

Sermon Notes: Sept 29,2019

Focus: Book of Amos. But, I will also touch on 1 Timothy's focuses on abuse of power in the sermon.

[Lectionary Readings for September 29](#)

Brief Summary of Amos—(I heavily edited some portions for length- (source is from cliff notes- literally)

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/o/old-testament-of-the-bible/summary-and-analysis/the-prophetic-books-amos>

The theme that runs through the book of Amos is a protest against social injustice. Amos takes aim at northern Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. Warnings that Yahweh will surely punish the nation for violating the demands of justice are throughout. A shepherd and tender of trees, Amos lived in the region of Tekoa (The Southern Kingdom). He made his living by taking care of sycamore trees. For business, he went to the marketplaces of Israel (the North). On his journeys, he observed the breaking down of the working class by the wealthy landowners who lived in the midst of luxury. Amos was deeply troubled by the way in which the political and religious leaders tried to justify this disparity. These leaders insisted that Yahweh blessed them because their fancy worship. Amos was raised in an environment where it was understood that loyalty to Yahweh involves fairness more than ceremony. *These themes are there in 1 Timothy too today but a little softer: it's ok to be rich, but it's hard to be humble and kind. Gratitude, service and humility is the way of God.*

Visions Amos began to have dreams and visions, three of which he recorded. In the **first vision**, Amos sees a man with a plumb line measuring a wall that is about to fall. The man is told that the bulging wall is none other than the house of Israel (North): Just as a wall of this kind will soon collapse, so the nation will surely collapse and go into captivity. In the **second vision**, Amos sees a basket of summer fruit that represents the people of Israel (N) whose material prosperity will rot and decay. . The **third vision** is one in which Amos sees a swarm of locusts about to devour the produce of the land. This vision is a warning of the evil days that lie ahead.

Worship Services After a time, Amos reaches the point where he can no longer keep quiet about his dreams. Addressing a group of people who have gathered at the place of worship known as the Bethel sanctuary, he declares that Yahweh has this to say to them: *I hate, I despise your feasts.* Amos' statements are daring because they directly challenge the generally accepted idea that good worship makes you good. He had nothing good to say about the priests of his day..

Collapse The coming downfall and the utter collapse of Israel (N) are major themes in the Book of Amos. The basis for these predictions is the immorality expressed in the political, economic, and religious life of Amos' contemporaries. Amos is convinced that Yahweh is a God of justice; therefore, Yahweh's power over the nations of the earth is seen by Yahweh's responding with ruin and decay for those who ignore justice and social righteousness. The nation will collapse because it "sells the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals."

The luxurious homes of the rich will be spoiled, the people who have spent their time in idleness and pleasure will be dragged away into exile, and the entire country will be laid waste. He declares, *Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again.* Whatever remnants remain after the approaching invasion from the north will be insufficient for rebuilding the nation. These remnants will be comparable to "only two leg bones or a piece of an ear" that a shepherd rescues from a sheep that has been torn to pieces by a lion or a bear.

Universal God Amos was a spokesman for Yahweh. He was not trying to please his listeners. In the ancient world, each nation customarily had its own god, a deity whose power and influence were limited by the boundaries of the country. But for Amos, dishonesty and transgression of the rights of people will bring about the destruction for any nation that practices it. A big theme in the book is **the Day of the Lord** and it will NOT be a time when their enemies will be subdued and peace reigns. For Amos, Yahweh is indeed the God of justice; therefore, God cannot show special favor to the Israelites by allowing them to escape punishment for their irreverent and disrespectful conduct. *"Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord. . . . That day will be darkness, not light."*

I wonder what a modern Amos would see...This below is my groping attempt to understand how to apply Amos.
The growing inequality and the big national debate we have around poverty is too big for me to do anything but volunteer

occasionally. However, I deeply connected with Amos' heartache for the poor when I re-read the Book of Amos. Amos saw the marketplace hurting people and he spoke up. I felt a similar heartache in a variety of places—I have felt this ache in Dulac, LA; McAllen, TX; Turley, OK; and in the Third Ward of Houston — not to mention Oakland, SF, and Richmond. Jesus says we will always have the poor, but he didn't tell us to make the poor poorer just because we can. Here are some modern things I notice in our "marketplace" today and how it affects people less powerful than us.

1—Cops and Live PD — We don't live in a city where the TV shows *Cops* and *Live PD* are active, but police have made licensing agreements with these reality shows for the last 30 years. Recently, some cities are beginning to ban them altogether. These shows mock, humiliate, and debase the poor just for titillating video. The "stars" sometimes are shamed out of their hometowns, even if it was proved they did nothing wrong. For a good round of "that can't be," listen to *Running from COPS* <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/headlong-running-from-cops/id1459118695>

2—For Profit Colleges — Friends don't let friends go to for-profit colleges. FPC's started in order to give underperforming people the chance for higher education that was unavailable to them even at the Junior College level. Frontline did a full length episode on for profit colleges. Here is an excerpt you might like: <https://youtu.be/PCIS3W5HzKw> FPC's have a long record of indebting people for life. It kind of looks like *Amos chapter 2* to me. This should be a little personal because we're all on the tax-man's hook for providing vulnerable people with a substandard education, poor employment choices after graduation, and massive debt. Young people and single parents who can't get into a community college, should be massively cautious about jumping into the for-profit ecosystem. I dated a girl decades ago, who enrolled in a for profit school and still has debt, a worthless degree, and the same employment options she had as when she started.

3 Dollar stores if you find yourself in a poor community, you may wonder why there are two Dollar Trees, a Dollar General, and Everything's a Dollar within a mile of each other, Well...they are extremely profitable through scale and inventory that does not spoil. They crush regular grocery stores in poor and rural communities. You might say "yea! free market," which would be fine except for the food deserts they leave behind after the grocery store closes. Their presence in Dublin and Concord is no big deal and awesome for balloons. But, they are very destabilizing in Dulac, LA. NPR has a nice piece on this <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/11/569815331/loving-and-hating-dollar-general-in-rural-america>

Civil Asset Forfeiture Across much of the country, civil (asset) forfeiture laws allow police and sheriffs to seize cash, cars, or houses they suspect is involved in a crime. *California passed laws to restrict this in 2016.* A suspect need not be convicted or charged with any crime, yet the money stays permanently with law enforcement. In many states, police can keep 100 percent of the proceeds from property they seize. Guilt or innocence does not matter. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_forfeiture_in_the_United_States. *Municipal fines and the effect on the poor is for another day.*

If for example, the police seize your cash and/or property in Washington DC, it costs you \$2500 for the "right" to ask for the money back. CAF started with the noble and right aim to hurt drug dealers; but now it hurts anybody with cash on a routine traffic stop. For those of us not on a financial edge, civil asset forfeiture is just annoying. John Oliver did a 15 min segment on the USA's general approach to CAF. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kEpZWGgJks> (one off color reference in the first min)

I offer these to you not to feel guilty but as a way to understand what Amos (and later Paul and Jesus) might have felt. Amos looked around the markets where he worked and got very involved in advocating for the poor. He also tackled systems that created unnecessary suffering. Amos says in Chapter 2 *They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.* He did not shrug his shoulders, but went into the lion's den of Bethel. Let's be a little like Amos - open to dreams and visions. The Holy Spirit has a habit of asking the fortunate ones (you and me) to do something for people ruined by deprivation. At the bare minimum, we are expected to be grieved over the devastation of grinding economic injustice. Don't worry about timing of when to act-- when God calls, it is usually as subtle as a truck. **Todd**