

February 5, 2012

Chosen
Let Justice Flow
Amos 3:1-15
Pastor Bryan Clark

(Skit & Clapping)

We would never do that would we, ignore the warning signs? There's probably not a single person in the auditorium that's driving a car with the *Check Engine* light on your dash. You just keep driving, thinking eventually it'll turn off. (laughter) Yesterday I had a cup of coffee; there's a warning sign on it. It said: *Caution—Contents may be Hot*. I didn't pay any attention; I never do. As a matter of fact, that same warning—did you notice—is on frozen pizza? That's a warning we should listen to. I've been burned lots of time with frozen pizza; it's dangerous. The other day I bought a thing of epoxy, two part epoxy. There was a warning label on it: *Do not consume or inhale*. I mean I was going to...(laughter)...but they warned me! The fact of the matter is, almost everything now has a warning label because we're such a litigious culture—all the companies are kind of protecting their behind. But the problem is: we become inoculated to the warning. There are some warning labels we really need to pay attention to. Is it possible that, in becoming inoculated, we actually no longer hear the warning that comes from God? That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Book of Amos, Chapter 3.

This is now our third week in the Book of Amos and you're starting to get a feel for the Minor Prophets. It would be safe to say this isn't exactly Philipians. The minor prophets are very intense. It's typically a warning: Turn; repent, or else. Basically the scene would be: God sends prophets over and over and over again but the nation ignores them until it gets to the point where God must do something. That's typically when these minor prophets write—that, because you haven't listened, here's the consequences. So that creates a very intense book. One of the challenges we have anytime we're in the Old Testament, is trying to figure out what's the relevance to our lives today. You can't just kind of take *one-for-one* what's in the Old Testament and apply it over to our lives in the New Covenant. While there are people who do that, it leads to some pretty disastrous theology. So you have to kind of back up and rethink things a little. It's good to kind of go back and revisit the story.

Genesis 1 through 11 is really about God's vision for the world—sin entering into the picture—and this divide—two roads if you will. One road is made up of those people who are willing to surrender to God as God and all that goes with that. The other road is about those who are determined to be their own god and all that goes with that. But even in Genesis 1 through 11, you have those two roads merging into one road. That brings the flood. Those two roads merging into one road; that brings Babel and so in Chapter 12 there's a new strategy, kind of a proactive strategy of God choosing a people, choosing Abraham to father a people who would be the called-out people of God—"I will be your God; you will be My people." And the arrangement was that you follow Me; you walk in obedience to Me and I will pour out my goodness on you; I will pour out my generosity on you; I will pour out blessings upon you. And it's through that that the world will know that the God of Abraham is God, in order that the light might shine into a dark world. God's desire was always that the whole world may *know*. But it would come through the called-out, chosen people of God. So they weren't just chosen; they were chosen *for* something. They were chosen to be on mission. But all through the history of the Hebrew people there was a struggle. They consistently rebelled; they wouldn't obey God; they took on the pagan ways; they followed

the way of idolatry. And again and again and again they would disobey and they would travel down the wrong path and God would have to step in and bring correction and discipline in order to get them back on the path because, what was at stake wasn't just whether they were obeying or not, what was at stake was the very mission for the world of darkness to see the light of God. Everything was at stake! So you kind of have this pattern throughout the history of the Hebrew people.

The Old Covenant rolls into the New Testament and ultimately is culminated in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. You went from Abraham to the economy of Moses, where you had The Law and you had the Temple and you had sacrifices and you had the Sabbath and you had fasts and you had all these things that were meant to be shadows and pictures of God's promise that He would send a Messiah, a Savior. So they were shadows that go on into the Gospels and ultimately are fulfilled in Christ. It would be fair to say that the Old Covenant wasn't so much done away with as it was fulfilled. But once it's fulfilled, you no longer need the shadows. That's why we still don't have temples and animal sacrifices and the keeping of the Sabbath and fasting and these kinds of things that defined the Old Covenant and that longing for the coming of the Messiah.

