

Amos 2:6-3:2 – The Peril of Privilege**Readings**

- Amos 2:6-3:2 (page 906)
- Romans 3:9-31 (page 1114)

Intro

Over the past two weeks we have been spending time looking at the book of Amos. Amos was an 8th C prophet who is bringing God's word to Israel the 10 northern tribes of God's people. (separated in 922 BC). Amos is a small book, it is just 9 chapters long. It is a hard book to find in your bible using the flick method. Hint - Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos.

Amos is a shepherd who God called from his home place of Tekoa in Judah to go to the northern kingdom of Israel to proclaim God's judgement on his own people. But as we saw last week, God who is God of all the nations, begins by telling Israel about his just judgement on the surrounding nations first. As Dave said last week in some sense this might draw them in to being excited by God's judgement of their 'terrible neighbours' before they hear his judgement on them but God exposing the sins of the surrounding nations also served to highlight the consequences on others of their failure to live God honouring lives that would have served as a powerful light to the nations around them. God had chosen his people to be a light to the other nations, to bring the blessings of God to the world but they had consistently refused to do this.

Today we are going to see what God says to the 10 northern tribes, the nation of Israel. We are going to see what Amos says as he details their sins, in a real sense it is not a pretty read and we are also going to see what God's just judgement on them is going to be. Finally, we are going to be asking ourselves the question, "How does Amos speak to us as God's people today?"

Pray

As you will have gathered from our reading, the message of Amos against the northern tribes of Israel is not a pretty read. Amos has been proclaiming to the people of Israel God's judgment on the surrounding nations but now things have changed, it is Israel in the spot light of God's judgement.

Let's look at what the reasons are for God's right and just judgement of his own people Israel.

The reasons for God's judgement (v6b-8)

In the second part of verse 6 we see the first reason God gives for his judgement on Israel. In Israel, people who claimed to follow God, had thought it OK to take advantage of the weak, the poor and the vulnerable among them. God is holding them accountable for the way they have treated others. They have deprived innocent people of justice, they have sold them into slavery to recover small debts like that incurred in purchasing sandals.

As Amos goes on to detail, the people who claim to follow God have used their position as wealthy and powerful people to tread on those who are poor, grinding them into the dust and making life harder for them denying them any sort of justice.

In v 7, the condemnation by God for their misuse of power over the vulnerable continues as God condemns them for sexual exploitation. Both father and son use the same girl for their sexual pleasure. Not only is it exploiting the vulnerable but it is direct disobedience to God's word. God's description of their acts of disobedience are clear. And when God's people act this way it not only is a reflection of their culpability before God, it

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also dishonours God's name before the world. We must remember that God is not condemning these actions in people who have no idea who God is or what his word says about how to live as his people. God is condemning these actions among his own people. They should have known better.

Remember how Dave mentioned last week about the failure of Israel to shine the 'goodness of living for God' before the other nations, instead they have dishonoured God's name before the other nations. You could imagine the other nations looking in at what Israel is doing and saying, "if they do not take living for God all that seriously why should we." "a god that is treated like that is hardly worth while following"

Not only have they used their wealth and power to exploit people and deprive innocent people of justice, the second reason God gives for his judgement of Israel is that they have corrupted their worship of God. In verse 8 it describes their worship practices. Their sexual exploitation of girls is linked to their corrupt worship of God. It occurs on before God's altar, on garments taken in pledge as they drink wine that was taken as fines and should have been distributed to those who it was taken for. Now without unpacking this in detail let me assure you that this was wrong at a whole range of levels. But I want to move on...

If you remember back to last week you might be tempted to feel that God's judgement of Israel seems little harsh because it seems like their actions are not as bad when compared to the heinous actions of some of the other nations around them. But God is having none of this wrong way of thinking.

Israel should have known better (v 9-12)

Israel's actions are just as culpable as the actions of their neighbours as they should have known better. As verse 9-12 says God has revealed himself to the nations of both Israel and Judah in a way that the other nations have never experienced and so with their greater privilege comes a greater responsibility.

