

### THE WORST KIND OF FAMINE

I think we all have had the experience of not being heard. If you are a parent, you know full well the experience of your children not paying attention to anything you say. Or teachers, how many times have you felt like no student was listening, just in on ear and out the other. And preachers, well, who listens to us?

There is a story told about Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who came down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir."

It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Surprised, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming."

Israel had a hearing problem. Sometimes we don't hear others because we think we know what a person is going to say. Israel was not listening to God or his prophets because they thought that they knew what God wanted. Since they stopped hearing God, they had drifted so far from God that there was no longer any kind of relationship between them. A new kind of ignorance had arisen. The people of God were ignorant of the things of God. They had zeal, great zeal, but the zeal was misplaced because it did not conform to the wishes, desires and law of God.

As the book of Amos progresses, we see God's increasing contempt for Israel. Judgment was meant to call Israel back to God but Israel would not listen. They went on their merry way. Amos even did as Moses did and intervened on behalf of Israel. God threatened to wipe Israel off the map, Amos pleaded with God to spare them

It is strange to me that though Amos pleaded with God, Amos was rejected by Israel. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, sent word to the king that: 7:10 "*Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words.*" It is not unusual for religious leaders, even church leaders, to reject God's word. For whatever reason, their hearts become hardened and their ears would not let them hear. Those who loved God and sought to serve him become the enemy of God because they would not listen.

Amaziah comes to Amos and says, Amos 7:12-13 *“Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! 13 But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.”* Is it ecclesiastical jealousy? Is his power threatened? More than likely, he had stopped listening to God and was very comfortable just the way it was. We know that the coffers of the temple were overflowing. Perhaps he was happy because he had a false measure. Money was coming in, people filled the temple to sacrifice. These are the kinds of numbers that preachers use to measure success. They gather at conferences and conventions and brag about their numbers. But if what the preacher preaches and what the people hear is not the Word of God, has there been any success? If hearts are not changed, if people are not living righteous lives even when no one is looking, are we successful? If we are not loving each other and giving our tithe out of love and attending worship to express our joy and love for Christ, then can we say the church has done well?

“Get out Amos, you prophet, we don’t want your kind around here.” We don’t want an independent pulpit, we don’t want a prophet who speaks the truth. We want our ears tickled. Amos responded with those famous words, *“I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet.”* I am a sheep herder and a fig farmer. One day God called me out of the sheep pen and told me to go and prophesy *“to my people Israel.”* The thing is, God still called them my people. There was still hope that they would listen. But we can see the corruption, from the religious leaders on down, all of Israel had turned a deaf ear to God.

What followed was hard and terrible. Now listen to the Word of God, he told Amaziah. You tell me that I should not prophesy, you Priest, your wife will become a harlot (no husband to protect her) and your children will die by the sword and your land will be taken away from you and you will die. It was blunt and hard and terrible. As a priest, he was a mediator between men and God, he knew better. The ones who know better bear a greater responsibility.

Because the people refused to hear the word when it was preached, God passed a peculiar kind of judgment on them. God will leave them alone, he will speak to them no more. Amos 8:11-12 11 *“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD. 12 People will stagger from sea to sea And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, But they will not find it.”*

There will come a time when they will realize they had not listened to God. It will be desperate times and they will seek the Word of God and it will not be found. No prophet, no preacher, no one will bring them the Word of God. They will stagger to and fro wondering why God does not answer, why has God abandoned them. Always self centered, to the very end thinking only of themselves. And God will allow no Word to be preached lest they hear and repent, for judgment is on them and it will not be turned away.

We live in an age when the Word of God preached is becoming something of a rarity. People want feel good sermons. They want Mr. Happy over in Texas to tell them that all God wants is for us to be happy. And when people tell me they read his book and liked it, I know that we are not hearing God anymore. When we even halfway believe the preachers who tell you that God wants you to be always healthy and prosperous, then I know we have stopped listening to the One who promised we would have troubles in this world.

When we stop hearing God, we not only break our relationship with God, we destroy the souls of our children and the generations that follow us. We stop hearing and we do what is not right, and the next generation thinks it is normal. The sins of one generation becomes normal behavior in the next generation. We already see it because we have made such gods out of sports and leisure that they keep us from worship and service to God. Our children and youth think it is normal to attend church once a month. We don't have time to think and pray because we have given in to the busyness of life. We don't hear the Word of God. And our children and our children's children will find it even harder, if not impossible to hear God because we closed that door.

There are still preachers who will preach the Word of God. There are still some who will tell you the truth of Scripture. There are teachers who still teach God's Word. Don't tell us not to preach. Don't take your Sunday School teacher to water down the lesson and twist it so that it makes you feel comfortable. Don't say to the deacon or the committee member who asks you to do a task, I don't want to hear you. Don't keep saying no to God because the ultimate result is that you will get what you wish for. God will say to you, "your will be done" and he will leave you utterly alone. It will be the worst kind of famine.

Don't do it. Don't keep seeing and not see. Don't keep listening and not hear, for God will take away his presence and we will have a famine of the Word God. Our souls will dry up, our confidence will be gone. And God will not listen to us so we can repent. Hear the Word of the Lord and obey it while there is still time.