

Sermon on Amos prepared by Jonathan Shradar

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Amos 5:18–24 “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light, [19] as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. [20] Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

[21] “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. [22] Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. [23] Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. [24] But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (ESV)

We have jumped in, to the middle of the conversation...

God demands justice FROM and delivers it FOR his people.

You don't have to train humans to become selfish. It really is an inherited trait for all of us. The inclination to put ourselves first, seek our desires above others, maybe even at their expense.

We have a lot of little kids in the church, and more on the way, and an infant proves the point. They have to start small or they would kill you for allowing them to be uncomfortable or hungry. Any displeasure, they yell. Pangs of hunger, they tantrum. With flailing arms and legs they would ruin everything around them if they had the ability to.

It is so ingrained, that eventually when they finally share a toy in the nursery, it is as if Heaven has opened and redeemed a lost soul!

The challenge is, we never really lose the inclination. We just adapt and learn to mask it, use it to manipulate or get ahead. The Prophet forces a mirror before our faces and shows us the spoiled fruit of selfishness and its tactics.

Amos gives us, by way of Israel, warnings of living selfishly, without regard for others... But if we are able to see the mirror and be honest with who we are, there is hope just beyond us!

Who is Amos? *Not to be confused with the famous cookie baker*, this Amos was an unlikely prophet. In the opening verse, we learn that he was among the shepherds of Tekoa (a region south of Jerusalem). He has visions of Israel, the northern kingdom that was divided from Judah. Often a target of prophetic warning against idolatry and rejection of God's way.

A contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, likely around 793 - 739 BC. Before the exile.

A shepherd, this traveling prophet brings a beautifully poetic but blistering declaration of God's judgment. And it must have been shocking to the first audience because this was a time of peace and prosperity in Israel. They were lying on beds of ivory and extravagant couches, eating abundant food, singing idle songs, drinking wine by the bowl, freshly doused in the best essential oils!

But it is a word they must hear, and that we can't mistake ourselves.

It is what Amos says of God that we want to notice today.

God demands justice FROM and delivers it FOR his people.

God cares about how we treat people.

From the beginning of this book, the prophet amplifies God's word of judgment beginning with surrounding nations, Damascus is to be cut-off; Gaza shall be devoured; Tyre will burn with fire; Edom will experience wrath; the Ammonites will suffer tornadoes that take them into exile; Moab shall die amid an uproar; even Judah will be visited with fire.

Hearing Amos it seems God is on a rampage and no one is to be shielded from it. And I imagine hearing the poem as it unfolds Israel was giddy to hear of how its neighbors and enemies would be struck down... then their blood Judah is included... and finally Israel's own transgressions will be dealt with.

Where each prophet speaks against idolatry in general and rejection of God's way, in Amos we have the overwhelming bullhorn calling for justice!

Now we are living in a strange time where there are arguments over what biblical justice is. The handing out of what is deserved, making wrong things right, giving everyone their day in court where they can be heard and judgment can be rendered with fairness. To some, we have to protect it from the taint of "social justice," because if you are woke you are broke. So maybe it stays an individualized salvation story.

Still, others find the church's failure at every turn and advocate for the deconstruction of everything, even your trust in thousands of years of the faith handed down from generations that have gone before. Justice becomes synonymous with gospel and we take to the streets.

What Amos tells us of justice is that God does in fact care how we treat other people and it is central to his judgment and redemption.

The offenses of the nations and Israel are border skirmishes (1:3), enslavement (1:6, 9), betrayal (1:9, 11), greed (1:13), and brutality (1:11,13). All how nations and individuals are relating to each other. They are doing it wrong.

A rejection of the Word of God leads here. **Amos 2:4** "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked." (ESV) They have lost the way...

Israel is worse off, their rejection of the Lord has left them drunk and the promise that because they have made a mockery of worshiping God they will be spiritually cut-off.

Amos 8:11–12 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. [12] They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it." (ESV)

How could this be? Wasn't life going pretty well? Outside threats were minimal, and the rich were getting richer. What's the big deal?!

Where there was supposed to be justice (equality and opportunity among God's people) the affluent were oppressing the poor - tipping the glass with the toast of "we hate the poor!"

Amos 4:1 "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!'" (ESV)

Amos 2:6b-8 "because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— [7] those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; [8] they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined." (ESV)

Amos 8:6 they "buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?" (ESV)

The way they treated people ruined their worship, it had become a meaningless ritual, and they even commanded the prophets to not prophesy - they knew they were in the wrong and were sick of hearing it.

I imagine it may have felt right to those getting ahead at the expense of others - after all it was their economic system (which they probably thought was the best in human history!) But it makes God sick.

They are a redeemed people once oppressed and having become the oppressor.

The result is judgment.

Amos 2:13-16 "Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. [14] Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; [15] he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he

who rides the horse save his life; [16] and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day," declares the LORD." (ESV)

They might respond that God can't judge them, they are his people, but he hated their false worship, hated the way they were wreaking injustice.

