

January 8, 2006

“God’s Demand for What Is Real” Amos 7:7-9

FCF: The problem of hypocrisy

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because we stand before the true and living God,
(magnet) we cannot hide and must be real.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

([READ The Message, Amos 5:21-24](#))

I can't stand your religious meetings. I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I've had all I can take of your ego-music. When was the last time you sang to me? Do you know what I want? I want justice – oceans of it. I want fairness – rivers of it. That's what I want. That's all I want.

We know hypocrisy within the church turns people off. Read any survey. And that's serious. But it's worse than we think. Let me put it this way. What if it turned out that the hypocrisy of those who profess to be followers of Christ was not just a stumbling block for those searching for answers or made an easy target for those outright hostile to things of faith – what if it turned out such hypocrisy actually enrages the heart of God?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Amos 7:7-9](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

We know from the early chapters of Genesis that Adam and Eve for a time enjoyed unfettered fellowship with God, peace with one another, and harmony with the world in which they lived. All was good. Then came the Fall and the Curse. Where once they longed to be with God and to be open with one another, now they longed to hide and cover themselves – quite literally ([READ Genesis 3:6-8](#)). You realize how truly pathetic this is – hiding behind leaves and trees. It's so sad. And duplicated still in each of us – hiding from each other, hiding from God. Something's wrong in the Garden.

The people of Amos' day were, in their own way, doing much the same – living behind a veneer, a façade, a front they thought could sustain a comfortable distance from this God who made them so uncomfortable. You may remember from some weeks ago what transpires in the verses just before our text. The LORD pronounces judgment upon His people. Amos intercedes in prayer. And the LORD, hearing His servant's prayer and showing us the instrumental role of prayer in accomplishing His purposes, relents. But here, after the announcement of a “plumb line,” there is no such prayer. Why?

Because Amos knows that such inspections are good, necessary, and part of what it means to be the LORD's. A plumb line is a tool used in construction to make a straight vertical line – the simplest being a weight tied to one end of a string which is suspended from a nail on a wall. The LORD is telling Amos that the contractor is coming to visit the job site. What will He find? The NIV is misleading in saying the wall was built “true to plumb.” That's not quite it ([READ Amos 7:7](#)). The wall was built in the presence of the plumb line. But what state was it in? It would seem a bit like a Dr. Seuss house. The inspection shows “code violations” of the worst kind – a twistedness, a bentness, an emptiness, a falseness. Which would surely be and needed to be shown up for what it was. For this contractor, the one conducting this inspection, was the true and living God. And before Him, we cannot hide, we must not hide, and we must be real.

I. WE CANNOT HIDE BEHIND RELIGION

In particular, we cannot hide behind religion. The LORD simply won't have it.

A) Hypocrisy Described

He will not stand for such hypocrisy. And that should come as little surprise.

1. Definition

To engage in hypocrisy is to put on airs, to pretend we're something we're really not – to honor the LORD with our lips while dishonoring Him with our lives.

2. Despising

Without question, the LORD despises hypocrisy (READ Amos 7:8). The LORD despised what His people had become. Morally bankrupt – treating one another as objects to be used and disposed. Spiritually adrift – treating Him as another god to be manipulated. He hated what His people had become and most especially because of whose they were – His. Look at chapter 3 (READ Amos 3:2). This is the intolerable compliment of the LORD's affections. As J. A. Motyer wrote (READ pp.51, 68):

The uniqueness of the church includes its unique peril...Special privileges, special obligations; special grace, special holiness; special revelation, special scrutiny; special love, special responsiveness...the church of God cannot ever escape the perils of its uniqueness.

Illustration:

We crave authenticity. We long for it so much that we gravitate towards anyone who reflects it in any form. I've been listening to some of Johnny Cash's music lately. Surely that authenticity, that realness, is what pulls people in. He wasn't the best lyricist, musician, or vocalist. But there was something there. U2's lead singer, Bono, recalls a visit to the Cash home. A meal was prepared. Cash asked them to bow their heads, and then "*said the most beautiful, poetic grace.*" After saying amen, Cash then turned to Bono and said, "*Sure miss the drugs, though.*" Bono said in reflection (READ quote):

He just couldn't be self-righteous...I think he was a very godly man, but had the sense that he had spent his time in the desert. And that just made you like him more.

We crave authenticity. Well, so does God – the One in whose image we've been made. Should it shock us that we long for this? That He would long to see it in us?

B) Hypocrisy Destroyed

Should it shock us that He would be determined to root out our hypocrisy? That a time comes when He will surely say, "*Enough is enough. This mockery must stop.*"

1. The high places and sanctuaries

(READ Amos 7:9a) These were the public face of the nation's idolatry – houses of religious syncretism, a blending of whatever seemed right in the worshipper's eyes.

2. The house of Jeroboam

(READ Amos 7:9b) This was the royal family where it all began, the historical origins of Israel's waywardness. The leaders – those who should have been leading the people in the way of godliness – had proven themselves capable of only leading them astray.

