

February 26, 2006

“Far as the Curse Is Found”
Amos 9:11-15

FCF: Loss of strength, need for hope

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because of the promises of things yet to come,
(anchor) we have much to hold onto in the struggles of our days now.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“The End is near.” That’s the message of Hollywood. Look at the stream of movies over the last several years – aliens are coming to take us over, the icecaps are melting, the core is imploding, and meteors are on their way. And the publishing world has gotten in on it too. Look at the series of novels hitting on these same themes – some even using isolated biblical texts to carry the plot. “The End is near.” It may well be.

But too often we’re preoccupied with the wrong things. “What, how, and when will it all happen?” That’s not the emphasis we find in the Scriptures. There the clear message is that the days of the present state of things are numbered. Be sure of that. And the complacent should be warned. But the faithful should be encouraged. Or, to put it another way, our anticipation of the end times should have an effect on our present days.

SCRIPTURE READING: Amos 9:11-15

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

The Winter Olympics are nearly over. It hardly seems the opening ceremonies were two weeks ago. Such events leave me with mixed feelings. The beauty, pageantry, hopes, and expectations. The athletes gathered together under their nation’s respective flags but assembled as one before the world. The underlying message being world peace and good will among nations. Nobody believes it will happen – just switch the channel to the coverage of world events – but it’s a nice thought for a couple of weeks. But just because no one really believes it will happen doesn’t mean that it won’t. Though it will come about in ways and to depths that will surprise quite a few. Better days are coming.

Which is no doubt what Amos needed to hear as he considered what was to come, as he spoke and his message was spurned, as he ached to see repentance in the people, a revival in the land, and nothing was happening. No doubt Amos needed to know better days were coming. And so did the LORD’s people, those who still served Him, those few who did hear the prophet, as they underwent what was to come in the next few years. As this sifting took place and the wheat was jostled and bruised along with the chaff, as the purging fire swept over the nation and the faithful felt the scorching heat, they needed something to hold onto. They needed “*strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.*” And it would be this hope that would give them that strength. They needed to hear that.

And so do we. Amos uses vivid imagery here, grabbing hold of our imagination, deepening our sense of wonder as to the days to come. The prefix *re-* is so important in biblical theology. Redemption, return, reunion, rebirth, reconciliation – each pointing to the giving or receiving something that was taken or lost. A restoration is coming.

But when is all this going to take place? Not with their return from exile nor with the establishment of Israel as a state. The imagery, if taken seriously, won’t allow for that. Amos points us partially towards the times in which we live but mostly towards those to come – the already and not yet, Christ’s reign inaugurated but not yet consummated, His kingdom having come but not yet in full. And what we need to see is that these promises, these things that await, give us the hope to fuel our strength today.

I. RULE ESTABLISHED

We see this first in the promise of Christ's rule (**READ Amos 9:11-12**).

A) Over His People

This rule of Christ will be established over His people.

1. Though divided

This "booth" of David described as fallen and needing to be repaired, raised up, and rebuilt is a reference to David's reign, dynasty, and kingdom that was torn asunder when Israel broke off from Judah after Solomon's death two hundred years before.

2. To be united

And now this booth, this tent, though seemingly hopelessly divided is going to be made one. It is an image of reconciliation. This is the LORD's passion (**READ Psalm 133**).

B) Over All Peoples

Yet this rule of Christ is not only over His people but over all peoples as well.

1. Though estranged

Edom was a constant and bitter foe throughout Israel's history. Edom stands here symbolically for all the hostility of all the nations towards Israel and towards the LORD.

2. To be embraced

Edom represents peoples once hopelessly estranged. And Amos points to a time when such people will be embraced – expressed in terms of a military conquest to remind us that this embrace is under the Lordship of a King. This too is His passion (**READ Psalm 67**). God has intended all along to work through a people to reach all peoples.

Illustration:

This is why we see what we do in what is referred to as Jesus' "cleansing of the temple" (**READ Mark 11:15-17**). It's not that Jesus was in a bad mood or is against the free market. It's that the area of the Temple where all this took place was the "Court of the Gentiles" – an area specifically set aside by the LORD for non-Jews to come and worship Him. And the merchants and the activity surrounding the selling of their wares was interfering such that Jesus' passion was enflamed over such crassness and disregard for His Father's glory and peoples' access to Him. And He would not have it.

Application:

The question begs to be asked. Are we passionate about these things? Do we long to see unity in the Church? Do we treasure peace and pursue it as the precious thing it is in our Lord's sight? Are we willing to lay aside our petty agendas and selfish pride for the sake of this living demonstration of reconciliation grounded in the gospel?

Do we see the connection between these things – hinted at here in Amos – that the restoration of once broken relationships is a key component in reaching others with the hope of being relationally restored with their Creator? And do we see the hope we have that even as we pursue this peace with one another we have the assurance that the LORD is more passionate about this than we will ever be? There's hope in these promises.

II. CREATION RENEWED

And not only because of the hope of a rule established but of creation renewed as well (**READ Amos 9:13-14**). This is a promise absolutely sweeping in its scope.

A) The Reality of the Curse

The reality of the curse is spoken to – how things once were and then became.

1. How things once were

In the beginning – Genesis 1 and 2 – God created all things of nothing by the word of His power and it was all good. Indeed, after creating man, it was all very good.

