

July 31, 2005

“It Matters Not”  
Amos 1:1

FCF: Need to undo our ideas of strength/weakness

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Because the LORD is the One who calls us,  
(anchor) the things we think matter most matter not.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

As enjoyable as critics said the most recent “Star Wars” movie was, many would add it still wasn’t nearly as good as the original three – especially “The Empire Strikes Back.” There we were introduced for the first time to Yoda, the 800-plus year old Jedi master, and the ways of the Force. Think back to the scene as Luke Skywalker’s spacecraft sinks down into the swamp. He cries out, “*We’ll never get it out now!*”

Yoda sighs and answers, “*So certain are you? Always with you it cannot be done. Hear you nothing that I say?*”

“*Master, moving stones around is one thing. This is totally different.*”

“*No! No different! Only different in your mind,*” Yoda insists. “*You must unlearn what you have learned.*”

Luke nods, “*All right, I’ll give it a try.*”

Yoda, exasperated, says, “*No! Try not. Do. Or do not. There is no try.*”

Luke stretches out his hand, tries to raise the ship, but fails. Exhausted and frustrated, he sits down by Yoda and bewails, “*I can’t. It’s too big.*”

Yoda answers, “*Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you?*”

There are some things we can learn from this. Certainly, the true and living God is far different than this non-personal “Force.” And none of us are being called to serve as some kind of real-world equivalent to the Jedi order. But, like Luke, we too need to unlearn much of what we have learned. We too weigh, measure, and judge by the wrong standards – size, strength, power, and age. But God is not bound by such things.

That’s what we need to consider this morning – this, our first installment in a new series through the book of Amos. But before we do, let me answer a question. Why are we studying this? Good question. I’m glad you asked. There are several ways to answer that. Let me give you two. First, because of what it is (**READ 2 Timothy 3:16-17**). So it has to do with its origin, its ultimate author. This is the Word of God. The second reason has to do with its message – one that’s quite applicable for us today. Let me read you this quote from the preface to J. A. Motyer’s commentary on Amos (**READ quote, p.10**):

*His message is relevant, humbling and frightening. It rebukes the ‘eleven and six-thirty’ of our formalism; it offers the salutary reminder that a tradition of the church may have lasted two hundred years only to be as false at the end as it was at the beginning; it insists that the church loses the centrality of the Word of God to its eternal peril; it exposes the sin of religious self-pleasing; it describes a religion which is abhorrent to God and calls for its replacement by a resting upon divine grace in faith and repentance, a commitment to God’s law in obedience, and a ceaseless concern for the needy among men. Without these, there is nothing so effective as religion to separate us from God’s love and to cement us to His wrath.*

That’s a message I know I need to hear. And so do we all. So do we all.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** **Amos 1:1**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

The book of Judges relays to us the cycle of Israel’s forsaking the LORD, His disciplining them through a foreign power, their crying out to Him for deliverance, and His raising up a deliverer for them. One such deliverer in these cycles was Gideon.

Gideon was to drive the Midianites from Canaan – but not through ordinary means (READ Judges 7:1-8). I can remember in a childhood Sunday School class hearing the explanation as to how it was the mark of a better soldier to lap the water like a dog, that the LORD was after only the best and this was to be a means of determining who would make the cut. Which is to miss the point entirely. The 300 “lappers” were the worst of the bunch. To kneel down with your head in the water is to make yourself an easy target, unaware of enemy movement. Yet the LORD chose them. Why? To make all the clearer from whom this victory was to come – not from Gideon but from Gideon’s God.

All that is to say that the things we think matter so much really don’t matter as much as we think they do. In God’s economy, in our service to Him in the totality of our lives, there is so much more to consider. Think with me. Some of you here this morning – in the callings He has given you, in the charge He has placed before you at this stage in your lives – are feeling pressed. Work is unbearable, your kids are inexcusable, and your spouse is undecipherable. And you’re feeling like you’re on the edge of despair. Everything you banked on has given way and now you’ve got nothing left. That’s good. You didn’t have much to begin with. The only difference is that now you can see it.

Others of you are just beginning to feel some pressure. It’s not quite so bad. You can see what’s coming and you’re marshalling your resources. Be careful lest you find yourself in the despairing camp real soon. Listen – the things we think matter so much really don’t matter as much as we think they do. They really don’t. They really don’t.

But we so easily, so quickly, lose sight of this. The LORD is the One who calls us. He is the One who appoints, prepares, sends, and equips. He is the One to whom we pray and upon whom we rely. Which means that as we face the obstacles, the barriers, the challenges – whatever form they take in whatever calling we have – it ultimately doesn’t really hinge on what sort of resources we have, how clever we are, how much we prepare, how much we have to bring to the table. For He is the One who calls.

