

The Lion Roars

Let Justice Flow

Amos 1:1 – 2:5

Pastor Bryan Clark

How do you suppose God feels when He looks at the world as it is today? How do you think God feels? God—knowing His vision for the world, God knowing what He intended it to be—looks at the pain and the heartache and the hatred and the bloodshed. I'll guarantee you, every day God grieves over what we've done to His world. I'm absolutely convinced that every day it breaks the heart of God.

The question I've been wrestling with, as I've been thinking about this series and just processing it through my own life, is, "Do I grieve over the things that break the heart of God? Am I offended by the things that offend God? Do I celebrate the things that God celebrates? Or is it possible that over time something's happened to my heart—that I've become inoculated—to where I literally can just walk by and not notice the very scene that breaks the heart of God?"

That's what we want to talk about over the next ten weeks. We want to talk about the world as God intended it to be, the world as it's become and what God is doing and what God is inviting us to do with Him. If you have your Bibles this morning, turn to the minor prophet, Amos. Probably most of you were just reading through Amos this week (laughter) but, in case you don't know where it's at, it's towards the end of your Old Testament—what we refer to as a *Minor Prophet*. Now the Minor Prophets aren't minor because like they're in the minor leagues. They're minor simply because the book is smaller. The larger books are referred to as the Major Prophets; the smaller books are referred to as the Minor Prophets. There's a lot of historical information in verse 1. I'm going to read that and then I will fill in a couple of things:

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.
(*NASB Amos 1:1)

The opening line, **The words of Amos**...is a typical opening, kind of technical language for these prophets. It's talking about the words, or what is referred to as the *oracles*. One of the features of the prophets is what we call *oracles*, which probably are best understood today as sermons. So they are a series of sermons, or oracles, delivered to a specific audience. In this case we are told, delivered specifically to **Israel**. We are told that he is from **among the shepherders**. That's not the typical word for shepherd. It's actually a word that means like a sheep breeder. Probably closest today would be the idea of a rancher. We're told that he is a rancher down in Tekoa. Tekoa was south yet of Bethlehem. So you go south to Jerusalem, south yet to Bethlehem; a little bit south of that you're right in the wilderness of Judea—so probably right on the edge of the wilderness and the area that he would need to run his ranch. There's a couple of ways that it's helpful to think about this. One is that throughout the book there are a lot of wilderness images and that really comes from his background as a rancher. It's also important to realize that when Amos is called to go to Israel to deliver this message as a prophet, it's very John the Baptist-"ish" in that this is a Sand

Hills rancher called to New York City to deliver the message. So you kind of have to understand that kind of imagery. He didn't really fit in, in terms of the cosmopolitan city that he was visiting.

We are told that **...he envisioned in visions**. Basically all that means is it's a reminder that a prophet did not speak for himself. A prophet was the mouthpiece of God—he spoke God's message. Amos is not offering his opinion on the way things should be. The idea that **...he envisioned in visions** is saying that God spoke to him in a vision and said, "This is exactly what I want you to say." Amos is nothing more than the mouthpiece of God and that's what he's referring to. He says to **Israel**. During this time period the Hebrew people were divided into basically the equivalent of two nations. You had the ten nations in the north, which is referred to as Israel, and you had two nations in the south, which is referred to as Judah. For all practical purposes they were functioning as two distinct nations. He's referring then to Amos going to the northern ten tribes known as Israel. The time frame: it's during the time when Uzziah was king of Judah, so that would be in the south. Jeroboam was king of Israel which was in the north and then **...two years before the earthquake**.

You put all those details together and we can date this roughly 750 years before Christ—750 BC. That's about the timeframe for this story. Now one of the things that's very helpful is knowing what was going on in that time period. We know that this was a time of peace and prosperity. Neither the north nor the south was at war so, because they were not spending money on warfare, they were accumulating massive amounts of wealth. As a matter of fact, this was a time of great wealth, of great opulence, of luxurious living. The rich were getting richer; the poor were getting poorer. This was a time of significant corruption in the political system, significant corruption in the judicial system—everything weighted toward the rich and powerful at the mercy of the poor and the estranged.

