



BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

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Amos

Amos 1 & 2

~ Brent Russell ~

Read AMOS Chapter 1 and 2

- Amos is known as the **righteous prophet**
- But also as the **Angry prophet**
- The man himself as so many of our OT characters had **no theological training** at all
- He was a simple **shepherd**
- He was **not a priest**
- He had **not apprenticed** with another prophet
- He was the most **unqualified** man to bring God's word to the people
- **But God had called this man to bring God's word of righteousness, justice and restoration**
- And so the book is **characterized by quite hard judgements** on the activities of humanity in the area of Ancient Israel
- There is much to learn from his words
- And there is much to learn from the actions of Israel and the lands surrounding the area
- People say that **history repeats** itself
- **And whilst we as Christians do believe that there is a clear beginning and end to History, we see too that it does seem to repeat**
- People and Nations make the **same mistakes** again and again

- **Someone once quipped "The only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history"**
- And it is so true
- We only have to look a short distance into our own pasts to see that we too have made the same mistakes that others have made even though we had been warned

- And so as we look at the word of God given to the people just over 2500 years ago we must never allow ourselves to think that the world we live in is any different
- **It has been said that it is the arrogance of every generation to somehow believe that it is better or worse than the one before it**
- And so as we read the sins of the nations around Israel we can see so much of our own society reflected in them

- Amos brings the message of God to six nations surrounding Israel
- Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab and Judah
- The sins they are judged by God for having committed are similar to our own society

Damascus

- Damascus-Cruel **deaths of those in Gilead**
- We only have to look at some of violence on the **Cape Flats** and elsewhere in Africa like **Rwanda**
- To understand that the world we live in repeating the cycles of destruction

Gaza and Tyre

- **Gaza and Tyre-Selling entire peoples into slavery**

Edom

- Edom was judged as being a nation of **warmongers full of anger**
- Edom is accused of having pursued with the sword
- Judged of having a **lack of compassion**
- **Judged of having anger and fury that has been out of control**
- As I read the passage I cannot help but find my mind drawn to the **US occupation of Iraq**
- They have allowed their anger to burn against some to such an extent that they have displayed and absence of compassion
- They have allowed this anger to burn uncontrolled and to lead them to pursue and to lead them into war
- One might have thought that they would have learned from the mistakes of the past
- Mistakes that have been made so many times since Amos wrote God's judgement 2500 years ago

Ammon

- **When the land of Ammon wanted to extend their borders they destroyed with absolute violence around them**
- The judgement of God against them was because they had even **ripped open the bodies of pregnant Women** of the land of Gilead
- The sin was against the very **sanctity of human life** in an absolutely vulgar way
- **And yet with our own land we have allowed unborn children to be ripped from their mothers simply because we desire the freedom to indulge our sexuality with out the responsibilities that come with it**
- The abortion bill was passed a few short weeks ago
- And we have allowed more and more freedom to destroy human life

Moab

- Moab-Burned the Bones of Edoms King
- Previously the King of Moab had previously burned his own son to appease their Gods

Judah

- **The Kingdom of the Jews at this point had split into two**
- There is Judah and there is Israel
- **The judgement against Judah is harsh because they have betrayed their faith in God for faith in false God's**
- They had forgotten their true love and had returned to the pagan worship of those around them
- And we only have to look at how those in the church have forsaken a love for God and now follow the teachings of **other religions or cults**
- I have even seen the life of a close friend ravaged by the destruction of a cult
- And yet all around us we find the idolatry so clearly warned against in the scriptures
- **Horoscopes, fortune telling, spiritists, 'feng shue' and all sorts of other spiritual mumbo jumbo that lead away from the truth that is in God**

- And so to each land on who God brings judgement with regards to sin he also brings punishment
- And so for land the following **punishments are prophesied**
- **I will destroy them with fire**
- **I will destroy their fortresses – Their security**
- **I will kill their leaders – leave them with no direction**

