

Amos: The Biblical "One Hit Wonder"

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Lord Jesus, have mercy. If there is not a better cry for our culture, I don't know what it is. Let me define for you, you may not know the word "mercy." It means "may we not receive that which we rightfully deserve." Hopefully that's the cry of your heart today as an individual, as a member of a respective family, as a member of this church and as a member of the human race, "O Lord, may you have mercy on us in spite of us." And yet today we're going to read the story of a group of people who are a lot like us who refused to make that cry.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we seek your mercy, as we desperately desire your grace, God, may we not be like the many generations who have gone before us who refused to learn from days gone by, who refused to learn from the history books that have been written. God, you have blessed us today with ample information from thousands of years ago that's eerily relevant to our lives. Lord, may their refusal to seek mercy spur us on, inspire us today to cry out for it. May their story not become ours. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Amos. For those of you who may be guests or visitors with us as we as a family of faith, we are just very systematically and somewhat slowly walking through the Scriptures on a path or plan that's about three years in length, typically a chapter maybe two chapters a day. You may notice particularly in this season of what we know as the minor prophets, we are typically focusing on a prophet or a text per week. Today we come to the book of Amos and particularly we're going to look at chapter 8, but we're going to go back into subsequent chapters as well.

Amos, as many of the prophets, is a unique character utilized by God. In fact, when you begin to read your Old Testament, by the time you get to Isaiah you've got some interesting characters. Those of you may not be aware, Isaiah preached for three years without a stitch of clothing on him. If you don't believe me, read chapter 20. Jeremiah lived his entire life as a bachelor as commanded by God. We've got prophets who laid on their side, were fed by the ravens, we've got Jonah getting spit up by a whale, and then we've got Amos. You say what's so unique about Amos? Well, Amos didn't have this

personality that was somewhat obscure, he doesn't have this story like Hosea that is unique, Amos is what I like to call the original one hit wonder. You know what the term one hit wonder means. Typically we utilize it in a music sense, that somebody who wrote a song that became incredibly popular and that's the only song that they wrote or saying that made it to such success. But there's two things about one hit wonders that I've noticed throughout time, the first one is this: that even though their career may be spanning of decades, they're only known for one brief song; and number 2, that most people associate their song with somebody else who is really popular. We think that somebody else actually sang the song because it sounds familiar to us but we don't realize that it was someone completely obscure that had one hit, and the same should and can be said for Amos. His ministry lasted in excess of 30 years, as we are going to see and just a moment, he was a common everyday man who picked sycamore figs, who one day the Lord utilizes to take 30 years of observation to speak 20 minutes of proclamation. What we are about to read in the book of Amos is really one sermon preached one time to one group of people. Can you imagine only being known for one 20 minute message yet his entire observation was for over 30 years, and yet today we have the privilege of understanding that that one message, that one sermon should have caused them to seek the mercy of God but rather they stayed on the path they were already on.

In the book of Amos, I want you to turn to chapter 8, verses 11 and 12, somewhat a synopsis of the message of the book of Amos, then we're going to go back into chapters 2 and following. And today as we address this one hit wonder, I want you to focus on verse 11 and 12 of chapter 8. It says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it."

Now I'm going to ask some very strategic questions this morning. The first one is this: what is this concerning? Now I know it seems somewhat obvious that there will be a famine, there will be an extensive drought, there will be a lack of being able to acquire the word of God, that people can run to and fro, they can seek it with all their heart but yet not acquire it, not find it, not be able to to achieve the goal. What's interesting is the comparison that the Lord uses to people seeking his word to a famine, for it was the experience of a famine that was utilized predominantly by the hand of God in what you and I know as the Old Testament dealing with the Israelite people.

