Amos: True Worship - Amos 9:1-10

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Date: 27 August 2023

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[0:00] Well, one of my favorite things is when you feel like you come up ready to preach and the sermon has already been preached through song, through prayer of confession, through a prayer of thanksgiving. And I can already say a lot of what you're going to hear today out of God's Word has already been preached to you through those modes. But now we get to hear it straight, direct from God's Word. So I want to just open by reminding everybody and telling everyone back to childhood memories. What I'm making specifically is the game hide and seek. Now, I grew up in a family of seven kids. Hide and seek was a staple on our two-acre property, big home, lots of rooms. I can tell you who the best hider was in our family. My little sister, her name is Amanda. Let me tell you, she's the youngest of the seven. We would play hide and seek and Amanda would hide for over an hour and no one would find her. The game was over. We're done. We've moved on and Amanda's still hiding. And then finally someone says, look, it's Amanda. He goes, no one found me.

Yeah, we finished the game. Everyone got found. Here's the thing about hide and seek. It's fun and thrilling as hide and seek can be. Today we're going to see a passage that puts God's people in a position of hiding from God. And when God goes to seek his people who are trying to hide, it's not a pre-site. So we're going to see this morning that God's justice cannot be outrun. God's dust justice cannot be hidden from. But I guarantee you, I promise you, that by the end of this morning and this message, we will be encouraged with a lot of hope, but also called to action as we repent in love of our Savior. So look with me at Amos 9 verse 1.

We'll start with verse 1. We're going to see this theme of God's justice not being able to be outrun through this entire passage. So let's look first at the first line of the chapter. It says this, I saw the Lord standing beside the altar and he said, and before we look at what God actually says, which is the bulk of the material this morning, I want us to just pause and envision God standing beside an altar. This is the final vision of five visions given to Amos. And this is the final vision in terms of not just a number, but it's also the final vision in terms of the end of Israel's chance to repent. And in this vision, the Lord stands beside the altar. Now this altar might be calling Israel back to recognize the altar that they worship on and they offer their sacrifices on to be made right with God, or it may be God standing metaphorically next to the altar at Bethel, which has been hijacked by false teachers, false rulers, and false worship.

Regardless, God stands next to the altar, the place where God's people have been commanded to come and seek community, fellowship, forgiveness, and right relationship with God. And now God stands at that same place and says, now from this place where you were supposed to be right with me, I will bring my judgment. And here's what the Lord says. We're going to read verse one to four. Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake and shatter them on the heads of all the people, and those who are left of them, I will kill with the sword. Not one of them shall flee away, not one of them shall escape. If they dig into sheol from there, shall my hand take them.

[4:12] If they climb up to heaven from there, I will bring them down. If they hide themselves at the top of Carmel from there, I will search them out and take them. And if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent and it shall bite them. And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword and it shall kill them.

And I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good. Let me offer to us this is one of the darkest and scariest texts in the entire Bible.

Why is that? Because it is shouting to anyone who will listen that God's judgment cannot be outrun. And this is especially true in the nation of Israel at this time. We've already seen over eight chapters how Israel's been warned. They've been called to repentance. Amos has spoke boldly about sin and the offensive sin against God and God's inability and frankly, not willingness to tolerate sin. And now we reach the point of no return. There's two main realities here about God's judgment in these

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four verses. First, God's judgment of sin is total. It's not partial. It's total.
If you look at the images we're given, it says from the top of the pillars to the bottom of the threshold in verse one, shake and strike the capitals, which capitals is another word here for the top of a pillar. You think of a pillar and you see the beautiful ornate top of a pillar.
[6:06] That's the capital. Here's what God's saying. Strike and shake the pillars from the capital all the way down to the threshold. Every part of the pillar that holds up all of your buildings, shake it completely, totally. But not just this. It says that the building rubble will crush all of the heads of the people in verse one, all of them. Another final term. And then, and those who are left of them, I will kill with the sword. None shall flee away. Not one of them shall escape. The finality of God's judgment against wickedness. There is no escape. But here's what's fascinating about this first verse. God's promising a judgment to come. Yes, Israel will go into exile, but here's what we also know. At the beginning of the book of Amos in verse one of chapter one, it talks about how Amos, this story, can go into Israel, takes place two years before a massive earthquake that is chronicled across cultures of the world. And it seems by every indication that

