

Bearded Men – The Minor Prophets – Amos

The Minor Prophets

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Bible Text: Amos 2:4-6

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open in the Old Testament to the Book of Amos. Amos is actually the third of 12 books in the Old Testament toward the end, known as the Minor Prophets. Amos, as we'll see in just a moment, is a unique passage of the Bible. In fact, that's the theme of this whole message series, what we've entitled "Bearded Men" is that all of these individuals and all these messages are incredibly unique.

Last week and the last couple of weeks as we studied the person of Joel, we discussed that his uniqueness was in that many people thought of him as the mysterious prophet or the prophet of mystery because we know so little about him. Today, when we come to the Book of Amos, particularly chapter 1 and then a little bit in chapter 5 in a moment, the person of Amos is somewhat mysterious to us because he tells us in chapter 7 that he's not a prophet, he's not the son of a prophet, nor does he come from a family of prophets. In fact, Amos is from an area known as Tekoa. He's from the southern part of what we know as Israel and at a point and a purpose in his life, God calls him to go to the northern part and to communicate a very specific message.

Now, when we come to the person of Amos, and I think this is critical for understanding the message today, his ministry was about three years in length. He was not a professional prophet, he was not a minister by trade. In fact, what he did every day of his life when he got up in the morning is he took care of sheep. That's what he did. But, his ministry lasted for about three years. They're really two main thoughts, or two main concepts when we look at his message that I think we need to address from the beginning because whichever one you subscribe to, it doesn't change the focus of today.

One idea is that the message of Amos was preached one time to one audience. In fact, if you read Amos from beginning to end, it is about the length of a sermon you would hear on any given Sunday at any given church. And so, many people believe that it was a one time message that God prepared his heart for, for about three years. He goes up in the off-season of being a herdsman and he delivers it one time and that God used it in such a powerful way. Not only did he inspire it to be a part of what we know as the Bible, but that it was transmitted from generation to generation, one sermon repeated that many times because of its impact.

The other idea is that over the course of three years, when he had a break in his regular job, that Amos would travel up north and he would preach this message. And the fact is that he would preach it over and over and over again. See, the fact is that it doesn't matter whether Amos preached it one time or he preached it many times over the course of three years, what we know is this: he never preached anything else. This was his message.

And so, when the Lord prepared his heart to go to his people, he said, “You really need to hear this,” and that’s the part about Amos I want you to get. This message, this book of the Bible, today’s message is to the people of God. The message today affects and does deal with the world at large but it’s really particularly to you and me, those who claim to be a part of the body of Christ. What does it say to us today?

I want you to turn to the Book of Amos, chapter 1,

“The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. And he said, The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither. Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron: but I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Benhadad. I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith the Lord.”

Now, I’m going to stop right there because six times in chapter 1 you see the same idea repeated to the surrounding areas of Israel. “For three transgressions and for four.” And the first thing that we see in the Book of Amos, that God is diagnosing or discussing with us what’s the problem, what’s going on here, what needs desperately be addressed. And he begins diagnosing this problem by pointing the proverbial finger. He speaks to Damascus and then if you’ll notice in verse 6, he says, “for those in Gaza”; in verse 9, “for those in Tyrus”; verse 11, “for those in Edom”; verse 13, “for those in Ammon.” In chapters 1 and 2, including Moab of chapter 2, there are six different places and six different people groups that God points the finger at and says, “They are rebellious. They are filled with iniquity. They are sinners beyond sinners.” I get the idea that the people of Israel, the people of God kind of gave this “Hallelujah, woooo,” and said, “it’s about time God, that you’ve called them out on the carpet.”

