

CHRIST THE PLUMB LINE

APRIL 12, 2026

9:00 & 10:15

Hey, good morning, everyone. For those of you who may not know me, my name is Carmen Harper, and I am one of the associate pastors here at Woodlawn. Joe is taking time off today to rejuvenate after Easter. I am excited to share the message with you this morning. Let's take a moment to pray before we get started.

Holy Father,

Thank you for the opportunity to share your word. May it go forward and prosper and accomplish your will in our hearts and minds. Anoint the words as they leave my lips so that they have power and anoint the ears to hear and the hearts to receive your truth. Holy Spirit, fall like rain on this gathering. We ask for more of you today. Allow us to feel your Holy presence and know you are near. Pierce the veil so that we understand that the spiritual life we do not see is so much more real than the natural life that we do. Hold us to your standard today and help us to live up to you. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Amos 1:1-2

The Words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa – the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam was king of Israel.

He said: The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.

A few weeks ago, I sat down to read this book as I have many times over the past two and a half decades not knowing where it would lead. Although I knew I would be preaching today, I wasn't looking to write a sermon. I was merely spending time with God reading His Word.

As I said, I have read this book any number of times over the past two and half decades and was never particularly moved by it. But on this day, something was different. Right away, I began to see things I had never seen or understood.

First, I saw so clearly how God gives hearing to the prophets. Amos hears God as a roar and as thunder when others hear nothing at all, and God gives sight to the prophets. Amos sees the Word of God dry up the pastures and wither the top of Mount Carmel. He understands the immense power contained in God's words.

Without a doubt, from the outset, Amos understands that for blessing or judgment God's Word performs what He sent it to do.

Through Amos, God speaks judgment. He continues in verse three. This is what the Lord says. This is what Amos heard that sounded like roaring thunder.

For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not relent.

As we skip down this chapter, God says I will send fire. I will break down. I will destroy.

To Gaza, He says for your sins, I will do the same.

Tyre, will receive fire for their sins.

Again and again, God proclaims war oracles against the nations for their sin. Edom, Ammon, Moab. All nations built from close relatives of God's people. All enemies of God's people.

The message is plain. The nations have sinned and for that sin, they will receive God's judgment.

We read these words, and we envision a wrathful God bent on destruction who will use His power and might against the very humanity He created. So many people read these words, and they cannot reconcile the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New. They see two different entities. Too unlike to be reconciled as one.

But that morning, as I read these words, I began to weep. Here are these people that God created for Himself. People God loves dearly who refuse to listen to Him. They refuse to be anything but evil, and for that reason they will be judged.

The more I wept, the more I realized I was weeping because God was showing me how He felt about the judgment He was about to exact on these people. He took no pleasure in it. In fact, He was showing me that it made Him very, very sad.

You see, God is just and He is holy. So, He cannot allow evil to go unchecked forever, but He is not a God who takes pleasure in it. It breaks His heart, even when the people richly deserve judgment.

What follows made me cry even harder. Let's look at Chapter 2, beginning in verse four.

This is what the Lord says: For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not relent. Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed, I will send fire on Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.

This is what the Lord says: For three sins of Israel even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.

Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god, they drink wine taken as fines.

Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them, though they were tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below. I brought you out of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness to give you the land of the Amorites.

I also raised up prophets from among your children and Nazirites from among your youths. Is this not true, people of Israel? Declares the Lord. But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.

Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life.

The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life. Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day, declares the Lord.

Hear this word, people of Israel, the word the Lord has spoken against you – against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt:

You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.

Did you catch what is going on? These folks show up at the temple, they bring their offerings, they offer sacrifices. They sing praises to God and continue in their sin. They are completely oblivious to the fact that they are not right with God.

God says in Amos 3:10 They do not know how to do right, declares the Lord, who store up in their fortresses what they have plundered and looted.

God had entrusted them with laws to live by and they did not know how to do right.

Throughout Chapter 4, God tells them all the ways He tried to get their attention and turn them in the right direction. He says . . . I withheld rain. I struck your vineyards and gardens with blight. I sent locusts to devour the figs and olives. I sent the plagues of Egypt to get your attention. I sent people to kill your young men, but you still did not return to me.

4:12, "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God."

God proclaims the day of judgment has come and you brought it on yourself because of your sin. I tried time and again to get your attention, but you turned your back on me.

In Chapter 5, God calls to His people to repent.

Seek me and live. Seek the Lord and live. Seek good, not evil that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

God is calling His people to repentance. Calling them to turn from their sin. Instead, they continue in sin and go to the temple every week as if they are perfect, feeling very prideful that they were God's chosen ones. Not realizing that they are just as sinful as the nations that surround them.

In Chapter 5 verse 18, God speaks to that. He says:

Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him.

He says, you think you are right with me and you can't wait for me to show up, but woe to you when I do, because you are not living right. You think I'm going to show up and pat you on the back. I AM not. You're going to be like a man who got away from a lion and runs straight into a bear. A man that escapes trouble and makes it safely home only to get bit by a snake in his own home.

When I got to this part, my completely broke. God says beginning in **5:21: I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.**

These people were so callous to their own sin that they did not notice it anymore. It's like when people get nose blind to certain smells, they don't even notice them anymore. The first time you smell it, it's offensive, but if you stay around the smell long enough, your body tunes it out. You don't notice it until someone else brings up the smell and you remember how terrible it is.

They had convinced themselves they were fine in God's eyes. They no longer smelled their own corruption, but God looked at their services with contempt and hated the sound of their songs.