Look with me as to how we see that reflected in two ways here in the opening to Amos – that it ultimately matters not “who we are” or “where we come from.”

## **I. IT MATTERS NOT WHO YOU ARE**

First, it matters not who you are. Not to say it matters not at all – for the LORD does prepare and send with intention – but in terms of how we usually think about it, ultimately, it matters not who you are. Think of Amos (READ Amos 1:1a).

### *A) Trained as a Shepherd*

Amos’ background, his training, was that of a shepherd.

#### 1. What this involved

What did this involve? It was a demanding calling. The shepherd was to find grass and water in an often dry and stony land, protect his charges from weather and predators, and retrieve those that strayed. The sheep were totally dependent on their shepherds. They could not survive without them. And, as is often noted, they are not only dependent creatures; they are stupid, prone to wandering and unable to find their way to a sheepfold even when it is within sight. Which then points not only to the strength of the shepherd and the demands upon him but to his care and compassion as well.

One other thing – especially pertaining to Amos. It’s noted in chapter 7 that he was not only a “herdsman” but a “dresser of sycamore figs” as well. Such were regarded as the food of the indigent, the poor. That is to say that Amos was no rancher, no owner of a great plantation. He was a common man, a simple shepherd, a man of the land.

## 2. What this meant

Think of the implications of this. How would he have been regarded by others? As just that – a common man, a simple shepherd, a man of the land. Certainly not as one well schooled in rhetoric, ethics, or theology. How might he have regarded himself? Initially, perhaps much the same. He knew his background. He knew his resume.

### *B) Sent to be a Prophet*

And yet despite all of that – whatever stature he may have had in the eyes of others or even himself – this shepherd had been called to be a prophet.

#### 1. What this involved

What did this involve? You see it alluded to here in Amos 1 (**READ Amos 1:1a**). Now it becomes clear as you read through the book that “*the words of Amos*” are not to be understood as “Amos’ words” but rather that which was revealed by the LORD especially to Amos – words which Amos is said to have “seen” (not necessarily describing a vision but revelation, a true perceiving given by the LORD). And such he was then called to foretell by prediction and forthtell by declaration.

#### 2. What this meant

The implications? He wasn’t qualified to do this! Not in the ways we think of such things. He wasn’t qualified. Is that not amazing? Is that not encouraging?

#### *Illustration:*

Many of us have at some point have sat down with a career counselor and gone through all the tests to see just what it is we are best suited for. Personality types, areas of interest, proven aptitudes, weather fronts and the mood of the day are all worked together to give you this list of possibilities. And I can just imagine someone pulling Amos aside and saying, “*Who have you been talking to? Were they licensed to give you this sort of advice? Didn’t they tell you you’re not cut out for this sort of thing?*”

#### *Application:*

Who *was* Amos’ career counselor? The LORD. And look what happens. Is that not amazing? Is that not encouraging? He can use you – any one of us in any number of ways. It ultimately matters not who or what you think you are. Amos was but a shepherd called to be a prophet. And no doubt his experience as a shepherd did come into play – but not in a direct way. Yet that’s just the way the LORD so often does things. Listen to these words of Paul in 1 Corinthians (**READ 1 Corinthians 1:26-29**). He intentionally chooses the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong. Think of that.

Ultimately, His willingness and ability to work through us does not hinge on the right training. Ultimately, it does not hinge on what type of personality we have. He has many different tools in His shop and is well skilled to do most anything with any of them. That’s not to dismiss the value of training or the fitted-ness of certain personalities to certain roles. He works through those as well – and is the One who provides those things from the beginning. The LORD is God. He is the One who calls – who shapes, prepares, sends, and equips. So ultimately, ultimately, this thing of who we think we are matters not. For His hands cannot be tied. And shepherds are then sent as prophets.

## **II. IT MATTERS NOT WHERE YOU ARE FROM**

That’s the first thing – it matters not who we are. The second follows closely behind it – it matters not where we’re from. Not to say it matters not at all – for the LORD does prepare and send with intention – but in terms of how we usually think about it, it ultimately matters not where you’re from. Again, think of Amos (**READ Amos 1:1**).

### A) *Called from Tekoa*

Where is Amos from? Tekoa. What do we know of it?