- **This is a tough book to read – We are confronted with a side of God that is quite frightening in His Holiness**

- Let us be straight here
- **We as individuals; we as the church ; and we as nations sinned against God**

- But it is when we **flaunt our sin** like these nations had that we are in danger of the wrath of God
- Nations like the US have built themselves towers of paper above the world and they will fall at some time
- You cannot flaunt your arrogance, your sinfulness or your anger in the face of God and think that you will come away unburned
- You cannot expect to parade an absence of compassion a lack of consideration and believe that God will not judge you and bring punishment to you

- **And our Society stands heavily judged as did the lands around Israel**

- By the end of vs. 5 of chapter 2 you can almost imagine Israel beginning to gloat a little
- Being a little glad when they hear of God's judgement on the lands around them
- As they hear their enemies getting what they deserve
- **And the church has been guilty more often than we like to admit of seeing the sin in others**
- **And almost being glad that they will be punished for it**
- **But more dangerous for us we have often failed to see the sin in ourselves**
- **It is easy for us to sit on our Ivory towers and to point out the sins of others**
- But we have allowed ourselves to somehow become complacent because we are the church
- And so we condemn others around us without looking at ourselves
- Jesus spoke of us seeing the speck in our brothers eye but ignoring the plank in ours
- And so shortly into chapter 2 God turns and faces Israel and brings judgement on her
- I believe that there is some sort of **corporate accountability** within Gods response to sin in Israel and in us
- There are certainly countless examples where Nations or groups of people and even churches have been held **corporately responsible for some sin**
- **Israel as a nation** is held responsible for the sin of the nation even though not every person was guilty
- **There is clearly the idea that there is some sort of communal guilt**
- If we look at our own **chequered past as a nation** I believe that many whites and maybe even some black folk have some share in the corporate guilt for the sins of the country of South Africa
- And I believe that those who are guilty will be held accountable for their actions or even their inaction
- **As I believe that there is corporate guilt in our past as South Africans for the racial discrimination, so too I believe that there are times coming where we too may share in corporate guilt again**
- **And it lies in our handling of a specific group of people**

- **The corporate guilt is not the guilt of our country but in fact the guilt of the church and our response to the poor**
- **in vs 6 and 7 of Amos 2 the first rebuke to Israel by God is for their treatment of the poor**
- **'For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.'**
- **The biggest issue facing this country is poverty followed by AIDS**
- And the reality is that as the church we do very little if anything about it
- **And I fear that God will judge us like he judged Israel**
- **You see when we oppress people we at some level still acknowledge their existence**
- We may hate them but we acknowledge that they exist
- **But when we ignore people entirely we reduce their existence to that of a Ghost or of a shadow**
- **By ignoring them and pretending they don't exist we deny them their humanity**
- What did the last person who **begged at your car window** look like?
- What clothes were they **wearing**?
- How **old** were they?
- Did you take enough time to look at him to see the **hardness in their eyes**?
- Or did you like me look straight ahead giving a cursory nod of your head to tell him to get lost whilst you turned up the radio or fiddled with something in your car
- By doing nothing to help the plight of the poor we are being worse than oppressors because we are denying the poor the very essence of humanity

- **In the days of Jesus the outcasts were seen to be subhuman and they were ostracized and ignored**
 - They were so uncared for by society that they lost all sense of humanity
 - In Mark 5 we find Jesus healing a man who was **demon possessed** and was living amongst the graves
 - **Perhaps because he felt he had more in common with the dead than with the living**
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- **And the truth is that because of our inactivity in helping to solve the problem of poverty**
 - **By simply ignoring the poor we are denying them the humanity they have every right to**
 - **And we are denying that they too have been fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of the creator**
 - **By turning our back on the problem we are wishing that they would cease to exist**
 - It's like the ostrich burying its head in the sand because it sees a lion, but get eaten by the Lion anyhow
 - And I believe that we are skating on thin ice as the church and we will be held responsible by God
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- But we are complacent and in chapter 6 God rebukes the complacent with powerful words
 - You lie on **fancy beds**
 - You lounge on **comfortable couches**
 - You eat the **finest lamb** and the **fattened calves**
 - You listen to **music**
 - You drink **fine wine** and use the **finest lotions on your skin**
 - **But you do not grieve for your fellow human beings...**

