

"A Modern Spiritual Health Crisis"

Vital Signs – Pt. 7

March 5, 2017

INTRO ... "Prosperous Souls amidst a Prosperous Land" ... How does one stay spiritually healthy amidst earthly prosperity?

Physical Health amidst Prosperity ... America is world renowned for its prosperity, we are also among the unhealthiest people in the world.

"Compared with other developed and many developing nations, the United States continues to rank at or near the bottom in indicators of mortality and life expectancy while continuing to exceed other countries in health spending."
(Americashealthrankings.org 2016 annual report)

Prosperity is a difficult condition to manage well ...and a challenging topic to get right from Scripture.

How does one stay spiritually healthy amidst earthly prosperity? ...That is the question of our day in the West, and it was the struggle of the people of God in the mid-700's BC that plays out in Amos and Isaiah's writings and prophetic ministries.

AMOS

HIS TIMES: Amos is the first of the "Writing Prophets" in about 760BC (then Hosea, Micah, Isaiah... all in the 700's BC).

- There's was a time when God's people had drifted into a Spiritual Health Crisis—their worship was cold & empty, their lives were self-consumed and neglectful of others, and they were increasingly open to idolatry

...Oh, and they were coming off a season of HISTORIC PROSPERITY!

[due to disruption in the Assyrian Empire's control and a time of stability in Judah & Israel] "...the two nations were experiencing a time of wealth and prosperity

unparalleled since the day of Solomon. ...Thus when opportunities for amassing wealth and the trappings of prosperity presented themselves, Israel was in a better position to capitalize on those opportunities. ...As has tended to be true throughout history, the Israelites took this wealth and prosperity to be unmistakable signs of the blessing of God. Thus, they were reinforced in their belief that 'the day of the Lord' would soon dawn in which God would subdue their enemies under their feet and make them the rulers of the world. But in fact, their present wealth and power was not evidence of the blessing of God. As Amos conclusively showed, they were actually under the curse of God because of their egregious breaches of their covenant with him. Much of their wealth had been amassed at the expense of the poor, whom the rich and powerful were systematically oppressing. Their worship of God was little more than attempts at magical manipulation of him, much like the religion of their pagan neighbors. ...It was Amos's unhappy task to disabuse them of their foolish expectations. Not only was Israel not going to become ruler of the world, within just a few years they would not exist as a nation at all, and would continue to exist as a people only by the unmerited grace of God." **ESV Study Bible** from Intro to Amos

- "unmistakable signs of the blessing of God" – material/economic prosperity is merely one factor in life, yet many people use it as THE Barometer of their Spiritual Condition!
- "worship of God as magical manipulation of him" ...if there ever was a Textbook Definition of the Prosperity Gospel, THIS IS IT!!

TOUR of AMOS

Amos 1:1-2 ...Amos announces judgment from "top to bottom" in the land

Amos 2:4 ...How does Amos measure their "Spiritual Health"?

Amos 2:6-8 ...

- v. 6-7 ...They sell, trample, and turn aside from people—they are USERS of people and are Bent on their Own Personal Benefit! —See also Amos 4:1, 5:10-12
- v. 7-8 ...They are sexually immoral and engage in idolatrous practices

Amos 2:14-16 ...These verses reveal what they are impressed by—the athletic warrior, the naturally talented, the bold & courageous—but God will make their natural strength empty!

Amos 5:18-24 ...Heartless going through the motions of 'worship'—God Hates!

- **Amos 8:4-6, 10-12**

This is an interesting portrait of a people who are controlled by prosperity and greed. They have robbed the festivals and Sabbaths of their meaning and their hearts don't dwell meaningfully in these locations, instead they look beyond them to the next opportunity to feed their real appetites on goods and gain! ...In addition to emptying their relationship with God of its meaning, they also empty their relationship and responsibilities to others of its meaning and begin to use and trample people (v. 4, 6).

"We have seen the seriousness of our situation in the analogy of the solar system. The preference for other things over God is like replacing the sun at the center of the solar system of our lives with an inferior planet—such as money, sex, power or simply self—so that the planets of money and sex and power, which were once held in their God-glorifying orbits, are flying wildly and dangerously out of orbit. Money is zigzagging everywhere, awakening covetousness and greed, and becoming the currency of "pride in possessions"(1 John 2 :16) and dishonesty and anxiety and theft and bribery and embezzling. Sex is spiking up and down erratically in fornication and adultery and pornography and public nudity—or even the fear of sexuality, as if it were not a good gift from God. In all these sins we turn God's glory into shame, and our shame into so-called human glory. And power is thrusting itself through everything in every manner of self-exalting control and domination and exploitation." John Piper, "Living in the Light: Money, Sex, and Power" Kindle loc 898

- **Amos 3:10** "...they do not know how to do right..."

It is Hard to Manage Prosperity and Spiritual Health ...As is evident in the West Today...

NOTE: Amos 8:11-12 ...They have lost interest in God's Word ...and God brings the judgment of a famine of hearing from Him
—Is it this way in the West today?

"The global era represents the most significant opportunity for the Christian church since the apostles and the most significant challenge for the church since the apostles. ...The challenge lies in the equally simple fact that modernity—the spirit, system and structures of the world that have risen since the Industrial Revolution—has done more damage to the Christian faith than all the persecutors in Christian history, from Nero and Diocletian to Hitler, Stalin, Mao

and the assorted tyrants of today. The seductions and distortions of modernity are in fact the central reason for the sorry disarray of the church in the Western world." Os Guinness, "Renaissance", p. 31 (subtitled: 'The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times')

- There are a plethora of books in the last few years by well respected authors that are cataloging this sorry disarray of the western church!

"We are currently living through one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide. Over the last five centuries, the story of Christianity has been inextricably bound up with that of Europe and European-derived civilizations overseas, above all in North America. Until recently, the overwhelming majority of Christians have lived in white nations, allowing some to speak of "European Christian" civilization. ...Over the last century, however, the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably away from Europe, southward, to Africa and Latin America, and eastward, toward Asia. Today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in those regions." Phillip Jensen, "The Next Christendom" p. 1

Over 3,500 United States churches close their doors every year, and the attendance of more than 80 percent of those remaining has plateaued or is declining. ...we are seeing the marginalization of the institutional church." Tim Chester & Steve Timmis, "Everyday Church"

"... the bigger story of American congregations is one of accelerating decline, ...Based on data collected from more than 200,000 churches, he projects that by 2050, only 10 percent of Americans will be in church on any given Sunday." Jeffrey MacDonald, "Study Finds Attendance at Churches Still Falling", Winston-Salem Journal

...It's Begun...

I want to talk about church members who attend their home church with great irregularity. These aren't unchurched folks, or de-churched, or under-churched. They are semi-churched. They show up some of the time, but not every week. They are on again/off again, in and out, here on Sunday and gone for two. That's the scandal of the semi-churched. In fact, [Thom Rainer argues](#) that the number one reason for the decline in church attendance is that church members don't go to church as often as they used to. ...Some people will always be intermittent with their church attendance. I'm not talking about nominal Christians who wander into church once or twice a year. I'm talking about people who went through the

trouble of joining a church, like their church, have no particular beef with the church, and still only darken its doors once or twice a month." **Kevin DeYoung**, "The Scandal of the Semi-churched", Dec 13, 2013

- Observations from the LCC Spiritual Health Questionnaire