

Amos - God's Judgment + Mercy

Stand Alone

Amos

11/20/22

Tim. Pastor.

Explain Stand Alone Sermons. A couple of times a year we have what we call a “stand-alone” Sunday. We tend to preach through what we call a sermon series - collections of sermons around a set Biblical idea or a book of the Bible - but we keep intentional gaps in the calendar where we can have a week set apart to preach something we feel like our Church family needs to hear or we want to address as a collective group.

So we've got one of those today, and I thought it'd be fun in this stand alone to tackle an entire book of the Bible - the book of **Amos**.

And I want to cover Amos for two reasons:

1. Help us as a church continue to grow in our ability to read the Bible.

Amos is what's known as a Minor Prophet. He's sandwiched in there near the end of the Old Testament with other books like Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, and Micah. And it's one of those books, let's just be honest, that doesn't rise to the surface of our want to read list. Like I don't wake up in the morning going - I need a word from the Lord today, I know, I'll read Amos! It's kind of confusing – there's a lot of prophecy and poetry and it's written to a very specific people in a specific time and place - what does it mean for me and my life? And so I want to help us understand Amos while also hopefully giving us tools to better read others of these minor prophets.

2. If you are able to see and understand what is happening in this book - Amos can absolutely capture and grip your heart with the gospel.

If you have eyes to see it Amos is an incredibly rich, painful, and yet hope-filled view into the wickedness of man and the great mercy of our God. And so my prayer for us today as we study the book of Amos together is that you would be encouraged, your soul would be strengthened and that you would further rest in the incredible good news that God will stop at nothing to accomplish His redemption in the world and in your life.

Pray.

Double Twists

Now the best way to think about a summary of the book of Amos is that it is a story with two plot twists. You think the book is headed in one direction and then bam, plot twist, but then just when you settle into that one, bam - it changes again.

Welcome. As a dad of two girls it reminds me a lot of Frozen. This is my life. Welcome. Not a spoiler, been out for almost 10 years. Elsa freezes Anna's heart, the trolls tell them only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart. So you think - ok she needs to kiss Hans! So they race back to Arendale only to realize Hans is evil and in fact Anna needs to kiss Kristoff - Plot Twist #1. But just when you think that's the solution, Anna runs off to save her sister Elsa's life and boom - that is the act of love that thaws her heart - plot twist #2 and pure movie magic.

Well that's what's happening in the book of Amos. You're heading in one direction, boom plot twist, then just when you think that's the end - bam it changes again.

Context

That's my best attempt at an intro, it'll make sense as we go, so turn with me to **Amos 1**.

1 The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds 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.

Background:

Israelites (God's people/Abraham's descendants) are split up into two kingdoms - Southern Kingdom of Judah, Northern Kingdom of Israel

- Split around 975 BC
- 200 or so years of oppression and attack from different enemy nations

Finally, around 780 BC they think the tide is starting to turn in their favor. Their most notable enemy, the Assyrian Empire, started to decline due to political unrest and instability. Judah and Israel started to experience a time of wealth and prosperity they had not seen since the reigns of King David and King Solomon before the split.

The Northern Kingdom in particular, which is who this book is written to, was lavishing from all of this wealth and success and prosperity.

And the people took it as a sign that what they called "The Day of the Lord" was drawing near. The Day of the Lord, to the Jewish people, was a day they looked forward to in great anticipation, a day spoken about by former prophets where the Messiah, the Chosen One, would be sent by God to wipe out God's enemies, usher in God's forever kingdom, and establish the Israelites as God's chosen people forever.

So they think - we're doing awesome, all this prosperity and success, our enemies are failing, surely the Day of the Lord is coming soon.

But they couldn't be more wrong about what is to come.

You see, at this time, Israel was led by a king named Jeroboam II, who was a great general, skilled at winning battles and generating wealth for the nation, but he also had a wicked heart - bringing into the nation a ton of idol worship and rebellion against God and injustice towards the poor. So God raises up **Amos**, who is a shepherd and farmer from the Southern Kingdom, and sends him as a prophet, a messenger from God, with a message for the northern kingdom of Israel.

And at first, it starts pretty good. Pick it up in v2...

