

Prophecies of a Fig Pincher

PART 2: INDICTMENT (AMOS 5:10-15)

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It is good to be together this morning! We do plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper together right after we study the word of God, so if you need the elements for the Supper, those are available in the entryway, right inside the front door. And then, following the Lord's Supper, we plan on singing several songs together before we dismiss [for class].

As we begin, we'd like to summarize God's plan for saving us. To start with, we need to be saved! We have sinned, and we fall short of what God requires. Anticipating this, God made a way for us to be forgiven of our sins by sending his only Son as a sacrifice. He died on the cross, he was buried, but he was raised up on the third day. In response, we hear and believe that good news, we turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. At that point, the Christian life begins, and we spend the rest of our time on this earth living for him. Why do we repeat this every week? Because it is incredibly important!

And to show what this actually looks like, we've been sharing pictures of people being born into God's family all around the world. Today, we have some good news from Toby, a gospel preacher in Wichita, Kansas, who recently baptized his friend, Doug Smith. He says,

Today was a GREAT day! Baptized my 74-year-old friend into Christ!! Welcome to the church, Doug! I have no idea how many folks I've baptized into Christ over the years. I've lost count, but it's a joy every single time. It simply never gets old. ...No matter your age, ...no matter how deep in sin you've been, ...no matter how distant from God you feel, ...as long as you have breath in your lungs, it is NEVER too late to start over.

Amen to that! If you are interested in following in Doug's footsteps this morning, if you have any interest in studying together, please let me know. It is truly the most important thing you can ever do.

This morning, we are continuing in our brief series of lessons where we are just getting a taste for the prophets by looking at Amos 5. Last week, learned that Amos was a fig-pincher, a caretaker of fig trees, he was not a professional prophet by any means, but he was a farmer called by God to leave his home in the south to go up and to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. We compared the prophet Amos to a farmer from down

south yelling at us on the sidewalk out here, telling us that everything we've done in worship is offensive to God. By way of very brief review, Amos is represented by the purple band on the timeline up here, showing that he prophesied in the mid-700's BC.

Last week, compared the prophets to those who might need to have an intervention, confronting a loved one who's caught up in destructive behavior: 1.) We love you, you are important to us, 2.) These are some of the terrible things that will happen if you continue down this path, and 3.) This is what you need to do to fix this situation. This is the message of the prophets: 1.) God loves you, 2.) This is what will happen if you continue living the way you are living, and 3.) This is what you must do to fix it. This is the message of Amos. And this is the message of Amos 5.

Last week, we looked at the first nine verses of Amos 5, and the message starts like a funeral, lamenting the death of the nation. They seem to be rather strong at the time, everything seems to be fine, but everything is not fine. We then had something of an opening invitation as Amos tries to explain that ultimately, the solution to this problem is to seek the Lord. And this is where Amos reintroduces the Lord to these people. It has been so long since they have known the Lord, Amos has to say, ***"The Lord is his name."***

This brings us to the next paragraph. As Amos gets specific, he brings an indictment. So as to remove all doubt as to what they have done, the prophet explains the charges; and once again (as he does in the previous paragraph), he proposes a solution. We are seeing a pattern here: This is the problem, and this is what needs to be done. Let's look together at Amos 5:10-15,

- ¹⁰ They hate him who reproves in the gate,
And they abhor him who speaks with integrity.***
- ¹¹ Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor
And exact a tribute of grain from them,
Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone,
Yet you will not live in them;
You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine.***
- ¹² For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great,
You who distress the righteous and accept bribes
And turn aside the poor in the gate.***
- ¹³ Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time.***
- ¹⁴ Seek good and not evil, that you may live;
And thus may the LORD God of hosts be with you,
Just as you have said!***
- ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good,
And establish justice in the gate!
Perhaps the LORD God of hosts
May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.***

So again, we have the PROBLEM, and then we have God's SOLUTION to the problem.

I. But let's start with the PROBLEM, let's start with the INDICTMENT, let's start with GOD'S ACCUSATIONS in this passage (we see this in verses 10-13).

And as we look at verses 10-13, we might be a bit surprised, because these don't look like the normal accusations we find in some of the prophets. Often, we read about people not giving as they should. Often, we read about people sacrificing animals that are blind or lame in some way. Often, we read about people worshiping foreign gods, or things like that. But here in this passage, the accusations are a bit different. Here, Amos describes the people as taking advantage of the poor and favoring the rich. These are what we might describe as "social" issues. These are issues of justice, and fairness, and rent, and taxes.