So what was their greater privilege? The nation of Israel should have known better firstly because God has rescued them from Egypt and established them in the promised land. YHWH is not like the lifeless idols of the nations. He is real, personal, visibly and powerfully present among his people. In establishing them in the promised land God rescued them from the super power of Egypt and drove out the Ammonites nation who were a strong and powerful nation. Verse 10 says God lead them as his people, he provided for them for 40 years in the wilderness, it reminds them of God's goodness, his graciousness, his presence among the people, his provision of the people and his protection of the people but it would also remind them of the reason why it was 40 years, they were a stubborn and stiff necked people who refused to trust YHWH.

Israel should have known better because of all that God had done in rescuing his people from Egypt and establishing his people in the promised land. But there is another reason Israel should have known better.

In verse 11 Amos reminds Israel that their further culpability before the Lord is because they have rejected those God has sent to call them back to him. God has sent prophets, to proclaim God's word, to call people back to covenant obedience and to proclaim God's judgement if they do not return. God had also proved Nazarites, people who took living for God seriously. They lived among the people as an example of godliness for all to see. But as Amos says in verse 12, people forced the Nazarites to break their vows of obedience and they also refused to listen to the prophets. God sent along these special messengers to his people to call them back to him and they outright refused to listen. That is why their actions are just as culpable as the other nations.

They should have known better, they had experienced God's gracious care of them, they had experienced God's awesome power, they had heard God's ominous warning, and they had received God's special revelation. But it all went unheeded.

God's just punishment (v13-15)

So far, we have simply covered what it is that Israel is going to be punished for, God's punishment is just, then from v 13 we see what it is that God is going to do. As we read from verse 13-15 we see that God's punishment of his own people Israel is going to be both comprehensive and total. No one will escape, there will be no 'last minute' blast of the horn as the cavalry arrives. It seems like God is not going to step in to save his people as he has done so many times in the past. There will be no escape, even the bravest warrior will run for his life.

Israel, God's privileged people, after many warnings from God, after God's special providence and God's sustained care, is going to experience God's just judgement upon them because of the unjust living and their corrupted worship.

Now Amos has not finished and as we will see over the coming weeks God will unpack his judgement upon them with more detail. He will even call them to turn back to him one final time, but I want to pause there and begin to ask the question of how this passage might speak to us today.

For us today

It can be easy to forget the who God's people are. In the OT it is the Israelites in the NT it is the church (Christian not denominational). Although God will judge the nations of today, Amos is addressed to Israel as God's people.

And just the same as he has done for his people in the OT, God has graciously saved his people, established his people, taught his people and provided for his people, and he wants his people to live as his people should. In Ephesians we saw the call to live lives worthy of the gospel. So with this in mind, let us unpack just three areas in which Amos should challenge us.

1) Listen to God's word

Let me begin with a question, "Are we people who take listening to God's word seriously?" We have God's word in our language, in our hand and we have the ability to read it, ask questions about it, study it and write about it. In some respects, the bible is more accessible to us than it has ever been in all of history. But are we people who heed it?

Danger if Complacency, God will not worry if I ignore him again... not a lifestyle choice but hearing from the living God

The statistics regarding bible reading by followers of Jesus in bible believing, gospel hearted churches is very sad. Many people with a high regard for the authority of scripture will not pick up their bible from week to week and read it. Many will not even know what the bible says on key ethical issues they face. Many, when faced with a new situation or major life choice will not ask the question, "What does God's word have to say about this situation?"

Amos rebukes the people of Israel for not wanting to hear God's word from the prophets. Do we want to hear from God's word on how to live as God's people? Are we prepared to live in our relationships in the way God's word call us to/ Are we prepared to gather as God's people as God's words tells us to, are we prepared to love one another as God's word tells us to...do we love our enemies, do we pray for those who persecute us, do we love the stranger in our land... the list could go on. Do you want to know what God's

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word says on how to live as God's people? How is this reality reflected in how you have lived over this last week?

