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. Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light—pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me 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! "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god—which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty.

Raise your hand if you like surprises. For those that raised their hand, it’s very telling of your personality—you raise your hand quickly even when you don’t have any idea what the surprise is! Others of us are a little more cautious. We catch ourselves thinking, “he says surprises...is he talking about good surprises or bad surprises?” What I mean by a good surprise may go something like this...you are just going about your day and then someone brings you a gift that you like. You weren’t expecting this at all, but they thought about you, they knew what you liked, they shopped for you, and then they brought this gift to you, and the only thing you need to do is to open and enjoy this gift! Now, that is a good surprise! Or, maybe your supervisor calls you into his or her office, and you find that you have now become slightly anxious. You are wondering,
why does he or she want to speak to me? You wonder, “did I do something wrong”? So, you make your way in there, sit down, and your supervisor shares all these words of praise with you, and how great a job you’re doing, and really builds you up! Now, that is a good surprise as well!

Now I think a bad surprise might go something like this. You know you have a doctor’s appointment at 11 o’clock and you want to be on time for your appointment. So, you leave at 10:30. You have your music going in your car. You are just enjoying your day—it has been a great day; it has been a great week. And you get into the doctor’s office, go through the appointment, and toward the end of the appointment, your doctor approaches you and starts to share some very challenging news with you. Your doctor is very concerned about one of the things he or she notices in your blood test, and because of this, your doctor would like to do further testing on you. And then the doctor starts throwing out the changes that you need to make with your diet and with your exercise to help with these out of range numbers in your blood test, and throws out a couple possible diagnoses but says, “we need to do more testing to figure this out.” What started out as a beautiful day, quickly dissolves into one of extreme anxiety. You are not sure you can pay for all these tests; you’re not sure you have what it takes to make all these changes in your life as your work and family life are busy right now, and you are really concerned about the possible diagnosis coming down the road. Sometimes bad surprises are good. They force us to make needed changes in our lives.
I think that is what makes them bad—we hate the effort it takes to make changes. It requires work and effort on our part. But sometimes we need bad surprises to get our lives back on track physically, so we can experience healthy living, and spiritually to have our lives be in alignment with God.

Our passage today is from Amos Chapter 5 verses 18 through 27. Amos lived in the southern kingdom, in Judah. God called Amos to be a prophet to the northern kingdom, to the Israelites. Amos was a sheep herder; he was also a keeper of Sycamore fig trees. But God called him out of that and said, “I want you to go Israel, the northern kingdom, and I want you to share these words of Mine as a prophet.” And Amos responded faithfully. Amos shared 3 surprises, 3 bad surprises, with the Israelites. This passage of Scripture has 10 verses. The first 3 verses are one section—that’s the first bad surprise that he shares. Then the next 4 verses are the 2nd bad surprise, followed by the last 3 verses, which is the 3rd bad surprise.

So, let’s look at the first bad surprise that Amos shares with the Israelites. Israel’s first bad surprise is: the day of the Lord will bring no hope for sinful Israel, because they are not following the Lord and His Ways as an outward sign of their inward commitment. Let’s look at the verses.

Verse 18 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.” You see, “the day of the
“The day of the Lord” is the day when God personally intervenes in history to fulfill His plan. “The day of the Lord” was a future event for the Israelites, and it is for us. It is the “day” where God will settle all accounts, where He will defeat the enemy, and establish His eternal kingdom on earth, and He shall reign forever and ever—that is “the day of the Lord”.

The Israelites were living in a day of prosperity and so they were just enjoying life. They were putting their focus on their prosperity and not on God. Their faith was in their prosperity, not in God. If something wasn’t working for them, they said, no worries, “the day of the Lord” is coming and all will be good for them then. But the truth is, if you have not committed your life to God, you will have no hope on the day of the Lord—it’s going to be darkness, not light because wherever God is, there’s light. God is light. He is our hope.

