

Amos 7:1-8:3

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[0 : 0 0] We have been working through this Old Testament book called Amos, and it's very serious, isn't it? It's a very heavy book, and I suspect some of you are a bit tired of Amos.

I hope not. I hope not. I am really grateful that there is this little book in the Bible that tells us that God is really committed to us, so committed to us that He won't put up with superficiality.

He won't put up with complacency. He won't put up with hypocrisy. He won't put up with it because He wants a real relationship with us. Because He wants a real relationship with us, He warns us.

Now, let's get straight into chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8. You heard it read, and you can see something a little bit different is going on this week. Up until now, it's mostly been Amos delivering these kind of short sermons, but here, half the passage is Amos receiving visions from God, very serious visions about judgment.

And the other half is this little story about a temple priest telling Amos to go home. Okay, so what's the big idea? I think it's this.

[1 : 1 6] It's about how people respond to the Word of God. About how people respond to the words of God, particularly these hard words of God.

You have these two main human characters, Amos and Amaziah, who respond very differently to God's Word. Let's have a think about these two main characters just for a moment.

We have Amos. We don't know tons about him, but from verse 14, we know that he didn't come from his family line of pastors. He was a farm worker, a low-status farm worker who did something with trees periodically.

Amaziah, on the other hand, he's a professional priest. He's a company man. He's got the ear of power. He'd be like the dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, perhaps.

You know, he'd officiate the state funerals, he'd do the weddings of the members of the royal family. He was a privileged religious professional. So how do each of these guys react when God speaks a hard word?

[2 : 2 0] Good. We'll start with Amos. Chapter 7, verse 1. Amos receives his first vision. And we learned from last week that Amos, that Israel had become prideful and complacent.

And become uncaring. The great goal for their life was comfort. So God gives Amos a vision of judgment, and you can see it behind me there. The judgment takes the form of a locust invasion, destroying harvest, which in an agrarian calendar would have been devastating.

Now, up until this point in our sermon series, you could have got the wrong end of the stick when it comes to Amos. Perhaps you see him as just this fearless proclaimer.

He just kind of rolls into town. Just starts shouting, judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment. And then skips out of there. Not really engaging with what God says.

Just delivers it and just sort of moves on. But that's not him, is it? How does Amos respond to this vision he gets from God? How does he respond? He responds with prayer.

[3 : 29] Oh, Lord, please forgive. How can Jacob stand? He's so small. Jacob is another name for Israel.

Please forgive, Amos says. And there's such tenderness in this prayer as well, isn't there? Lord, they're so small, they won't be able to handle what you're bringing.

Verse 3, after Amos prays, it says, The Lord relented. The Lord pressed pause. He didn't bring this plan to pass.

God said, this locust thing, it won't happen. We see this again in verse 4. Verse 4, Amos receives another vision, a judgment of fire.

A fire that sweeps through the land. A fire so intense, so powerful, it vaporizes the water that it's around. And how does Amos react? How does he respond to this vision of judgment?

[4 : 30] Again, with prayer. Oh, Lord, please cease. Do you notice, he doesn't even ask the Lord to forgive them. Because these people, they're not going to repent anytime soon. Amos simply begs God, no.

No, please, please don't do this. Again, I hope you see, Amos is not some one-dimensional hellfire preacher. He's also a compassionate intercessor.

He prays for the people he is warning. Some in our world delight in bringing people down.

And we see this a lot, sort of, you know, on social media. Somebody does something dumb. It's the worst three minutes of their life, but somebody's filmed it. Goes viral.

Millions of people watch it. Their identity is released. Person gets fired from their job. And everyone piles on. You know the story. They become the most hated man in North America for a few minutes.

[5 : 30] People love it. Love it. Even in Christian circles, we can do this sometimes. You know, there's been a lot of celebrity pastor failures in the last few years.

People caught out doing stupid things. And when it happens, inevitably, in the news I know for my social media feed, I see, unfortunately, Christians celebrating it.

Finally. Never liked that guy. Always knew he was dodgy. Those mega churches with their issues, you know.

Finally some justice. Let me read Proverbs 24, 17, 18 to you. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls. And let not your heart be glad when he stumbles.

Lest the Lord see it and be displeased and turn his anger away from him. Do you see what it's saying? It's not messing around here. It's saying if we rejoice when the wicked fail, God will see it.

