

A Glimmer of Hope

The Lion's Roar: Listening to the Book of Amos

Amos 8:4-9:15

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Introduction

Good morning to you all! My name is Lucas McGarity and I am the Middle School and Missions Pastor here at First Free. It is wonderful to gather here this morning to worship the Lord.

Before we get to Amos 8-9 this morning I want to let you know about what is coming up. Next week we will begin a new series in the book of Hosea called Learning to Love Again. I would encourage you to read through Hosea over the course of this series. Also check out the blog post on the website that explains more about Hosea and why we are going to preach through it. There will also be a link to a video done by The Bible Project that gives an overview of the book. These videos are very helpful to watch in order to understand the big picture of the book.

Which means this is our last week in the book of Amos. I have really enjoyed the last few weeks because the book continues to remind me about the importance of not oppressing the poor and not being focused on greed and pride. I hope the Word of God has convicted you of sin and also pushed you towards the mercy and grace of God that we receive through repentance and belief.

The book of Amos has changed from oracles to visions. Amos started the book by telling the nation of Israel what would happen if they did not repent of their sins and stop oppressing the poor. But the people did not listen and the last three chapters of the book are visions that Amos saw of God's judgment. Josh preached on the first four visions last week. One of those visions was the Lord standing beside a wall built with a plumb line and the Lord had a plumb line in his hand. God is showing them how out of alignment they are with his word and commands. And because of that, the nation will be torn down so that it can be restored and remade. There are times when something is just so out of balance or wrong that the only way to fix it is to start anew.

This happens a lot when I am playing Legos with my son Weston. You see, Weston is a car, truck, tractor, and everything-that-has-wheels-and-rolls type of kid. When we are driving down the road he can spot construction from a mile away and yells it out. As we drive past it he is shouting, "skid steer, back hoe, roller, skid steer, another skid steer." There are some boys his age that are all about balls, but not Weston. One of the things that he loves to do with his vehicles is make them drive through tunnels that he builds with his Legos. But he's 2 ½ and wants to build them all by himself. So his tunnels usually end up looking like a hodge-podge of Legos which have been attached together. They tip over and fall apart, or the tunnel isn't tall enough for his little bus to fit through. And so the only way to fix the problem is to tear it all down, take it apart, and start over. It is through the destruction of the old that the new growth can happen. This picture of destruction leading to new growth also happens in forest fires and every spring in the Flint Hills. The old dry grass is burned off, so the new growth can come through.

And it is the same in our passage this morning. We will see how the day of the Lord is a day of both judgment and destruction but also a day of restoration and hope.

Amos 9:1-15¹

^{2:1}I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said:

“Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake,
and shatter them on the heads of all the people;
and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword;
not one of them shall flee away;
not one of them shall escape.

²“If they dig into Sheol, from there
shall my hand take them;
if they climb up to heaven,
from there I will bring them down.

³If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,
from there I will search them out and take them;
and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea,
there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.

⁴And if they go into captivity before their enemies,
there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them;
and I will fix my eyes upon them
for evil and not for good.”

⁵The Lord GOD of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts,
and all who dwell in it mourn,
and all of it rises like the Nile,
and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt;

⁶who builds his upper chambers in the heavens
and founds his vault upon the earth;
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out upon the surface of the earth—
the LORD is his name.

⁷“Are you not like the Cushites to me,
O people of Israel?” declares the LORD.

“Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,
and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?

⁸Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom,
and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground,
except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,”
declares the LORD.

⁹“For behold, I will command,
and shake the house of Israel among all the nations
as one shakes with a sieve,
but no pebble shall fall to the earth.

¹⁰All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword,
who say, ‘Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.’

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ *"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,
¹²that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations who are called by my name,"
declares the LORD who does this.*

¹³ *"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when the plowman shall overtake the reaper
and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.*

¹⁴ *I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.*

¹⁵ *I will plant them on their land,
and they shall never again be uprooted
out of the land that I have given them,"
says the LORD your God.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

We are going to start our time by looking at the judgment of God on the day of the Lord and then finish our time by looking at the restoration and hope that is also a part of the day of the Lord.

