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Sermon- Amos 7:7-17  
Sunday, July 15, 2012

1. God’s judgment against Israel  
   a. Today we are going to look at the OT book of Amos. Amos was actually a shepherd and farmer to whom God came and delivered messages to take to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Amos wrote prior to the exile in Assyria during the time that Israel had been divided into the Northern Kingdom, all of Israel minus Judah, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah where Jerusalem was. Amos’ prophecies were warnings of the impending judgment and exile that Israel would face because of their disobedience.  
   b. Amos was delivering a message of visions God had given him regarding the judgment he was going to send on Israel. There are several visions that Amos described and we are looking at the third one.  
      i. Then the Lord said, “I am setting a plumb line among My people Israel; I will no longer spare them: 9  Isaac’s high places will be deserted, and Israel’s sanctuaries will be in ruins; I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with a sword.”  
   c. The Lord said he was setting a plumb line among his people. As any of you who have done contracting or construction work probably know, a plumb line is used to measure the verticality or depth of something. If the Lord is setting a plumb line among his people, what is he doing? He is measuring their uprightness before him; the depth of their commitment to him.  
      i. The two primary issues Amos challenged Israel on was their failure to be just or righteous, and their failure to worship God from their hearts. So his plumb line will expose both their moral corruption- righteousness is often called being “upright before the Lord”- and the depth of their love for him in their hearts.  
   d. The Lord was very clear on how this measurement would play out. Israel would be found to not measure up. And his people Israel would no longer be spared. When God said that Israel’s high places will be deserted and their sanctuaries will be ruins, he was predicting that he would send an enemy against Israel and not only would their land be destroyed, but the people would be taken away from the land into exile.  
   e. And the Lord said that he would rise up against the house of Jeroboam with a sword. Jeroboam II was the king in Israel and he was a corrupt king. God was saying that not only would Israel as a people face exile, but the monarchy itself was going to pay for their corruption and unrighteousness.

2. God’s concern for justice and righteousness  
   a. The plumb line that God uses to measure people is his word. Do the people measure up to what he has commanded of them in his word? Israel obviously didn’t measure up. What had they done that was so wrong? They had abandoned true worship of the Lord and they failed to be just.  
   b. The issue of justice that God was so concerned with wasn’t the kind of social justice that we hear so much about today. It wasn’t soup kitchens and clothing
shelters. It wasn’t rallies for one side or another of an issue. And it wasn’t about tax policy that asked some to pay a higher percentage than others in order to be fair. Often, even within the church, when we hear about justice, it is these kinds of things about which we hear.

c. The justice God was concerned about was actual justice. It was fairness. God had given the law and expected it to be implemented fairly and evenly regardless of social class or standing. But the system in Israel had become so corrupt that those with money were able to buy judgments against those without it. For the right price judges and leaders were willing to use God’s holy law to benefit one and harm another.

d. Thus Amos said in chapter 2, “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 block the path of the needy.”
   i. The statement about selling a righteous person and a needy person is about the judges taking bribes to give bias judgments. They were willing to sell judgment of God’s holy law for personal gain.
   ii. God was angry, and thus was sending judgment on Israel, because they had failed to be just and had grown so corrupt.

3. God’s response to ungodly leadership
   a. When Amos had finished speaking this message we are told:
      i. Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you right here in the house of Israel. The land cannot endure all his words,” for Amos has said this: ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into exile from its homeland.”

   b. Amaziah was working to undermine the message of Amos as so many false prophets and priests in Israel did. Amaziah, as priest, was a part of the corruption in Israel. So such a prophecy was personal to him because it was a prophecy against him as much as it was against the king. And it if Israel stopped the corruption, Amaziah stood to lose the benefits he was reaping from the corruption.
      i. The fact that the priests, those responsible for the spiritual care of Israel, were routinely part of the corruption and moral decay of Israel, is a huge part in why God was so angry and why all of Israel, not just the king, needed to be punished. It was a systemic problem.

   c. It really shouldn’t surprise anyone that there is heresy and false teaching in the Christian Church today. Heresy and false teaching is an intentional undermining of God’s word as delivered. The false teachers may not think they are undermining God, but they know they are undermining his word as received in scripture. In our day we see this as people will say, “The bible was written thousands of years ago. We know so much more now. And we have the Holy Spirit.”

   d. In Amos’ day this kind of false teaching came by false prophets telling the king and the people what they wanted to hear and then telling the king and the people that the true prophets were lying and distorting God’s word. Amaziah was an
example of this. He was involved in the systemic corruption and so as a priest was going to deny the words of a true prophet in order to preach messages about his own agenda.

   i. As such, Amaziah told Amos to go make his living as a prophet elsewhere. In other words, “Don’t infringe on my living here. Bother someone else with your ‘God’s word’ stuff.”

e. Amos responded that this wasn’t his job and it wasn’t something he was born into. He was called by God and sent to minister to Israel. He then delivered a message that makes it clear how important it is to God that he has godly leadership among his people.

   i. Therefore, this is what the LORD says: Your wife will be a prostitute in the city, your sons and daughters will fall by the sword, and your land will be divided up with a measuring line. You yourself will die on pagan soil, and Israel will certainly go into exile from its homeland.

   ii. Not only was the Lord saying, through Amos, that Israel would indeed go into exile away from its own land. But Amos would be vindicated because Amaziah would witness first hand that Amos’ words had been true.

      1. Amaziah’s own wife would become a prostitute; his own children would die; his own land would be divided up; and then he would die in exile in a pagan land. And when all of that came true, he would know that the word of the Lord was indeed with Amos and that it is a plumb line that measures the uprightness of his people.

f. God not only had, and still has a major concern about justice and righteousness among his people; he has a concern that there is godly leadership over his people. I take comfort in that as I watch so many pastors and priests across denominations teaching moral abominations of all sorts in the name of Christ.

   i. As an example, the dean of an Episcopal divinity school said that her vows as an Episcopal priest require that she take 15 year old girls across state lines to get abortions, whether it is legal or not.

g. Just as God promised to deal justly with Amaziah in the OT, in the NT James (3:1, 2) gives a similar warning to Christian teachers.

   i. Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment, for we all stumble in many ways.

h. We serve a just God. We serve a righteous God. We serve a faithful God. And God wants us to be just, righteous, and faithful to him and his word. He will deal with evil. As Christians, our plumb line by which we will be measured is the plumb line of Christ’s righteousness. Thanks to his sacrifice on our behalf, we have all the more reason to obey God and be just, righteous and faithful as fitting of one who has received his mercy.