

PROPHECY: NOT A DIRTY WORD

Amos 7:7-15

Intro

This morning's passage is the classic example of scripture that, unless you're willing to do a little research, is incredibly tough to figure out. So here's a little lesson on what we are about to hear.

The words and actions of the prophet Amos, as they are collected in this book, is close to, if not the oldest book in the Old Testament. Amos delivered the message of God in the mid-eighth century BC at a time when, politically and militarily, things were going really well, for the northern kingdom of Israel. Her enemies had either discontinued their attacks due to internal political unrest (as was the case with Assyria) or had been beaten (this was what happened with Syria). Israel (as well as the neighbor to the south in Judah) had seen her borders balloon to a size that had people thinking of the glory days of Solomon when Israel and Judah were actually unified.

Life was good.

However, in the midst of this prosperity, the king of Israel, Jeroboam II, allowed worship of idols to pour into the mainstream to the point that worship of God was something that was scoffed at as a tradition of a bygone era. The priest whose name you will hear in a moment, Amaziah, shows just how true this assertion is, as he is a priest of the false cultic gods.

When Amos begins to offer the message of God Almighty, he speaks against the kingdom of Israel, its king Jeroboam, and its religion, as led by Amaziah.

Very simply, God is about to level these disloyal people. When you hear the talk of the plumb line, that is what is being spoken of.

Now mind you, Amos is not a powerful and well-connected individual within the power structure of the nation of which he is a part. He is, as we are about to hear, somebody who makes a living working paycheck to paycheck as a shepherd, or a farm hand depending on the season. I want you to think about that and then compare and contrast it with how you view yourself and what you are able to do in the context of making the will of God known to the world today. The scripture reads this way.

Amos 7:7-15

⁷This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; ⁹the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

¹⁰Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words.

¹¹For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.' "

¹²And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; ¹³but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a

temple of the kingdom.”

¹⁴Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

‘Prophesy: Not a Dirty Word’

Prophesy is one of those biblical words that hear and immediately a switch is flipped that says, “this is not something that I need to worry about. I am not a prophet.”

If you’ve recognized this in yourself, I don’t blame you.

The way that we hear the roll of the prophet in the scriptures, it sounds like a job that is limited to people who are “clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around [their] waist, and eat locusts and wild honey” (as is the description of John the Baptist in the 1st chapter of Mark). We’re thinking that someone who prophesies either lives out in the wilderness, or at the very least is considered somewhat secluded from society in general. Everything that we picture in regards to the prophet is contrary to who we view ourselves to be.

And as for prophesying?

Well, it might as well be kryptonite to our superman, because we back away from it as quickly as we possibly can, stumbling over ourselves in our haste.

Now all of this may be absolutely true. But what I am here to say this morning is that prophesy is not a dirty word. It is not something that we should run away from like the plague.

In fact, it is something that all of us, whether we know it or acknowledge it or not, are already taking part in. And if you think that I’ve completely lost it with that statement, I can actually prove it by having you answer just a few quick rhetorical questions.

To begin with, how many of you have ever prayed, or taken part in a prayer that was offered out in public? How many of you have ever told someone that you are a Christian? How many of you have ever said to someone that you go to church, or made reference to the church that you are a part of? How many of you have ever gone to church? If you have done any of these things, *any of them*, then you are, by definition, a prophet. And what does a prophet do? Prophesies.

A prophet is “a person who serves as a channel of communications between the human and divine worlds”¹ and if you answered ‘yes’ to any of those questions then you are saying to the world around you that God exists and is important in your life. Even just showing up here this morning says to the neighbors who watched you leave, and the people who see this parking lot start to fill up that there is a presence that is so important in your life that you are willing to leave your home on a Sunday morning. What you do is an example of prophesying to the world and saying that God is alive and well and most definitely needed. You are a prophet, engaged in prophesying to the world.

Is it the same way as was felt in the days of John the Baptist, or for that matter Amos? No, certainly not.

¹ Harper Collins Bible Dictionary; Paul J. Achtemeier, editor: pg. 884. 1996.

But you are engaged in prophesy.

