

August 7, 2005

“The Lion’s Roar – Against the Nations”
Amos 1:2-2:3

FCF: Failure to see how God regards the sins of those around us

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the LORD’s inevitable judgment,
(magnet) we must speak out against the sins of our age.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes desperate measures have to be taken for the sake of perishing people – tough choices made, harsh things said, hard things done. I remember hearing a report from the BBC years ago of a horrendous traffic accident outside London in the early morning rush hour. The fog had enveloped lower areas of the terrain such that people couldn’t see what they were driving into. And there was a collision. And then another. And then another. Police called to the scene couldn’t stop the carnage. No one could see them or their flares. No one was slowing down. And so, in desperation, the police began to throw the orange cones at cars as they passed by, hoping it would get their attention, hoping they would stop. Desperate measures needed for the sake of perishing people.

I think any of us would agree with that – at least in theory. The problem comes in understanding that there are perishing people all around us all the time. And the nature of the carnage – as ugly as what I described to you must have been – is actually far worse.

SCRIPTURE READING: Amos 1:2-2:3

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

We’re really just getting started in our study in Amos. Amos was but a shepherd from Tekoa called to be a prophet to the people of Israel. At the very least, we see that it really matters not who we are or where we’re from. God can strike a straight blow with a crooked stick and He can use even people like you and me. Or, to put it another way, we are living demonstrations of the message we bear – God’s strength in our weakness.

Such is the messenger. Which brings us to his message (**READ Amos 1:2**). Who is speaking here? The LORD – “*the LORD Himself*,” Amos emphasizes – the One who appeared in the burning bush declaring Himself to Moses as the great “*I Am*.” He is speaking. From where comes His voice? From Zion, from Jerusalem – the place of the Temple, the altar, where His justice and mercy were so graphically portrayed. From there His voice goes out over the pastures to the heights of the hills – it is an image of totality. Nothing escapes His gaze nor is anyone given a pass. And this voice goes out with the “roar” of a lion prepared to pounce, to attack, to maul its prey. Why? If the LORD is roaring forth, would it not be wise of us to inquire as to why? Indeed, it would.

Six times we hear the refrain in the verses we just read, “*For three transgressions ...and for four, I will not revoke the punishment.*” A multiplicity, a pattern of offenses is being spoken of here. The punishment coming is not from some rash impulse. It has piled up with ample opportunity given for repentance. And none has been taken. And who is being spoken of? That would be worth considering too. For now, for this week, let’s look just at these verses and the attention given to the nations surrounding Israel.

The Syrians, Philistines, Phoenicians, Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites are about to be pounced upon by the Lion roaring from Zion. That ought to get our attention. For whatever it is in them that brings forth such anger from the LORD should anger us as well – wherever we find it – whether in others’ lives or our own. Whatever it is and wherever it is found we should be speaking and working against it ourselves, joining in with Amos in prophetic concern and protest. Let me break this down into two parts.

I. THE PARTIES INVOLVED

First, let's look at the parties involved. Who was being spoken of here?

A) *The Accused*

Who are the accused? And what did they have in common?

1. Bearers of His image

Though six different nations, regions, and cultures were being spoken of, they were all alike in that they were all created in the image of the same God. Not to say that they (or we) are gods but like God. They bore resemblance to the One who made them.

2. Possessors of a conscience

Part of which entails possessing a conscience, having His moral commands hard-wired into us from the start. Paul refers to this in Romans 2 (**READ Romans 2:14-16**). The implications of this? No one could claim ignorance. No one. Such is why the accused were being accused. They knew better. And so they should have done better.

B) *The Victims*

Which brings us to the next group – the victims. Who are they?

1. Bearers of His image

Most listed here would have been Israelites, the LORD's people. But not all. So then the thing they shared was not a common faith but a common humanity – the same image.

2. Possessors of worth

Made in the image of the same God with the same conscience and the same worth, the same value put upon their lives – inestimable value. We are like Him and in as sense, we represent Him as well. So much so that to strike at one is to strike at the Him.

Illustration:

There's a line from C. S. Lewis' Prince Caspian in the Narnia series where Aslan, the mighty lion, challenges the Prince's shame of his heritage (**READ Lewis quote**):

You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve. And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor in earth. Be content.

Application:

All this is to say that what happens in this life has consequences. There are consequences. Do we recognize that of ourselves in our dealings with others? Do we recognize that of others in their dealings with others? Do we recognize that this is how the LORD views us all – as creatures made in His image that will have to give an account one day? As creatures of inestimable worth that should be treasured and not trashed?

II. THE CRIMES COMMITTED

Such is what we see here in Amos just in examining the parties involved. But what of the crimes committed? What do we learn from them? Here too there were certain commonalities in that each took place in the context of human relationships. Not to say their false gods were not a problem but that it came out in their treatment of others.

A) *The Value of People*

In the first two – Syria and Gaza – we see it in the low value put upon life.

1. Syria

(**READ Amos 1:3-5**) Damascus the city stood for the whole of Syria. Brutal in war, treating people as things, “threshing” them at least symbolically if not literally.

2. Philistia

(**READ Amos 1:6-8**) Gaza the city stood for the whole of the Philistines. Here we move from battlefield to business and see a bent on putting commercial profit over human life.

Application:

And the LORD was watching. And He still is. He sees and knows when the song of profit sings louder than the cry of conscience. And He hates it. And so should we.

B) Relationships with People

In the next two – Tyre and Edom – we see the low value put on relationships.

1. Tyre

(**READ Amos 1:9-10**) They too were involved in the slave trade but what gets special attention here is a betrayal, the trivializing of one's word, of bonds forged between us.

2. Edom

(**READ Amos 1:11-12**) Twice Edom has been said to be involved in the slave trade. Yet the focus here is put on an implacable, blinding, parasitic hatred nourished in the heart.

Application:

And the LORD was watching. And He still is. He sees and knows when self-advantage and bitterness wreaks havoc between us. And He hates it. And so should we.

C) Positions over People

Then in the last two – Ammon and Moab – we see the strong muscling the weak.

1. Ammon

(**READ Amos 1:13-15**) This is too horrible to imagine. But it was real. And it is what happens when the rights and interests of the helpless are run over by ambition for more.

2. Moab

(**READ Amos 2:1-3**) Vengeance had been taken to extreme. Some in the ancient world believed such burnings would prevent the victim's resurrection, ensuring eternal death.

Application:

And the LORD was watching. And He still is. He sees and He knows when those in positions of power take advantage of those positions over others for their selfish gain. And He hates it. And so should we – in the lives of others and our own as well.

CONCLUSION:

This is all very real – now as much as it was then. It is all very real. And let me add this – something that may strike you as odd but still true. This is a good thing. The reality of the LORD's "judgment" is a good thing. The fact that He is now and will one day fully set things right is a good thing. Think with me. That such evils, such cruelties will eventually be addressed, that there will one day be justice rendered – that is a good thing. If for no other reason it serves as a sobering check on the idea we can just do what we want, as we please, as though no one would bring us to account. What we do matters. We matter. I love Becky Pippert's quote there in your bulletin (**READ Pippert 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.

God is not indifferent. What we do matters. We matter. Thus there will be a judgment.

That gives us hope especially when we ourselves are suffering injustice. And it gives us a message as well. If you are on this path, turn away. Turn away for the sake of your days still left on this earth. Turn away for the sake of your days beyond this life. The punishments described here really happened – every one of them. But they were merely foretastes of something far worse. Turn away. And turn to Him. Turn to Him. None is too foul for Him to cleanse. He died for these very things – for people such as us. This gives us hope. And it gives us a message. Turn away. And turn to Him.

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