God was fed up. His people would have been better off not even pretending to be religious, because God calls it a sham that He hates and refuses to accept. He says you will not live like

you do all week and come to the temple and pretend with me. He says I know your hearts, and I have seen it all. You rob the poor and oppress them. You are full of sexual sin. Away from me with your false worship.

As the book progresses, God continues to speak to his shepherd-made-prophet telling him He is sending locusts to devour the land and then fire to destroy, and Amos (whose name means burden) carries the weight of God's peoples' sins and burdens before the Lord and he cries out to God twice for God to relent and not to destroy. Twice, God relented.

The third time, God shows Amos a plumb line and says Amos what do you see? Amos answers a plumb line.

God responds: Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.

A plumb line is used in building to ensure that walls, posts, and structures are vertically straight. It is the standard. A wall had to be built perfectly to the plumb line because if it began to come off the line even a fraction, the wall would not be straight. Once the build was off, usually it becomes further off the line and once it does, it must be torn down. A wall that it is not straight is good for nothing. You cannot have three straight walls and one that it off even a fraction if you want the house to be sure. God is calling Himself the plumb line. He is saying I am setting my standard here. My people need to align themselves with my plumb line, my rules, my standards and if they do not, they will be torn down just like a useless wall.

He is saying if His people do not keep their lives up against the standard He sets, if they move off even an inch, the wall will not stand. Their lives will fall, and God knew the future. God knew He would not relent a third time because His people refused to live on the plumb line of His commands.

As I spent the next week or so reading and meditating upon these words, God began to reveal to me that although I was feeling His heartbreak over the sins of the people then, my tears, my grief were truly just as much for the state of the world around me and even worse the state of God's church. The universal church. You see, sin is in the camp.

In pulpit after pulpit, the word is being watered down. Pastors are no longer talking about sin lest they offend someone. Pastors, themselves, are falling in sin and God is bringing it to light. Child molesters and adulterers, men dressed in drag are sharing the message in pulpits. God's people today are no less guilty than they were then. Some might say they are more so.

And then, I began to weep over my own sin. It's so easy to look outwardly and see failure and sin. It's much more difficult to see it in ourselves, because if we were honest, we don't want to.

We like thinking like the ancient Israelites. We like who we are. We are God's after all. We call that pride, and it's a sin too. God showed me the things in me that bring Him displeasure. All of the things that HE rejects. I realized God was calling to me the same way He called to His people back then. Carmen, Seek me and live.

He gave me the picture of Christ on the Cross. He showed me that the church today is really good at comparing themselves with others, me included, and feeling good about how holy and righteous we are. But this (picture of Jesus) this is our plumb line. This is the line we are supposed to build our life up against.

But, we read God's word, IF WE DO, and we pick and choose what we will be obedient to and what we won't. We gossip and we think it's not that bad. It's not like we killed anyone. No, but we assassinated their character.

In the church, we glorify things that God expressly forbids in His Word, and we think nothing of it, and we come in here and sit before a Holy God and we feel good about ourselves because we are following all the other commands. Not even taking into consideration the ones we don't. We are nose blind to our own sin.

We need to realize He died because all had sinned and to not fulfill any part of the law was complete failure of the law itself. We do live in a time of grace when our sins can be forgiven, but we have to repent, which is not feeling sorry for what we have done.

To repent is to turn our backs on that behavior and to never do it again. It is to come into agreement with what GOD says and obey His every word, not just the ones we feel good like and feel good about. God calls us to take up our crosses and to die to self. Not continue in sin and feel justified.

I think it would be foolish for us to believe that as much as the world has entered the church that God does not look down on congregations today and find no joy in our worship.

We act as if God would never say He hates what happens in our churches or God is not going to judge the nations and His people the way He did back then.

Let's take a look at 1 Peter 4:17-18 has to say about that. It says

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

See, God is not going to begin by judging the nations. Next time, He is going to begin with the Church. When He starts at the church what does the word say about the fire of God?

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 says:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid that is Jesus Christ. (God is talking about how we build our lives again)

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day (Judgement Day!) will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality to each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames.

That ought to give us pause. Let's look further at that. Gold, silver, costly stones. Do you know what happens when the fire of God's judgment hits those items? It refines them. Purifies them. Makes them more valuable. It doesn't destroy them. It makes them more precious. Wood, hay and straw as soon as fire touches hay or straw, they are destroyed. Wood may take a bit longer but fire will turn it to ash. God is saying some people are going to make it into eternity having everything they did on earth be worthless. It will be destroyed by God's holy fire.

I believe God has the same message for today's church as he gave to the Israelites when He told them there were those among them looking towards the Day of God and they should not be. These verses clearly show that there are those among us living lives that get us to heaven, but just barely and with no reward.

God is watching what we are building and how we're building, and it will soon be judged by His holy fire.

God's message for the church today is the same as in the days of Amos.

Seek me and live.

Talking about Himself, our plumb line, our Lord and Savior said that He was the cornerstone and that whoever fell on Him would be broken. He was talking about repentance. Jesus also said that we would prove our love for Him by our obedience.

In a moment, Bill is going to come up here and lead and open the altar to prayer. If Holy Spirit is convicting you come fall on the Rock of Ages and let Him humble you, Let Him break you. Let Him Restore you, come up and pray. Better to humble yourself here today than to stand before God having your works burned up.

Father,

Thank you once more for your Word. Thank you for your call to repentance. Thank you for loving us enough to want to make us holy as you are holy. Do a great work in us here today. In Jesus's Name. Amen.