2) Our gospel driven care of the vulnerable

The second way in which this section of Amos should speak to us flows from our first point and has to do with how we treat those around us who are weak or vulnerable.

If we are going to be people who live lives worthy of the gospel we must be people who have a gospel driven care of the vulnerable. But we are not always good at doing this. Let me highlight two problems we can fall into.

So many times, churches seek to care for the vulnerable but they end up no longer speaking the gospel into the lives of vulnerable people, or worse still they depart from speaking the gospel at all. But the other second problem is that people speak the gospel on Sundays but do not care about exploiting people mon- sat.

People who follow Jesus, whose lives have been transformed by the gospel must not only speak the gospel we must also be people who care for the vulnerable, the poor and the marginalised if we are going to reflect the mind of Christ in the way we live.

So how do we do this? Sometimes the whole idea of caring for vulnerable people can seem a bit overwhelming. What can one person do in a world so full of vulnerable people?

As a result, gospel driven Christians have set up larger organisations to try and do this and this is good but sadly they often reflect the first problem I mentioned... the gospel is lost in the organisation - in the direction is heads, the people it employs and the message it proclaims (So Anglicare SA leaders often stand for things the bible speaks against, they rarely share the gospel, and whilst they do have a number of Christian employees they are full of people who are not followers of Jesus in any shape form or description).

Now when done well these larger gospel driven organisations are good to run and it is especially good when they keep the gospel front and centre to what they do however since obedience to God's word cannot be sub contracted out, we still need to ask the questions at a parish and a personal level - how do we personally seek to care for and not exploit those who are vulnerable people?

Maybe if we have developed a habit of not caring, discounting the problem or blaming the person in need we will need to start with a heart change.

Just so we know God's word still calls on us to care for vulnerable and needy people let me read Gal 6:9-10. *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers"*

Since no one situation will ever be the same maybe we should be asking, "How can God use me, the gifts, talents and the resources he has given me to care for vulnerable people?"

What Amos also condemns is the fact that God's people have not only lost their care of vulnerable people, they have exploit them more.

So, who are the vulnerable people in your life, who are the vulnerable in your family, in our church, in your place of employment, or other places you gather? Who is it that you are not treating justly, who is it that is walking away from you needy and maybe, who it is whose vulnerability might be being exploited by your actions?

3) Ensuring our worship of God is not corrupted

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The final area I wanted to look at today regarding how this passage could well apply to us also flows from a failure to listen to God's word and it has to do with how we worship God. This is a huge topic that we will not even scratch the surface of today but it is worth our while asking if we are people who seek to let God's word shape our worship of God or do we seek to find something that is mostly comfortable and not too invasive that simply affirms how we wanted to live in the first place?

Do we try and blend the 'gods of our society' in with our worship of God? Can we easily rationalise and justify why God need to take second place in our lives again, or have we reduced God to someone who simply want me to enjoy life and experience its full pleasures given my social and economic situation.

I guess not many of us are setting up a buddha statue in our lounge room but the way we can corrupt our worship of God is to turn our worship into a self focussed life, pleasure seeking, not too confrontational experience. Let me focus on just a part of our life of worship as God's people, the Sunday service. Has church been good today if we need to sing just the right number of songs that you like, the service has run just the right length that you like and the style of service has been the one that you like as well?

Israel corrupted their worship of YHWH as they added stuff in that God's word told them not to, as they pursued pleasure over obedience and as they wanted to fit in to what everyone else was doing. They listened to the part of God's word they liked but ignored the parts they did not like.

Over the coming weeks as we work through Amos we will continue to hear the judgement of God for their wilful disobedience towards YHWH and their corrupted worship of YHWH. I imagine none of us have taken the outer garment of a person who owes us money and failed to return it by nightfall. And I could guarantee you that none of us have forced a Nazarite to drink wine. But I hope that we see that we still need to be people who take obedience seriously, that we need to be concerned about the way we treat others and how we worship God.