God uses, even causes this earthquake to happen that destroys the buildings in the city of Bethel and beyond. But not just as God's judgment of sin total. Second thing we see in verse two to four is God's judgment of sin is inescapable. There are five methods of escape that God convicts the people of. He uses imagery here to convey what people do. Specifically Israel here, but I think these also convey images of what we all do to escape sin. And there's five images. The first one dig down into death. He says if they dig into shul, the dwelling place of the dead, if they dig into shul, from there my hand shall take them. But then secondly, if they climb up to heaven from there, we'll bring them down. And these first two images are largely metaphoric.
They're largely spiritual. It is possible that to dig down into shul is a euphemism for death itself won't save you from my judgment. One commentator even said there are hints of suicidal ideation in this thought. But then secondly, climb up to heaven. Well, this one seems better, right?
If they try to ascend to heaven and reach the highest of highs, images of the tower of Babel come to mind where the people build a tower and in their hubris, they say, let us make a name for ourselves. We can attain to that high heavenly reality. Spiritual enlightenment, karma, even religion, baseless as it is, may be implied by climbing to heaven. But the next two methods are less metaphoric and more literal, the more earthly. The next one is in verse three, if they hide themselves in the top of karma, from there I will search not and take them. And then also, if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent and it shall bite them. Even literal fleeing on this earth will not escape the judgment of God. If you hide on the top of a mountain or you hide deep in the darkness of the deepest ocean, God will find you there. What's fascinating is the first four attempts to escape God's judgment are active, meaning that the people who are wicked and evil, who want to avoid God's judgment, they actively pursue any and all routes to escape God's judgment. But the fifth one is fascinating. Look at me in verse four, and if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword and it shall kill them. The fifth one is passive.
[10:30] Even in wickedness, if you are taken against your will into captivity, into exile, I'm still going to judge you. In fact, this is the method that God uses primarily in this context.

So what are we learning here? What are we seeing here? That for God, justice must come. And as hard as that reality is for us to stomach at times, the gospel is so good because this is so true. Our sin, our rebellion against God and our rebellion against one another, His code of living, His holiness, His standards, His righteousness, our rebellion against that in the heart and outwardly expressed through the hand, feet, mind, body.
It screams of godlessness and pride. And here's what God is teaching us in this passage. Every escape route to judgment is blocked off.
For much of my life I viewed my sin as, you know what? I'm on a highway and I can just take an exit if I don't want to deal with God. Well, that exit's blocked off. I'm going to take this exit. That one's blocked off. And after doing this throughout many, many, many years, God finally got me to realize this highway you're on, it only leads to me. And I will have my judgment.
Now, I've kept fish for many years. I've currently have a fish tank, but I've kept fish for many years. And let me tell you, there are times when you have to go in, you have to get fish out. Maybe you're selling one, maybe you're quarantining one, maybe one is sick and you want to treat it, whatever it is. So you grab your net and you get your fish tank and you begin to grab your fish and hunt it down and they swim everywhere. Anybody have fish?