2 And he said: "The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers."

Amos pulls no punches right off the bat - "Hey God is really upset and ready to lay down some judgments and it's not going to be good." He says God utters his voice from Jerusalem - that was the resting place of the temple, where God's presence lived among His people at that time, and from where God spoke.

And from there Amos goes on this entire monologue about God's punishment for the enemies of Israel. And the continual indictment is not so much their idolatry or worship of false gods, as is the indictment so often in the OT, but rather Amos directs the reason for God's punishment as being the sins of these people against others.

They are guilty before God and going to be punished because of the way they mistreated and abused and attacked one another.

Look at what he says:

1:3 – Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.

1:6 – “For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom.”

1:9 – Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.

1:11 – “For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever.

1:13 – “For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border.”

2:1 – Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom.

That line Amos keeps repeating - for three transgressions and for four - is a poetic line in the Hebrew expressing a large multitude of something. You see it a lot in proverbs. “Three” is a way of expressing multiple or plural of something in Hebrew. So by raising it to “four” an author would say - it's a ton, more than you can imagine. So Amos in repeating that line is saying - there's a ton of this wickedness going on. This is not a small thing. All of these nations are guilty, not just of one offense of evil against others, but of a whole host of sins and wicked acts.

Amos is very clear - God hates evil. He hates wickedness. He hates injustice. He will not let the sins done by others towards others be left unpunished.

Which it is worth pausing here to say this - if you have been mistreated by others:

- Abused (physically, emotionally, verbally, sexually)
- Slandered
- Betrayed
- Lied about
- Gossiped about
- Taken advantage of
- Mistreated

If someone has sinned against you in any of those ways, let Amos 1 be an encouragement to your soul - that God cares. He cares deeply about the injustices and wrongs done against people created in his image. He cares deeply about the ways someone has hurt you and treated you. He has wrath and justice stored up and reserved for those who hurt other people.

He is set to punish these nations for the injustices and wrongs they have committed.

Twist #1 - God will punish his own people.

Now, at this point, Amos - this little shepherd farmer from the southern kingdom, has probably drawn quite the crowd.

Israel's ears have perked up, people have probably gathered around him - YES Amos! PREACH PASTOR PREACH. God is going to destroy our enemies. Yes, those wicked wicked nations. GET EM GOD. LET'S GO. Day of the Lord!

But, here comes the first twist...

Twist #1 - God will also punish Israel for their wrong and injustice.

The Day of the Lord, this day of justice and judgment that Israel has been waiting for and longing for, Amos says - be careful Israel, because God has judgment for you as well.

You see Israel is no different than us as modern Americans. We want justice for the wrongs of others, mercy for the wrongs we commit. We want justice for the ways others hurt us, justifications for the ways we hurt others.

I see this so clearly in myself when I'm driving - if someone cuts me off in traffic they're a terrible driver, they shouldn't be on the road, how could they think to do that? I cut someone off - I'm running late, I didn't see them, I just got distracted in my thoughts.

And that's just a small example of what we do all of the time - we want God to have justice for evil, just not our evil. For our evil we want clemency. For our evil we want forgiveness and mercy and understanding from God.

But Amos tells the Israelites - you are guilty and God has punishment for you as well.

Look at Chapter 2:6...

6 Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—7 those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; 8 they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.

What was happening in Israel is the wealthy were ignoring the poor, not using their wealth in generosity, but rather hoarding and amassing greater wealth for themselves. And then they would turn and rather than caring for the poor would sell them into debt slavery - indentured servitude to pay off their debts. Then while in debt slavery they would deny them any legal representation or chance at justice and freedom.

And God is angry with this. For a whole host of reasons, but two in particular that He tells them.

First, because these people who are taking advantage of others and oppressing others and selling others into indentured slavery, are the very same people God brought out of slavery and oppression in Egypt.

He says this in 2:9...

9 “Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. 10 Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. 11 And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?” declares the Lord. 12 “But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, ‘You shall not prophesy.’

He’s delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He’s redeemed them from bondage and oppression - and now they are putting people under the very same burden God had release and freed them from.

But God is also angry because this was supposed to be His people. His family. The family of God he set apart to be righteous in the world.

He says in 3:1-2...

