

Amos: The Nobody From Nowhere
Chapter 4
Amos 2:6-16

The Lord says:

I will not relent from punishing Israel for three crimes, even four, because they sell a righteous person for silver and a needy person for a pair of sandals. They trample the heads of the poor on the dust of the ground and obstruct the path of the needy. A man and his father have sexual relations with the same girl, profaning my holy name. They stretch out beside every altar on garments taken as collateral, and in the house of their God they drink wine obtained through fines.

Yet I destroyed the Amorite as Israel advanced; his height was like the cedars, and he was as sturdy as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. And I brought you from the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness in order to possess the land of the Amorite. I raised up some of your sons as prophets and some of your young men as Nazirites. Is this not the case, Israelites? This is the Lord's declaration.

But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets. "Do not prophesy." Look, I am about to crush you in your place as a wagon crushes when full of grain. Escape will fail the swift, the strong one will not maintain his strength, and the warrior will not save his life. The archer will not stand his ground, the one who is swift of foot will not save himself, and the one riding a horse will not save his life. Even the most courageous of the warriors will flee naked on that day — this is the Lord's declaration.

All at once, there came a shift in the sermon and the tables were swiftly turned. Up to this point, all the listening ears of the house of Israel would have loved the preaching of Amos. Oh, they may have been a bit unimpressed with his uncivilized demeanor and his backward way of speaking in what they deemed polite society, but so far, they had loved his message. He had pronounced The LORD'S doom upon everyone they despised, including those to whom they were the most jealous, the Judites of the Southern Kingdom. But now Amos rushed headlong into the real sermon that he had traveled to Israel to preach. And the message was to say the least, not very well received.

Israel's day of reckoning was upon her. Not only had she abandoned the worship of The One True God and had prostrated herself to idols, but her deplorable treatment of the least of these had reached the heavens as a stench to The Holy One. There would be no turning away from the judgment that was on the horizon. "I will not relent from punishing Israel for three crimes, even four..." must have stunned the crowd. "Did he just say Israel?", many must have turned aside to ask, making sure they had heard him correctly. "Who does this crude person from Judah think he is to come and lecture us as if he were better? He's not just a simple hick. He's an arrogant one!" How soon is the congregation offended when the preacher goes from railing against the sins of others and instead begins to point out the guilt within the audience!

If any were to actually study The Holy Scriptures, they would find something that is offensive to God, like no other. God hates to see the poor and helpless regarded as nothing. He fights for the downtrodden of society. And every nation that disenfranchises the poor will have their day in His courtroom. When we read The Gospels, we see how the plight of the suffering masses invokes the compassion of The Savior;

When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Matthew 9:36

One of the worst things about modern day Christendom is that people tend to measure their faithfulness to God by the things that they have “*stopped doing*” as opposed to the things that they actually *do*! For example, many modern day testimonies sound more like AA meetings, where Believers speak of how many days sober they are, or how many years they have been faithful to their wives etc. While it is most certainly true that a good dose of The Spirit will convict of sin and cause one to abandon the sins that formerly consumed them, He also breathes into us a love for those around us and a desire to actually *serve them*! In short, our Christianity should not only be measured by what we no longer do, but what we *are doing*. God expects His children to share in his compassion for the downtrodden, and then actually go and do something about it. Anything less is empty religion.

The people of Israel in Amos’ day were not only idolators, they were cruel and heartless as a result of abandoning the One True God. They had created out of nothing, a false religion with a god they could worship, as it allowed them to be self-indulgent, and gave them leave to abandon any notion of compassion for the suffering of those in their midst. And it was for these sins that The LORD had purposed in His heart to remove them from the land that He gave them as an inheritance.

The Israelites in Amos’ day not only had no regard for the plight of the downtrodden, in addition, they considered them to be no more than currency to be exchanged for goods and services. To them an indigent person was only valuable to be sold for currency, or even more degrading, to be traded as a slave for something as common as a pair of sandals (**vs.6**). The mark of a nation that is ripe for God’s judgment is one that devalues the lives of those they deem to be of no societal value. We in this county are much the same in our treatment of the aged, immigrants, the races we deem as inferior, and even the unborn child. When any of us view others as lesser in value, rest assured that we have the full attention of Almighty God, and not in a good way.

