

Kings and Prophets 15-03-13a

This is Friday, the 13th of March, 2015. We continue our study of kings and prophets by way of looking at the book of Amos. This is the third of the four prophets that we're looking at in this time period, having already looked at Jonah and Hosea.

We now look at Amos. And you'll remember that each of these three has explored the falling away and the failure of God's people from a different perspective. Each reflects a different aspect.

You think about the book of Jonah and it was the responsibility to be a light to the Gentiles and it was the responsiveness to God's call to repentance. And they're rebuked by the example of the Ninevites. The Nineveh people, of course, that's the capital of the Assyrian Empire, the Assyrians we talked about last time who were so cruel and evil.

And yet at the confrontation with God's prophet, they clothed themselves in sackcloth and ashes and changed their minds. And yet God's people who know better do not. So that aspect of the difficulty was reflected.

In Hosea, it was the personal relationship reflected between Hosea and Gomer. And the rest of the book extends from the notion of what the relationship between God and His people should be. Now we are in the book of Amos and we'll begin as we always do with a word of prayer and then we'll resume our summary overview of this book in its historic context of Kings and Chronicles.

Shall we pray? Father, how grateful we are for Your Word, the light that it shines, the divine enablement that it imparts to our souls as it is received and energized by Your Holy Spirit dwelling within us, a wonderful gift and privilege that we enjoy in this age because of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You for Him. We thank You for His willingness to be our Savior, to represent us at Your right hand, to return and take us unto Himself and claim us as His own and call us by His name and give us the privilege of representing Him on this earth in the intervening time.

We pray that as we study together this portion of Your Word that God the Holy Spirit will cause it to be meaningful to each heart, that each of us can see what we should do having learned it, having understood it, having seen its pertinence and its relevance to our life and our circumstance. We know that it is here for our instruction and for our benefit. We pray that we can be a blessing to one another and we can reflect the light of Your grace and the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Having learned and having come to an understanding of these things, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We have already reviewed in some detail the first couple of chapters in Amos.

You'll remember that Amos introduces himself at the beginning and then you have that wonderful little entrapment where he begins condemning the surrounding nations, all of which by the way at one time those territories had been under the control of King David and Solomon. At its widest extent all of these lands were either a part of Israel or under its immediate dominance and subservience and would be paying tribute and being loyal in the sense of not attacking and being under the control of the king in Israel. But this is part of the condemnation is the fact that any of these territories would be a curse to Israel and to Judah is because of the loss of blessing and the loss of power due to disobedience, indifference, apathy and the spiritual malaise that has afflicted both kingdoms worse in the north.

So it's a double edged sword in the sense that they are being condemned and God is sort of getting all of the heads nodding, but in a way if you stop and think about it how did they ever get to the place where they could do these horrible things in warfare except that they had already come out from under the control of Israel? And then of course the snapper at the end is when the northern and southern kingdoms themselves are condemned and there is a much more fulsome condemnation. And we saw last time that Hosea goes on to talk about lions that roar and birds caught in a snare. And there is a sense in which they are hearing God's roar as the lion of judgment when God would normally be the shepherd.

The Lord is my shepherd. He takes me to the green pastures and the still waters. He restores me and comforts me and provides for me and protects me from my enemies and blesses me and anoints my head and all of those wonderful promises and pictures in the Psalms.

God is the shepherd protecting the sheep. Well what's the difference in relationship between a shepherd to the sheep and say a lion to the sheep? Well instead of the shepherd calling with his voice and the sheep knowing his voice and coming and enjoying his protection, now the lion is roaring. And instead of being protected and defended from enemies, now God Himself is setting the snares in which the people are going to be trapped.

Why? It's their choice. And it seems awfully silly when you look at it in someone else's case. Why would you forsake the benefits and the blessings and the provisions and the wonderful fulfilled promises of God and wind up in this shape? It is so nonsensical.

But we of course do the same thing and that's why it's in the Word of God to show us as David looking at the parable told by Nathan and finding out you are the man. We look at these things that happened nationally for Israel and Judah so long ago and try to make sure that we are not the man, that we are not guilty of the same things. And remember the model in chapter 1 and 2 with those surrounding nation judgments was for three transgressions of the people of fill in the blank and for four here comes the judgment.

And he didn't really fill out the three and the four until he got to Israel and Judah and then the cause becomes more fulsome. And what we find is that not only does he list them here at the end of chapter 2, three transgressions of Israel and for four in verse 6, they sell the righteous for silver, the poor for a pair of sandals, they pant after the dust of the earth, covetousness,

materialism, infatuation with worldly goods. I say again, materialism, infatuation with the things of the world.