And with this in mind, I would also point out that these accusations are personal. Amos isn't necessarily condemning the king of these things, he's not accusing the nation as a whole, but these sins are committed by individuals. We think of Samuel and Nathan and Elijah and Elisha focusing their efforts on kings. That's not Amos. Amos speaks to the people. If a prophet accuses a king of something, if a prophet accuses the whole nation of something, those may not be things that we personally can fix, and maybe we get overwhelmed. I can't fix foreign policy. I can't solve the latest national crisis. I can't end a war. I can't fix the border crisis. I can't fix the nation. There is a place for God sending prophets to the kings and priests and leaders as he did. But Amos brings it down to what I can do.

Notice, first of all (in verse 10), ***"They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks with integrity."*** It's the attitude of never wanting to be corrected, but even beyond that, the people harass and ostracize those who dare say anything. They hate people like Amos who shine light on the injustice. If someone speaks up, that person is "cancelled," as we might describe it today. They are harassed and bullied away from society. And this is what we saw last week from Amaziah the priest and what he said to the king about Amos in Amos 7:10, ***"Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. For thus Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.' Then Amaziah said to Amos, 'Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.'"*** If anybody speaks up, they are immediately harassed and rejected. People hated Amos, just as they hated Jesus, just as they hated Stephen, just as they hated Paul, and I would say, just as they will hate us, but unfortunately, we might be the ones doing the hating (if somebody dares correct us for something we are doing) – we at least need to be open to this. So, this first complaint is calling for an attitude adjustment: Amos is calling for change in the way we take correction. When someone speaks the truth, we are not to retaliate, we are not to lash out, but we are to listen.

The second accusation in the indictment comes in verse 11 as Amos accuses these people of taking advantage of the poor. They are imposing heavy rent, they are demanding a tribute from their grain. The words he uses here seem to imply a heavy burden of some kind and taking this by force. And this is addressed to the landowners. At this point, we might think to ourselves, "Well, I'm not a landlord and I don't own a vineyard. I'm not abusing the poor, I'm not exploiting the poor with low wages, I'm not taking an excessive tribute of grain from the poor, so this verse really doesn't apply to me." And I know, this is Amos; we are living under a New Covenant, and all that. But is there really no way to see ourselves here? I might not be exploiting the poor directly, but are there ways I might benefit from others exploiting the poor? If we take time to learn about where our "stuff" comes from, I'm afraid many of us might be shocked by what we find. I would encourage you to start with a quick search online for "slave labor products" and do a little reading. And then we need to remember that God sees everything. What does he think about my singing this morning if I am wearing a shirt made by

slaves in Bangladesh? How does God feel about me partaking of the Lord's Supper if I am wearing shoes made by children in a sweatshop in China? We could spend weeks on this, but I would encourage us to take some time to think about where our stuff comes from. Do we truly need what we want? Are there ways to be more aware and more involved in the process? Does God care about the living conditions of the workers who picked the coffee I had with breakfast this morning or of the chocolate I had a few days ago? He does. We might not be abusing the poor directly, but in a global economy we do need to be aware. I'm not off the hook just because the person who harvested the cotton for my pants lives 8,000 miles from here. There is a distance, but we are connected. And with our wealth comes responsibility. I may not control how a company treats its workers, but I do control whether I purchase a product made by that company.

So, we've seen two categories so far: Those who hate being corrected, and those who oppress and take advantage of the poor financially. In verse 12, we have a third part of the indictment as Amos condemns those who pervert justice. They ***"...distress the righteous and accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate."*** The reference to the ***"gate"*** in this passage is basically a way of referring to their court system. In ancient times, the elderly men would hang out at the city gate, and people would often bring their cases to be decided by those who were older and wiser. I think of visiting my grandparents when they lived in Lynchburg, Tennessee. Whenever we would walk down to the city square, we would always see the old men sitting out in front of the courthouse, and they were always whittling. Everybody had a knife and a stick, and they were out there whittling. Old guys in Tennessee like to whittle! In ancient times, they would also decide cases. If I needed witnesses to an agreement, I would take it to the gate. If I had a dispute with my neighbor, we would bring it to the old guys at the gate, and they would hear both sides and make a decision. Sometimes the king might even show up and get involved (maybe on the really tough cases). Well, Amos says that this system has been corrupted. They ***"...distress the righteous and accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate."*** The system is rigged in favor of those who can afford to bribe the officials. Once again, they are taking advantage of the poor – not just oppressing them financially, but now in the courts as well. There is no justice. Justice has been perverted. The entire system is biased against those without resources, and there is no hope of fixing it, without the people turning to God in repentance. Today, we might think of how the death penalty has been perverted through the years. God gives permission for the concept. We think of a passage like Romans 13 where Paul says that the government does not "bear the sword in vain." God has given governments his permissions to execute justice, but we also know that it has been abused from time to time. First of all, executing a man today for something he did 30 years ago makes almost no sense whatsoever. And then we have the divide between the rich and the poor. Generally speaking, we don't execute rich people in this country – they have lawyers! And so, once again, there is this divide between the rich and the poor. But we can't go the other extreme, either, where we give preference to the poor. We think of Leviticus 19:15, where God said, "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly." I think of every time we have a nominee for the supreme court – everybody wants to know how this person will treat this group or that group, when the real question should be: Will this person follow the law? Nevertheless, the poor in the days of Amos always seemed to be on the losing end of justice. So, this is the third indictment: The poor were not being treated fairly in the courts.