It's really important to remember that the Gospels are still Old Covenant. You see a lot of things in the Gospels. You see animal sacrifices; you see the Sabbath; you see fasting; you see circumcision. You see all these things that defined these shadows—that even Jesus in the Upper Room said, “This is the New Covenant,” holding up the elements of Passover, saying, “It would be My broken body and shed blood that would usher in the New Covenant, the fulfillment of what we've longed for, for thousands and thousands of years.” So the Gospels are still Old Covenant and the New Covenant then begins with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. So that now is the fulfillment and all of the benefits that go with that. You can't just take something in the Old Testament and automatically roll it into the New Covenant; that's not going to work. The Hebrew people were an ethnic people. God called them out to be a nation so that they were very definable, so that He could pour out His blessing on them in an obvious way. They had a specific piece of land, a literal geographical piece of land. The blessings tended to be physical; the judgments tended to be physical. It had to do with locusts and plagues and crops and rain and drought—but all those, again, pictures of a reality yet to come.

The United States is not the chosen people; you know we're not a theocracy. We don't have a geographical piece of land we claim; we're not an ethnic people. We're a spiritual people. So you have to see the differences between the two and wrestle through that. Now one of the doctrines that really helps us with this is called the immutability of God and that is the doctrine that God doesn't change. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. So what you're looking for is: how did God feel about the abuse and the poverty in the Old Testament? How did God feel about sin and rebellion and idolatry and all that, because that doesn't change? How God felt about it then is how He feels about it today. So you begin to get a sense of what was God's vision for the world and how did He feel about it and how would He still feel about it today and what would the warning signals be today and how do we process through that? So as we continue to work our way through Amos, that's kind of how you have to see it. I don't think the point of Amos is: if we don't clean up our act as the United States, then somebody's going to attack and take over. You know that's not the point; that's not a correct application.

So, with that in mind, we pick it up in Chapter 3, verse 1. It opens with the words, **Hear this word.** Now we've had a formula in chapters one and two—and I would say chapters one and two are these war oracles; they're like war sermons—and the formula was this formula: *For three transgressions*

and for four. Now that formula is laid aside and it's a new formula and the formula are these words: **Hear this word.** Chapter 3, verse 1, Chapter 4, verse 1, Chapter 5, Verse 1—as a matter of fact it's those words that bring the chapter divisions where they are. The idea is that the Lion has roared and no one's listening, so the message turns to, "You better listen to this!" We've moved from talking about the problem to listening to the warning and that's the idea of this chapter.

**Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which He brought up from the land of Egypt,
"You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth;
Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."** (*NASB, Amos 3:1-2)

Notice the name used for God, consistently used in this book, is LORD, all caps. That is a reference to the Hebrew *Yahweh*. It's a reminder that these are the chosen people; this is the God who entered into a covenant; He entered into an arrangement. This is the God who's entered into a covenant relationship with His people. So He's talking to His people; He's talking to His family and that's basically what He talks about. "We're family here; we need to talk about this." He reminds them that He's the God that's brought them up out of Egypt.

Now we would say this is a literary technique. In Chapter 2 He talked about the many ways that He has protected them; He has provided for them; He has delivered them; He has set them free—made the argument that, at the end of the day, they're a nation because God made them a nation. And if it wasn't for God, they wouldn't have anything. Now in Chapter 3 He doesn't need to go back through all of that; He just did. So He captures it simply by saying, "I'm the one that took you out of Egypt...and everything else I talked about in Chapter 2". That's kind of the technique. If it wasn't for Me, you wouldn't even be a nation. We're family; I've been there for you. He's saying, "Of all the families on the earth, I chose you to be my family—but with choosing comes responsibility. You weren't chosen to be teacher's pet; you were chosen for a mission; you were chosen for a purpose and there's responsibility with being the chosen people."