The first and the most known of these famines is found in the book of Genesis. A man by the name of Joseph, the one whose dad made him the coat of many colors, he was betrayed by his brothers, ultimately sold by them and ended up in the land of Egypt. The Lord prospered him and took care of him. He made his way up to where he was one of the leading commanders in that nation, to which one day the Lord gave him a dream and in that dream, the Lord communicated that there would be seven years of famine, seven years without rain, seven years without harvest, so he began to lead the Egyptians to putting away a certain amount every year so that they could make it through the famine. Not only did it provide for Egypt but it provided for the brothers who betrayed him and his father who mourned him who would make their way and in Genesis 41, we see the

context there of this incredible experience of a famine, this drought where people were desperate, willing to travel hundreds of miles for a grain of wheat.

We see in 1 Kings 17 and 18, that at the prayer of the prophet Elijah, the heavens were withheld for three and half years. In 2 Kings 8, Elisha, which by the way, he prayed to God that he would receive twice the blessings of Elijah. Elijah's famine lasted three and a half years, guess what? Elisha's lasted seven.

So for numerous occasions in your Old Testament, famine was in the land but it's being utilized by God as a picture, as a prophetic word. In other words, what the Lord is saying is you remember how people behaved in Genesis 41, you remember how they behaved in 1 Kings 17, how they craved a grain of wheat, that's what's about to happen for the word of God.

Now there are multilevels of fulfillment here but I think the most relevant text is actually found in the book of Lamentations 4. The book of Lamentations is that of weeping, given to us by the prophet Jeremiah, probably most notably known for chapter 2 where we get that great hymn of our faith, "Great is thy faithfulness, thy mercies are new each and every day." But it's in chapter 4 that it begins to describe what life looks like in exile. What does it look like when in their context the Babylonians have taken you captive? What does it look like when you no longer have a culture that is conducive to the word of God? What does it look like when we take, "Thus saith the Lord," put it by the wayside and try to do this thing on our own? I love how chapter 4 of Lamentations begins, it says the gold has become dim. The sanctuaries and the structures have fallen down on themselves. In verse 5, maybe my favorite description, those who used to be robed in scarlet now embrace the dunghill. What a description, that gold is no longer worth what it used to be, the physical structures of life no longer have the glamour they used to possess, and the luxuries of life are now described as a pile of dung.

That's the picture. That's what happens when we forsake the word of God not only as an individual but as a collective body, and this is what God is warning them in the book of Amos. He is saying, "If you go down the path you're headed, you forsake the words of the Lord, you're going to seek them one day as they desired wheat in Genesis, you're going to see the gold go dim, the scarlet turn into a dunghill, you'll see the structures fall upon themselves." It was a lesson that unfortunately was not heeded by Israel in Amos's day but we shall heed it this day.

That is what is of concern here and the immediate question then becomes: well, how does this happen? How do we get to a place as described in Amos 8 and Lamentations 4? Well, turn back to Amos 2 and I'm going to see and show you how this happens. Now Amos, as I mentioned, was a unique fellow. He was actually from the land of Judah or the southern kingdom, specifically from a place known as Tekoah. He makes his way up to Israel, the northern kingdom, 30 years of observation comes out in 20 minutes of proclamation, and he begins in chapter 1 with what I call the amen sermon. In other words, he begins to preach about the sins of their enemies and I can just imagine that the Israelites are beginning to shout, "Amen and hallelujah," after every single one of them.

In fact, in verse 3, he talks about for three transgressions of Damascus, I bet there was a hearty amen about those in Damascus. Verse 6 talks about Gaza. Verse 9 talks about Tyre. Verse 11 talks about Edom. Verse 13 talks about Ammon. Chapter 2, verse 1 talks about Moab. I can just imagine that the amen's in the crowd began to get a little bit louder. "That's right, call them out, Amos, for they have sinned!" And then he hits what I call a Pentecostal moment. I mean, the hankies came out and people started taking laps. In chapter 2, verse 4, he says for three transgressions of Judah. Oh, they may be of the Israelite people but they're on the other side of the tracks. They worship in a different building. They have different prophets. They do things differently. They have different rulers. "That's right, Amos, call them out!"