2. How things changed

But then came Genesis 3 – the fall of Adam as the representative of all humanity and of creation itself. And the beauty, the harmony, the pristine state of the world gave way to the pollution and curse of sin ([READ Genesis 3:17-19](#)). Where once there was wondrous fruitfulness now there is frustration. The tragedy is spoken to in Romans 8 ([READ Romans 8:19-22](#)). This is the reality of the curse, a reality we all know all too well.

B) *The Reversal of the Curse*

But here in Amos 9, Amos speaks of something new – the reversal of the curse.

1. The presence of sin

Sin will be present no more. It will be driven out. Think of the images. The reaper will still be cutting stalks when the plowman arrives to turn the earth. The harvest will be so plentiful that the treader will fall behind in his work and get in the way of the sower.

2. The power of sin

Sin will be present no more. Its power will be broken. No more frustration. No more futility. Fortunes restored, cities rebuilt, and wine running faster than casks can be made. Beachaven has never seen anything like this! Great abundance and great enjoyment!

J. A. Motyer sums it up this way in his commentary ([READ Motyer, p.206](#)):

All is well between God and man. On man's side the rebellion is over, on God's side there has been a great reconciliation and the whole creation is liberated and its energies 'pent up for the centuries during which sin abounded and death reigned...explode in one triumphant burgeoning as nature hastens to lay its tribute at the feet of Him whose right it is to reign.' The curse is gone and Eden is restored.

Illustration:

“Joy to the World!” ([READ “Joy to the World,” Trinity Hymnal – 195](#))

*No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.*

Application:

“Joy to the World!” Oh, how sweet this promise is! The futility and frustration – real as they are – are not forever! Their days are numbered! They are coming to an end! And that means something for us even now. It gives us reason to hold on. And it gives us reason to fight, to push back, to pull the weeds of the garden even now! Physically, we have reason to find cures and work for healing. Psychologically, we have reason to listen to one another and be a helpful presence. Environmentally, we have reason to care for this world and steward well its resources. Socially, we have reason to pursue justice and mercy. Relationally, we have reason to pursue peace and one another. Scientifically, we have reason to study and discover what's out there. Artistically, we have reason to spur the imagination and beautify our surroundings. Spiritually, we have reason to proclaim this great gospel of new life. And we have reason to do all these things with hope. For He is righting all wrongs – partially now and fully in the days to come!

III. DELIVERANCE ASSURED

A rule established, a creation restored, and a deliverance assured ([READ Amos 9:15](#)). I mentioned already the presence and power of sin done away with. Now we see the same for its penalty. Reconciliation has been made. Deliverance is now assured.

A) *Promise of Security*

The agricultural image continues and shifts with a promise of security.

1. Firmly planted

His people will be firmly planted – blossoms shooting up, roots going deep.

2. Never uprooted

So deep His people will never be uprooted, never be snatched up again.

B) *Promise of Permanence*

Security is promised. And permanence as well.

1. His gift

The LORD is giving them this land. This land long promised. This land long awaited.

2. His assurance

With His assurance. Note the commitment in His words (**READ Amos 9:15**). The strong note of His assurance rings forth repeatedly through this text. “*I will*,” the LORD says.

Application:

This is an assurance of rest rooted in His grace and promise, not in their grit or performance. And so the roots go deep. And no wind or storm can blow it down, no hand nor force can pull it up. The longings for rest and peace are finally to be met.

Illustration:

It reminds me something of C. S. Lewis’ “The Chronicles of Narnia.” In the final book, The Last Battle, the children and their Narnian allies are brought into “Aslan’s Country” – a range of high yet snow-free mountains, bathed in warm breezes and freshness, alive with the sounds of running water, waterfalls, and birdsong against a “background of immense silence,” and covered with orchards of autumn-ripe fruits, forests of mighty trees, and flower-decked meadows. Here the air is cleaner. So too are minds clearer. In all other countries the air is thicker and minds more confused and confusable. And here Jewel, the unicorn, cries out (**READ The Last Battle, p.171**):

I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Bree-hee-hee! Come further up, come further in!

CONCLUSION:

Listen. These promises of things yet to come give us the strength to hold on in our struggles now. Let me take you back to the opening ceremonies at the Olympics. That longing for unity and peace is a good one. The problem is that the hole, the darkness within, is too dark for good intentions to fill. Certainly not intentions of our own. You see it in the events of the last two weeks. Bode Miller boasts of his skiing abilities, parties hard, fails to adequately train, and then flops. Shani Davis, though winning a medal for himself, earlier had refused to participate in the team speed skating event so as to preserve his strength. Then there was Zach Lund, the head-first sledder who was initially banned from the Olympics because he used an anti-balding product that contained a substance used to mask steroids. He was later cleared but it points to the energies officials have to spend in trying to thwart the greed of other athletes who would cheat the system to win the gold. Do you get the point? Even as the athletes gather celebrating what we wish would be true in the days ahead show it surely will not to be.

Not by our good intentions. Nor by our best efforts. No matter how deep our longings. We need someone else to take the wheel, someone who can pull this thing out of its nosedive and bring us home. And that Someone is the one who placed those longings in our hearts – the King who is returning to establish His rule, to renew His creation, and even now to assure us of our deliverance. These sure promises of the things yet to come are what can give us what we need to press on in the struggles of our days now. Not our intentions. Not our efforts. But His accomplishments. And His promises.

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because of the promises of things yet to come,
(anchor) we have much to hold onto in the struggles of our days now.