

February 19, 2006

“Going to Church and Going to Hell”
Amos 9:1-10

FCF: Damning complacency

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because all of this is so very real,
(magnet) we cannot afford to be complacent.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Sarah and I were in Maine trying to catch a ferry for the next leg of our vacation. We knew it ran twice a day. But we didn’t know where to catch it. It was the off season so the town seemed deserted. Seeing a man standing outside an inn, I pulled up and explained our situation. His counsel was not what I expected. “*No worries, man.*”

Now, I probably did seem tense. But the fact was even if we were late, that ferry was going to leave without us. And if it left without us, we were up a creek. “*No worries, man*” would do nothing but numb me to my very real predicament.

Real predicaments demand more than a complacent response – especially predicaments of the kind described here in Amos 9, a kind we need to face this morning.

SCRIPTURE READING: Amos 9:1-10

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Here’s the image. Exhausted sailors on their bunks, the only sound the hum of the engines and a few snores. Then a voice breaks through over the speaker – “*Red alert. All hands on deck. This is no drill. Repeat – all hands on deck. This is no drill.*” The scene is transformed from one of stillness to action as each then heads to their station.

Such a response is what Amos longed for from his hearers – the kingdom of Israel – an awakening, a rousing from complacency to action. But it wasn’t to be. The LORD was then going to utterly sift His people. No refuge would be found – neither natural or supernatural, no matter how high or low they might flee. Why? (READ Amos 9:4b) How could this be? Because of who was pursuing them – the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God of all. He was pursuing in order to utterly sift. But not utterly destroy. His pursuit would be purposeful and discriminating, purgative and protective. A remnant would be preserved. The “wheat” would be spared. But the “pebbles” would not.

But why? Why such fury, such passion? Because of the complacency of those who called themselves His people, a complacency that was encouraging them towards such dullness and presumption that they were “going to church and all the while going to hell.” Maybe that shocks you. “*How can that be?*” Remember what we read in Romans. It’s possible to be assured of one’s standing before God and for all the wrong reasons. Think of Galatians where we were reminded that if our hope is in anything of ourselves, any semblance of deserving on our part, Christ is of no use to us. We will have allowed Him place as an example, a teacher, a demonstration of divine love but no room as an atoning sacrifice. Oh, dear ones, it is very possible to be going to church and going to hell. There are people all around us doing this. And, I fear, some here this morning.

We too need to hear the words over the speaker – “*All hands on deck. This is no drill.*” This is all so very real. And so we cannot afford to be complacent in any way.

I. COMPLACENT ABOUT GOD’S COMMANDS

We cannot afford to be living in a spiritual dreamworld, going about as though God’s commands didn’t matter, as though they weren’t directed at us. We’ve talked a bit about this through this series, but think again about the state of things in Israel.

A) *Calloused towards One Another*

Clearly, despite all that the LORD had told them, despite the mercy and grace extended to them in countless ways, they were calloused towards one another.

1. Injustice

Injustice was running rampant. We see it early on in Amos 2 ([READ Amos 2:6-7b](#)).

2. Greed

Behind all this was a materialism, a covetousness, a greed with an insatiable appetite for yet more and more with no thought to others ([READ Amos 5:10-12](#)).

“Love of neighbor” was anything but the law of the land.

B) *Calloused towards God Himself*

Nor was “love of God.” Behind their calloused hearts towards one another was an equally calloused heart towards the LORD Himself.

1. Ritual dominated religion

We see this in a religion dominated by ritual with no heart connected to the outward acts ([READ Amos 5:21-24](#)).

2. Preference over revelation

We see it in putting selfish preferences over prophetic revelation ([READ Amos 2:11-12](#)).

Perhaps the best summary is found in chapter 8, where we see expressions of this callousness towards God and one another wedded together ([READ Amos 8:4-6](#)).

Application:

Now let me stop here before we go any further and ask a question. Could we be guilty of such things? Could we be equally calloused, complacent regarding the LORD’s commands? Surely we could. Perhaps in areas we can’t see. Perhaps in areas we choose not to see. David’s prayer needs to become ours ([READ Psalm 139:23-24](#)). This is all so real, His commands so real, we cannot afford to be complacent.

II. COMPLACENT ABOUT OUR SIN

But let me press further. For complacency towards the LORD’s commands inevitably leads to complacency about our sin. Here too we find ourselves living in a spiritual dreamworld as though it was all “no big deal” ([READ Amos 9:10](#)). Who is Amos speaking of here? J. A. Motyer describes them this way ([READ Motyer, p.199](#)):

They are sinners, but they are not aware that sin constitutes a threat or needs a remedy. They are sinners, but they think nothing of the law of God before which they stand condemned nor of the grace of God by which they could be redeemed. They are complacent, careless sinners living in a world of pretence and make-believe.

A) *No Concern Regarding Their Past*

Or, to put it another way, they have no concern regarding their past.

1. No sense of guilt

No sense of guilt. No sense of shame. No sense of regret or remorse.

2. No sense of pollution

No sense of pollution. No sense of struggle. No longing to be made new.

B) *No Concern Regarding Their Future*

They are not concerned for their past. Nor are they concerned for their future.

1. Delight regarding others

Oh, they know a judgment is coming – a day of reckoning for everyone else. And they’re delighted when those “low life” types will get theirs. Think back to Amos 1 and 2.

2. Deceived regarding themselves

But they are completely deceived regarding themselves. There is no sense that whatever would be coming upon the nations surrounding them they themselves would deserve.