This might seem so far off, another time. But the human inclination stands and we, like Israel, frequent in injustice and oppression. Even if we are not the responsible party, we are unlikely to advocate for those that can't rise up themselves.

Just like it is hard to shake off the selfishness of our infancy, their, and our inclination is toward injustice and oppression.

"Amos painted an ugly picture. But it wasn't an unusual picture. The Hebrew society he confronted had striking similarities to our own. We're members of a society that's unfair economically, unashamed morally, unjust socially. And we've lived with it so long that we don't even see the ugliness." EP

I was struck by the reality of it, in a secular sense, on a trip to Tanzania for work. We had spent a week with a great group of partners in the country and we got to know each other well. One couple was telling me how they had hired a cook and groundskeeper, not because they were wealthy but because they saw it as a duty to provide for their neighbors.

Surely, financially I was far more well-heeled. But all I ever contemplated my money being used for was me! Sure I would tithe, but that was to test if God would bless me! If I hired someone it was for my ease, not their good. If there was extra, I would buy a bowl of wine and celebrate...

Here my friends exemplified a different way, something more in line with the way of the kingdom without even knowing it.

God cares how we treat others, and that's why the prophets have something to say about it. So much so that judgment comes.

The lion will devour and nearly nothing will be left. Accomplished by the God of angel armies, the unstoppable, all-powerful One.

Amos 5:24 “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (ESV)

For all of the clear declaration of judgment of injustice in Amos, the prophet also reveals the mercy of God, and ultimately that he brings justice himself.

God delivers the justice he desires.

He does it through the unlikely... We see this in Amos.

He isn't a professional. He is just a shepherd. Yet God uses him to speak to his people. Even when he is told by the priest to stop and flee back to Judah, he says he was just being obedient.

Amos 7:14–15 “I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. [15] But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ (ESV)

And God responds to Amos' mediation and relents. Given a series of visions of destruction, the prophet pleads with God to remember his covenant with the people and he withholds his wrath delivering justice through Amos.

That gives those of us that don't have pedigree or privilege hope that the Lord could use us! He always uses the unlikely. Even Jesus was unexpected.

He is the ultimate delivery of justice. All of the prophets are pointing forward, and Amos is no exception. Injustice will be dealt with and it has in Christ.

Amos 8:9–10 “And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. [10] I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.” (ESV)

Justice poured out on the cross, the land dark, the loss of an only son...

Jesus is the greater Amos, as he mediates our salvation by his obedient life and death on the cross. He calls his people to the better kingdom, to new life in him.

Jesus is the ultimate prophet; rebukes the scribes and Pharisees... **Matthew 23:11–12** “The greatest among you shall be your servant. [12] Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (ESV)

He establishes a new nation of Jews and gentiles, forgiven and redeemed.

We are the poor and oppressed in need of our own exodus out of sin and self. By taking on our sin he raises us up and gives us a mission to pursue justice because we have experienced it in him.

The silence of the word, brought on by the injustice of the people, ends with Jesus’ arrival and now we share the word, as he has commissioned us, both of forgiveness of sin and advocacy of those without a voice.

And we live trusting the One who will restore the garden. **Amos 9:11–15** “In 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, [12] that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the LORD who does this.

[13] “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. [14] I 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. [15] I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,” says the LORD your God.” (ESV)

"What we make of Jesus' death and resurrection will determine how we enter into and come through the final "day of the Lord." Knowing this, we should give ourselves to gospel-fueled social ethics (to justice) even as we commit ourselves to speaking the gospel message in fulfillment of Christ's mission." GTB

Transformed by his Spirit, living from his redemption for us, and headed home to eternity with him, we can live for justice, treating others how Christ has treated us. Loving the least, empowering the poor, representing those without influence.

A good step is engaging, putting ourselves in place and with people that would match the categories... I have been encouraged by the Bernal small group burdened to care for the homeless in Escondido. They are sure how things will develop, but they are making a start.

When Jesus was asked which commandment was most important, he “answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30] And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ [31] The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” **Mark 12:29–31** (ESV)

This now is the call of the kingdom, to love the Lord with all of who we are, and love our neighbor as ourself. He doesn’t force an economic policy upon us, but he does give what justice looks like. Love.

A love he gives.

The all-powerful, majesty, God of hosts, he has worked this love by taking on injustice with his blood. We don’t have to be left to our own devices and selfishness.

And clinging to the gospel makes us doers of justice.

Galatians 6:7-9 “Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. 8Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. 9So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.” (NLT)

“Seek the Lord and live!” We come humbled by his grace for us, with repentant hearts, and eyes for justice.

Once babes thrashing about, now made mature in Jesus and given the justice that is demanded. From Amos, we know God cares about how we treat people and he gives us the ability to love our neighbors by redeeming us in Christ. May we be a people that love well because we have been loved.