

## Unpopular Prophet

Amos 1:1-9:15

### Introduction:

**Amos:** Amos was a **normal** farmer and shepherd dude (not a vocational prophet). <sup>1</sup> The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake (1:1).

- <sup>14</sup> Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. <sup>15</sup> But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’ (7:14-15).
- Amos brings a needed perspective. He’s not a professional prophet, he’s a farmer. He’s not from the north, he’s a foreigner. He brings a businessman’s sharp eye and an outsider’s honesty (we need more **ordinary** prophets).

**Judgment to the Nations:** Ch 1 starts Amos’ prophecy of judgment. He stands up proclaiming the Lord’s judgment **against the surrounding nations, Israel’s enemies** (Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, even the southern Kingdom of Judah). The Israelites are probably happy. Amos makes clear that **judgment is necessary, is coming, and is unstoppable.**

- “For three transgressions of \_\_\_\_\_, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment” (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). God says he will destroy with fire, tear down their cities, and send them off into exile. They have acted brutally, killing each other, slaughtering the innocent, and perpetuating injustice and brutality.

Undoubtedly **well-received** (enemy of my enemy is my friend). Everybody likes to hear about judgment on their enemies (“Amen” and “Preach it Preachers”).

- We love to agree against the sin of others. *And their sin is real sin, worthy of judgment.* But Scripture consistently warns us to examine ourselves before we examine others, The real threat comes from within, not without.
- We don’t need a sanctimonious church, but a holy church. A church that is more worried about the sin “in here” than “out there.” What’s the difference between good preaching and meddling? Preaching steps on other people’s toes, meddling steps on mine.

**Unpopular Message:** Goodwill lost when message turns to judgment against Israel! **Why?**

They were given the law of God, they experienced the grace of God in being saved from captivity, they had judges, and prophets to tell them the truth, yet they **chose sin.** <sup>2</sup> “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (3:2). Their judgment will be *worse* than the nations.

- **The nations sinned out of ignorance, the Israelites sinned out of indifference.** They knew better, they just didn’t care.

The Israelites expected a “day of the LORD” when all their *enemies* would be judged. They were not prepared for judgment for themselves. They would be held **more accountable** than their neighbors. “They presumed that since they were God’s chosen people, nothing bad could

happen to them. They mistakenly thought that as long as they kept up their *external* forms of worship, the Lord would not let them perish” (Sailhamer).

**Privilege:** For those that have received the calling of God, who have experienced the grace of God, judgment will be *more severe* when they disobey. “With great power comes great responsibility” (Spider-man). We might say, **with great privilege comes great accountability**. If you know better, you are expected to do better.

- <sup>13</sup> “Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. <sup>14</sup> Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; <sup>15</sup> he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life; <sup>16</sup> and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day,” declares the LORD (2:13-16). <sup>1</sup> This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. <sup>2</sup> And he said, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the LORD said to me, “The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. <sup>3</sup> The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,” declares the Lord GOD. “So many dead bodies!” “They are thrown everywhere!” “Silence!” (8:1-3).
  - For Israel, the **Assyrian Empire** will tear down their fortified cities, the damn will break and the waters of God’s judgment will roll in. They will be flattened like an animal in the road.

<sup>26</sup> For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” <sup>31</sup> It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:26-31).

Amos’ prophecy is a call to anyone who has heard the Word of the Lord to pursue justice and holiness that flows from a deep well of genuine love of God.

*In God’s courtroom, they are found guilty of injustice.*

## **1. A Lifestyle of Injustice**

**Justice:** God is a just God. God cares about justice. He created a just world that was destroyed by sin. **Every injustice is an affront to the desire and design of God.** <sup>6</sup> Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— <sup>7</sup> those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; <sup>8</sup> they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined” (2:6-8).

- Poetic description of **exploiting the poor**. Israel transitioned from a subsistence-based economy (localized farming communities) to a nationalized economy (mass-production of cash crops). Some figured out how to get rich, leaving the rest in poverty and debt.
  - Can't even afford sandals (taking loans for them)! **Imagine putting someone in debtor's prison over a sandal debt?**
- Also Israel's **sexual sin**, violating God's commands (incest; profaning marriage as an expression of his faithful love). Possibly also ritual prostitution, a pagan practice of manipulating a god through sexual performance.
- Their **religion and their injustice** go hand in hand. "Garments" were probably confiscated from the poor and this "wine" was payment for fines, and they're drinking it in "the house of their God."

"There's a reason the prophets so consistently connect idolatry and social injustice: in the end, idols will always demand things of you that you can only give them by exploiting other people" (Schiess).

**God Cares:** Amos answers a question that may be nagging you. **Does God care?** Does God care about you? Does God care that you were abused? Does God care that you were neglected? Does God care that you were led astray by religious leaders? Does God care that you were cheated? **God absolutely cares!** He knows, he sees, and **he will judge**.