[6 : 32] And he'll be more angry with you than he is with the person who failed. When you gloat, you put yourself in a dangerous place spiritually. And if we have to speak about the failure of people and judgment on them, we should only ever do it with grief and mercy.

And we should never do it without praying for them. This is what Amos did. When the vision of judgment came, he wasn't, you know, punching the air in victory.

He was saying, finally, yes. No. He prays a begging prayer. It's not like he has much to stand on in terms of what Israel's been up to.

It's not like he can say, Lord, I think they've turned a corner. You know, I think they're going to turn this around. I think they'll do well shortly. Just give them some time. No, he just says, please, Lord. Please, Lord, no.

And again, the Lord says, okay, this won't happen. The fire thing, it won't happen. He delays his judgment. He exercises mercy and patience. And it's also a great reminder of how important our prayers are, isn't it?

[7 : 41] Folks, your prayers matter. God scoops them up. He accommodates them. He includes them in his plans for the world. So keep praying.

Let's move on. We've got a third vision here, verses 8 and 9. God shows Amos this picture of a plumb line being held up against the wall. So you know a plumb line? It's just basically a piece of string with a weight on the end.

It's used in the building industry. You hold it up like this. It's this incorruptible measure of straightness. And the plumb line in this vision is held up against a wall to see if a wall is straight and true.

And it isn't. And the wall, of course, represents the people of God who, like the wall, are crooked. And up until this point, God has been patient and merciful.

And through the ministry of Amos, he's been appealing to people again and again and again. But this time, God says, the mercy has ended. And now is the time for justice.

[8 : 45] Now is the time for judgment. And in the face of this word from God, Amos in humility accepts it. As a reminder of where we are in this sermon, we're talking about how Amos responds to these hard words from God.

And now we move to verse 10, the second half of chapter 7. We're jumping into this interesting little story. It's the conflict between the big shot priest, Amaziah, and Amos.

And here we see the comparison between how Amaziah responds to God's words and how Amos does. And I can sum it up pretty quickly for you.

Amos' response is, please, Lord, forgive. And Amaziah's response is, Amos, shut up. Like, just go away. Let's get into it.

How does Amaziah respond? Well, as we see, as we said before, Amaziah is an establishment man. He's a leading religious figure like much of the Western world. This idea of God, judgment on the world, it's just offensive.

[9 : 51] But Amos is causing some drama. He can't be ignored. So Amaziah goes to see the king. And he says this, Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. Which, as you know, Amaziah is very selective in what he tells the king.

He massages the message to make it as politically inflammatory as possible to get the result he wants.

Which is a tactic of many who are not friendly to faith. Our faith is often misrepresented in the media, isn't it? And you know this. Christians are sometimes represented as, at one end of the spectrum, in these dangerous, regressive, repressed zealots.

Over here, we're just these, sort of, you know, cheery, harmless idiots. But either way, our message is kind of misrepresented. Amos doesn't spend any time on that. He just gets on with the job.

He gets on with what God has for him to do, which is admirable, I think. It should be our approach. Back to my point. How does Amaziah respond to God's hard word? He misrepresents it for his own purposes.

[11 : 00] Moving on to verse 12 and 13. Amaziah says, look, just do your prophesying somewhere else, please. Go back to your homeland. You can eat well there.

The people in Judah will love you. Just go there and do your thing there. And then at the end, you see in verse 12, but never again prophesy in Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary. It is the temple of the kingdom.

You don't really belong here, Amos. This is the king's place. It's a sort of, how dare you come here?

How dare you? It's that kind of attitude. So Amaziah's response, in summary, is, you know, there's no humble engagement in what Amos has to say.

In fact, do you notice Amaziah doesn't even bring up the Lord? God doesn't come into it. It's just misrepresentation. It's rejection. It's condescension.

[12 : 04] Perhaps you've been public in your faith and this is the kind of response you've got. So how does Amos now, shifting gears slightly, how does Amos react to Amaziah's response?

What does Amos say to Amaziah after that? Verses 14 to 16. Well, he doubles down. Let me read it to you. Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, I'm no prophet, nor a prophet's son.

I'm just a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. That's him saying, look, you can, he's saying to Amaziah, look, you can talk down to me all you want. Who I am doesn't really matter.