THE DAY OF THE LORD BRINGS JUDGMENT (8:4-9:10)

If the day of Lord brings judgment, one of the questions we must ask is why is the judgment coming. Verses 4-6 of chapter 8 give one of the most vivid pictures in the whole book of how badly the rich were oppressing the poor and going through the motions of religion, because their ultimate goal was money and wealth. These people were sleazy, dirty people; scum bags, the people we hate in movies. They are like Gordon Gekko in the movie *Wall Street*. They did not care about anyone but themselves and their own prosperity. They couldn't wait until the religious festivals and the Sabbath were over so that they could get back to their real goals in life of profit and prosperity. They didn't have a desire to worship the Lord in any way but instead saw the act of worship as something that intruded on their life. They were the people who kept looking at their watches and counting down the minutes until they could be done with church or prayer. They organized their whole lives around profit by deliberately making the measurement of an ephah of grain smaller than it should have been and changing the weights on their scales. They even stooped so low in their love for profit that they threw the chaff and trash from the wheat in with the good grain. They could make their grain go further this way and make more money, even though the poor were desperately hungry. The desire for profit at any cost, refusing to listen to the words of the Lord, and a lack of repentance is the reason that the day of the Lord brings judgment on the people of Israel.

This desire for profit at any cost as the main driving force of life is prevalent in our culture today. If we are honest with ourselves there are many times in our lives that worshipping God seems like it is

getting in the way of the rest of our life. We just want the worship service to be over so we can get back to the rest of our life, which includes work. We don't have the time for the things that God has called us to because of the increased desire and call we have to work, money, and profit. We must remember that work is not a bad thing for people. The apex of godliness isn't sitting around on the beach relaxing, hiking in the mountains, or consuming our lives with our favorite hobby and not doing any work. The command to work came in Genesis 2 when God put Adam in the garden to work it and keep it. This was before the Fall. So in what way is God calling you personally to work? Are you only looking out for yourself at work or for the greater good of the community and job? How can your work do the most good and not be solely focused on profit, tasks, or productivity alone?

The judgement that comes on that day will come in two parts, spiritual drought and physical death. Chapter 8:11-14 explains what this spiritual drought will look like. Amos has been proclaiming the word of the Lord to the people but they have not listened to it. Because of this God will no longer give them the words and will instead be silent. Verse 12 says, "They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it." Verse 13 talks about people fainting because of thirst. These words give us a picture of people stumbling about and looking everywhere for the word of the Lord but not finding it. They hunt for it because they know that it is only through hearing the words of the Lord that they can have life. But no matter where they go they will not find it. They will call out and seek God but they will not find him. The time for repentance is over, they had their chance.

The words of the Lord are precious things that sustain God's people. They cannot "live without the power and guidance of the Lord's words any more than anyone could live without the nourishment of bread and the refreshment of water."² Jesus said something similar in Matthew 4:4 when he was being tempted by the devil, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." It is better to be deprived of food and drink than to be deprived of God's Word. But do we really believe that? Do you believe that it is only through the Word of God that life can be sustained? Does the way that you live prove that you value God's Word and the life that it brings? How are you currently reading, reflecting, studying, and memorizing the Word?

One of the ministry principles that we have here at First Free is celebration. We want to be people who are celebrating the gospel growing deep in God's people and going wide to all peoples. So let's celebrate this value of God's Word. On Wednesday night Caleb Gibson and I lead the eighth grade guys. They have all persevered with us as their leaders and we are starting our third year together. Last week we went around the group and asked them what is one way that they want to grow in their faith or relationship with God this year. Levi, Drew, and Benjamin all said that they would like to read through the Bible. Levi has started and is 25 percent of the way through already. I am really proud of them for committing to this and desiring to spend time in God's Word to know the life-changing message that it contains.