Hebrews 12 says really the exact same thing in the New Covenant—that, if you are a child of God, that's exactly why God disciplines you. It's actually a sign that you are one of His children. God doesn't sit passively by and watch His children self-destruct. If He needs to, He'll step in and discipline His children precisely because you are His child. If there is a room filled with twenty naughty kids and three of them are mine, I will step in and deal with three, precisely because they are mine. So there's a responsibility that goes with being *my child*. Now any parent understands that; that's how it works. That's the exact same thing God is saying. That's why, in the middle of verse two, you have the word **Therefore**. He just said, "*I chose you; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*" In other words, "You were called for a purpose but, because of your sin, because of your idolatry, because of your rebellion, the light isn't shining; the world isn't seeing the light of God. Therefore, I have to correct you." The word **punish** there is an interesting Hebrew word. It means to visit them and can either mean to visit you for a blessing or to visit you for a correction or a punishment. In this case He's clearly saying, "I've got to step in; you're making a mess of things and I've got to bring discipline or correction or punishment in order to get things back on track."

From verse 3 down through verse 8 you have a series of statements. This, again, is kind of a literary technique that has a definite cause and effect. I would say the point of this technique is: he's going to pull a handful of things out of what I referred to as the "*Duh*" file. In other words, they're just

obvious. You look at it and you say, “Well, duh!” And that’s what He wants. So I’ll explain them and then I’ll give you a taste of the “duh” technique. Verse 3:

Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?

The idea is, if you see two people walking together somewhere, you don’t just assume that’s a coincidence. You assume they probably had a conversation and are probably going somewhere. So the idea is, “Do two men walk together unless they’ve made an appointment?” “Well no—Duh!” That’s the Bryan version, but that’s really what he means.

Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? (vs. 4a)

In other words, does a lion roar to show off to the neighbor? Does he roar because he’s feeling a bit sporty? And the answer is, “No, he roars because he’s captured his prey!” He can’t exactly sneak up on something when he’s roaring and so, if he’s roaring, it’s because something happened; it’s a sobering sound; he’s captured his prey. The same with the other one:

Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured *something*? (vs. 4b)

In other words, the young lion doesn’t sit in his den and growl to pass the time of day. It’s an indication he must have captured something and he’s consuming it. Verse 5:

Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it?

You know, does a bird just wander into the trap? Well, Duh—No!” (laughter) You know, middle school kids would like this text. Well—Duh?

Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all? (Vs.5b)

No!

If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? (vs. 6a)

This turns to a, “Yes”. The idea is in an ancient city—a fortified city—when the trumpet blows, that would absolutely bring terror because you knew the enemy was advancing. They’re coming over the wall and it meant everything was about to break loose. I can’t even imagine how horrible that sound would be. But, man, when you hear the sound, that’s trouble and that’s what he’s saying. Doesn’t it cause that reaction? “Well of course, yes.”

If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it? (vs. 6b)

Now, again, this is Old Covenant. One of the big problems we have in kind of the evangelical Christian world are those preachers that get on television when a world calamity strikes and state that, “This is judgment from God.” There isn’t a preacher on the face of the planet that can make that call. Nobody knows that but God. That’s just disastrous theology. But in the Old Covenant, that is how they would have understood it. God was their God and He would deal with pagan nations and He would deal with the enemy and, if God brings the calamity, certainly that would be God. That’s what he means by that. And they would say, “Of course it is”.

**Surely the Lord-GOD does nothing
Unless He reveals His secret counsel
To His servants the prophets.
A lion has roared! Who will not fear?
The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?** (Vs. 7-8)

But here's basically how it goes: "Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?" "Well—Duh, no." "Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?" "No." "Does the lion growl from his den unless he has captured something?" "No, I mean—Duh." "Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does the trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?" "No." "If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people tremble?" "Yes, of course, like—Duh!" "If a calamity occurs in a city, has not the Lord done it?" "Yes, of course." So here comes, then, the point: So if a prophet from God has shown up in the midst of your town and tells you the Lion is roaring, don't you think maybe you should listen? What he is saying is, "That's just as much out of the—Duh file!" The prophet never shows up and speaks for God unless God has said, "This is what I have to say: The Lion is roaring! Why aren't you people listening?" It's, in essence, what Amos is saying. Starting in verse 9 then—verses 9 and 10—it's a very interesting discussion. As a matter of fact, I don't know one like it in the Old Testament. Verse 9 he says:

Proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod...*So that would be the Philistines...*and on the citadels in the land of Egypt and say, "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see *the* great tumults within her and *the* oppressions in her midst."