The people of Israel trampled the rights of the poor and obstructed the paths of the needy (God’s words, not mine). Rather than show a modicum of kindness and compassion, they took pleasure in keeping them down and seeing to it that they could never find a way out of their impoverished condition. When basic human kindness becomes a scarcity, then the world becomes an even more wretched place in which to live. Life is difficult enough without additional cruelty being heaped upon the heads of the helpless. But there is a judge in heaven Who sees all and keeps very detailed records. And make no mistake, He will recompense the wrongs visited upon the poor.

Amos continued passing down The LORD’S rebuke by calling out the gross immorality of the people, accusing fathers and sons of having sexual relations with the same woman (**vs. 7**). This actually may be a reference to the consorting with temple prostitutes as part of their pagan rituals. It would make sense if this is the case, simply because it would be in proper context with the following verses that speak of idol worship.

They stretch out beside every altar on garments taken as collateral, and in the house of their God they drink wine obtained through fines. **Amos 2:8**

I suspect this imagery is portraying the ultimate debauchery of their pagan worship which would include the verse before it speaking of young men with their fathers lying with the same girl. In ancient fertility rituals held before the altar of pagan gods, this was a typical form of worship. And as they lay in front of the altar, these godless souls would even lay out the clothes of the poor people they had wronged in order to have a pallet on which to sin. It was forbidden in *The Old Testament* law to keep a person’s cloak as collateral.

“If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as collateral, return it to him before sunset. For it is his only covering; it is the clothing for his body. What will he sleep in? And if he cries out to Me, I will listen because I am gracious. **Exodus 22:26-27**

So just imagine how displeased The LORD would be to see someone not only robbing the poor of their garments, but using them as a pallet to consort with temple prostitutes in the worship of a demonic, foreign god! Judgment was coming to Israel, for her paganism, her cruel indifference to the suffering of others, her usury, and her drunkenness (**vs.8b**).

All this was done in the sight of The LORD even after He had delivered them from Egyptian bondage, and drove out the Amorite inhabitants of Canaan before them in order that they have this land that He promised to their ancestor Abraham. The ingratitude was hard to comprehend. How far they had fallen from the once proud nation that had prospered under the blessing of God!

And how had they returned His kindness? By despising the prophets He sent to them and undermining those who had taken Nazarite vows to serve Him. In short, they had despised everything that God had intended to set them apart as His chosen people among the nations. The land that He had given them had become accursed, a mere shadow of its former glory. And the worst part of it was, the people had not even noticed! They thought they were altogether great and prosperous generation. But little did they know that they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. (***Revelation 3:17***).

Now why do you suppose that I would use a *New Testament* verse to describe an *Old Testament* problem? Because false religion always gives its followers a false sense of security that's why. The Church at Laodicea thought they were doing just fine, but Christ plainly showed them otherwise. The people of Israel in Amos' day were much the same way. They were living under the suppositions of a delusion. They were all too happy to hear about God's coming judgment upon their neighbors, but when the topic turned to their own wickedness they were taken aback.

God had already decided to put an end to their so-called affluent society. He sent Amos to put them on notice that it was already too late. They hadn't heeded the repeated warnings of God's prophets, so there would be no relenting on God's part, when it came to their destruction. The Assyrian's would see to that, and when that awful day came, no one would be able to withstand their onslaught.

So why does this matter to us? Because the very same attitudes that permeated ancient Israel, have been allowed to germinate as yeast in our own country today. The poor are marginalized and taken advantage of, the church has become lukewarm much like the church at Laodicea, believing that everything is going great, when in fact the faith of many is a dead and delusional faith. There is much affluence all around, and yet, we are poor in matters of the spirit. As we look around, we cannot help but wonder when God will pronounce judgment upon our own nations, for we have called despised good while celebrating all that is evil.

I once heard Billy Graham declare, "If God does not destroy America for her wickedness, then He will owe Sodom and Gomorrah an apology." What a fearful reality that we are living in here in these last days. The most desperate thing that we need is the last thing that we seem to want, and that is revival. I do not know if it is too late for us, as it was for those in Israel when Amos came to deliver his fiery message. But this I do know, if we do not repent and turn back to God, then judgment upon this nation is inevitable. I truly hope the church of The Living God will unapologetically shout out a warning with the same conviction that Amos had in his day. There is a day of reckoning upon the horizon, and I long to see a church on fire once more, proclaiming truth to all who will hear. We do not need any more so-called prophets, who use flattering words to lull us into delusional slumber. We need men like Amos to take their stand and tell it like it is, as if our very existence depends upon it... because it does.

About the times and the seasons: Brothers and sisters, you do not need anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. When they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. So then, let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armor of faith and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing. ***1 Thessalonians 5:1-11***