I'm not really part of the equation here. I'm not here in my own authority. I'm just a guy God spoke to. And I'm just passing that on to you as I understand it.

There was a preacher in New Zealand I used to love to listen to. His name was Ian Grant. He was somewhat of a mentor to me. When he had to say something difficult in a sermon, he would preface it by saying this.

[13 : 10] He would say, look, I'm just a beggar telling another beggar where there's bread. Always like that picture. That's what we're doing. It's a lovely reminder, isn't it?

We don't have to be anyone special to pass the word of God on to others. We just have to be willing, it seems. And God does have a history of using unlikely people and empowering them for his work.

Now Amos, back to Amos. Amos, to the man who told him to shut up and leave, Amos delivers a devastating word. He says, your children will be lost in the coming war.

You'll be exiled in a foreign land and your wife in desperation will have to prostitute herself to survive financially. Amos, again, is not afraid to say difficult things to powerful people.

It's not about him. It's not about his authority. He's just a messenger. Okay, I'm going to wrap up here. We have been going through this little book of the Bible each week, and I know it has been judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment.

[14 : 15] And you've probably wondered, is there anything else to say about this topic? And chapter 7 says, yes, well, there's the very important issue of how you and I are going to respond, how we will respond to these words of judgment.

Will we respond like Amos? Will we respond like Amaziah? Let me summarize again and then pose that question to you finally.

What are the, at 40,000 feet, big picture now, what are the great biblical truths that Amos presents us with?

And now these. God delays his justice and his judgment. He exercises patience until he doesn't.

God speaks and speaks and warns and warns and warns until he acts on his warnings.

[15 : 32] And this God who speaks and warns does not want us to fall into fake Christianity. He does not want us to fall into nominalism or hypocrisy like Amaziah.

He doesn't want that to happen because he loves us. But all of us, every single human, is personally accountable to their creator, this book tells us.

And we know from the New Testament that God has appointed a judge, Jesus. And at some point we will face God. And there will be a final separation between those who have trusted Christ and those who haven't.

And that judgment will be definitive. It will be final. It will be eternal. And there is no way to get around that biblical truth. What does Amos do with that message?

What does he do with it? This hard word. Folks, he believes it. He speaks about it. He doesn't push it aside because it's unpleasant.

[16 : 39] But remember, he is not some cartoonish fire and brimstone guy, a bit too delighted in this. No. He speaks about it.

And he prays about it. And he prays for mercy. This is a great model for us. We pray for a lot of things in our life.

We pray for healing, I'm sure. We pray for joy. We pray for wisdom. Keep praying for those things. Let's also pray for those who are making unwise decisions in life, who are pushing God aside, who are hurting themselves, who are rejecting God, and therefore under God's judgment.

That's what Amos did with the message. That's what we should do with these hard words. What did Amaziah do? In his arrogance, in his desire not to rock the boat, in his desire to only sort of live in this comfortable mental space.

What did Amaziah do with it? He was condescending. He misrepresented it. And mostly, he just straight out rejected it. Now, I know that here, you guys, you are not going to go full Amaziah, right?

[17 : 54] But I wonder, after a month of studying this book, Sunday in, Sunday out, I wonder if a little bit of Amaziah starts to bubble to the surface.

What are we, week five now? And what would that look like? It would look like this. It would look like you sitting here, hearing the reading, and just going, Oh, goodness, no.

Not another sermon on judgment. Enough. It's summer. I want to think about nice things. You know. Folks, I hope that's not you.

I hope each week you are cut to the heart with the seriousness and the certainty of these words. I hope you pray about it. I hope you speak about it.

I hope you let others know that we are all accountable to our Creator, who warns and warns and warns, and offers mercy, mercy, mercy, until it's too late.

[19 : 02] And I hope, like Amaziah, we don't misrepresent this word, because it suits us, because it sits more comfortably with our modern sensibilities.

Let's not do that when it comes to the judgment of God. The stakes are just too high. And finally, I hope the salvation you enjoy now, because of Christ, is all the more precious to you, and all the more sweeter, as a result of hearing about God's justice.

Now, I want to give you a chance to think on that. And so we're going to have a short, musical reflection. It's quite a mournful piece.

And I think that's appropriate. So during this time, this is not a performance, during this time, would you bring your hearts to the Lord, and ask Him to speak to you. Amen.