In verse 19, Amos shares a dangerous wild-animal analogy. He says, “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.” Raise your hand if you have encountered a lion in the wild, in the jungle? Not many people have, but I have 4 times. I have been to Kenya, on a mission trip 4 times, and I have encountered lions in the wild, in the jungle, while on safari at the end of each of these mission trips. The missionary host made it possible for me, and the mission team on the trip, to go on a safari after we completed our mission each time. It’s the coolest thing! When you go on safari, you get in a van, and you’re not allowed to get off the van when you are in the game park.
These game parks are huge—with thousands of acres and all of these wild animals, but you are not allowed to step off the van while you are in the game park. Only people like National Geographic photographers, who have a permit, can step off these vans on to the game park. The safari van is designed to make things comfortable for the tourist, so the top of the van raises up, so you can stand up and move around inside the van and take pictures. On this one trip, we came upon a den of lions, and one large male lion was right next to the van—right next to me and some others. And he came up to the side of the van with this great big huge mane and rubbed his back against the van, like an old cow would do to a fence post, making the van rock back and forth. The driver turned around to us and said, “Don’t you even think it! That lion knows you are there; he can smell you. And if you stick your arm out that window that lion will reach up and snatch your arm off with its jaws and it will happen so quick that you won’t even know it’s missing!” And so, you have to be really careful around these wild animals. Anyway, what you’re hoping is, that if you do encounter a lion, and you’re out in the jungle, you’re hoping that the lion gets distracted by something else and pursues that and not you. So, with verse 19 just pretend you are out there, and you are encountering the lion—and the lion gets distracted. So, you escape the lion and then you encounter a bear. Raise your hand if you have encountered a bear in the wild. I have encountered a bear in the wild 4 times! I climb 14’ers and those are mountains in Colorado; they’re called “14’ers” because their summit is at fourteen thousand feet plus. There are 54
14’ers in Colorado, the most densely populated place on the globe for 14’ers. There’s a
debate whether there’s 54 or 52 14’ers—so for the sake of things, we’ll just say there are
54. I have been fortunate enough to summit 20 of those 14’ers, and 3 of those 20, I
have summited twice. It’s an adventurous thing to do. Anyway, to summit one of those,
you need to begin your trek up it super early in the morning as it will usually rain around
2pm daily in the summer—the rain clouds moving in is like clockwork on many of these
mountains in Colorado. When the rain clouds move in, they bring rain, but they also
often bring lightning. So, if you are above the tree-line trying to get to summit when
that happens, lightning may strike you, and you may not come down alive. And so, you
get up really early in the morning way before the sun comes up, and you start making
your way up through the tree-line so you can make it to summit and then back down
into the trees before it rains so you are not a lightning rod. You’re usually moving at a
pretty good pace, and it’s generally in the tree-line when you encounter a black bear
because they want food and there is not much food above the tree line. So, when you
encounter a black bear, what do you do? What I do is—pray! Pray that the bear gets
distracted, because I know for them, they want food, and I might be their main course
for the day! So, when I’ve seen the black bear, I just stop. And I get quiet. I kinda roll
my eyes to the side and try not to make direct eye contact with the bear, and I’m hoping
the bear doesn’t make eye contact with me. And so far, I’m 4 for 4—the black bear got
distracted each time by something else and moved on. I hope this trend continues!
So, you are in the jungle; you encounter the lion, and the lion gets distracted and chases something else, so you escape that. But then you come across a bear, thankfully the bear gets distracted and you escape that too. With relief, you make your way home and you get in your house and rest your hand on the wall and what happens? A snake bites you! Now, raise your hand if you have ever been bitten by a snake? Fortunately, I have never been bitten by a snake, but I thought it was a possibility when I was in the Army. During our training, we used walk through swamps. The water was so deep it would come up to your neck in some of them; it was muddy on the bottom so you just continued to make your way through there the best you could. Some of these swamps had huge white snakes in them. I had never seen a white snake until I was in the Army and then I saw several of them. These snakes were super long and pretty big and they would slither right along the front of your neck and the back of your neck. What a weird feeling it was! And then you’d see their heads coming toward you, and their mouths would open wide. Oh, my goodness, all I could think was, “am I going to get bit by this thing?” Fortunately for me, each time I have been in that situation, there was somebody near me who knew about snakes, and they’d say something like this, “Don’t’ worry about the snakes; they are not going to hurt you. Just keep moving nice and steady forward and leave them alone. You don’t bother them; they won’t bother you.” And that’s the way it worked for me. So what the point Amos is making in verse 19 using these wild animals analogy—basically he is saying, “on the day of the Lord, you can run, but you
cannot hide!” You are gonna get “bit”, there will be no hope for you on the day of the Lord if you are not following God and His Ways as an outward sign of your inward commitment.