This is what we hear Amos saying to Amaziah when he says, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"

Now some of you may be saying to yourselves, "but even Amos says that he is 'not a prophet'. If he's 'not a prophet' then how could I possibly be one?"

Very simply, what Amos is saying is that he does not descend from a family of prophets nor make his living by prophesying whenever he is called upon by a ruler of the land (as was the case with many individuals who were referred to as 'prophets').

No, Amos is instead a run-of-the-mill joe, who works hard for a living. He has felt the call of God to speak the message of impending judgment and therefore he is out there 'prophesying' to the people. Amos is not a prophet because he wants to be one.

Instead, he is a prophet because God wants him to be one.

And yes, this absolutely ties into the conversation that we started last week when we asked the question of what do we show and share. So again, what are we showing and sharing?

Beginning tomorrow morning we are going to have 80+ people moving in and around the church facility (just a reminder, that's when Vacation Bible School kicks off). We are going to have just shy of 50 campers and 30 or so volunteers. It's going to be fun. It's going to be loud. It's going to be of God.

The reason that I bring this up is because there are more than a few of those children who do not attend church on a regular basis. AKA: many of the families have no connection to a community of faith...except through their children whom they are trusting in our very capable hands for a week. Which means that when those parents, when those families drop off their kids in the morning and pick up their kids in the afternoon they are going to have the opportunity to maybe hear some of the promises of God, but more importantly see and hear how their kids are hearing those promises of God. Those 30+ volunteers become prophets who are serving as a channel between the human and divine worlds.

Some of you who are those volunteers might be thinking, 'whoa, that is not what I signed up for! I thought I was putting goldfish in a cup! I thought I was just helping to take care of kids for a few hours.'

Alright, just for a second, I am speaking to the folks who are going to serve as one of those volunteers: one of the positives about a setting like VBS and the way that we have been led to host it, is that you realize that you are not alone in that responsibility, and that, much like Amos was able to say in the passage this morning, it doesn't matter what your job is, what your age is, where you live. It doesn't matter. You now have a responsibility to go and prophesy, through your actions, your words, your very being. In taking part in helping to lead VBS you have become a prophet of the Lord showing and sharing that the God of all is alive and well in the world, even today, even with those folks who might not have a community of faith. Go and prophesy.

The thing is, this message of responsibility, to go and prophesy, is not just for those 30. If you thought that you were off the hook, sorry, you're not. You too have been called.

Now I know that I use that phrase "being called" a whole lot, and that almost every time I use it, I leave it open ended.

However today I've got a specific for you.

As you go about your normal business of life, I want you to pray for your fellow prophets who will be serving at VBS. Take the sheet that is in the morning bulletin and take it with you. Take it with you to work and put it in a spot where you and others can see it; put it on the refrigerator so that everyone in your family can see it; tape it to the dash of your car so that as people walk by your car they will wonder what in the world is stuck there; put it in your wallet so that it falls out every time you reach in for money or a credit card.

And this is a reality that the church (you know, you and I), need to be ridiculously intentional about, because I don't know if you have noticed, but most folks out in our world think that church and God really don't matter, let alone affect their lives...at all. Why do you think that is? Could it be because too many of us, too much of the time, are unwilling to show and share the presence of God with those who are around us? People are more than willing to follow (our current President, anyone?). But we have to show the world not only that it matters, but why it matters: 'do you want to have a better life? Come and meet Jesus with me'.

So take the sheet, not only to remind yourself to pray for those who are actively serving as prophets, but to show and share to the world why God being alive matters. Once again, it doesn't matter what your job is, what your age is, where you live. You are a prophet of the living God and in your words and actions you will be able to declare to all that the living God is moving in the world today.

Prophesy is not a dirty word. The more you take an active part in it, the more you will realize just how correct I am. Let us share the truth of God with the world. Let's show them why God matters...one person at a time.

After Sermon Prayer

O holy God, prophesying is something that we look at in the scriptures and think is for someone else. However, when we begin to realize what a prophet really is, we begin to see that prophesying, declaring Your divine message to the world, is something that all of us need to take part in. We pray that we are able to do this in specific as we pray for our volunteers so that they are able to feel our support, and the world is able to know the truth that they are going to live out through their service at VBS. Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.