One of the things that makes Amos such an interesting book to study is that the context is very much like the context in which we live. Some would make the case that we, as Americans, live better than any people have ever lived in the history of the world—more opulence, more wealth, more luxury...more! When we talk about the wealthy and the poor, it's very easy for most of us to dismiss ourselves from the indictments of the wealthy because we don't think of ourselves that way. I mentioned two weeks ago if you make \$25,000 a year, you are in the top 10% of the wealthiest people in the world today! That's staggering! We are a culture of wealth; we are a culture of abundance. When Amos is talking about that culture, he's talking about an ancient culture where money had become the god of the day. They were driven by greed; they were driven by the desire for more and it turned into behaviors that were simply unacceptable to God. And we will talk our way through that as we go through the book. Verse 2:

**He said, "The LORD roars from Zion,
And from Jerusalem He utters His voice;
And the shepherds' pasture grounds mourn,
And the summit of Carmel dries up."**

This is one of those wilderness metaphors. It's going to show up several times in this book. That is the idea of a *roaring lion*. As a matter of fact, when you go through the Old Testament, you actually see the imagery of a lion show up a lot because, in the ancient Near East fear of lion attacks was a very legitimate, a very real fear. Now most of us have not heard a lion roar in the wilderness but those who have would say, "It's absolutely terrorizing!" As a matter of fact, one commentator said the only reasonable response to the roar of a lion would be absolute terror—and I think that's

correct. I think that's the intent of the text right here. The Lion—which is God—is roaring! Lions don't roar to say, "Hello". They don't roar to say, "Good morning". When a lion roars, there's reason for terror. What would upset the Lion to the degree that He is roaring? The intensity of His roar is described in such imagery that He roars from Jerusalem in the south, and the intensity of the heat of His roar travels all the way up to Mount Carmel in the north and it literally wilts the grass from south to north—because of the intensity of His roar. That's the imagery that Amos is presenting.

Starting in verse 3 through Chapter 2, Verse 5, which is as far as we are going this morning, you have a message to seven different nations. All of the messages use the same basic formula. I'm going to explain it once and then we're not going to spend a lot of time with the details. You kind of get the sense as we go through it. The first one, verse 3, is to the nation of Syria, identified by their capital city, Damascus.

**Thus says the LORD,
"For three transgressions of Damascus and for four
I will not revoke its *punishment*,"** (Vs. 3a)

That's the formula. The idea of **three** and **four** is not saying you did this seven times. It's just a poetic way of saying it's uncountable; it's innumerable. You've done this over and over again as a way of life and the Lion can't take it anymore. The Lion's going to do something about it. The Lion is roaring. What did they do? Verse 3:

"Because they threshed Gilead with *implements* of sharp iron." (Vs. 3b)

The idea of **threshed** comes from this farming implement called a threshing sledge. Basically it was a very crude instrument that was two boards tied together at one end that formed the handle and then it would separate a little bit at the other end and they would put a piece of iron or really sharp stone—something like that—in there and they would tie it up and then they would use it to separate the grain off the stalk. So it was a rather violent process. They would go through and they would thresh these stalks and just violently beat them until the grain was separated from the stalk. Now whether they actually used this farming implement as a weapon or it's just meant to create an imagery, it's a very violent, bloody imagery that that's what the Syrians have done to the people around them. It's not that they were just at war with them. It was a bloody massacre and that's what God is objecting to. It didn't happen one time; this was a way of life for them. And the Lion is going to stop it. Verse 4:

**"So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael,
And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad. (Those are kings.)
I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus,"** (Vs. 4-5a)

In all of these, there is something about a **citadel** and the idea of, in this case, the **gate bar**. In understanding these ancient nations, which are more like what we think of as states, they were fairly close geographically; they had these capital cities. They would fortify them in order to keep their neighbors out. The most important part of the fortress though was the gate. If the enemy penetrated the gate, the enemy would destroy them. What God is saying, is, "I'm going to kick the gate down. You have massacred; you've massacred in bloody fashion all these other people, so I'm going to kick your gate down; I'm going to knock your walls down. There will be no place to hide and people are going to do to you what you've done to them." That's in essence what He's saying here.

Verse 5:

**"I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus,
And cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven,
And him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden;
So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir,"
Says the LORD.**

Starting in verse 6 is the second nation, Philistia:

**Thus says the LORD,
"For three transgressions of Gaza and for four
I will not revoke its *punishment*, (same formula). Why?
Because they deported an entire population
To deliver *it* up to Edom."**

Now again, understanding in the ancient world, these nations were fairly close in proximity. When they would go to war with one another, when one nation defeated the other, you basically had two choices: either you slaughtered everybody or you brought them back as slaves. You aren't going to let people go right next door that want to get even. So in some ways, bringing them back to be slaves was the more humane option. But this is not talking about slavery. This is talking about—human trafficking would be the term we would use today. They're going to communities of people that were not at war—that offered no threat. They were not hurting anyone; they were just wanting to be a community. They would go in; they would attack them; they would kidnap them—men, women, and children—and they would sell them as slaves to Edom or to whoever was the highest bidder, for no reason other than for profit—literally selling human beings as a commodity for profit. That's what God is identifying as their sin. He says in verse 7:

**"So I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza,
And it will consume her citadels.
I will also cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, (these are now main cities)
And him who holds the scepter, from Ashkelon;
I will even unleash My power upon Ekron,
And the remnant of the Philistines will perish,"
Says the Lord GOD. (Vs. 7-8)**

Starting in verse 9 is the nation of Tyre:

**Thus says the LORD,
"For three transgressions of Tyre and for four
I will not revoke its *punishment*,
Because they delivered up an entire population to Edom
And did not remember *the* covenant of the brotherhood."**

They are accused of the same behavior, human trafficking, with one twist. They would actually go to the neighboring communities and say, "Let's sign a covenant. Let's live in peace with one another. Let's watch out for one another. Let's have commerce with one another. Let's just all get along and watch each other's back and that will make life better." So the communities, the nations, would sign a covenant of brotherhood, and as soon as that nation let down their guards, they would

attack them and they would take the men, women, and children and they would sell them to Edom purely for profit. So it's the same behavior with a deceptive betrayal twist to it. Verse 10:

**"So I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre
And it will consume her citadels."**

Verse 11 to Edom:

**Thus says the LORD,
"For three transgressions of Edom and for four
I will not revoke its *punishment*,"**

Now up to now the nations have been distant, pagan nations but, starting with Edom, it's getting a little closer to home. Edom comes out of Esau. Esau was the brother of Jacob. So you can make the case there was a family tie now. So the circle is getting a little bit smaller. What was their sin?

**"Because he pursued his brother with the sword,
(that's probably why the word brother is used; this is family)
While he stifled his compassion;
His anger also tore continually,
And he maintained his fury forever." (Vs. 11b)**

What He's talking about is a group of people who were passionate about violence, passionate about war, passionate about bloodshed. Rather than hearts of compassion, they actually lived to be at war. They lived to hate other people. They lived to destroy and massacre others. That was a way of life for them. There are people in our world today that could be described this way. That defines their life. They are passionate about hating; they are passionate about murder; they are passionate about bloodshed. That's what will define their life. They live at war with people they hate. Many of those today do it in the name of God. What's helpful about this text is: the text is telling us this is how God feels about that behavior. God considers it to be horrendous! He hates it; it disgusts Him. Nobody ever commits this kind of behavior in the name of God. God will not have it and the Lion is roaring and saying, "I will not tolerate this anymore." The judgment: Verse 12:

**"So I will send fire upon Teman,
And it will consume the citadels of Bozrah."**

Verse 13 to the nation of Ammon:

**Thus says the LORD,
"For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon and for four
I will not revoke its *punishment*,"**

Ammon is getting a little closer to home still, because Ammon comes from the line of Lot. Lot was Abraham's nephew. Lot had an incestuous relationship with one of his daughters and produced a son by the name of Ammon, and out of him comes the Ammonites who have been a chronic problem for the Hebrew people. What have they done?

"Because they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead..." (Vs. 13b)

Now whether that's specifically what they did or meant to create just a gruesome image, it's an image of someone who was no threat. A pregnant woman is not a soldier. She's not a threat; she's not attacking. She's just full of life, carrying this child, and you've shredded her. You have violently murdered her; you've torn her open. It's a very violent imagery of just simply the depravity and the loss of human decency and human dignity. Why did they do it?

"In order to enlarge their borders." (Vs. 13c)

Again, this isn't a war. This isn't a battle. This isn't a threat. It's driven by greed—a desire for more—and to get more we will do this level of violence, even on a pregnant woman.

**"So I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah,
And it will consume her citadels
Amid war cries on the day of battle
And a storm on the day of tempest.
Their king will go into exile,
He and his princes together," says the LORD.** (Vs. 14-15)

Chapter 2, verse 1:

**Thus says the LORD,
"For three transgressions of Moab and for four
I will not revoke its punishment,"**

Lot actually had an incestuous relationship with two daughters. One produced Ammon and the Ammonites. One produced Moab and the Moabites. So these are now two brothers with some link back to basically the line of Abraham. What did he do?

"Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime." (Ch. 2:1b)

Now compared to the other graphic images, this doesn't seem nearly as graphic, but understand what's being said. It's probably not limited to the king, but referring to the king's bones is referring to what they were doing to the king and his kingdom. Basically what it's talking about...*burning his bones in order to make lime*...the Hebrew word is referencing a plaster that they used to plaster their homes. Virtually what's being said is: in order to have enough plaster to remodel our homes, we have to go out and massacre people, bring them back, collect their bones, burn them down, collect this dust and, out of that, we mix it with water and make plaster to remodel our homes. You talk about people becoming an absolute commodity and the absolute loss of the dignity of human life—just for human consumption, just for human pleasure, just for more. So it's kind of giving a picture of how depraved this has all become.