Then verse 20 says, “Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light—pitch dark, without a ray of brightness?” On the day of the Lord, Amos told the Israelites, if you are not following God and His ways, it is going to be darkness. But if you do follow Him, you are going to experience light—you are going to experience God His pleasure. Israel’s first bad surprise was: the day of the Lord will bring no hope for sinful Israel, because they are not following the Lord and His Ways as an outward sign of their inward commitment.

How does this apply to us? (NOTE: Please know throughout this message, I am preaching to myself as well. So when I say “you”, when I am applying this passage, I am addressing myself as well). Is your faith based on your prosperity versus being based on Christ? If your faith is based on anything but your commitment to following Christ and His Ways as an outward sign of your inward commitment, it’s dangerous! Some people think, “well, my mom and dad, they are Christians and I grew up in a Christian home and therefore I am safe.” No. Each person needs to commit their life to following Christ and His Ways as an outward sign of your inward commitment in order to enjoy the hope on the day of the Lord when it comes. So, follow Jesus and His Ways as an outward sign of your inward commitment.
Let's look at the **second bad surprise** that Amos shares with the Israelites, and that is: **God rejects Israel’s ritualistic worship.** Verse 21 states, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies.” Let’s see what God told Amos to say here. “I hate your feasts and your assemblies!” You see, what the Israelites were doing is that they were gathering for these feasts and gathering for these assemblies, but their hearts weren’t in it! They were showing up so they could “check the box” so they could say they were there. Hey, I was there—and so-and-so would see them. And they thought they could appease God just by showing up. The problem is—their heart wasn’t in it! You can’t just show up for a worship assembly and then just check the box. You need to gather because your heart is right with the Lord. And Amos called them on it.

Verse 22 says, “Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring me choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.” The Israelites were bringing their offerings and basically “checking the box”. “Look! We brought our offerings!” But their heart wasn’t in it. They were just performing this ritual of showing up for the assemblies, bringing their offerings.

Verse 23 says, “Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.” The Israelites were singing in these assemblies, but their hearts weren’t in it. They were just doing it so they could do this ritualistic thing—the easy thing—and
check the box and say “I was there. I gave my offering. I sang.” But their heart wasn’t in it. It was ritualistic. They were just going through the motions.

Verse 24 says, “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” What God wanted for the Israelites was justice and righteousness to flow from their lives to others in the world. He wanted them to be in the assemblies and when they left the assemblies to go out and do righteousness and justice, and not, for example, oppress the poor, like they were doing. Israel’s second bad surprise was: God rejected Israel’s ritualistic worship.

So, how does this apply to us? When you show up for worship are you just checking the box or are you there because your heart’s in it? Do you really want to be there and worship God, or are you just showing up because someone told us it is important to be in church?...and/or, you want to model well for your kids?...and/or, you want to be a good example in our community? Or are you doing it because your heart is right with God and you long to be present with Him? How about your offering? Are you giving because your pastor said you need to give 10%—that’s what the Bible says—and you’re just doing it out of duty, so you can ritualistically perform that duty and check the box and say “I did it!”? How about your singing? Are you singing with your heart or are you just checking the box? You show up, you move your lips, and you want it to sound good, and fit in with everybody else. Or, are you singing with all your might, really worshiping God even if you’re off tune, and you are not concerned about what
other people think? Is your heart in it, or, are you just going through the motions, performing ritualistic singing so you can check the box? God rejected Israel’s ritualistic worship and God rejects our ritualistic worship. Verse 24 says, “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” Justice needs to roll on like a river from us. A river never stops flowing; a river has a current, it’s extremely strong; it keeps moving. And the righteousness rolls from us like a never-failing stream, not like a stream that dries up! And so, what we do is, we show up for worship and what happens is, God fills up our tank! Right?! And we give our offerings because we want to see the kingdom flourish. He’s blessed us so we are giving back, so others can be blessed and reached. This is God’s money anyway; it belongs to Him; we’re just being a good steward of it, with the primary goal—to honor Him. And the singing: we want to sing praises to our Creator. We’re not just showing up because we want everyone to see us, or sound good singing with us. No! We want to be charged up with the Holy Spirt. And so, we’re there, we’re assembled; we’re giving our offerings and we’re singing our songs—we’re into it; we’re not just checking the box! And the Holy Spirit fills us up. And when we leave worship, we are ready to go out into the world and let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing steam. As believers, when we are filled up with the Holy Spirit, when we’ve been in worship with God, we leave full to overflowing and are sent out to make a difference in the world, we can’t help but do justice and righteousness—that’s just what we do! And what does that mean? That
means, if someone is being oppressed, you help set it straight. When there’s someone being treated unfairly, don’t do nothing! Take action! Make it right! Do the right thing! Give, educate, encourage! You see, that’s God using us and working with us, as a vessel making a difference in the world. So, God rejects Israel’s ritualistic worship and God rejects our ritualistic worship as well. **Follow Jesus and His Ways as an outward sign of your inward commitment.**