Is it in our culture, in our day and in our time difficult or easy to fall victim to this syndrome? It's easy. Almost always within the radius of my reach is one of these. Almost always within reach when I'm at my house is a remote.

In fact, I was looking at my nightstand, I have three remotes. I've got a Roku remote, I've got a TiVo remote and I've got the TV remote that enables me to switch the inputs so I can either watch the Roku or the TiVo. What is now missing is my Verizon Fios remote and I say good riddance, you know that story.

These things are largely free, certainly much less expensive. But we are immersed and enmeshed in our culture, in creature comforts, in entertainments, in what we consider to be utilities at this point. We used to think, well, when you move into a house you turn on the utilities which are the water and the electric and maybe the landline phone.

Now the internet connection is a utility. You really cannot function in this world without it. Seriously, you just can't.

So because of that we are exposed, we are invited, we are encouraged, we are prodded, we are promoted, we are advertised at and we are drawn into more and more opportunity to end up like these people. So involved in the materialistic culture around us that we forget who we are and why we're here. That's why we have this warning.

So enough said on that. We know that challenge and we're in some sense successfully meeting it. I say we because if you weren't successfully meeting it you wouldn't be listening to me, you would be on Amazon Prime watching the next episode of your favorite series or worse.

But we understand this, but it is helpful to have it stated afresh so that God the Holy Spirit can bring it to our minds when we take the first step off the narrow road, not six or seven or eight steps. I would rather be guided, you know how the really well-trained horses when they're guided by their rider, it's just a touch of the reins on the neck. You want to go just a little bit more, just touch their neck with the reins and they're very sensitive and they're very focused on what the rider wants.

And so it's just a touch, it's just a gentle guidance, it's all they need. I don't want the riding crop upside of my head. I don't want the reins being yanked back to stop me from tumbling myself down the cliff.

So we want to be aware, we want to be sensitive and be ever watchful, watch and pray, Jesus exhorted His disciples and us. So this is helpful to us, but we get that. Well, we saw at the end of Chapter 2 that the three and the four are detailed.

The whole last half of the chapter is the three transgressions and the four that God has against

His people and for which judgment is coming. And we think, okay, well, He's done that, so what's He going to say now? Well, He's not finished with the three transgressions and the four. Beginning in Chapter 3 with an authentication or verification of the prophet and His message, He is going to elaborate on those.

And we are going to get extended messages in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6. So Chapters 1 and 2, this was the hook, this baits the people, gets them interested, gets them nodding, and then sets the hook, you are the man. Now that He's got their attention and they are either indignant or incensed or trying to figure out who is this Amos, we need to get something done about him, he's spoiling the party. God, while He has their attention, is going to elaborate on these things with messages.

Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6. This is the second big section of the book. And this is an elaboration of the reason for judgment. Statement of judgment and attention getting in the first two chapters, the reason for judgment in these next four chapters, 3, 4, 5, and 6. And the first of these messages is in Chapter 3. This is, children, you are the family that I brought out of Egypt.

God says, you're not just any old nation, I'm not just any old God, we have a unique relationship, you would not exist except that I chose you and I brought you up from the land of Egypt. That's the first verse in Chapter 3. You only have I known of all the families of the earth. You I have known.

And right away we think, from those to whom much is given, much is expected. You can imagine that God would look at you and me, people who have studied the Word of God, who are familiar with a lot of its content, with its emphasis, with its focus, with what our goal is, what God requires of us, what the Christian life, quote-unquote, is really about. We know this.

Remember the condemnation when everyone is sitting down at the table with the Lord Jesus at the banquet and there's a knock at the door? Oh, Lord, let me in. What does He say as He looks through the little sliding portal in the green door? I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity.

It works. It's what they have done. It's not faith.

They are at the future kingdom. They're alive. They're not sleeping, waiting for the great white throne, but they're outside.

Fellowship, opportunity, all of the wonderful potentials are denied. They are outside the door. There was a time when Jesus stood at the door and knocked.

They didn't open. Now, in that classic reversal that God so often does, they are at the door knocking, and Jesus isn't going to open. You didn't open when I knocked.

Why should I open now that you're knocking? Sorry, depart. And there will be an eerie

familiarity in that reply, in the ears of people who are currently giving that reply to the Lord Jesus now. Well, this is a similar thing.

You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore, I will punish you for your iniquities. Think back to those first five nations out of the seven that He indicted in chapter 1 and 2. He didn't ever say He knew the Egyptians or the Philistines or the Edomites and the rest of these folks.

It's you that I know. This is all on you. So, this is the first message.