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[12:45] This is what happens though. The fish just keeps swimming around. And eventually it'll get underneath the castle and then you lift the castle up and try to grab it and then it swims again. It goes behind a bush. It keeps on running and keeps on running. But what is the reality of the fish tank? There's only so many places to hide because it's a contained tank. And yet God brought this image to mind of me trying to catch a fish. I've always got my fish, by the way. One did jump out of the tank, but still got them. But the reality is this is the image that we're given here. Israel is given. We should be cautious of is this, that we're like in a fish tank. And God and all of his sovereignty and all of his power and all of his authority over all of creation, there's no star, there's no galaxy, there's no tree, there's no cave, there's no castle to hide under, which God is not sovereign over. And he stands above the tank and we think we can escape. It's a sobering picture. But I want to read to us a passage that hopefully will allow us to connect ourselves in this truth and this reality as well. In Romans chapter two, Paul uses a very similar image to convict the hearts of the hearers that they may see their sin, recognize the judgment to come and recognize their inability to escape God. He says this in Romans two, therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges for in passing judgment on one another, you condemn yourself because you the judge practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Or do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your heart and impotent heart, impotent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. So Paul is saying we're like vessels in every sin, every day, every month that passes more and more wrath gets put in that vessel. And there will be a day that that vessel is taken by God and poured out on us. And that is not going to be a good day. I would offer to you that that day will be like God taking us, bringing us down from the mountain, sending a serpent to bite us, a sword to kill us. That's the picture of God's wrath. It is the final moment for the sinner. And the question I have to ask us, because I had to ask myself this at one point, if you do not know Jesus, and if you have not tasted of God's goodness in salvation and in grace and in mercy that he freely offers, I have to ask this question, do you suppose that you will escape the judgment of God? I once thought this, we hide God finds, we seek escape, God executes judgment.
Don't play hide and seek with the God of the universe verse, it will not end well. Adam and Eve found this out immediately upon sinning. Next, let's look at verse five and six. After the sobering indictment of the one that hides and seeks to avoid God's judgment, here's what we see next. We see God giving his credibility as the one who is rightful in exercising judgment. And here's what he says in verse five and six, the Lord, the God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts and all who dwell in it mourn and all of it rises like the Nile and sinks again like the Nile of Egypt, who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth. The Lord is his name.
Who is our God? He's the God who dwells in upper chambers in the heavens. A picture of God's transcendence above the earth, above all that we know, a picture of God standing in sovereignty and power and in might and as he stands and he sits in his throne in the heavens, all things are under the earth's control. And there's a picture that is suggested here again of earthquake.
It says that God when he touches the earth, it melts. Now the word melts here, I would say, is better translated as shakes or waves back and forth. The earth will shake when he touches it.
[18:12] And then it also says that the earth, he used a picture of water in the Nile, but it's actually the earth that he's referencing. The earth will rise like the Nile and sink again. The picture of mighty, mighty earth displacement. And it is very likely that God used a literal earthquake by his hand to level Bethel, the city of wickedness, which leads us to verse seven and eight.

Now, Jay, you get the passage next week and we're all looking forward to the last five verses of this book. But man, there is a little glimmer of sunlight that just flashes through these 10 verses.
So I hope you're ready. Here it is. Are you not like the Kushites to me, O people of Israel, declares the Lord, did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt and the Philistines from Cathdor and the Syrians from Kerr, behold, the eyes of the Lord are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground. Where's the glimmer? That sounds really, really bad. Ready? Except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, declares the Lord.

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This is the God of all promise. This is the God who is covenanted with his people, to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to the whole nation of those who call themselves God's people and live holy according to his standard and pledge themselves to him. And he says, and amidst all of this judgment, he says this, but I won't utterly destroy the house of Jacob, because I have promised that I will be faithful to my people, even amidst judgment.
And he talks about the Kushites here and the Philistines and the Syrians. What is this? The Kushites are a distant, irrelevant nation to Israel at this time. So God's saying, pfft, you, Israel, you're like the Kushites. This would have been sobering. Were you promised people the Kushites? They're nobody's. Then he says this, didn't I bring you up out of Egypt? Remember your redemptive identity? I did that for you because I love you and you are my people? He says, yeah, but I also brought up the Philistines from Qaftor. I also brought up the Syrians from Kerr. In other words, what God is doing here is not saying that his people are no longer special. He's no longer their covenant God, but now what God is doing is he's reminding them, he's showing them, just because you're my people, it doesn't mean that you get special privilege to not be judged for sin. The nations of the earth, I control them all. I control you as well. And then he doubles down with verse 8, behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it, but I want you to notice something. There seems to be a comparison that God is making between two parties. The sinful kingdom, what's a sinful kingdom? It's made up of sinful people, the sinful kingdom of Israel, and then there's a distinction here, and the house of Jacob, the remnant, the faithful among that kingdom. He's making a distinction. The sinful people, they will be judged, but the remnant, [21:55] I will hold. And then we have verse 9 and 10, which says this, for behold, I will command and shake, there's the word again, the house of Israel among all the nations, as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall to the earth, and all the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, disaster shall not overtake or meet us. Now the point of a sieve in our day is to put noodles in and shake the water up, maybe use it for something else, but the largely the point of a sieve in the ancient Near East culture was to separate grain from chaff, husks, and rocks, big large sieves, and they would put the grain in, shake it around, beat it, and what would fall through would be the grain, and what would be left is the bigger pieces that you throw out, the husks, the stocks, pieces that don't go through, but also pebbles as you pull up grain and put it in. Here's the illustration,

