

August 28, 2005

“The Lion’s Roar Against His People”  
Amos 2:4-3:2

FCF: Failure to appreciate how very deep God’s love is for us

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Because of the LORD’s distinguishing love for us His people,  
(anchor) we must then live distinguished lives.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

I want to take you back to the playground, back to a story told a few weeks ago. A man came upon two boys fighting on a playground. He took one aside and spanked him. An indignant bystander approached and demanded to know why he had not done the same to the other boy. And he responded, “*This one is my son. That one is not.*”

Rightly exercising discipline in the lives of our children is not easy. It is never convenient. It is never pleasant – neither in what we see nor in the measures we’re forced to take. It is not easy. But it is a mark of parental love – ours to our children and a picture of God’s love towards us (READ Hebrews 12:7-8). Logically, that makes sense. I wonder though to what extent we really believe that – that the intensity of God’s love for us is a good thing, something not to be disparaged but to cause us the deepest delight.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Amos 2:4-3:2

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

“*Guess how much I love you,*” said Little Nutbrown Hare to Big Nutbrown Hare. “*This much,*” as he stretches out his arms. But his father had longer arms. “*But I love you this much,*” he said. “*Hmm, that’s a lot,*” thought Little Nutbrown Hare. And thus begins a competition between this little rabbit and his father as to whose love could outdo the other. Not surprisingly, the father wins. No matter how high Little Nutbrown Hare could reach, hop, see, or imagine, his love would always be overtaken by his father’s. Guess How Much I Love You – pick up a copy and cuddle up with a little one.

They’ll be glad you did. And so will you. For in that sweet story is the echo of an even sweeter reality – the heights, the lengths, the depths of God’s love for His own. It’s something we must never forget. And the very pulse of the Scriptures as well.

Three weeks ago, we began digging a bit more deeply into the book of Amos and how it begins with what could well be described as “the Lion’s roar” (READ Amos 1:2a). The LORD’s voice is going forth from the place of His dwelling, roaring forth as a lion preparing to pounce, attack, and maul His prey. But who then is in His sights?

Amos begins with the Lion’s roar against the nations – the accused were bearers of his image, possessors of a conscience and so worthy of judgment for their treatment of others who also bore His image and thus possessed great worth. We see that in 1:3-2:3. Amos’ audience – the northern nation of Israel – likely took perverse delight in hearing of how those around them were going to “get theirs” though there would have been some level of nervousness in hearing the southern nation of Judah was the last listed.

And well they should. For the Lion’s roar proves ultimately not to be against the pagan nations alone but against His own – Judah and Israel. Amos had circled his audience like a bird of prey, drawing them in, the noose now wrapped around their neck. They had become complacent, proud, and presumptuous. They were the ones about to “get theirs.” Or, rather, His – the full expression of the LORD’s love for them in all its intensity (READ Amos 3:2). J. A. Motyer put it this way, “*The uniqueness of the church is its unique peril.*” God has loved us with a “distinguishing love” – then and now. He has loved us with a distinguishing love. And that should call forth “distinguished lives.”

## I. A LOVE THAT GUIDES

All the more so as we consider the rich and varied features of that love. Think with me as to what we see here. What features does Amos set forth? Clearly the LORD's is a love that guides. How has this guidance come? What forms does it take?

### A) *With Instruction*

First, through formal instruction (**READ Amos 2:4-5**).

#### 1. Form

"Law" is mentioned. Yet the word used here does not refer to "legislation" but to "instruction" – words given in a relationship between a teacher and a pupil. "Statutes" are mentioned – something hard, engraved, that which was unchangeable, imperishable.

#### 2. Result

So what we see here is a wondrous blending of both the personal and the permanent, of the intimate and the ultimate – a security, a foundation upon which to live and build.

### B) *With Example*

But guidance came not just in instruction but by example (**READ Amos 2:9-10**).

#### 1. Form

Now there's more here that needs to be said, but certainly we can see that the LORD was extending His mercy to His people – meeting the needs of the helpless. And not just that but His grace as well – meeting the needs of those who did not deserve His help.

#### 2. Result

Thus, they were given a model to pattern their lives. Thus, they were given a motive to propel their lives. His dealings with them were to shape their dealings with one another.

