
Against Spiritual Comforts

Amos 6:1-14

Russ Kennedy

When was the last time you said, “Woe to you if you...”? This is generally not the way we talk unless we very deeply steeped in Lord of the Rings or some other form of Elvin folklore. So our text can seem encrusted with ancientness. It can feel a little like a movie we know is just a story. But this is Scripture. This is a prophet named Amos. This is his prophesying, his preaching. These are the people he is preaching to.

Thomas Gray once wrote, “Where ignorance is bliss, tis folly to be wise.” While Gray was talking about not telling children the deep trials and troubled insights of adults, how this statement speaks to the Jews of Amos' day and to our current climate. Ignorance of history, economics and the true aims and agenda of social justice has led to childish passions and deceitful arguments. In the face of that, being wise sometimes looks foolish. But this is entirely expected. The wisdom of God is counted to be foolish to the world.

After the Jews settled in the Promised Land, two generations of leaders guided them in the way of the Lord. But by the time the third generation came along, the people had turned to the idols of the nations around them (Jud. 2:10-15). God chastened them by allowing these nations to enslave Israel in their own land. But the message Amos had for the people was that they would have to leave their land and go into exile wherever the Assyrians sent them. It meant the end of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17:6ff).

The house of Israel is being called to hear a lamentation. This wail is not spelling out disasters which will fall upon others; it is a lament for themselves. Israel is spoken about here as though the nation is already dead. (Bentley,p.6)

Casual Indifference (v.1-3)

The prevailing attitude was of unconcern. Who cares? All will be ok.

“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,
and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria,
the notable men of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel comes!

² Pass over to Calneh, and see,
and from there go to Hamath the great;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
Are you better than these kingdoms?

Or is their territory greater than your territory,
³ O you who put far away the day of disaster
and bring near the seat of violence?

Their False Security (v.1)

Both the northern and southern kingdoms were indifferent toward God's Word and the judgment that hung over them. They called themselves "the foremost nation" (v. 1, NIV). They had an unwarranted false confidence because of their geography and their prosperity. They were at ease, casually ignoring what loomed over them.

Their False Superiority (v.2)

These are the people who think of themselves as being superior. They are the "notable men of the foremost nation." They have a very inflated view of themselves and their place in the world. So God gives them a dose of reality. Go look at the two cities Assyria has already captured. Are you better than them? Are you larger than them? Do you think somehow you will escape their fate?

Their False Safety (v.3)

They think they are safe. They don't think much about what Amos has been preaching. They don't listen. They don't ponder it. They think that they are safe and do not realize that their doom is on its way. Did not the judgment Amos warned them about in his preaching come upon them? How then do they think they will escape it as well?

Carnal Indulgence (v. 4 -7)

The next woe is pronounced upon their carnal indulgence.

⁴ "Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory
and stretch themselves out on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock
and calves from the midst of the stall,
⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp
and like David invent for themselves instruments of music,
⁶ who drink wine in bowls
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
⁷ Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile,
and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away."

Their Luxurious Lifestyle (v.4-6)

God indicts them for their wealth and extravagances. They have expensive furniture in their expensive homes. They eat the most expensive delicacies. They entertain themselves with their own music imagining that they were as good a musician as David was. Instead of drinking their wine from cups, they suck it down from bowls. They buy and indulge themselves in the most expensive oils and perfumes. Their lives were so opulent and self-focused.

Was all this wealth in and of itself sinful, wicked? No, for David and Solomon were wealthy beyond belief. What made this so wicked is that it was lived with

no thought for others. There was massive poverty and need around them. It is called the “ruin of Joseph”. The people had no chance to live as they did.

Their Impending Judgment (v.7)

They would be the first to go into captivity. As the rich and wealthy of the land, the Assyrians took them first into captivity and scattered throughout the empire. Their wealth and luxury were ended. The northern tribes including those in Samaria were decimated and scattered. Remember, those tribes living in the northern region of Palestine, never returned.

No wonder Jesus warned His followers, “Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:34-36)

It is difficult today to find people who are burdened about the sins of the nations in a Biblical way. They have a very narrow, culturally informed care about the sins of the church. Too many are like the rulers of Samaria or the members of the church of Laodicea, closing their eyes to reality and living on fantasy based on false theology.

The reality is that the world is wicked and under God’s judgment. So many have bought into the idea that the church is responsible to right the wrongs of the past by joining in alliances in the present. This has never been right. It has never worked well. Co-belligerency will always lead to compromise. To join with BLM and other Marxist organizations to march against injustice is misguided at best and simply a violation of 2 Corinthians 6:14-16:

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

That text has little to do with marriage or business partnerships. It has everything to do with partnering with unbelievers and unbelieving groups.

Condescending Insolence (v.8-14)

Why would anyone do this? How could someone just simply ignore the dire warnings of God's prophet?

Their Lofty Pride (v.8)

The Lord will bring Israel to being debased.

⁸ The Lord God has sworn by himself, declares the Lord, the God of hosts:
"I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds,
and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it."

Now we know how all this could happen. It happens today. National, cultural, ethnic, and religious *pride* all prevent a real hearing and heeding the preaching of God's Word.

Pride goes before a fall. Sometimes that fall is the natural result of what happens when pride keeps us from hearing what God is saying. But in this case, God rises up and takes an oath. He swears by Himself. He promises what He will do.