The next aspect of the judgment is physical death. Amos 9:1-4 is the fifth and final vision of the book. This vision is different than the other four in the fact that there is not interaction between Amos and God. Last week we saw that after the first two visions Amos prayed for the people of Israel and asked God to relent of his judgment. Then in the third and fourth visions there was a conversation between Amos and God. But in this final vision Amos is telling what he saw and what God would do. There would be no opportunity to escape the judgment of God this time. They had

² David Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, 223-224.

their chance and now the time is up. The Lord is speaking in the first person and commanding what will happen because of their sin and refusal to repent. God speaks to them from the altar and commands for the capitals to be struck until the thresholds shake and shatter on the heads of the people. The destruction of the people would be from top to bottom and be complete. But if any happened to be left, the Lord would kill them with the sword. Reading verses 2-4 reminds me of the movie *Taken*, when Liam Neeson is on the phone telling the bad guys, “I have a very particular set of skills... I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you.” It doesn’t matter if the people of Israel dig holes and try to hide in caves or underground, if they climb to the highest mountain, if they hide at the bottom of the sea, or even if they are taken into captivity. God will find them and he will kill them because he has fixed his eyes on them for evil and not for good.

God then reassures them that he is capable of doing this in verse 5-6 because he is “The Lord God of hosts.” He is sovereign over, in control of, and created all things. But even with all of the words in Amos’ oracles and the five visions from the Lord, the people of Israel don’t believe the judgment will come. The reason for their unbelief is because of their pride as God’s covenant people. They remember their heritage as God’s chosen people. They remembered the promises that God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They remember how God cared for them when they were slaves in the land of Egypt and how God brought them out of Egypt in the Exodus. They remember conquering the Promised Land. Israel thought their history with God meant he would always protect them and do only good to them. But God’s involvement with Israel didn’t bring with it a special immunity from judgment. In 9:7 God says that he was involved in bringing the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir. And even though he was involved in their kingdoms and in their movement from one place to another, it did not make them immune from God’s judgment.

Israel is living in the past and not in the present. They think their past credentials will carry them through despite their present moral disobedience.

We know people in our lives and characters in movies that live in this way. One that comes to my mind is Uncle Rico from *Napoleon Dynamite*. All that he did was live in the past of his high school football days. He wished he could go back to them so that he could take state and throw the football a quarter mile again.

The only credential of my past that continues to follow me in life is the fact that I was in Boy Scouts and got my Eagle Scout rank. I actually have my uniform down here. I know what this uniform and badge represent. It represents the Scout Oath: “On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country, to obey the Scout Law, to help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.” It also represents the Scout Law: “A scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.” But these things don’t mean anything if my present-day living does not go along with them. There is a phrase that is often said at the Eagle Scout court of honors: “Once an Eagle always an Eagle.” This may be true, but if my present-day life doesn’t look like that of an Eagle Scout, then this is just a patch sewn on a uniform that sits in the closet, and it doesn’t really mean anything.

Israel’s spiritual heritage could not save them from the day of the Lord’s judgment. God was not concerned with Israel’s obedience in the past but instead concerned with their present obedience to his word. God’s people are called to actively live their lives in obedience to his word and not rely on their past to carry them through. We must be people who persevere in our faith and believe to the end. Saving faith perseveres to the end. Are you relying on your spiritual heritage to prop you up

before God? Are you relying on the faith of your parents or grandparents? How is your present moral obedience to God's word? Are you living a life of repentance and belief?

It is because of Israel's unbelief, pride in who they are as God's people, lack of obedience, and blatant sin that God swears that he will bring judgment and death on them. We are given a picture of what this day will look like emotionally and physically in chapter 8:7-10. God says that he will never forget any of their deeds and the land will tremble and the people will mourn when the day of the Lord comes with judgment. God will make the prosperity of Israel fall apart when it is at its height and all of the feasts and songs of joy will turn into mourning. Every person will wear sackcloth and it will be a bitter and horrible day. Verse 10 says, "I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day." There is no grief that can compare to that of a parent grieving the loss of their child. This is the sorrow that will come upon the nation of Israel because of their sin. There will be no escape from God's judgment. This day for Israel will one day extend to all of the nations and peoples of the earth who do not repent of their sins and believe the gospel. And it will be a bitter day for them.