Indeed, Moses had said of the LORD's commands (**READ Deuteronomy 4:5-8**). This was "distinguishing" and it demanded a response. To "reject" and "not keep" His ways was personal – a spurning of their God and turning to covetousness and lust (**READ Amos 2:6-8**). Self-pleasing and not God-pleasing had become the way. All other voices were drowned out. That's partly what's behind verse 12 (**READ Amos 2:12**).

### *Application:*

We have such guidance now. Not with prophets and Nazarites but with what the Spirit has inspired – the Scriptures. Here we find the "laws" and the "statutes." And His Spirit is still working – no longer inspiring new revelation but illuminating what has been revealed – helping us to understand, enabling us to apply. This is His Living Word.

How have we received it? Have we accepted it? Or have we rejected it? Don't be too quick to answer. Israel would have been. Examine your life beside the Word. Hold the two beside one another and ask the hard questions. Is the purpose of my life driven by the LORD's glory and honor over my own? Is the direction of my life driven by the LORD's revelation and counsel? Is the motive of my life driven by the LORD's mercy and grace to me? Have we accepted His Word? Hear what Amos says. This is a mark of the LORD's distinguishing love. And it should bring forth distinguished lives.

## II. A LOVE THAT SAVES

Yet this love that guides also saves. And here too it demands a response.

### A) *Past Acts*

Back to verses 9 and 10 (**READ Amos 2:9-10**).

#### 1. Victory over the Amorites

The reference to the destruction of the Amorites is to the conquest of Canaan. The LORD is a warrior. He had fought to give His people a home.

## 2. Freedom from the Egyptians

The reference to Egypt is to the Exodus. He had redeemed them from slavery.

All which is testimony to His power and to their weakness. Against Him they'd rebelled.

### B) Present Works

But His work was not merely once-for-all, limited to the past (**READ Amos 2:11**).

#### 1. His ongoing guidance

Divine guidance by word and deed continued through the ministry of the prophets and the consecrated lives of the Nazarites. His guidance had continued.

#### 2. His continual presence

So too had His presence. This is implied in the reference in verse 8 (**READ Amos 2:8**). The "house" was the place of His presence, the focal point of His dwelling with them.

And at every point where this love manifested itself, we see scorn and spurning. The "drunken carousing" in the house and by the altars, the rejection of those He had sent to be their guides – they were determined to part from Him. The LORD emphasizes this very thing – verses 9, 10, and 11 "It was I..." versus verse 12 "But you..."

### Application:

But He would not have it. He would not have it. Let me stop there and pose the question. How should we respond to such a love, a love that saves us so fully, so freely? Could we not say it begins with acknowledging His great work of salvation and resting in that? Not just saying "Jesus saves" in a plastic sort of way but actually living it.

Remembering His salvation has come, has really come once for all. Which means we are no longer trying to work our way out of Egypt. He's already brought us out. It's time to start living in Canaan. Remembering His salvation has come, has really come and is present now. Which means we are no longer trying to do it on our own. You can't. You can't make it in Canaan any more than you could pull yourself out of Egypt. Trust in Him. Seek His mercy and grace. Yes, "Jesus saves." But it's a lot bigger than we know. Distinguishing love flowing forth in the lives of distinguished people.

## III. A LOVE THAT DISCIPLINES

Finally, this love that focuses intensely on His own guides, saves, and disciplines as well. Perhaps this is the most obvious. (**READ Amos 2:6a**) This is an expression for a pattern carefully weighed. The LORD's response is not rash (**READ Amos 2:13-16**).

### A) Borne Out of Love

As harsh as this may sound to our ears, this was borne out of love.

#### 1. Not merely to hurt

Despite whatever misconceptions we may have, this was not measured out merely to hurt – as though the LORD was just waiting for the chance to pour out His wrath.

#### 2. But to bring healing

The purpose is not to hurt but to heal – much like a surgeon. The great church father, Jerome, writing in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, said (**READ quote**):

*The most merciful physician, cutting away the cancerous flesh, spares not in order to spare; he pities not in order to pity the more. For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and he scourges every son whom he receives.*

He hurts only to heal that which is already deeply broken. Why? His is a love deeper than we want. I've alluded to this quote from Becky Pippert before (**READ quote**):

*Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward strangers? Far from it...Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference.*

The LORD loves His own, willing to do whatever it takes, never standing by but always standing with. Again, never hurting to hurt but only to heal. I wonder if we believe that.