**"So I will send fire upon Moab,
And it will consume the citadels of Kerioth;
And Moab will die amid tumult,
With war cries and the sound of a trumpet.
I will also cut off the judge from her midst,
And slay all her princes with him," says the LORD.** (Vs. 2-3)

Verse 4:

**Thus says the LORD,
"For three transgressions of Judah and for four
I will not revoke its *punishment*,"**

We've had pagan nations. Now the circle closes to kind of shirttail relations—now we're talking about our backyard. I'm going to guess that the Israelites listening to Amos were applauding at God's justice for all the pagan nations because they were nasty; they were wicked. "It's about time God did something." As God moved into Judah, I'm going to guess they still applauded because Israel didn't like Judah. "They were a bunch of losers down there and it's about time God showed up and dealt with them but, man, that's getting really close to our backyard!" I'm guessing the applause was a little less enthusiastic at this point.

**"Because they rejected the law of the LORD
And have not kept His statutes;
Their lies also have led them astray,
Those after which their fathers walked.
So I will send fire upon Judah,
And it will consume the citadels of Jerusalem." (Vs. 4b-5)**

It is interesting how the discussion changes. For the six previous pagan nations, they are held accountable for what we would refer to as *general revelation*. Because they are people made in the image of God, God has put within them a moral conscience, a moral compass that tells them it's just simply wrong to do this to another human being. You don't have to have the Bible to know that doing that to another human being is wrong, and God holds them accountable for that. But as the discussion moves to Judah, it changes from general revelation to *specific revelation*. God is saying, "But you are My covenant people. You have so much more. I have identified Myself as your God. I have led you; I have delivered you. I have made Myself known to you. I have given you My law; I have told you what's right and wrong in the eyes of God and, when you disobey the law of God, you reject the law of God."

When it talks about them *believing the lies*, it's talking about the lies of the pagans, the lies of the culture, the very same lies that led their fathers astray. When it talks about *leading them astray*, that Hebrew word was either used to describe an animal who had gone astray from the flock or someone who was intoxicated and just staggered back and forth down the street. He says, "This is what you've become because you have listened to the lies. You just stagger through life, from one thing to another; you completely lost your way."

This is as far as we go this morning, but you get where this is going. God has addressed the pagan nations. God has addressed the relatives. God is right in the backyard. You don't have to read too far into verse 6 to realize the message of Amos is coming home to Israel and that's what the rest of the book is about. And we will talk about that next week. For this morning I would like us to think about just a couple of things.

Number one: I do think it is worth noting that God is holding pagan nations accountable. These were not nations that acknowledged Him as God. These are not nations that followed the God of the Hebrew people. These were nations that had their own gods, made up their own rules and had their own ways. Our culture today, in its relativistic way, basically says, "Each nation is free to

kind of have their own religion, make up their own rules, decide for themselves what is right and wrong.” So it’s interesting that God steps up to these pagan nations and says, “Whoa, wait a minute. I am God; I make the rules; I hold you accountable. I will determine what is right and wrong, what’s acceptable and what’s unacceptable. At the end of the day, every person of every nation ultimately answers to the one true God, and the standard is the standard as He has defined it.” That’s what He is saying. General revelation means that no matter who you are, no matter whether you’ve read the Bible or not, God has put within us this sense in which we know it’s simply not right to treat another human being like that.

Second of all, it’s interesting again to get a picture of both God’s justice and God’s love. It is both God’s love and justice that took Him to the cross. We as a nation want to embrace a God of love. We struggle with the concept of a God of justice. The reason is because we live in such luxury. We live as few people have ever lived and, because of that, we embrace this idea that, “Can’t God just be a God of love?” But we’re offended by the concept of a God of justice. But most people in the world today and throughout history quickly embrace the concept of God as a God of justice—because everything they’ve loved, everything they’ve cared about, everything that mattered to them has been stolen or raped or killed. They embrace a concept of a God of justice. What they struggle with is the concept of a God of love in a world like ours today.

Sometimes people say to me, “How can you believe in a God of love when you look at the world as it is today?” I’ll tell you, I sympathize with that question. I do not conclude that God is a God of love by looking at the world as it is today. If you look at the world as it is today, you would have a horrendous view of God. I believe God is a God of love because He reveals Himself as a God of love both in His Word and in His incarnation. But the same Book that says He’s a God of love says He’s a God of justice. When people say to me, “How can you believe in a God of love when you look at the world today?” the question I always ask them back is, “What would you like God to do?” It’s easy to say, “That offends me,” but what are you asking? What do you want God to do? Are you asking God to go out there and kill everybody that’s an offender? So who do we kill? How far does that go? How bad is the offense? Who lives and who dies?