Application:

Listen. The LORD still feels this way. Which means we cannot hide behind our religion. We cannot live the lie without His confronting. We cannot hide behind our church activities, our spiritual duties, our righteous works. We cannot have all these other things going on on the side (like multiple affairs) while forgetting the greater things – justice, mercy, faithfulness. We stand before the true and living God. We cannot hide.

Perhaps what we need is an audit – an audit of our daily planners, a review of the transcripts of what we say and how, an invasive comparison between what we profess and what we practice. Perhaps what we need is help. Prayer that the Great Physician would work to carve this cancer out from within. Pursue the question: "*Where in my life am I proclaiming one thing and living another?*" Do it with a partner – someone you can

trust. And do it with the mindset that this is not an option, not an elective, that it is serious. This is all very serious. We cannot hide. We must be real. Truly real.

II. WE MUST BE TRULY REAL

Which brings me to the second point. The opposite of play-acting is not just getting into character but becoming the character. Not just “knowing our lines” but living out the script all through, through and through. Being real, truly real.

A) *The Shape of Our Lives*

For Amos’ audience, this was to have affected the entirety of their lives.

1. Humility

Beginning with a posture of humility. Bowing before the LORD as God, as creatures before the Creator. Recognizing the laws He gave, the laws they had spurned, were a reflection of His nature. Recognizing that – as creatures made in His image, according to His likeness – those laws were really then a reflection of their own nature as well. So much so that there was a fittedness that could be had – a fittedness lost in their folly and reflected in the brokenness of their lives. And Amos has traced that out in stirring ways.

2. Obedience

Which brings me to this. This posture of humility was then to flow over into obedience. Bowing first as creatures, bowing then as servants. Responding to and reveling in their redemption. Not just any servants but His servants. Who, after all, had given them these commands? Not just their Creator but their Redeemer (**READ Exodus 20:1**). This is the preface, the preamble, the platform upon which the Ten Commandments are built. So critical to understand – you see it in other places as well (**READ Deuteronomy 7:6-11**). In giving His people His commands, the LORD was saying, “*I have reached out my arm to save you and bring you near, to make you my own. This then is how you are to live.*”

B) *The Shape of Our Worship*

Being truly real was to affect the shape of their lives. And their worship as well. I alluded to this earlier. Reality in life meant no longer treating people as objects to be used and then disposed. And reality in worship meant no longer treating God as just some being to be manipulated to one’s advantage. It meant something wholly different.

1. Honest repentance

Beginning with honest repentance. “*You have graciously given us your Word to guide us and to encourage us. We have spurned all of that. We have failed in our callings. We have forsaken your commands. We have been fools. Please forgive us.*” Honest repentance – this is where worship begins. This is what Amos was crying for.

2. Joyful expression

Honest repentance and joyful expression. “*You are in our midst. You have heard our cries. You have made a way. And we are still yours. Your promises are trustworthy and true.*” From the posture of humility comes the release of praise. “*We’re His!*”

Application:

All this is what Amos’ audience was missing, what was held out to them, what they were spurning. All this is held out for us as well – real life, real worship. The question then is: Are we bowing as creatures before our Creator, as servants before our Redeemer? Amos’ vision of the plumb line reminds us of who we were made for and what He is looking for. That we are His and that He sees us, knows us and loves us with a love that is too real, too intense, too passionate to simply just let us go along our merry little way. And that – as painful and jarring as that might be at times – is good.

CONCLUSION:

Let me take you back to Adam and Eve's plight. Longing for a covering, they seized on the first thing they could – leaves. And then they hid. What happened next? (READ Genesis 3:8-9) The LORD sought them out. He sought them out. And more, He gave them the covering they needed (READ Genesis 3:21). Now, you need to understand the dual thrust of what's happening here. Yes, these skins covered their nakedness and provided protection from the elements. But as much as they needed that, they needed something else even more – a reminder of the promise that they would ultimately be covered in the fullest sense only by the blood of another in their place.

Listen. Authenticity is what we crave. And well we should. It's what we were made for and so it's little wonder our hearts should yearn for it. But "being real" is only possible in Christ – the One who covers. Look to the cross. There you see all that we need, all that is necessary to be freed from all the shams in our lives and freed finally to be authentic and real. How? There you see full condemnation for sin – what we deserved in all its ugliness. And there you see full acceptance as well – what was accomplished for us in all its wonder. Look to the cross. There you will find the freedom to be real. There you will come to see you don't have to pretend anymore – He really loves you. There you will come to see you have nothing to prove anymore – He accepts you. There you will find freedom from the fig leaves. There you will discover the ability to be honest – honest about your need for guidance in confusion, strength in weakness, forgiveness in failure. Look to the cross. There you can be freed from the hypocrisy we hate and freed for the reality we crave. There it is. Look to the cross.

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