Now this is what he's saying: God is inviting dignitaries from the land of the Philistines and from the land of the Egyptians and He's saying, "I'm inviting you to come and sit in the bleachers on the mountain and look at what my people are doing. You get a front row seat to watch what I'm about to do to them." The essence of this is God saying, "My people have grossly misrepresented Me and I want you to come sit on the mountain and I want you to look at what's happening with My people. I want you to look at what they've become and then my action is going to tell you, 'I don't approve of that! That no way represents Me or should represent the people of God.'" It's a very intense imagery there. It talks about...**on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults**. It's a Hebrew word that means the chaos—the social fabric coming unraveled—the **oppression** that now defines my people. Verse 10:

"But they do not know how to do what is right,"

Now, think about that. That's quite a statement about the people of God. They **no longer know how to do what's right**. I think that one's worth thinking about a little bit. Over the years, one thing I've found is when you start involving yourself with people as it relates to money and stuff, of all the discussions of all the behaviors, that's the one most likely area where people will rationalize—where people will begin to reconstruct their theology to fit their morality—where people begin to lose sight of what's actually right and what's actually wrong. In the marketplace, one of the challenges is: the bar in our culture now has become so low that we would say that as long as it's legal, it's right—as long as it's legal, it's right! We need to understand, that bar is really low and God disagrees. It isn't about whether or not you can find a legal loophole to justify your greedy behavior. It's about doing justice; it's about right and wrong; it's about looking at people and how you treat them and is this right or is this wrong? So he says to the people, "You can't even choose between right and wrong anymore; you're so morally confused. Verse 10:

“But they do not know how to do what is right,” declares the LORD, “these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels.”

They **hoard up violence and devastation** like they hoard up their money; it just now has become their way of life. Verse 11:

**Therefore...the consequence of that...thus says the Lord GOD,
“An enemy, even one surrounding the land,
Will pull down your strength from you
And your citadels will be looted.”**

And this, as we mentioned last week, happened in 722 B.C. when the Assyrians came in and wiped them out. Verse 12:

**Thus says the LORD,
“Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth a couple of legs
or a piece of an ear,
So will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away—
With *the* corner of a bed and *the* cover of a couch!**

Now what he’s talking about is this: If you were a shepherd and the sheep belong to somebody else, and a wild animal comes along and kills one of your sheep, you had to prove, to demonstrate, that you didn’t steal the sheep or you didn’t sell the sheep. If a wild animal attacked your sheep, you were expected to get a body part—a bone, a leg, an ear—and deliver it to the owner to say, “This is proof I didn’t steal it; I didn’t sell it; it got consumed by a predator.” He’s using that imagery to say that when the enemy comes to discipline Israel, that basically they’ll be carrying pieces of your fine beds and your fine linens and all your fancy stuff as an evidence that you’ve been totally devastated. It’s a very vivid imagery.

**“Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,”
Declares the Lord GOD, the God of hosts. (vs. 13)**

Whenever you see...**the God of Hosts**, that’s basically talking about the General—God and His army—and God is the General. So it’s almost always a picture of some sort of a war, of a fight.

**“For on the day that I punish Israel’s transgressions,
I will also punish the altars of Bethel;” (vs14a)**

The altars of Bethel were really the place where the social elite worshipped. Jeroboam the first, actually built a golden calf and it was displayed at the altars of Bethel. During the writing of Amos, Jeroboam the second was the King and he also embraced the golden calf at the altars of Bethel. So this was where the social elite came to play religion and God is saying, “I’m going to wipe this out.”

**“I will also punish the altars of Bethel;
The horns of the altar will be cut off,
And they will fall to the ground.” (Vs. 14b)**

The corners of the altar were referred to as **the horns**; the law allowed that if you were a fugitive, if you could make it to the altar and get a hold of the horns, then that was a place of refuge. In essence

the law couldn't touch you there. What God is saying is, "I'm going to bust the corners of the altar off." In other words, "I'm going to remove any place of refuge; there will be nowhere to run."