- **The problem of poverty is frighteningly real**
- And we as the church need to make some real response to it if we are to fulfil our role as Gods hands in the world
- **We need to do something more than our feeding schemes**
- We need to make a concrete change in the circumstances of those around us
- If we fail to share with the poor we may find ourselves losing our share of Glory

- **And I mean more than chequebook help here**

- **I would love us as a church to get involved in building houses for the poor – perhaps through a organization like habitat for humanity where we physically get involved in making a real difference**

- **I believe we should look at walking alongside a poor congregations to see what we could to assist them share in their needs, share in their troubles and share in their joys**

- **I believe that each of us could walk alongside a poor family and bless them as we have been blessed with material wealth**

- **I would love to see us use the classrooms upstairs that stand empty 6 and a half days a week as a night shelter**

- **We are simply not doing enough**
- **And we stand before and we are going to be held responsible**

- We are so wealthy And we fail to understand how much we have
- Listen to the following article written by and American author Richard Helbroner:
How Wealthy Are We?

From the standpoint of material wealth, we have difficulty realizing how rich we are. Robert Heilbroner, who has written dozens of books on the subject of the economy, suggest that we go through a little mental exercise that will help us count our blessings. Imagine doing the following, and you will see how daily life is for more than a billion people in the world. And possible for 1/3 of RSA

- 1. Take out all the furniture in your home except for one table and a couple of chairs. Use blanket and pads for beds.*
- 2. Take away all of your clothing except for your oldest dress or suit, shirt or blouse. Leave only one pair of shoes.*
- 3. Empty the pantry and the refrigerator except for a small bag of flour, some sugar and salt, a few potatoes, some onions, and a dish of dried beans.*
- 4. Dismantle the bathroom, shut off the running water, and remove all the electrical wiring in your house.*
- 5. Take away the house itself and move the family into the tool shed.*
- 6. Place your "house" in a shantytown.*
- 7. Cancel all subscriptions to newspapers, magazines, and book clubs. This is no great loss because now none of you can read anyway.*
- 8. Leave only one radio for the whole shantytown.*
- 9. Move the nearest hospital or clinic ten km away and put a midwife in charge instead of a doctor.*
- 10. Throw away your bankbooks, stock certificates, pension plans, and insurance policies. Leave the family a cash hoard of 50 rand.*
- 11. Lop off twenty-five or more years in life expectancy.*
 - *By comparison how rich we are! And with our wealth comes responsibility. We should use it wisely, not be wasteful, and help others.*

Conclusion

- **There is a great story about an elderly man walking alongside the seaside after a great storm the night before**
 - **Thousands of starfish had washed up and he was walking along throwing them back into the sea**
 - **Another beachcomber asked him why do you waste your time?**
 - **What difference can you possibly make there are thousands of these starfish**
 - **The Old man picked up a starfish, threw it back into the sea and said "It made a difference for that starfish"**
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- **We may not change the whole world**
 - But we can **bring hope** to the lives of hundreds of people
 - But we can **change the lives of a good number of families**
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- The reality is that we can and must make a difference
 - **The Message of God through Amos is not without hope**
 - **God says to Israel "Seek me and live"**
 - Part of our seeking God is seeking his purposes
 - **And I truly believe that one of the purposes God for as His people is to serve the poor**
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- **Amos is a tough book to read because it allows us to glimpse the angry and holy God that we serve**
 - **He is angry because we have failed to serve with compassion that we should have**
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- He is slow to anger and abounding in love
 - **But he does want us to walk in the path he has set out for us**
 - **And he does of expectations of His people**