#### 1. Odd origins

It was a farming village about seven miles south of Jerusalem. Sitting on the edge of what is called “the desert of Judah,” its inhabitants likely had to work very hard to maintain their existence as farmers and shepherds. It is a place of little significance. And it is in the southern kingdom of Judah, not the northern kingdom of Israel to which Amos was to be sent. The two had been separated for 170 years by this point. So Amos is being sent from a small village in a separate country – odd origins, this place he was from.

#### 2. Amidst relative corruption

A place experiencing some level of corruption as well. This was a time of prosperity for Judah. The borders were expanding and trade was increasing. But King Uzziah, while in some ways one of Judah’s better kings, was not perfect (**READ 2 Kings 15:3-5a**).

### B) *Sent to Israel*

So it is from this village in this nation that Amos is sent – sent to Israel.

#### 1. A great place

Israel under King Jeroboam II is experiencing a time of prosperity as well. We noted this during our study through Jonah. Assyria had broken the back of the Aramaeans to Israel’s north but was now preoccupied with things at home. And so Israel was free then to expand and see her trade grow as well. It was a time of unparalleled prosperity.

#### 2. Amidst rampant corruption

And a time of rampant corruption as well. We’ll see this in our study through this book – extreme wealth and poverty, empty religious ritual and false security.

Now think with me. What chance would Amos then have of being heard? Considering who he was, where he was from, and the state of the nation to whom he was sent – why would they listen? *“Amos, go back to your fields. Go home. Look around you. See how well things are going? How can God be displeased? Has He not blessed us? And besides – who do you think you are? Are your people any better than ours?”*

#### *Application:*

Let me come back to my thesis. It matters not where you’re from. Amos was from Tekoa in Judah called to go to Israel. And no doubt his experiences at home did come into play in this hostile land – but, again, not in a direct way. Yet that’s just the way the LORD so often does things. Again, think of 1 Corinthians 1. He chooses what is foolish to shame the wise and what is weak to shame the strong. Think of that.

Amos’ was not the right background, the right upbringing or culture. Nor was it the right position. You can imagine what might be said. *“Judah is full of hypocrites.”* To which Amos could say, *“Yes, it is and that’s a tragedy. It shows you how messed up we all really are. And don’t worry – you’re included.”* Or perhaps Amos might even say of himself, *“I’m too great a sinner to say anything.”* To which the LORD could say, *“Yes, you are. Now go tell them about the One who is your only hope. And theirs too.”*

Ultimately, the LORD’s ability to work through us does not hinge on where we’re from. Again, He has many different tools in His shop and is well skilled to do most anything with any of them. Again that’s not to dismiss the value of where He brings us from and what He might have in mind in using that in where He’s sending us to. But He is God. And so ultimately, ultimately, this thing of where we’re from matters not. For His hands cannot be tied. And shepherds are then sent as prophets from Tekoa to Israel.

## CONCLUSION:

In a way that transcends our typical reasoning, Amos was the perfect man for the job – the right sort of man from the right sort of place. Why? Again, why is Amos sent to Israel? What is Israel's greatest need? A shot across the bow, a wake up call, to see their presumption before the LORD. And you can imagine their shock as they see and hear such things from this shepherd of Tekoa – a seeming nobody from nowhere. It wasn't just his words. He himself was a living reminder of the very things they had lost sight of, of what we lose sight of – focusing on the wrong things, giving too high a place to things that don't ultimately matter. They needed to unlearn what they had learned.

Let me take you back to Gideon and his small band of men and the outcome of his battle against the Midianites. It's instructive in many ways and parallels something we see in Amos and surely ourselves as well, reminding us of what really does matter in our service to the LORD. (READ Judges 7:19-22a). It was a rout. The LORD made 300 against this massive opposing force a rout. And how? Was it because of Gideon's might, his great tactics, his superior training? No (READ Judges 7:22a). The LORD is the One who routed the enemy of His people. Gideon was there. He was obedient. He was willing. He was the instrument through which the LORD worked. And the rout was on.

It's the same with Amos, the same with us. Amos is a shepherd called to be a prophet. He was from Tekoa in the south yet sent to Israel in the north. The LORD takes what little is there and uses it. How is Amos qualified? What is on his resume? The LORD's call. And that's it. And that's all it takes. Now think with me. What has He called you to? To love others. To serve, to look after their needs ahead of your own. To speak words of grace – sometimes hard, sometimes soft. To minister, to witness, to testify with the whole of your life in every sphere of your life – home, work, and everywhere in between – as to His grace and the work He has begun in you. We are like Gideon before the army of Midian. We are like Amos the shepherd sent to the northern country of Israel. We have so little. So little. But that's okay. That's okay. Because He can do so much with so little – so little, like us.

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(anchor) the things we think matter most matter not.