God will put the entire people of Israel into a metaphorical sieve, and he will hold the sieve, and he will shake it violently to separate the grain from that which is worthless, and he compares the sinful nation to a stone or a pebble. That pebble won't go through, it will stay in the sieve, and just like they would do in that culture, God will take and he will throw out in judgment. Every pebble is caught, there is no escape from punishment, which again illustrates the big point here from God, which is God's judgment cannot be outrun.
But is that it? Is that it? Is that all we have for this morning? No. No. I am so grateful that in God's judgment there is abundant mercy.
Who is the one that suffers death and destruction in God's hand? Well, it's the sinful kingdom, and it's the sinners. He makes that clear in those last few verses. He makes a distinction between the sinful and the faithful, the house of Jacob. But now we have to ask the question, who is the one who suffers death and destruction at God's hand?
Is it the sinner? Yes. But for you and I who are redeemed and washed and have a new identity as God's children, we can answer this question a little differently, can't we? Who is the one who suffers death and destruction at God's hand? It's Jesus Christ. And through repentance and faith, as Joshua was saying earlier, sinners can become saints. But not because God has removed His judgment, but because God has placed His judgment rightfully so on our sin, but instead that sin is paid for through Jesus. The Messiah promised to come and deliver God's people, the one who fulfills all of the promises of God, that God would give us a new heart. He would fill us with His Spirit. He would cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He would cleanse us with the blood of His own, a King who will reign forever. Jesus Christ.
[25:39] Through a believing remnant, God's promises to His people to give them a land, a people, blessing, an eternal King. Jesus fulfills these completely. And brothers and sisters, through the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, we too can be considered saints and avoid the judgment that leads to death. We can escape judgment, but not by our power, not by our cleverness, but through God's mercy to cast it on His Son.

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One offered to us that God's power and presence are a blessing to the saint, but a curse to the sinner. God's power and presence are a blessing to the saint and a curse to the sinner. The most terrifying element of God's omnipresence, His ability, His presence in every part of everything, God's omnipresence, the most terrifying element of that is also the most wonderful.
For the sinner, God's judgment will always find them, but for the saint, God's favor will always find them. The relationship has changed no longer am I a child of wrath that God seeks out to hold accountable for sin, but now I'm a child of God, His Son, His daughter, whom He loves and holds. This is why in Psalm 23, one of the most beloved Psalms, you see this incredible word, the very end of the Psalm, here's what David says, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days in my life. Now the word follow me can be even more specifically and more helpfully translated.
I would argue that the word follow here is to pursue, to chase or to hunt down. This is amazing. This is a promise for all of us to hold that goodness and mercy for the saint, for the one who has been washed by the blood of Christ and is in Jesus, goodness and mercy shall chase you down wherever you go. The relationship has changed. So I want to end by saying yes, God's justice cannot be outrun for the sinner, but also God's love can be outrun for the sinner. And I want to end by saying yes, God's justice cannot be outrun for the sinner, but also God's love cannot be outrun for the saint. I'm going to read this to finish Psalm 139, 1-12. Oh Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up, You discern my thoughts from afar. You search me out, my path and my lying down are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my hand, you hem me in. Behind and before you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful.
It is high. I cannot attain from it. Listen to this. Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed and show, you are there. If I take my wings in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me. Let's pray. God, we love you.
[29:07] Let me thank you that we are not in condemnation. We're not sitting under your judgment, Lord, but that through Jesus that payment of sin has been paid. That there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, but only favor, love, blessing, forgiveness at the cross. May we seek you, serve you, follow you all of our days in response to the great love by which you have loved us. Let me pray. Amen.

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