Ah, but then we see what happens. Look at verse 6, "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel." Now I don't know exactly what was said that day but I have a funny feeling it was somewhere to, "What? What do you mean, us? We're not the Edomites. We're not those people. We're not on the other side of the tracks. We're the ones that are okay." You see, the reason that we end up in this famine, the how-to, so to speak, it always begins with arrogance. It always begins with this mentality that we're better than, that we know what we're doing. "We got this, God." You do realize it's that same arrogance that God has kicked out of the garden of Eden, right? "We know what we're doing. We don't need your instruction. We're good." What happened in the northern kingdom, which by the way incidentally was taken captive a long time before the southern kingdom of Judah, is they believed that they were righteous in their own eyes and thus that made them righteous in God's eyes. They were arrogant about who they were and that arrogance bled into chapter 4 where we see the abandonment of the things of God.

I want you to hear what Amos says to these Israelites in chapter 4, verse 4. This is an incredible accusation of abandoning the things of God because of their own personal arrogance, "Come to Bethel," by the way, that's where they worshiped, "Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years." Here's what he's saying to them: that even in your religious expression, you are steeped in sin. Why? Because you're not doing it God's way, you're doing it your way. That's why the Lord was so specific with the Pharisees when he talked about the traditions of men. He said, "You've got this heritage and this history of doing it a certain way but just because you like the way it's done doesn't mean it's ordained by God."

In fact, he picks up the steam a little bit in chapter 5. I want you to see verse 21 of chapter 5. Here is what the Lord says to the Israelites who showed up at all the right times, all the right places, and supposedly doing all the right things, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies." In other words, the Lord is telling them because of their arrogance, because of their self-sufficiency, they have abandoned the things of God. Oh, they are still meeting, they are still reciting, they are still collecting, they are still doing, the problem is they're just like the Laodiceans in Revelation 3, Jesus is on the outside knocking on the door saying, "Hey, y'all are having a service in there but it doesn't include me." That's what's happening in Israel during the days of Amos and

eventually you walk down that road enough, you actually become antagonistic to the things of God.

I want you to go over to chapter 7. I want you to hear what comes out of the mouth of the priest of Israel. This was the man who was established to be the one who would not only regulate but mediate the people of God to their God. Verse 10 of chapter 7 of Amos, "Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." In other words, our arrogance leads to an end abandonment which leads to an antagonism which says this, "How dare you tell us what God said. We've got our own traditions. We've got our own philosophies. We've got our own way of doing things."

Do you see the eerie similarity in our culture today? For you and I are now living in a world that is starting to sound like this. In fact, if you'll allow me to give you a little bit of history, we've been arrogant for a little over 100 years in this culture. We haven't had a major sweeping revival in this nation that any of you ever witnessed with your own eyes. It's been over 100 years since the awakenings and the movements of days gone by, but we're proud of who we are. We've abandoned the things of God. In fact, for the last few decades we've said it's more important – hear me clearly – it's more important what the courts say than what God says. That, my friends, is abandonment. But now, woo, here we go, it's antagonistic, for if you begin to say, "Well, this is what the Bible says," it's hate speech. You and I, congratulations – note my gift of sarcasm – we've become Israel. We've become Israel because we're telling the Amos's of the world, "Be quiet. Sit down. Shut up. You're not welcome here." In fact, we live in a world today that all they want to do is sit in a big circle, sing Kumbaya and pretend we don't have any problems. What did Amos say? "You've got some issues here and we need to deal with them."