In fact, if I could parallel chapter 1 and a little bit of chapter 2 to our world today, one of the things that I’ve noticed within the “Christian community,” if you want to get people excited, hoop and holler and turn old, stale Baptists into Pentecostals, all you have to do is this, tell them that we’ve got problems in the White House, the schoolhouse and in your neighbor’s house. And if you say that, they start jumping pews. But, let’s be honest, and when I use White House I don’t mean the Oval Office, I mean collectively of the engine that runs this country. Folks, it’s broken. We’ve got moral crisis. We’ve got fraud. We’ve got lying. I don’t care what you call it, it’s called a lie, ok? We’ve got all this cheating, scandals, all kinds of mess and you look up at the powers that be, it doesn’t matter what side of the aisle, it doesn’t matter if they’re new, it doesn’t matter if they’re

seasoned, it doesn't matter what side they sit on, we all would have to admit that we've got a major moral malfunction happening in this country.

Then you break it down to the schoolhouse. You know what's amazing to me is what they let in and then what they don't let in. It's amazing to me that you have to have permission from your parents to take an aspirin but not to receive a prophylactic. Think about that for a moment. It makes about as much sense as putting me in the NBA finals as a post. That's how much sense that makes. Nobody in their right mind would ever do that. And we look at the institution of our culture and say, "It's broken." We look at the schools and what we're doing and say, "It's just broken."

And then, it gets personal because we look at our neighbor's house. What I mean by that, I mean proverbial, those that we live life around. Have you ever had one of those conversations with your spouse or with a sibling where you say, "You're never going to believe what happened." It just seems to me that those stories keep coming with more frequency nowadays.

And that's exactly what's happening in this passage of Scripture. The people of God who are in Israel hear from this prophet of God, Amos, and he says, "Hey, there's Moab and there's Ammon and there's Damascus..." and it's like you and me, they are hooping and they're hollering and they're saying, "You've got it. This world is messed up!" Oh, but here's the problem, chapter 2. If you'll turn to chapter 2 I want to show you that all of a sudden, now, the fingers start pointing. I don't know if you've seen the old illustration, any time you point the finger at anybody there are three fingers pointed right back at you.

I want you to notice beginning in verse 4, "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four." Now, those who are in the northern kingdom probably said, "You know what? Amos has got a good point here. They're down in the south country and they've got some issues." "I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked: but I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem. Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four."

It's at this moment of Amos's message that I actually have a little personal history in. Some years ago, I was asked by a friend to come and to speak or to preach at a pastor's conference. Now, if you're not familiar with that, a pastor's conference is that it is nothing but pastors in a room. I mean, we're talking hot air on top of hot air all in one building. And the area that I was asked to come and speak to was an area where the pastors were not getting along. They were arguing with one another and they were competing with one another. When they should've realized they were on the same team, they were acting like they weren't. So, this friend called me and he said, "Here's what I need you to do. I want you to preach about unity. I want you to talk about being on the same team." He used all those sports illustrations that you use and talked about, "There is no 'i' in team." One of those kinds of concepts. I said, "Ok, I'll do it." And so, I gave a little introduction and then I read from a passage of Scripture in the Book of John 17,

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane praying for his disciples, his apostles. In verse 11, he says, "I pray that they would be one as we are one." And there was an elderly retired pastor sitting in the front row. You know, when you're at a conference like that, you expect to hear "Amen. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah." Out loud from his mouth came, "Uh oh, here it comes." Because he knew what was going on.

And I think that's what's happening here when the fingers are being pointed because when it's Damascus, we celebrate, when it's Gaza, we celebrate but when it's Judah and Israel, it's like uh oh. The Lord is telling them that they are just as guilty of the sinful lifestyle as those whom they've been pointing their fingers at. You know, unfortunately, there is a plethora of stories that can prove and demonstrate this point. So, I thought I would tell you one that comes from another state. That way you know without a shadow of a doubt, I'm not talking about anybody in this room or anybody any of us even know.

