God is in the work of restoring all things. Even though over the past number of weeks in this series you may have felt broken-down as we studied Amos, you can know that God also wants to restore our brokenness. It doesn’t end with “the End.” It doesn’t end with our brokenness. That’s not the end of the story. It’s not the end of my story. It’s not the end of your story. It’s not the end of Providence’s story. God wants to restore His people. God wants us to experience His marvelous grace. And if Jamal is any indication, we want to experience grace too. It’s moving to our hearts and minds that God’s grace is beyond anything that we could do wrong. Even though we may deserved the judgment and punishment. Even though we may try to re-take control of what God is doing, by the blood of the lamb, Jesus Christ, WE ARE SAVED. It’s by His grace that we can know the freedom of this life and we can experience life eternally. Because we trust our Lord, we can testify in the face of death that we know the life in Jesus Christ. That He is the giver of life. That He is the provider. If our passage today says nothing else, it’s that our God is good. Our God holds up His end of the covenant. Our God fulfills His promises. He is generous and wants to see His people thrive. Can’t you see? God is re-planting hope in our midst. God is re-planting hope in the people of Providence. God is re-planting hope in His people who are faithful to Him. Praise God that He is the giver of life! Praise God that He re-plants hope in our lives when we are beaten and broken down! Praise be to God that He restores all people and all things! Amen.