“No worries, man.” God’s commands are no big deal. Blowing them off and Him off is no big deal. Everything’s cool. Is it?

Illustration:

James Denny tells this story in his book, [The Death of Christ \(READ Powerful Evangelism for the Powerless, p.130\)](#):

A man is sitting on a pier fishing on a calm summer day. Suddenly another man comes running down the pier, dives into the water, and drowns. Having witnessed this, I explain to the fisherman, “This man died for you!” The fisherman, however, has great trouble understanding why the man needed to die for him. After all, he was in no danger that he could see.

That is the muddle headed view of too many. They see God as a jolly old grandfather who has no wrath towards sin. And they see themselves as basically good folks who deserve to go to heaven. And so news of Jesus’ death is meaningless. Why bother?

Application:

That is not the message of the gospel. That is not the message of Amos. The message of Amos is that the Lion is roaring and there’s only one possibility of escape. You can hide all you want behind how good you think you are, how enlightened you think you are, how devoted and busy you’ve become. And it’s all worthless. It won’t save you. The Lion is roaring, tracking you, and is sure to maul you unless you embrace the reality that your only safety from His claws is in the slaying of a lamb. If your security is in Him, you have all you could need. If it is not, then you have none at all.

III. COMPLACENT ABOUT OUR STANDING BEFORE HIM

That’s how real this is. And we can’t afford to be complacent about it, to go about living in a spiritual dreamworld. Not in terms of His commands, our sin, or our standing before Him (**READ Amos 9:7**). This was a radical statement bringing them back to the essentials of their status – the essentials as they were meant to be understood.

A) Not the Termination of their Special Status

Now don’t be confused. This was not a termination of Israel’s special status.

1. God’s promises

The LORD had promised that through Israel the Messiah would surely come. We see this in Genesis 15 (**READ Genesis 15:7-11, 17-18**). What God was saying was that if He did not do as He promised, it would be to Him as to these animals. His promises stand.

2. God’s character

His promises stand because His character stands (**READ Numbers 23:19**).

Amos is not speaking of a termination of God’s promises. Those promises were great and precious, to be thought and relied upon with great joy. God had chosen them.

Illustration:

Garrison Keillor recalls being chosen – chosen last (**READ Keillor quote**):

The captains are down to their last grudging choices: a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick out in right field where nobody hits it. They choose the last ones two at a time—“you and you”—because it makes no difference. And the remaining kids—the scrubs, the excess—they deal for us as handicaps. “If I take him, then you gotta take him,” they say.

Sometimes I go as high as sixth, usually lower. But just once I’d like Darrel to pick me first and say, “Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c’mon!” But I’ve never been chosen with much enthusiasm.

Now you need to hear this. God chose us early – with enthusiasm. “You! I want you!” This should be a source of great encouragement for us. But never complacency.

B) But the True Nature of their Special Status

What we see here in Amos 9 is not the termination of Israel's special status but the true nature of their special status – significant things they had forgotten.

1. Its origin

The origin of their calling was not of themselves. It was the LORD's gracious call of them – not theirs of Him. And in that sense they were no different than any other nation.

2. Its design

They could not claim credit for their calling. Nor could they claim exemption from its purpose. Yes, they had been called out by God's grace to be a blessing to the nations. But in the sense of their need of that grace, they were no different than anyone else.

Application:

Now we need to consider this. Like them, we too have a special status – marked out as “holy” and “saints.” But, like them, that status is not one of presumptive privilege but loving purpose. It's not because of something in us but because He wants to do something in us and through us. We are being sent out with a message of transforming grace – a message that should be daily changing us even as we daily proclaim it.

We need to preach this message to ourselves, letting it transform everything about us – the burdens we bear and the hope we carry, the goals we strive for and the desires of our hearts, the way we respond to trouble, the way we respond to one another. We need that just for ourselves. And for others. For the reality is that this is a message that must be daily embraced by its heralds if anyone is to ever hear us proclaiming it.

CONCLUSION:

This is no time or place for complacency. This is real. Let me take you back to the scene of the sailors – to Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Eight battleships and 13 other naval vessels were sunk or badly damaged in that attack. 200 American aircraft were destroyed and 3,000 naval and military personnel were killed or wounded. The USS Arizona Memorial stands as a witness to that sad hour. “*Red alert. All hands on deck. This is no drill.*” That was real. And so too was what we read here in Amos.

What about today? What about us? Clearly, God takes seriously His commands, our sin, our standing before Him. Do we? Listen, this is all so real we just cannot be complacent. The Lion has roared and the prophet has spoken. So we must not be complacent. Ask yourself some questions. Jack Miller was good at pressing people in these areas. Let me share a few with you. Write these down and wrestle with them before the Lord ([READ Powerful Evangelism for the Powerless, pp.129-130](#)).

- *Have you ever stopped doing a single thing because you love Jesus?*
- *Have you ever started doing a single thing because you love Jesus?*
- *Do you enjoy prayer? Do you enjoy Christians?*
- *What is the gospel? Does it give you great joy?*
- *Do you regularly forgive others?*
- *Do you have any sense that your own sins are forgiven?*

My friends, is there such a calloused layer of deadness around your heart that these things are hardly present? Is this real to you? If so, praise God, the Author and Creator of all life. Praise the One who's breathing life into your once dead bones and bringing signs of spring where once there was only the long winter's night. But if there's nothing, no glimmer, no pulse, no longing and aching for these things, then I have to ask another question. Are you going through the motions, going to church and going to hell?

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(magnet) we cannot afford to be complacent.