God hates pride. He hates not only the pride of our hearts, but also what pride builds. The strongholds and cities God will deliver and destroy were built by the pride and independence of Israel, or as Amos refers to them, Jacob. Jacob is the way God refers to Israel when He wants to remind them of how terrible they were. God uses the name to undermine their pride.

Their Devastating Price (v.9-11)

God will bring Israel to terrible destruction. This next paragraph is a bit hard to understand. But it is portraying how bad the invasion by Assyria will be.

⁹ And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. ¹⁰ And when one's relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of the house, "Is there still anyone with you?" he shall say, "No"; and he shall say, "Silence! We must not mention the name of the Lord."

¹¹ For behold, the Lord commands,
and the great house shall be struck down into fragments,
and the little house into bits.

Want to know what pride can bring? What is described does not come across in the English as it does in the Hebrew. The prophet gives an example of the kind of complete destruction that will come upon the people. The total humiliation of the Israelites will have reached the point that they cannot bury their dead. There are so many dead that they are cremating the dead. The cremating parties are going around from house to house to find the corpses.

Amos imagines a house where ten men are cowering in hiding. Amos announces, "They too will die". Later a relative arrives to deal with the dead by cremating them. He is giving a picture of the complete removal of Israel. The relative asks a neighbor, "Is anyone with you?". The neighbor tells him there is no one left in the

house. As this is a very solemn moment, the Lord's name must not pass anyone's lips. Everyone must be silent before the Lord.

Because the Lord has given the orders, no one will escape the judgement. Not only will all kinds of people be deported, but even their houses will be demolished, whether they are the great houses which were the pride of the wealthy, or the small houses of the poor. God will demolish the pride of both rich and poor. (Bentley, p.82-83).

Their Final Punishment (v.12-14)

God will bring Israel to great disgrace.

¹² Do horses run on rocks?
Does one plow there with oxen?
But you have turned justice into poison
and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood—
¹³ you who rejoice in Lo-debar,
who say, "Have we not by our own strength
captured Karnaim for ourselves?"

¹⁴ "For behold, I will raise up against you a nation,
O house of Israel," declares the Lord, the God of hosts;
"and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath
to the Brook of the Arabah."

Michael Bentley is very helpful when he writes:

Amos draws attention to the absurdity of the situation by asking two seemingly foolish questions. 'Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plough there with oxen?' Of course, no one would dream of making horses work on jagged rocky outcrops; the level field was the normal place of activity. Yet, by their actions, God's people were completely reversing the normal way of working. Instead of justice being a precious, longed-for commodity, by their selfish, uncaring actions they had turned it into poison. Not only was Israel's justice unfair, it was deadly. Instead of them producing wonderful fruits of righteousness, all that they achieved was bitterness.

The prophet piles on the irony even more strongly; these arrogant people did not give God the glory when they achieved military victories. Sarcastically, Amos points out that they rejoiced in the conquest of Lo Debar, saying, 'Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?' (v. 13). (Bentley, p.83).

Why these towns? As often in Hebrew writings, the meaning of names is very important. These two towns have unusual names. Karnaim means 'horns'. Horns in Jewish thinking comes from the idea of the huge horns of a great bull. refers to one's strength, what one treasures. Lo Debar means 'nothing', but the nothing of emptiness, of a ruin. What a creative preacher! Amos was pointing out that their *strength* had had come to *nothing*. Their rich, lavish lifestyles were soon becoming

empty. Their carefully built and powerful fortresses would soon come to ruin. All that they treasured and trusted was... *nothing*.

Reflect and Respond

Amos was preaching to all of Israel, the sons of Jacob, the twelve tribes. As a people they had long denied and betrayed the Lord, their God. This was evident in their lifestyle, their luxury, their pride, their perversion of justice, their disregard for the poor and needy. God abhorred all of it. God promised to send judgment.

The church at large has not taken God seriously, nor heeded the many warnings given in the Scriptures. Their pride in what they considered to be their own achievements, their refusal to practical holiness, their embracing of the world's agendas in race, gender and social-justice, and their growing apostasy will lead to their downfall. The Lord means what He says. He would carry out his will.

As it has always been, one of our problems is the false teachers and false doctrine that infests Christendom. They are leading many astray. They are putting their stamp of approval on lifestyles that do not glorify God. They are examples of self-indulgent, self-focused living. They allow the world to pour them into its mold. They are more shaped by the world's wisdom than they are the Lord's wisdom. They import the world's evil ways of thinking in order to gain acceptance by the world. Most will prove to be false churches. Many will repent, I am sure. But the unbelieving church and her false teachers will come under the judgment of God. The true church will be chastened by God for her compromises. This is an Ecclesiastes world: so this will be how it will be until Jesus comes.

Till then, we need to give heed to some important New Testament texts. These are important for they are the Apostles' similar warnings

These words from James 4:13-5:6 (NLT) were written to the church, about the church to correct the church.

Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog – it's here a little while, then it's gone. What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. For listen! Hear the cries of the field

workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter. You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you.

Peter, in 2 Peter 2:1-3 (NLT) warned about the false teachers who already were in the church and would be a problem for the church down through the ages.

But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.

Paul, in Hebrews 12:1-11 (NLT) reminded us that God's people, if they are true believers, genuine sons and daughters, that God our loving Father will chasten, will discipline us.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."

As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?

For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening — it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

May God grant that we will listen, that we will change, that we will respond to God's chastening so that the peaceful harvest of a life pleasing to God will be ours.