Let’s look at the **third bad surprise** that Amos shares with the Israelites, and that is: **Israel’s false worship brings a consequence for Israel and their consequence was exile.** Verse 25 states: “Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings 40 years in the wilderness, people of Israel?” Verse 26 says, “You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god—which you made for yourselves.” The Israelites were practicing pagan worship, idol worship! Verse 27 says, “Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty.” The Israelites were practicing idol worship and because of their false worship, Israel was sent into exile. They wanted their man-made idols more than they wanted God and His ways. Exile happened because of their false worship, their worshipping idols. Again, in verse 27, “Therefore because of your false worship, I will send you into exile beyond Damascus.” And this prophecy was fulfilled in 721 B.C., as it did happen as recorded in 2 Kings 17:23-24, Israel was exiled from their homeland to Assyria. **Israel’s third bad**
surprise was: Israel’s false worship brings a consequence for Israel and their consequence was exile.

So, how does this apply to us? Are you worshipping idols? You’re thinking, “no! I don’t worship idols! I don’t have a wooden statue in my home! I’m not worshiping a pagan god!” Good. But let me ask you this. What is the most important thing in your life? What is it that you value the most, so much so, that you spend most of your time and thought life focusing on it? If we were to look at your calendar, the way you spend your time—not just the one you physically keep, but actually the record or the videotape of how you’ve lived your life and where you spend most of your thought life—where would it be focused? Would it be on God or would it be on something else? And if it is on something else, that something else has become your number one priority where you are spending all your thought life on—and because it is number one priority, it has become your idol. Maybe, for example, your idol is money. You start off as a young believer with little money but a wealth of intent on putting God first, obeying Him, having quiet times. You don’t have much money then but as you mature and grow and get promoted you make more money. You want to continue to provide for your family…but the next thing you know you are working harder and longer, putting in more hours so you can get paid more. So you can buy more things. Have a bigger car. Have a bigger house. Provide for your family. Pay for your kids’ college education. Set aside money for your retirement. And it is a perpetual “go, go, go” focused on the money.
With increased work hours, you don’t seem to have time, if we’re honest, to focus on God. No time for another small group. No time for a particular Bible study because you’re too busy. And what are you busy at? Making money. Saving money. Investing the money. Making sure all the things are provided for. You’re doing that, and you’re sacrificing time with God and having a life directed by God. Where you used to spend quite a bit of time with Him, now you have very little time—a little time with God but a lot of time spent on making and managing your money. Something else, money, is in that number one spot that is reserved for God in the Christian’s life. The number one priority in life should be God; and if it is not God and is something else, and that something else is what you truly value because you spend so much time pursuing it, so it becomes your idol. So, what happens for us is a consequence, and for us a big consequence is no hope for us on the day of the Lord if we are not following Christ and His Ways as an outward sign of our inward commitment. Israel’s false worship brought a consequence for Israel, and their consequence was exile. Our false worship will lead to consequences and judgment, and the big judgement is eternal separation from God, if we haven’t committed our life to Christ. Follow Jesus and His Ways as an outward sign of your inward commitment.

Amos brought these three bad surprises from God to the Israelites, and it was a wake-up call for them! This gave them the opportunity to correct, with God’s help, and
to commit their lives to Him, and repent and follow His ways. Today, this Scripture is giving each of us a wake-up call as well!

Let’s pray. Lord, I pray for anyone who is listening to this message and they are not a Christian, that they would take this opportunity to commit their life to Christ today so they can experience hope on the day of the Lord. And for those of us who are Christians, we need, You, Lord to help us follow Jesus and His Ways as an outward sign of our inward commitment. In Your Name we pray. Amen. THE END