Just this week, I was on the phone with a pastor friend of mine, who shared with me that he was on the way to the Attorney General's Office. Now, when a pastor is on the way to the Attorney General's Office, that's not good in any sense. And I said, "What are you doing? Are you there to do like a chapel service?" He said, "Jeff, you're not going to believe what I'm dealing with." He had an individual in his congregation, highly respected, Sunday School teacher, Youth Leader, always sponsoring trips, always having people over, kind of one of those places where all the teenagers hang out. He and his wife were going away to celebrate their anniversary. They'd gone a long ways off and they wanted someone to house sit their home. So, they asked a young, newlywed couple in the church, you know, you're in a one bedroom apartment, how would you like to have the Ponderosa with the pool, the whole bit for a couple of weeks? Who turns that down? Nobody. I would be there in a heartbeat with three kids jumping off the diving board.

That being said, they're there and they're going about their business and one morning, the young bride of the newlywed couple, is getting dressed. She's there in the closet and minding her own business and she looks up and notices that something just doesn't look right. So, she calls her husband in. He's a good ol' southerner and he discloses to her that what was on the shelf was a deer cam, a camera designed to pick up motion and to videotape. Well, they called the man who was on vacation and they said, "Sir, this is really strange and this is weird." And he kind of excused it and he said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I just put it there for storage. Turn it around, ignore it. I apologize, forgive me that it happened." This young wise man said, "You know, something's just not settling here." He took the SD card out of the camera. Three years' worth of video of people coming in and out of their house. Teenagers coming in and out of their house and this was a Sunday School teacher. This was a leader in the church. How dare we point the finger at them when we're hiding the same thing in our own very church family. How dare we.

I know I'm hot under the collar. You wonder why people won't believe in Jesus? Because we've got people teaching Sunday School in another state hiding cameras to film people who are teenage girls, coming in their house. Please, people! This is ridiculous! You wonder why they mock us. You wonder why they make fun of us. You

wonder why they make banners that degrade us. Because we deserve it. We're acting a fool is what we're doing.

And that's exactly what God told them. They said, "God, you can get upset with Gaza, you can get upset with Damascus." But you need to look at your own lives because it's just as dirty as theirs. Here's the problem, they're doing it in public and you're hiding it in the closet. Wow, what a scathing rebuke for the people of God.

I want to fast forward you to chapter 5. I want to look at how this problem becomes a product? How does it become something that's really tangible for us to grasp, for us to really not only look at, but to hopefully allow God to conquer in our lives. When you get to Amos 5 beginning in verse 21, the Lord makes this scathing rebuke of the worship services, of their celebrations, of their Bible studies, of their singing and even of their preaching. Listen to what he says beginning in verse 21, "I hate..." Now, any time God begins with "I hate," hold on. "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is The God of hosts."

In this picture, what God is trying to share with them, that the product that they had created is what we call religion. Please understand, when Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death on the cross and rose from the dead, he did not do so to start a religion. He did so to start a relationship with individuals who would collectively get together in an assembly that we call the church. The problem is, it doesn't take long for people in relationship to start becoming religious. That means they start doing the right rituals, but apart from the proper relationship.

I want to give you an illustration today of what this looks like in our lives. We have the product of religion, we become Amos chapter 5:21 people when we start blending our faith with the world. Now, we are to impact the world with our faith. Jesus said, "You are to be salt." Jesus said, "You're to be light." Last time I checked, salt changes the food, light changes the darkness. But when you blend something, you take things that are not currently together and you make them so you cannot distinguish them apart.

It was at this point in the service that I had conjured up this wonderful, dramatic illustration involving a blender for you, but there are a lot of wise people who are on staff here at First Baptist and they decided that that would not be healthy for any of us to watch in person, so we've made a little video for you. I want to show you what happens when you blend things you really have no business blending.

Miss Becky, show them this little video.

“Will it blend? That is the question. Now, we’re going to do something unique here. Here I have a dozen light sticks and they are break-and-shake light sticks. They last for 12 hours. Now, it says on the instructions, ‘Do not puncture, cut or bite into light stick.’ Now, it doesn’t say, ‘Don’t blend the light stick.’ Let’s turn the lights off for effect. {blender noise} That is a 12 hour lantern.

“Will it blend? That is the question. I wonder if my new blender is going to fit underneath my cupboard, 15 inches. Won’t need that anymore. Let’s try my new blender. I think I’m going to push the ‘soup’ button. {blender noise} That’s just amazing. Steel, tape measure. That’s one fast way to lose inches.