**"I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house;
The houses of ivory will also perish
And the great houses will come to an end,"
Declares the LORD. (vs. 15)**

Basically, in an ancient Near East culture, only the king had a summer house and a winter house and houses laced with ivory inlay. But they had so much wealth that was accumulated by destroying the social fabric, by advantaging themselves, by disadvantaging the community. And they had created these summer houses and a winter house and this unbelievably opulent lifestyle, while the rest of the nation came unraveled and suffered.

Now, again, you have to be careful with this. Maybe you have a cabin at the lake or up in the mountains. God isn't saying, "Whoa! Sell the cabin or else!" I know people who have a cabin at the lake; they're some of the most generous people I know. I know people who don't even own a house and they're some of the greediest people I know. You know, that's not the point; you can't really do that. But the issue is saying that these people were living unbelievably opulent lifestyles at the expense of the people that they had oppressed and used and abused.

Now there is a struggle in all this as to what really is the right way to steward what we've been given. There's a little bit of a concern, even within the Christian church, related to: where is this whole stewardship thing going? Because the mindset seems to be: As long as you can afford it without going into debt, it's okay. If you can afford a \$100,000 air-conditioned doghouse, as long as you can afford it without going into debt, it's fine. I've got to tell you; God disagrees with that. Everything that you have is from God and you have to ask yourself the question: Is that why God blessed you, so your dog could have a \$100,000 air-conditioned doghouse, while the people down the street go to bed hungry every night? There's nothing wrong with having nice stuff. We all have nice stuff but we all have to wrestle with: At what point does it just become immoral? At what point are we just consuming our resources on ourselves whether we can afford it or not? And is that really what God intended? I can't tell you where that line is; you have to figure that out for yourself. But I do know, at the end of the day, it's about justice; it's about right and wrong; it's about understanding that everything ultimately belongs to God and I have to be really thoughtful and prayerful about what I'm going to do with what I've been given. So what do we do with this text?

Let's start with the reminder that it is a warning. Amos is saying the Lion has roared and is asking the people, "Why are we not listening?" So let's start there, because the New Testament is filled with warnings. A couple of weeks ago—several weeks ago—in our Stewardship messages, we talked about the principle of sowing and reaping from II Corinthians—specifically talking about money. But Paul also uses the exact same principle in Galatians, Chapter 6, talking about sin and when you give into the flesh—you sow to the flesh—you reap corruption. It's the same principle; it's the warning that if you choose to ignore God, if you choose to disobey God, God's not going to passively sit by and watch you self-destruct.

So what are the warnings today that you're not listening to? Let's start with the men. Over and over and over again we've talked about this issue of pornography. This room has many, many men who every time we bring it up, they feel guilt; they know it's wrong but the fact of the matter is, you're still doing it! How many times do we have to go there? How many times do you have to hear the warning before you have the courage to say, "That's enough"? What's it going to take—the

destruction of your marriage?...the destruction of your children?...the destruction of your life? Trust me, the Lion is roaring! Come on, men, it's time to step up—that's enough! There are some of you here this morning; you know exactly what it is. You're engaged in behavior that's wrong. It's just wrong; it's sinful and you know it but you just won't do anything about it. The warning light is flashing but nothing's changing. The Lion is roaring and you're thinking, "If I just ignore it, it'll go away. At some point you have to deal with it. God is not going to just sit by passively and watch you self-destruct, so deal with it or the Lion will deal with it.

Beyond that is this idea of justice—of understanding what's right and what's wrong—social justice, as we defined it last week. This isn't about being generous; this isn't about charity. This is about right and wrong; this is about what God expects. For three weeks now we've talked about: What does it look like in your world? I'm wondering, "Are you thinking that way?" The Lion is roaring. We've invited you to see the world through God's eyes. Are you doing that? Are you looking for where there is injustice where I work? Where is there injustice in my business? Where is there injustice in our industry? Where is there injustice in my school? Where is there injustice in the neighborhoods? Where is there injustice in this community?