And there is the indictment and there is inevitable judgment. And He's going to use, in this first one, He uses seven questions in verses 3 through 8. There were seven indictments nominally against the nations, but really all against Israel and Judah in chapter 1 and 2. Now, He's asking seven questions. Can two walk together unless they are agreed? Does the lion roar when he has no prey? Will the lion cry out of his den? Will a bird fall to the earth? Will a snare spring up? If a trumpet is blown, will not the people be afraid? And finally, if there is calamity in the city, will not the Lord have done it? And these get increasingly pointed as they go forward.

Seven indictments, seven questions. Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servant the prophets. And this is a wonderful promise.

The Lord does nothing, meaning nothing by way of judgment. Think of the context here. He does all kinds of things that are higher than our ways and beyond our thoughts, but in the context of dealing with His people and dealing out judgment, He does nothing without warning.

There is always warning before judgment. That's a promise of God. That was true for nations in the Old Testament.

What does it mean for you and me? Sometimes we wonder, it seems like I've had a real patch of bad luck. Is God judging me? Is He disciplining me? Well, here's the thing. One of the ways to parse this and get the answer is, have I been getting warnings before all of this happened? Is this another in a series of knock on the head wake-up calls or is this just something out of the blue? I mean seriously, do we have any trouble gauging where we stand relationship-wise with our loved ones? Married people, do we know at all times right where we stand with our spouse? Anyone you're close to, your children and parents, parents and children, siblings with each other, close friends, close confidants, anyone with whom we are intimate, you don't have to sit around and say, hmm, I wonder if my husband is mad at me.

I wonder if my wife is put out with me. I mean, the equality relationship is defined by communication and you know where you stand. Well, here's the thing.

If you're wondering if a bad patch is something from God, the fact that you're asking the question is significant. I know when my relationship with God is healthy and I have been praying regularly and seeking His face and asking for wisdom as I reflect and meditate on His

Word. And if I have any doubt, I just go to Him.

You know, what's the best thing in a relationship? If you're not sure if you've given offense or done a sin of omission or something, well, you go and ask. Things seem a little quiet today. Did I screw up? Did I forget an anniversary? Did I fail to buy a card? I'm hypothesizing there because, you know, Patty and I have had a couple of years where we've never been big on cards between ourselves.

But, you know, there are the classic signs. And if you love that person, you go to them and say, did I mess up? You know, this relationship is important to me. I want us to be on good terms.

If I've messed it up, I want to try to repair the breach. Well, we should know. If God is so distant that we're not really sure what He's thinking, that in itself means it's time to take steps.

Here, it's very clear. These people have been worshiping golden calves and idols and going up to the Asherah poles and the high places and cavorting with pagan temple priestesses and a man and his father going into the same, all kinds of heinous things. So seriously, you have to ask if God's unhappy or not, please.

So, and nevertheless, God sends a warning. He does nothing by way of reproof and judgment without revealing it to the prophets. So, if you don't know that this is judgment and you don't know that this is warning, you know what the problem is? It isn't that God didn't reveal it, it's you're not listening to the people to whom He has revealed it.

You might have been sitting there in the crowd when the prophet spoke, but you didn't pay attention. I was thinking about this the other day. I was listening to a presentation and it was moving at a certain speed that was too slow for my brain.

And so my mind began to wander and I would come back and sort of just check in. I was sitting there, I looked like I was in rapt attention, but Mr. Brain had ridden a pony all over the horizon and was across a couple of creeks and in a whole different pasture. Every once in a while we would gallop back and say, anything new? Okay, and off we would go again, grazing elsewhere.

And I thought, it's really difficult to maintain your concentration on a thing unless you are genuinely interested. If God has revealed His word to the prophet, to the fourth teller, the only way you're going to know what He said is if you're interested enough to listen. And hopefully the prophet doesn't just suck all the life out of it and make it so dry as dust and desiccated that you can't get it down without sloshing buckets of water.

Well, surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants, the prophets. A lion has roared, who will not fear? Well, I'll tell you who will not fear is the one who didn't hear the lion roar because they weren't listening to the prophet who said, hey, let me tell you what the lion is roaring about. So that's the first message.

And why is God unhappy? Well, the number one cause here is oppression. Oppression. These

people are exploiting the poor.

They are building their prosperity on the backs of others. And this is what comes up in chapter 4. Right off the bat, here are the words, you cows of Bashan, you fat, self-indulgent, self-centered people. Oppress the poor, crush the needy, say to your husbands, and we covered this last time, the whole people are pictured as women who are bossing their husbands around.

And of course you know from past experience and past excursions into the Word of God that this is upside down. It is a rebuke to a people if it's like an Amazon society, women are in charge. It is a rebuke to a church or a denomination of churches if women are serving as bishops and pastors.