- God cares about the poverty that you face.
- God cares about the racism that you experience.
- God cares about the abuse you endure.

*Their injustice is fueled by an attitude of apathy.*

## **2. An Attitude of Apathy**

**Misplaced Priorities:** The leaders (in particular) of Israel are too distracted by their wealth to care about the poor, they are too comfortable in their luxury to notice all the problems that surround them.

- <sup>15</sup> I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end," declares the LORD (3:15).
- <sup>1</sup> "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes! <sup>2</sup> Pass over to Calneh, and see, and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory, <sup>3</sup> O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence? <sup>4</sup> "Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, <sup>5</sup> who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, <sup>6</sup> who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! <sup>7</sup> Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away" (6:1-7).

Here's the truth, **if God cares about injustice then we have to care about injustice**. We don't get the luxury to say it is someone else's problem. God cares, so we are called to care. **A compassionless faith is not a Christian faith.**

- The gospel calls us not only to *trust* in Jesus but to *walk* the path he walked. If he is a servant, then we are called to serve. If he suffers for righteousness, then we participate in that suffering. If he gives his life away, then we give our lives away. **It's not about you**. It is better to give than to receive.

They have winter and summer houses, but there are folks who can't even afford shoes. They drink wine from bowls, but there are folks who don't even have food on the table.

- The times are evil. People are denied justice. The rich would rather get more money than see the poor get justice. We have folks in our country who would spend \$5.5 billion for 4 minutes in space or \$44 billion to buy a social media platform when there are 400,000 kids in foster care and 6 million kids in poverty in the USA.
- You and I are not God, we can't fix every problem. We have to put boundaries on our tangible care for others (we have limits!) but **we can never put boundaries on our compassion**. We don't have the option of not caring!

**False Metric:** For the leaders of Israel, money and comfort were the barometer of prosperity. Amos says they are like cows grazing in an overflowing pasture all while the poor and needy are crushed under their feet. They lived in ease, comfort, and luxury in the face of suffering. They were apathetic toward those who suffered because *their* lives were going well.

- Amos' unpopularity was fueled by his preaching of **judgment** during a season of prosperity (chill).
- Do you know the hardest time to get someone's attention focused on God? When things are going well (bills are paid, the job is going well, health is holding up). **We often mistake comfort for blessing and prosperity for God's approval**. We know this isn't true. **There has never been someone more at the center of God's will than Jesus on the cross.**

**False Religion:** Most infuriating to God in all this is that they did all this while remaining fervent in their religious devotion. <sup>21</sup> "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. <sup>22</sup> Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. <sup>23</sup> Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. <sup>24</sup> But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:21-24).

- What good is your preaching ability if you use it to defend slavery (as happened in the 19th century)? What good is your theological brilliance if you're cheating on your wife (which happened in the 20th century)? What good is your musical ability if your ministry is based in greed (as happened in the 21st century)?
- What good are your songs? What good are your festivals? What good are your sacrifices if your lives are marked by sin and unrighteousness? These people "honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me" (Isa 29:13).

Is this true of us? Come to church, eat the bread and drink the juice, and act like nothing is wrong. Come to church and sing the songs but your *heart* is a million miles elsewhere. Come to

church and listen to the Bible but the rest of the week your mind is occupied by the things of the world (**what you really believe about God is not demonstrated by how loudly you worship on Sunday but by how you live the rest of the week**).

- Church is a terrible place to hide from God, as if your prayers and offerings will distract him from your sinful heart.

<sup>5</sup> “When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, <sup>6</sup> that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?” (8:5-6). They can’t wait for worship to end so they can go back to sinning! During the festival and the Sabbath they must share with the poor (religious charity mindset).

- I’ll worship God fervently on Sundays, but it can never *actually* effect the way I spend my money, or open my home, or adjust my calendar. I’ll sing loudly but I can’t let God impact my retirement or comfort. **I’ll change my profile picture but not my behavior.** I’ll give God a few hours each week but never control of my heart. “Too often we settle for symbolic victories rather than actual righteousness.”

<sup>4</sup> “Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; <sup>5</sup> offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel!” declares the Lord GOD” (Amos 4:4-5).

- Going to worship with a heart far from God only makes it worse. Their hypocrisy increases, their sins multiply (e.g., taking the Lord’s supper with unrepentant sin only brings judgment, not grace; 1 Cor 11). Their religious hypocrisy is incurring a *stricter* judgment. “Religious zeal can’t make up for our moral shortcomings.”

**If God cares about our suffering, then he also cares about our wickedness.** If he will judge the sin of others, then he’ll also judge our sin.

**Shoot the Messenger:** God, in his grace, has sent prophet after prophet to warn them.

- <sup>11</sup> And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?” declares the LORD. <sup>12</sup> “But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, ‘You shall not prophesy’ (2:11-12).