But wait, there's more! The people hate being corrected, they exploit the poor, they oppress by perverting justice, and finally (in verse 13), nobody cares! Nobody speaks up. This is just the way it is, and everybody seems to accept it. There are several ways of looking at verse 13. Some have said that Amos is telling the people not to speak up, the idea of not casting your pearls before swine, "They won't listen anyway, so if you're wise, just keep your mouth shut." And I suppose that might be it; however, Amos is speaking up, isn't he? God sent Amos to speak up! So, I would lean toward this being part of the indictment – not that they are supposed to be quiet

in the face of injustice, but this is further evidence of the problem: Even those who are thought to be wise refuse to speak up, and so the injustice continues. The whole system is at fault. We can almost imagine Amos saying, "This is why God had to send me, a foreigner, up here to say these things, because nobody up here is speaking up! This is why God had to send you a fig-pincher! This is how bad it is up here!"

Before we move on from this first paragraph, I would just point out what Amos says at the beginning of verse 12, ***"For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great."*** The sins are stacking up, and God sees all of it. For us to appreciate forgiveness, sometimes we need to remember how desperate we really are. So, this is the indictment, these are the charges: 1.) The people hate anybody who speaks the truth, 2.) They exploit the poor, 3.) They pervert justice, and 4.) They refuse to speak up against these things.

II. As we continue in this passage, we (once again) come to God's solution to these issues, as Amos tells the people that they must SEEK GOOD AND HATE EVIL.

It's actually pretty simple, isn't it! Seek good and hate evil! There is a positive, and there is a negative. And these are incredibly simple concepts. To start with, seek good; love what is good! This is not complicated. If we see something good we can do, we do it. We look for opportunities to do good. We go after what is good. We think about what is good.

On the other hand, Amos tells us to ***"hate evil."*** If we see this bad thing over here, we do not do it! Again, very simple! This is not a complex concept. It's challenging sometimes, but it's a very simple idea. We don't do the bad stuff! In fact, we hate what is evil. We are against it. We turn away from it.

Seek good and hate evil. This is repeated in the New Testament. In 3 John 11, John says, ***"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God."*** It's pretty close to what Paul says in Romans 12:9 when he says, ***"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good."*** Love good and hate evil.

And really, this is the "So what?" part of today's passage. What does this passage really mean for me? It means that I need to look around, find some good to do, and do it! We see evil, and we hate it, we turn away from it. We see injustice? We say something. We petition the governor. On the positive side, we write to prisoners. We volunteer; we donate diapers to a pro-life organization. We take somebody out for lunch. We apply to be house-parents at a place like Shults-Lewis. We pay attention to where our coffee and chocolate come from, paying more if we need to. We do some research concerning who makes our electronics and how their employees are treated. We get to know our neighbors. Any number of things. We do good and not evil.

¹⁴ ***"Seek good and not evil, that you may live;"*** Amos says,
"And thus may the LORD God of hosts be with you,
Just as you have said!

¹⁵ ***Hate evil, love good,***
And establish justice in the gate!
Perhaps the LORD God of hosts
May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph."

Conclusion:

Last week we looked at God's JUDGMENT on the Northern Kingdom, in the form of a lament, as announced by the prophet Amos. This week we've seen the INDICTMENT, as God has Amos read the charges, and once again, we have seen God's solution: Seek good and hate evil.

I would invite you to read ahead through the end of the chapter as we prepare for next week, but before we partake of the Lord's Supper, let's close this study by going to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are a God of love and justice. We look around us, though, and it's obvious that we live in a world where love is sometimes in short supply. We live in a world filled with injustice. We pray that we might open our eyes to what is going on all around us. We pray that we would love good and hate evil.

We are thankful this morning for your servant Amos – for his willingness to leave his home in Tekoa to preach your word to the Northern Kingdom, for his willingness to endure rejection and insults. We pray that we may be willing to follow in his footsteps, sharing your message of love and mercy to the world around us.

Bless us, Father, as we live as citizens of your heavenly kingdom. We pray that we would honor you in everything we do.

We come to you this morning in the name of your Son Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com