Next question we need to ask is this: well, who is responsible? Y'all probably are going to enjoy the next five minutes but not the following two because allow me to lay the blame where it needs to be laid. I'm the person who can get away with saying this so I'm going to today. Do you know who the major proprietor of this problem is? The preachers. That's right. As the preachers go, so go the pews, as the pews go, so goes the culture. You saw it in their day. Notice that they had hired prophets that told them what they wanted to hear. They had priests that said, "Oh, it's not that big of a deal, let's just sing Kumbaya. It's all fine." You and I have become the same guilty party. In fact, Jeremiah, the one prophet who prophesied before the exile and during the exile, made this statement in chapter 3, he said, "If you want to know who's responsible, just lay it at the feet of the pastors, they're the ones." I'll go ahead and confess for us all, as a whole we, the pastors, the communicators supposedly of the words of God, have decided it was more important for you to be happy than for you to be holy. We've decided it is more important to have job security than sanctification. We have decided that it is more important to have a thriving media ministry than to one day stand before God with a clear conscience.

I have just laid the carpet out on those who day by day supposedly stand before the masses and say, "Thus saith the Lord," but I want you to see what Amos did here in chapter 7. He's a guy after my own heart. He doesn't pull any punches. In fact, in verse 14 here's what he says in chapter 7, he says, "Okay," he says, "If you're not going to hear what I have to say, then I'm going to go out with a blaze of glory here." He goes, "Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. Now therefore hear thou the word of the LORD: Thou sayest, Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac." Get ready for verse 17, "Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land." Let me tell you what verse 17 does: it does not get you a best-selling book or prime time on television. Your wife will be a harlot. Your kids are going to die. And I know what some of you are thinking, "That's offensive." Too bad. That's the consequence of sin and you and I have got to get to the point where we start crying mercy to God instead of justification before God. In other words, "God, this is how I feel. This is how I identify." I've got news for you, God doesn't care how you feel and he doesn't care how you identify. He's God, you're not, pay attention. The problem is they went into captivity. The gold turned dim. The scarlet turned to dung. And you and I say, "Ah, but we got this. We're smarter. We're better. We've evolved." Yeah, we've evolved all right. Have you watched the morning news lately? That's not evolution, that's de-evolution is what that is. As we begin to sink deeper and deeper into the mess, who's to blame? The preachers because they didn't say what Amos said. They didn't say, "I don't care how you feel, this is what is truth."

Here's the second person to blame, are you ready? You. You funded it. You showed up and you patted them on the back and said, "Atta boy, preacher, I feel better now." Now I've got some news about old Jeff Meyers here, I listen to a lot more sermons than you do, trust me, and I don't like to feel good after I listen to a sermon. I like to have my feet stomped on, my heart punched out, and my eyes plucked. I got an amen out of that, all right. I don't want somebody tell me, "Oh, you're just good, you're just fine, go down the road." I want somebody to say, "Hey, you're not who you think you are. Get it right." That's what Amos said. The problem is, and by the way I'm not taking shots at individual personalities, but nonetheless if the shoe fits, all we're told today is how we can have our best life. Do you know how your best life can be lived? Crying out to mercy to God and saying, "Forgive me, a sinner."

Last but not least, it's not specifically from Amos but when can you and I see this take place? I've already alluded to the fact that I believe we're seeing the birth pangs thereof and we are seeing some things happen in our life, they ultimately went into captivity so when does our day come? Well, there are two things that have to occur, one or the other. This is an either/or not a both/and, either A, the word of God has to become such that it's inaccessible, in other words you can't do the things of God if you don't know what his

words are. The book of 1 Samuel 3, there was a priest by the name of Eli who when the Lord called out to Samuel, he didn't know it was the Lord's voice because it says in verse 1 of 1 Samuel 3 that the vision of the Lord was rare and scarce in those days. And I know what some of you are thinking, "Well, we have multiple copies of the word of God. I've got three or four copies in my house, in my office. I've got it on my phone. I've got it on my tablet. I've got it on my computer, I even got it on my watch." Dare I remind you and I'm not a conspiracy theorist, all it takes is the wrong person and one push of the right button and you no longer have it on your phone, your watch or your tablet. Interesting, there was a book written years ago by Ray Bradbury entitled "Fahrenheit 451," the destruction of all the books of the world, dystopian literature, and yet do you know what the most sacred item was? A Bible. That was the most cherished item in that story. Lest you think that occur as well, 1984 and Big Brother, Brave New World and genetic engineering, how dare we get arrogant and say that wouldn't happen as well.