*Illustration:*

The heart of the LORD towards His own in such times is much like Michael, my sister-in-law's husband, towards their young son, when he was in the hospital a few years ago. Diarrhea and nausea were tearing Matthew up. He couldn't keep anything in his system. Test after test, needle after needle. On one occasion, Michael had to hold him down for yet another test, all the while his son screaming, "*Please, Daddy, don't let them.*" There's no pleasure in the heart of a loving father in the hurt. Only in the healing.

*B) Bound With an Oath*

What Amos is speaking of here was borne out of love. And bound with an oath. Who, after all, were these people? Whose were these people? (**READ Amos 3:1-2**).

1. Not evidence of His breaking His Word

They were the chosen, the adopted, the redeemed. They were His. What was being pronounced upon them was not evidence of His breaking His Word.

2. But evidence of His keeping His Word

It was evidence of His keeping His Word. "*Oh, Israel, what were you expecting? This is what I said I would do. I will be faithful to bless. I will also be faithful to curse.*" He had promised that with their unfaithfulness would come His purging, His purifying work. He doesn't love us the way we want to be loved. He loves us the way we need to be loved.

*Illustration:*

I've heard that in the early days of plastic surgery it was thought you should stay clear of anesthesia. Which presented a tough choice. Do you want to go without pain and remain ugly or will you take the pain and recover something of your beauty?

*Application:*

How should we respond to a love that is so deep, so much more than we want? You feel as though the rug has been pulled out from under you. You feel as though the truck has run you over. You were the bug and life was the windshield. Listen. The pain isn't random. It's redemptive. How then should we respond to such a love?

*"Thank you for loving me as you do, for loving me more than I would ask you to, more than I deserve. I confess I can't see what you're doing. And to tell the truth, sometimes the pain is too much to think about anything else. I know I need this. But I need help to trust you through it. I know I'm but the patient. And my condition is terminal. And I know you are the Great Physician. And with you there is healing. I know that – now better than before. But help me not to forget it."*

**CONCLUSION:**

The LORD's is a guiding, saving, and disciplining love – what, again, comes back to being fundamentally a "distinguishing love." How should we respond to such a love, a love where we are chosen "just because," where affections are set upon us in ways that are so very overwhelming? Let me just say what I've said already. As objects of His distinguishing love we should then live distinguished lives. Longing to be more than we are – not because we could earn it but simply and solely because He's worth it.

Such longing can be illustrated in many ways. One of which could well be a scene from the movie, "*As Good as It Gets.*" Jack Nicholson stars as Melvin, a crude obsessive-compulsive author who becomes enamored with Carol, a waitress played by Helen Hunt. Melvin persuades Carol to go out with him. Carol arrives at this swank

restaurant, obviously ill at ease in her simple red dress. It is a place for the impeccably dressed where waiters cater to your every whim. Melvin sees Carol at the bar and waves her over to his table. When she approaches, he blurts out, “*This restaurant! They make me buy a new outfit and let you in wearing a housedress.*” Carol is understandably hurt. But she doesn’t leave. She looks him in the eye and says, “*Pay me a compliment, Melvin. I need one – now.*” Melvin, shell-shocked, replies, “*I’ve got a great compliment.*” And you can see the wheels spinning in his head. The audience is holding its breath. Can this man with all his flaws muster up some kind word? Finally, he says, “*Carol, you make me want to be a better man.*” Now, I’m not sure how well Carol’s desperate desire for a compliment captures something of the LORD’s love for us. But Melvin’s desperate desire to be more for her certainly captures something of what it should look like for us to live as objects of the LORD’s distinguishing love. It brings forth distinguished lives.

May He, from the deep wells of His abundant grace, pour forth yet more that we might know His love better. To know it, find our joy in it, and grow in response to it.

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Because of the LORD’s distinguishing love for us His people,  
(anchor) we must then live distinguished lives.