I’m just glad that I’m not God. I don’t know how to sort that out. Interestingly enough, often the very same people that are offended at the justice of God are the same people that are offended that God doesn’t do something in our world today. God simply can’t win. If He doesn’t do anything, they are offended. If He does do something, they are offended. What would you like God to do? It gets very complicated.

The third thing that I think about—and I would invite you to ponder with me—is the opening question: How do you think God feels about the world such as it is today? I have no doubt that this world breaks the heart of God. He grieves every day over what we’ve done to His world, what we’ve done to His dream. So passionate about His dream, He gave up His own life to make it possible to reconcile, to redeem, to restore it back. The question I’ve been wrestling with and I would invite you to wrestle with me is: Do the things that break the heart of God break my heart? Do I grieve over the things that God grieves over? Do I celebrate the things that God celebrates? Is it possible, because this is the only world I’ve ever known, this is the only world I’ve ever grown up in, that I just accept that this is the world as it is and, over time I’ve become inoculated against the hurt and the pain and that which is unacceptable all around me? Is it possible that I can simply walk past, without even noticing, the very thing that breaks the heart of God? And you have to ask the question, “Why is that?” What’s happened to my heart that I don’t see the world the way God sees it—that I’m not grieved over the things that grieve the heart of God? Why is it that I can watch the

nightly news and I can hear again that a bomb blast in the Middle East kills ten men, women, and children and that doesn't faze me? What has happened to me that that doesn't bother me anymore? Why doesn't that break my heart?

What I'm asking is: "What would happen if we saw the world through the eyes of God and we couldn't see that and hear that in such a way that it doesn't affect us in some way?" One of the great images of the book of Amos is in Chapter 5. He uses an imagery of righteousness and justice flowing like a river across the land, bringing relief and healing to a world in pain. And I find myself thinking: What would happen if five thousand people strong really saw the world through God's eyes and there was a river flowing from 70th and Highway 2—a river of righteousness and justice—into our community and beyond, to bring healing and relief to a world in pain? We could literally change this community for good, giving people a glimpse of God's vision for the world to come, as we proclaim the message of Jesus. But this I know: There will never be a river if it doesn't start with *me*. There will never be a river if it doesn't start with *you*. It starts with one person at a time saying, "God, I want to see this world through Your eyes. I know that's going to be hard; I know that's going to cost me." But what if we saw the world as God sees it, and the things that break the heart of God break our hearts? And what if God was to use us to give people just a glimpse of the world to come in the name of Jesus?

Our Father, we are thankful this morning that You love us, but, Lord, we are reminded that You are also a God of justice. You look at this world as it is today and I just can't even imagine. Lord, it's all I've known; it's just what it is, but, Lord, I just can't imagine how that grieves Your heart. Lord, You gave up Your own Son to restore and to reconcile and to redeem. Lord, my prayer is for each one of us, that we would open up our hearts to be willing to hear what You're calling us to, what You're asking of us, that a river of righteousness and justice might flow through this community, that the hurting might know that there is a God who loves them. Lord, this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen

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The Lion Roars

Let Justice Flow

Amos 1:1-2:5

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. How do you view the world today? What excites you and what breaks your heart?
2. What was God's vision for the world? In what ways today do we still see glimpses of that vision?
3. Could God ultimately be a God of love and not be a God of justice? Why or why not?

Bible Study

1. Read Amos 1:1-2. What does the text tell us about Amos? What do we know about the role of a prophet in the Old Testament?
2. What does the text mean in 1:1 when it says Amos "envisioned in visions"?
3. What do we know about the time in which Amos wrote? What were the similarities to twenty-first century America?
4. What is the imagery of God used in 1:2? What do we learn from this? What should we expect in this book?
5. Review what God says about the various nations in 1:3-2:3. Why is the lion roaring? In a world filled with injustice violating God's vision for the world, what should God do to the perpetrators?

6. What is different about the indictment against Judah 2:4, 5? How might this be a glimpse into what is to come in the book?

Application

1. Do you believe you grieve over the things that break God's heart? Why or why not? In what ways might we, over time, get inoculated into not feeling the pain God must feel for the injustices of the world? How do we avoid this?

2. What are some practical things you can do to prepare your heart to hear what God wants to say to you in this Amos series? What would it take for justice to flow in a significant way from 70th and Hwy 2 into our community and around the world?