But you and I live in a world where we have access as of right now to multiple copies of the word of God but there is one thing that I do see happening fervently in our culture that makes me just a tad bit concerned, is notice what it said in Amos 8, they will go to and fro to hear the word of God. You know, Paul mentioned this in 2 Timothy 4 and he said in verse 3, "In the last days," he said, "they will seek teachers who itch their ears, tell them what they want to hear, tell them there's nothing wrong, tell them to keep going to Bethel in sin, it's okay." Now I know that Ephesians 4:11 and 12 says the Lord gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors, and some to be teachers, we don't have the time today to discuss when he says pastors and teachers, does that mean the same individual with both roles, are those two separate people, but for the sake of the discussion I want you to notice what Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:3, they will seek teachers who will itch their ears. You see, when you want your ears itched, you don't want a preacher. You see, a preacher says, "Thus saith the Lord." A teacher encourages you to learn on your own. By the way, I'm not anti-teacher, my wife is a teacher, my mom is a retired teacher, my mother-in-law is a retired teacher. I've had four beautiful years where I have not lived with the teacher. I'm for teachers. You say, "What do you mean those were beautiful years?" Have you ever seen the way they look at you? Every woman in my life gives me the look. I'm telling you, I can't get away from it.

But a preacher like Amos says, "I don't care how you feel. I don't care what you think. I don't care how you identify. This is what God said and you'll reap the consequences if you do not repent thereof." And you and I today are starving for those voices. They are hard to find. Why? They don't get the book deals. They don't get the large media ministries. They don't get the Learjets paid for. Most of them are in obscurity, in fact, some of them will pastor little churches called Ebenezer 9 right in the middle of nowhere. But they are out there just like Amos. Do you realize to hear this message, the Israelites had to hear from a guy who was from another country and he was only able to come one time. You and I today if there's one thing we need to hear when it comes to looking at our lives and the culture, we need to say, "God, have mercy on us. We have sinned," lest we fall in the same path as the Israelites.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, this morning we talked about mercy, we even talked about grace, we talked about collectively the culture, the community around us, but for just a brief moment let's talk about you in particular. Have you come to that place, have you come to that moment in life where you've cried out to God for mercy, confessing that you have sinned, you have strayed, you have betrayed his way, his will and his word, fallen on the proverbial sword of mercy, the person of Jesus Christ and asked him to forgive you? You know, the Bible says in Romans 10:13 whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Maybe you're that person today who needs to call on the Lord. Can I encourage you just to cry out. You don't have to cry out out loud, per se. You don't even have to use the same words or phrases that I might use but maybe your crying out to God would sound a little something like this. "God, today I confess that I am the guilty party. I am the one who has sinned. I am begging today for mercy through the person of Jesus Christ. God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to pay the price for my sins on his cross. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that when he rose from the dead three days later, he actually made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues and problems of life, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. The best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who had that conversation with the Lord. We'd love to celebrate with you. In just a moment, I'm going to pray over us, we're going to stand and sing. Can I just encourage you just to step out and come forward and let us celebrate what the Lord is doing in your life. Or maybe that decision has already been made and you need to follow in believer's baptism. Maybe that's already taken place and the Lord has said this is your family of faith, this is your church home. Or maybe you just need somebody to pray with you. Whatever the Lord is doing, we just want to celebrate with you at this time.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of our service, thank you that in the midst of hearing the truth of your word we recognize that you are a God who celebrates those who repent. Lord, you showed us in Luke 15 that if one person would turn to you, that all the angels in heaven would celebrate. So thank you, O God, that when we come to you out of our condemnation, we receive your celebration. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as Jimmy leads us, whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.