I don't care if they're teaching or not. If they are authorities, it's upside down. And the gal may be doing a great job.

I've heard Joyce Meyers and some of these others do great teaching, but it's a rebuke if there are so few people in your denomination teaching that God is allowing a woman to teach. This is Deborah in the days of Barak and Sisera. It's a rebuke.

It's nothing about the quality or the capabilities of women, but it is as though the officers are so weak and insipid in a unit that the NCOs have to step up and run things. It's upside down. And that's the picture here.

So it is oppression and insensitivity. God has a lot to say about sensitivity and insensitivity to the needs of the poor. I was looking at a passage earlier with regard to the tithe in Israel.

We saw in Deuteronomy 28 last time all of the curses on Israel that would come if they were disobedient as opposed to rather a short section on blessings. But the same thing is true when you look at the regulations for tithe. And by the way, people that try to tithe today really need to go back and study it in the Scriptures.

You remember that the tithe was actually to be eaten before the Lord every year. The church people always want to tell you, bring the tithes into the storehouse, meaning me. Bring me the tithe and I'm God's agent.

I'll put it in escrow for Him and spend it as I see fit. But when you look at the Word of God, the tithe was to be eaten before the Lord. Take the first of your crops and your produce and your flocks and herds and come before the Lord and eat it.

And if you can't, if it's too distant, if you're too far away from Jerusalem, then turn it into money, make the trip, buy the equivalent animals and grain and so on when you get to Jerusalem, and again, celebrate before the Lord, consume it before the Lord. Eat your own tithe is what it says. Then every three years you take the tithe and take it to the city and store it at the gate.

So every three years, instead of bringing it before the Lord, you take it in and it is saved for the

Levites and for the poor and the stranger and those that are disabled among you. And I was thinking, it's real interesting if you think about the Sabbath year, every seven years and the Jubilee. And I thought if you started at the beginning, think about the math of that.

You say, okay, this is the first year of a seven-year cycle. Well, in the third year, you're going to set aside a tithe for the Levites and the poor. Then in the sixth year, you do it again.

And then there's a seventh year Sabbath. And then two years after that, you're still on the three-year cycle. And so if you work out the math, and I think this is right, I was an English major, but I think if you work out the math, the first place where the three-year cycle and the seven-year cycle cross is at the 21-year mark.

Those are divisible by three and by seven. So 21 years in, you get the third year and the seventh year coinciding. And then 21 years later, that's 42 years.

And you remember 42 months and the notion of 42? And it's just an interesting thing to look at the way God interleaves the three-year tithe with the seven-year Sabbath year and Jubilee, where you let the land rest. So that at different times, you're taking this tenth, which is going to be different depending on which year after the land has had its rest and has had a chance to really regain its productivity. But, again, there's a lot said about sensitivity to the needs of the poor throughout the law.

And by the way, all slaves in that seventh year were manumitted. People say, oh, the Bible is in favor of slavery. Read what the Bible says about slavery.

Your brother and your fellow Israelite is never to serve more than six years. In the seventh year, he is to be set free, and you are to give him enough to get started on his own. Make sure he has plenty so that he doesn't come back the following year to serve another six-year indenture.

It was really indentured service, and it was never to last more than six years. Well, I don't really call that slavery now that there's another category for foreign slaves. But look, that's got its own set of principles.

Sensitivity to the poor. This is the condemnation in chapter 3 and 4. The first reason that God states for judgment is, because of your self-indulgence, you have no eyes for the needs of others. Remember what it says in Philippians? We've memorized it.

Look out not only for your own needs, but also for the needs of others. Let the mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who completely sacrificed Himself on behalf of others, even to death. And the message to the nation is the message to us.

We have an obligation. Now remember, charity in Israel was to fellow Israelites. Charity in the Christian life is first and foremost to brethren.

Remember Ananias and Sapphira. The sin was against the Holy Spirit and the church. They

didn't get in trouble because they didn't give to the United Greek Man College Fund, or they didn't give to the Help the Galley Slave Fund.

It was shorting their fellow believers in the church, not being sensitive to the needs, putting themselves ahead of those needy people in their immediate periphery, in the fellowship, in the body of Christ. We are to be sure that those who share our grace and mercy and provision in Christ are looked after. We are enjoined.

We have that privilege. And it is not to be overlooked. Do not turn your back to the need of your brother.

Well, this is the indictment in chapter 3 and chapter 4. We'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at these other messages. Now that we've got this foundation laid, these other messages really rest on that foundation and make much more sense.

You could spend a lot of time, as you can see, in the book of Amos, but we're just going to summarize the remainder of these messages so that we can move on to our fourth and final prophet from this period next time. But let's pause here and take our break.