1 Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: 2 “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

Not only have I brought you out of slavery, I’ve made you into a family, but not just any family - my family. The family of God. You’re my people - and yet you’re mistreating one another, abusing one another, hurting one another, taking advantage of one another.

And for the next couple of chapters, the diagnosis for Israel is just going to go from bad to worse.

Amos continues, as a prophet, to speak for God.

Chapter 3 – God addresses how they have forsaken love of neighbor in pursuit of more.

Rather than letting their relationship with God flow into love of those around them - particularly those who are most vulnerable, most in need, most outcast and oppressed by society - instead they have taken advantage of them, been self-seeking, sought their own good and their own flourishing and benefit. Rather than caring for the poor, using their excess in generosity towards those in need, they have scorned the poor, taken advantage of them - God says they build more and more - winter houses and summer houses, living in luxury - neglecting those around them in need.

Chapter 4 – He’ll go on to attack their false worship of idols.

They would go to the cities of Gilgal and Bethel, and they would perform Jewish religious rituals, but instead of offering sacrifices and worship to God, they offer it to idols. They’ve co-opted true worship and instead built false gods and idols out of gold, that can’t talk but stay silent. And they do this, Amos says, so they can live however they want to and maintain a sense of favor from a deity at the same time. They loved their sin and they loved their religion, so they constructed a religion of silent idols that let them have both. And one of the things God makes clear is that worship of idols always leads to more injustice.

Chapter 5 – God says even when you worship me, I hate it because you neglect justice and righteousness.

They hate their neighbor, even as they claim to love God. They say they care about God, try to worship Him with offerings, singing and praise, and yet the Lord tells Israel, “I reject it because you shun the poor. I reject it because you cannot say

you love me and neglect justice and righteousness - caring for those around you in need. As we read in 1 John 4:20 - you cannot claim to love God and hate your brother. So your worship is empty, God tells them.

So notice the thread:

- All of these nations around Israel are under God's wrath and judgment because of the way they hurt, mistreat, and abuse other people.
- But Israel too is under the wrath of God. Because although they are His chosen family who He led out of slavery in Egypt, they are
 - (1) oppressing others,
 - (2) neglecting the poor in pursuit of more wealth and comfort,
 - (3) worshipping false gods
 - (4) honoring God with their lips but not their lives.

And it's worth pausing here to acknowledge that even with 2700 years and 10,000 of miles of separation, we are not all that different from the people of Israel, are we?

- **Do we not in the day to day of our lives shun and neglect the poor?**

Maybe not openly and actively, but I can set up my life in such a way where - with my neighborhood, and the restaurants I go to, and the people I hang out with - just set my life up in such a way where I only interact with people in a similar or higher socioeconomic status than me. Or if I don't want to think about those in need in other parts of the world, I can just avoid those articles on the internet. That's shunning and neglecting the poor - I just set my life up in such a way that I never have to see it or think about it, or step into it.

- **Do we not take advantage of one another, always seeking to accumulate more and more for ourselves rather than living with open-handed generosity?**

When we get a raise, is our first thought ever - more to give to the poor? Or is it - sweet house project, awesome cool vacation. When we consider career moves or vocational changes do we just look at the dollar signs and think about how we might set our lives up more comfortably or more materially successful? Or do we consider how we might actually grow in generosity towards those around us in need?

- **Do we not worship and devote our lives to false gods?**

This is everything we talked about last week - we can make god into an image of our own choosing who always and only ever agrees with the decisions we make. We can worship the false god of capitalism and consumerism, who rather than turning our hearts in repentance applauds our getting ahead, applauds our spending more, applauds our consumption and hoarding.

- **Do we not come into gathered worship ready to sing and praise and worship while neglecting justice and righteousness?**

We can sing songs that even make us confess our sin to God - "We have shunned the weak and poor" all the while ignoring the needs of our Community Group member who is struggling to make ends meet. We can learn all the ins and outs of theology and doctrine, while our hearts are turned away from our neighbors in the city who need our help. We can learn how to read and study the book of Amos, learning how to read an Old Testament prophet and all of his words on justice, with no plans to change anything about our lives.

Though the specific ways we sin may have changed, the human heart has not - rebellious and turned away from God and turned away from one another.