What is my talent? What is my call? What is it that I could do to begin to think about, praying about, changing what just simply isn't right? We've got to keep thinking and praying and start to figure out, "What does that mean for us?" The Lion is roaring as much today as He was roaring in the day of Amos. I'm not saying that I think the people in this room are doing those horrible things to people that the Israelites were doing. I don't think that at all. But I do think these things are happening every day, right under our noses and it's the call of the people of God to say, "That's enough!"

What about students that every morning get up with their stomach in knots because, everyday for them, going to school is a living hell. They are pushed around; they are picked at; they are bullied. Why does it have to be that way? And when are students going to have the courage to step up and say, "That's enough! In the name of human dignity, that's enough!" Nobody should have to live that way; everybody should have the right to expect to be loved, to be a part of a community, to be cared for, to be protected and have the right to an education. When are the students in the halls going to rise up and say, "That's enough of that; something's got to change!"

How about in the marketplace? Is it just possible that in your world the bar has been lowered to the point where, as long as it's legal, it's moral. How many ways did the big guys crush the little guys by paying hundreds of thousands of dollars of legal fees to figure out a way to do it legally? And as long as it's legal, it's moral. I've got to tell you, God disagrees with you. We've got to back up and rethink some things and ask the question, "What would it mean to do justice?" "What would it mean to treat people rightly and fairly and, in the name of human dignity, to give people a chance and to begin to change a business, begin to change a community?"

All of us need to think about, "What does this look like in my world and where do I see this and how could I make a difference? How could things be different if I began to see the world through God's eyes?" I will tell you this, "I have no doubt the Lion is roaring; who will not fear him?"

Our Father, we are thankful that You love us. You love us too much just to passively let us self-destruct. Lord, I know there are people in this room that know that the warning is flashing. There are areas of sin that need to be dealt with. And, Lord, I have no doubt that

if these brothers and sisters here this morning don't deal with their stuff, You're going to deal with it because You love them, because that's the right thing to do. Lord, give these people courage to do the right thing through the power of Your Spirit. Lord, for all of us, Lord, continue to give us eyes to see the world as it is, to see what breaks Your heart and really dream about and think about and pray about what really needs to be different and what each of us could do in order to bring about change, in order to do justice. Lord, this we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen

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Opening Discussion

1. As you've been seeking to see the world through God's eyes, what have you been seeing? What breaks God's heart? What have you seen that doesn't seem right in your world?
2. In what ways have you seen people advantage themselves by disadvantaging the community?
3. Is this "warning" from the Lion something we should take seriously today? Why or why not?

Bible Study

1. Review the terms "righteous" and "justice" from last week's study. What is social justice?
2. How would ancient Israel differ from the United States today? Why is it not possible to just apply to the United States what God was saying to ancient Israel?
3. The doctrine of the "immutability" of God is the doctrine that God doesn't change. How is that relevant to our discussion in Amos?
4. Read Amos 3:1-2. Why does God treat Israel differently according to these verses?
5. Compare Hebrews 12:4-11 and 1 Peter 4:17. What comes with being part of God's family? The Hebrew word translated "punishment" means to be visited and can be for blessing or punishment. What is the difference between condemnation and correction? Which does a believer receive?

6. Read Amos 3:3-8. What is the point Amos is trying to make? What are some warnings from God that people tend to ignore?
7. Why does God invite representatives from Egypt and Ashdod (Philistia) to observe what is happening in 3:9, 10? How does God describe what they are observing? What does He mean by the statement, “But they do not know how to do what is right?”
8. What is the consequence for ignoring the roaring lion according to 3:11-15? Pay special attention to the imagery presented. What does God plan to do?

Application

1. Can you identify some of what is done today in the name of money that destroys the social fabric of our communities? How is “violence and devastation” done to our citizens?
2. How does God feel today about what is happening? Does God feel any less strongly today than He did in the days of Amos? Then how should we feel about it?
3. While we may not be guilty of the evils being done in Israel in the days of Amos that doesn’t mean we have no responsibility to do something about it. Who are the “chosen” in the new covenant? What comes with being chosen? What is the role of the local church in such a fallen world?