This is a sobering message to hear and it was very sobering for me this week as I looked at these chapters. It has made me think of two things. First, it has reminded me of the amazing love of God towards me and those who he has raised to new life in Christ. I deserved this judgment from God but because of his great mercy he sent his son Jesus to be my substitute and take the punishment for sin that I deserve. If you believe the gospel I would encourage you to reflect on the love, mercy, and grace of God that has been extended to you and how you can extend that to others. If you do not believe the gospel I would encourage you to also reflect on the love, mercy, and grace that is being extended to you as well. What is keeping you from believing? And talk with someone here about that.

Well we have seen very clearly that the day of the Lord is a day of judgment and destruction. Let's now look at how the day of the Lord brings restoration. Because it is only through the old being torn down that the new can be built. Sometimes you have to tear down the Legos in order to restore it to what it was meant to be.

THE DAY OF THE LORD BRINGS RESTORATION (9:11-15)

"In that day" in verse 11 and "the days are coming" in verse 13 do not give us a specific time table for when these events will happen but the descriptions of the day do tell us about how great it will be and who will be involved. The day will be great! Now, I am talking Tony the Tiger grrreat! The day will be one of restoration and abundance. The abundance in the harvests will be so great that the time to plow the field will come again before the farmers have finished harvesting.

Can you imagine the crop yields that would be per acre? Now, I don't know much of anything about farming but that would be amazing! It would be thousands or tens of thousands of bushels per acre that is harvested. Instead of having the problem of not having enough grain there would be the problem of too much grain. Where would it all be stored? What would you do with it all? Would there even be a way to eat it? And that is just the grain abundance. There is also the picture of the mountains dripping with sweet wine and the hills flowing with it. But it doesn't stop there; the fortunes will be restored to Israel and the cities will be rebuilt. The people will plant gardens and vineyards and they will never be uprooted from the land again. All that was formerly theirs will be restored and made new.

The other aspect that makes this so great is that God is doing it! It is the same God who carried out the judgment and destruction that is also bringing the restoration and hope for his people. God tore it all down so that it could be rebuilt and restored.

Now let's take a look at who will be there on this day of restoration. Verse 11 says that God will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and verse 12 says, "they may possess a remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name." These verses of restoration are referring not to the nation of Israel being brought back and raised up but of the restoration of a people of God that is made up of all nations. We know this because these verses from Amos 9 are quoted by James as he was speaking before the Jerusalem Council about how to receive Gentile converts into a largely Jewish Christian church.

Acts 15:13-18

"After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

*"After this I will return,
And I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will restore it,
That the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,
And all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old."*

The tent of David that would be rebuilt is about a new king who would come. This new king is Jesus. It will not be through military conquest that God will rebuild his people but through spiritual conversion. The amazing prophecy from Amos is continuing to be fulfilled because we who are in this service are the proof of it. God is the one who does all of this work, because without him we would still be under his judgment. The bad news is what makes the good news shine so bright in the world today.

Conclusion

For the past six weeks Amos has been sort of a downer. I am not apologizing about that because that is the way it is. Amos is calling out sin and injustice. He is calling out the hypocrisy between what people say they believe and what they actually do. And if you have been here these weeks you have seen that everyone is at fault and no one gets off the hook from God's judgment.

But even though Amos is a book of warning, judgment, and destruction, it is also a message of hope. These last five verses are the glimmer of hope for Israel and for people today. God had something planned that they could never imagine. This didn't save them from God's judgment and destruction that was coming. But God doesn't hold grudges and get revenge. He is not out to get you for everything you have done wrong. God is full of justice.

But it is a good reminder to know that God isn't satisfied with destroying idols, sin, wickedness, and injustice. He also wants to rebuild. If we are willing to tear down the things that we put before God, he is ready to rebuild and make something beautiful in their place. He is ready to take our lives and bring justice wherever we go. He is ready to make our lives reflect his character and values. Amos wants the people to know what God can do and will do. He wants them to expect these things. I

also believe as God's people we need to live with expectation of what God can do and will do. The day of the Lord will be full of judgment but it will also be full of restoration and hope.