Even while God constantly calls to us like He did to Israel in chapter 5...

5:4 - "Seek me and live..."

5:6 - "Seek the Lord and live..."

Turn from your ways. Come back to God. Turn from your ways. Come and find true life. I will relent, says the Lord. Let justice flow like a river, invites the Lord!

And yet stuck in our sin, we reject justice, we neglect to live righteous lives, we worship false gods, and we turn from Him. And in so doing all of us, all of us on our own deserve the wrath of God.

We all deserve what God warns Israel of in **chapter 5:18-20...**

18 Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light, 19 as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. 20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

You think the day of the Lord is coming to save you. You think the day of the Lord is coming to rescue you from your darkness. Rescue you from these surrounding nations of evil – and yet you don't realize you are a nation of evil yourself! You are wicked through and through. You deserve my wrath. You deserve my punishment. You deserve my justice.

And specifically God says, this punishment is going to come at the hands of another nation. A nation which will rise up, overthrow Israel, and take them into captivity.

And if you track Israel's history, that comes true. You can read about it in 2 Kings 17. 40 years after the prophecies of Amos, the nation of Assyria rises up and takes Israel into captivity. And the story will get worse and worse for Israel.

In chapter 7 Amos begins talking about visions he has for what this punishment from God will be like. Their symbolic depictions of this coming judgment on the day of the Lord for Israel.

- He sees Israel devastated by a locust storm.
- And then destroyed by scorching fire.
- And then swallowed up like someone would devour a basket of overripe fruit.
- And then in his final vision in chapter 9 he sees God destroying the temples and altars built to all of the false gods of Israel.

And these visions end this way, **Amos 9:9-10:**

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

It's an image of God's justice on those who have not executed justice. The end has come for Israel.

Twist #2 - The Lord is merciful to those who seek Him

But, there's a second twist. That's not how the story will end. The curtain doesn't close and the screen doesn't fade to black on a destroyed Israel rotting in their injustice and sin.

Instead, there's this paragraph right at the end that gives meaning and hope to the entire book of Amos.

Let's look at it together. **Amos 9:11-15:**

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, 12 that 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.

Twist #2 - The Lord will restore for Himself a people called by His name.

Out of the ashes of Israel's destruction, God will one day restore and rebuild the house of David - which is a foreshadowing to the Messiah. The one who will come through the family line of David as the true Messiah and King, and he will rebuild the family of God's people, not just from Israel but people from all nations who call on the name of the Lord.

All of the devastation and destruction caused by Israel's rebellion against God will be reversed by the Messiah King, who will come to usher in God's forever Kingdom and create a new people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who worship God and God alone.

The Gospel on Display

And that is how Amos puts the gospel on display. Because it shows us the relationship so clearly between God's justice and God's mercy.

Because God is just – He must confront all of the evil of the nations and all of the evil of Israel. He must exercise judgment on those who would sin against Him and sin against one another.

But because God is merciful – He is also working out His long-term purposes to restore His world and build a new covenant family, brought together by and for and through His Son Jesus Christ.

God cannot let wickedness go unpunished. There must be justice for those who would mistreat, harm, hurt, and neglect others – And yet in His mercy God will send the Messiah to redeem and forgive these very ones who do just that.

That is the gospel good news for us!

Like the Israelites we too deserve God's wrath and justice. Like the Israelites we too worship false gods. We too turn our backs on justice for the poor. We hurt one another, abuse one another, mistreat one another, take advantage of one another. We also come to worship God and declare we love Him while hating our brother or sister in Christ.

And God has righteous judgment and wrath for that.

But also - in His mercy He is working something else out. In His mercy He provides the greatest sacrifice, who stands as our mediator, who stands as our great high priest, our great king, our great prophet - who goes between us and God through His life, death, and resurrection to make a way for us to be forgiven, washed clean, and brought into this forever new covenant family of God He is creating with all who call on His name.

Because God is just – He must punish our sin.

Because He is merciful - He provides the one who takes our punishment.

So we look at the book of Amos and this our invitation:

To rest in and celebrate and rejoice in the mercy of God for us, and to heed the warnings given to the Israelites by letting that worship overflow into justice and righteousness.

Communion. Pray.