Conflict with the priest, Amaziah: <sup>10</sup> Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. <sup>11</sup> For thus Amos has said, “‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’” <sup>12</sup> And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, <sup>13</sup> but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom” (Amos 7:10-13). Amaziah, the priest at Bethel (the holy place of the northern kingdom where Abram had pitched his tent and Jacob had his famous staircase dream). **This priesthood in Bethel (not in Jerusalem) allows the king to setup a golden calf (?!?) there. The priests allowed it! They clearly were using religion to serve the king rather than God.**

- These wicked leaders told the people and the king what *they* wanted to hear, not the truth (e.g., “itching ears”). “Tell us about blessing and success not sin and judgment.”

This congregation wanted a religion that wouldn't challenge their sin. "Congregations which welcome sin, banish Christ" (Dever)

The professional priest of Israel (Bethel) makes up lies to the King to discredit Amos. "Go back home." We don't want to listen to you ("We don't talk about Bruno"). Too often we'd rather kill the messenger than listen to the truth and change.

- Very often, those closest to power are motivated to defend the *status quo*. A prophet, preacher, or friend who will call you out on sin is a gift, not a liability. It's a grace to have someone who will tell you the truth, not just what you want to hear (e.g., John Ewart, already had a job, NRBC, money was good, far from God).

*Their apathy and injustice flow from a heart of pride.*

### 3. A Heart of Pride

**Entitlement:** They thought they deserved their prosperity! They thought they had earned their luxury. <sup>27</sup> John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (Jn 3:27).

- They had the "name" of God's people, but the lives of God's opponents. They are "functional" pagans. Do you know how many "functional" atheists we have in our world? They claim the name of Christ but live like he doesn't exist.

**Arrogance:** They acted like *they* built their cities, *they* earned their wealth, *they* secured their prosperity. <sup>9</sup> "Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath."<sup>10</sup> Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite" (2:9-10).

- They had exalted *themselves* above God, therefore they felt no need to repent. They were their own gods.

"In God's community, the ruler is supposed to listen to the prophet and care for the poor. In a perverted community, the ruler listens to no one, silences the prophet, and abuses the poor for his ends" (Brueggemann). When I set myself up as supreme, I am responsible to no one else. But when I submit to God I am called to love *others*.

**Pride:** (1) Pride sees God's blessings as personal accomplishments. (2) Pride has no place for repentance. (3) Pride sees privileges as opportunities for self-gratification rather than helping others. (4) Pride enables immorality because I can do whatever I feel like doing. (5) Pride cultivates self-centered delusions. (5) Pride says God and everyone else exists for me, **but the gospel says I exist for God and others** (e.g., love God, love others).

**Pride Before the Fall:** <sup>8</sup> The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares the LORD, the God of hosts: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it" (Amos 6:8). *Swore by himself!* He is going to judge them.

- But this judgment will be an opportunity for salvation (When God humbles you, don't get mad, tell him "thank you"). Destruction is coming. God will get your attention.

- <sup>12</sup> “Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” <sup>13</sup> For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth— the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name! (4:12-13) This is a good question for all of us! **Are you prepared to meet God?**

### Conclusion:

**Rebuke:** Maybe, in God’s grace you hear rebuke. Rebuke is not rejection, it’s a warning, an opportunity. This prophecy is a warning. If you are in sin, if you are living in pride, if you’re life is apathetic toward the justice of God, repent! God’s warning is grace. Hear the word of the Lord, repent of sin, and draw near to God.

- **I said that church is a terrible place to hide from God, but it is a wonderful place to be found by God.**
- God cares enough to heal your wounds and judge your sin. How can God judge sin *and* give mercy? His justice is based on his holiness and his mercy is based in his love. **On the cross both are reconciled.** Jesus as judge, *punishes* our sin. Jesus as merciful savior, *pays* for our sin. Jesus as judge, *destroys* evil. Jesus as savior, *knows* our sorrows and *heals* our wounds.

**Hope:** “There is a word of hope and salvation [in Amos]. God would not forget his promises to the house of David. He would send the Messiah after a time of judgment” (Sailhamer).

- <sup>11</sup> “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old (Amos 9:11). There is a small remnant who continue to seek God, and in doing so, they are saved.
- <sup>4</sup> For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: “Seek me and live (5:4) <sup>14</sup> Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. <sup>15</sup> Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (5:14-15)

**Question:** What would it look like to have a church full of people who don’t care if they live in comfort, but who hate evil, love good, and who devote themselves to establishing justice in our community? What would it look like to have a people who don’t just give lip service to loving God but demonstrate their love of God by loving their neighbor? What would it look like to be a people who don’t just seek the blessings of God but the presence of God? What would it look like to “seek God and live?”

- What (or who) are you seeking?