“Will it blend? That is the question. By popular demand I am going to flick a Bic the Blendtech way. I have here a half a dozen Bics. The warning label says, ‘Keep away from children.’ It doesn’t say, ‘Keep away from a Blendtech Blender.’ So, I’m going to blend a half a dozen Bic lighters. I’m going to flick the Bic button. {blender noise} {siren wailing} You really don’t want to try this one at home.”

You have to admit, that would’ve been really fun to do live. But, the purpose in our laughing through that, is that every item that was put in that blender, whether it was a glow stick or whether it was a measuring tape or whether it was a lighter, all of them had a very distinct purpose. When they began to be blended, when they began to be meshed with other things, they lost their uniqueness, they lost their distinction. And did you notice what they were turned to? Rubble. And that’s exactly what has happened to the church of Jesus Christ, by this art of “blending with the world.” We’ve lost our distinction. We’ve lost our uniqueness and what has happened is, we’ve allowed ourselves to become rubble to the culture.

What God says here in Amos, chapter 5, he says, “I despise this. I hate this. I won’t even hear your songs. I don’t want to hear the preaching. It’s awful because you sound just like the world.” What happens when we turn to religion is we ultimately end up turning to a replacement. What I mean by that is this, rather than having a real and live and active walking relationship with Jesus Christ what we have is a cheap imitation of the world glossed over with some “spirituality.” And what we’ve allowed to happen in our lives, what we’ve allowed to happen in our churches, what we’ve allowed to happen in the culture of “Christianity” is we’ve allowed this unique, distinct, life, -world-changing message to be replaced by something that’s not much different looking than what the world has to offer. What happens when we do that is we begin to start adopting man’s ways and man’s definitions. And we start thinking that man’s protocol for things actually can supercede how God has instructed us to do some things.

Before our time of invitation, I want to share a quick story with you that happened just this very week. You know, there are some moments in my life that I just absolutely love

and adore being a pastor and here's one of them. It's when somebody makes contact with me and says, "We would like you and some others to come and to pray over our family." In particular incident this week, there was an individual, there was a sickness in the home and we went over there we prayed. We did exactly what James chapter 5 says. Now, folks, James 5 doesn't sound Baptist, but it is biblical. It says, "If there be sick among you, call the elders, those that are of a more mature faith, bring them in, anoint them with oil and pray over the sick so that sins will be forgiven and sickness will be healed." And we do that, folks, and we do it a lot. Why? Because God said to. The problem is when we try to improve on what God said to do.

So, we go over to their house and we're going to have a time of praying over this person who is sick. But in the course of the conversation, the family begins to disclose to us that there is just an abnormal amount of things happening in the home that you just can't chalk up to normal behavior. And so, they ask us, in addition to praying for this person, "Would you pray over our home? Would you pray over the doors? Would you pray that if there's anything that somehow, some way, somebody throughout time has allowed to be present spiritually in this place that it would be gone?" So, we went through. A very simple time, a very sweet time. No fireworks went off, no loud noises. It was just a time of simple prayer.

We finished and the husband and wife were somewhat weepy; there weren't tears coming down but somewhat weepy. They shared this story with me that they had contacted another minister they knew, not affiliated with this church, and asked him to come and pray over their house. And do you believe what this guy said? He said, "Doing that is the equivalent to witchcraft." Folks, we have gotten to the point where praying over our homes we call witchcraft and doing the junk this world tells us to do we call living life. We've replaced how God said to live this life with the way the world's told us to live this life.

Guess what? God's message from Amos to today hasn't changed. God knows what he's doing. Simply put, today before our time of invitation, quit acting like an imitation the world. Folks, it's going to get you nowhere, particularly with the Lord himself. The message of Amos to the people of God and to you today is that we are to be distinct and different in our lives for his sake. May we stand out, not because we're strange, weird or odd but because we live for him alone.