

Amos 8:4-9:15 (AM)

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[0:00] For those of you who don't know me, my name is James Wagner. Thanks for the introduction of earlier Aaron. Especially for those of you who might be online, maybe those of you who are visiting from out of town, maybe even those of you who have been around for a couple of years, tend to float around at this service in the margins.

So while my ministry is in the margins, it's not marginal. It's pretty significant, I think. I do a lot of pastoral care with folks.

Beginning of life, end of life, in the middle of life, one-to-one stuff, group stuff. Interestingly enough, I love doing work around grief.

So that does mean grief groups, but also meeting with people. So one of my ideal days was on Thursday. In the morning, I met with someone whose relative died recently.

One o'clock and met with another family to prepare for the funeral tomorrow. And then I met with another person in the afternoon whose spouse died about three months ago.

[1:04] And then my last text with my beloved partner in ministry, Margaret Wilson, was to plan for a funeral, the date, that we would have planned that with the family later in the month.

That was a great day for me. It doesn't look like you would think that would be a great day, but what a privilege to be with you in that way.

And the reason that I say that is because we're going to look at a passage now. It's the last text in the sermon series, which is called The Lion's Roar. And there's just a lot of death and grief, but also a lot of grace and goodness of God in it, too.

So you might want to open up your Bible back to that page where Amos chapter 8 begins. And I could call this a sermon, The Lion's Hope.

The sermon series is The Lion's Roar. Some of you may remember that song, The Lion Sings Tonight. That was a terrible song. I don't recommend it.

[2:10] But if someone wants to write new words to that tune, that would be really a great redemption of that song. Anyway, let's look at chapter 8. I know we're going to be going to verse 4, which is read, but verse 1 is really important, too.

But let me ask you this. Some of my past will care with people. I'll ask them when they're facing adversity, what kind of image of God, picture, figure do you kind of relate to in your adversity? And when I do that, most people will say a shepherd, right, who leads us beside still waters. That was the most common. I don't ask this question anymore, but if I were to you, I wonder which one would come to your mind.

Would it be? What a friend we have in Jesus. Jesus is your friend. Most often or almost never would anyone say to me something like, well, God is a rock. Though there's lots of imagery in the Psalms and throughout the Bible that God is our rock.

He's also, of course, our lamb. No one ever says to me, he's my lion. Right? But in Amos, the lion roars. This is actually the picture or one of the pictures that's presented to us.

[3:12] Though when we come to the end of this sermon series, the last two chapters, prior to this, we've been given actually three of five pictures, visions.

Of course, they were the locust, the fire, and the plumb line. That was last week and the week before. Today, there are two other pictures that are given to us. This vision, which is also of judgment, but also of God's grace.

And the two are summer fruit and the Lord at his altar. So, that comprises chapter 8, verse 1, all the way through 9, chapter 10.

And then when we get to the end of that, chapter 11, the last five verses, we'll find that there's this great picture of hope. God's redemption. His love and flourishing for us.

So, this sermon is really very much actually about, well, death and life. So, let's turn to first these two visions.

[4 : 08] The first one is that of the summer fruit. I have to go back to verse 1, which wasn't read, so let me read that for us. This is what the Lord God showed me, Amos. Behold, a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what do you see?

And Amos said, a basket of summer fruit. That sounds really good and looks great, doesn't it? But it's not as great as it looks and sounds. It means, actually, that all good things are going to come to an end.

God's people have benefited from the generous gift of the Lord. But like the fruit of summer, God's patience doesn't last forever. I don't know if you knew that or not.

God's attributes do last forever, but there is a limit to his patience. And he's been really patient with his people. And, of course, summer fruit is sweet and it's juicy, but there isn't an endless supply of that, we all know.

God's people thought all is good, and they've kept the covenant with God because no disaster has come. Well, so long for the suffering of the Lord. It is going to come to an end like summer fruit.

[5 : 13] So why is this final judgment coming? Then we get an explanation of this, and one is actually oppression. Some, though not all of the people of God, trample the needy. If you look down with me at verse 4, you'll see that that's what Amos is actually expressing is happening.

There's this oppression. And it's not their indifference to those who have little, but it's actually their oppression of them. The poor are grounded into the earth, and they're brought to an end.

They're buried. That's what it's like for them. And death is dealt to them. And sadly and madly, some of God's people just can't wait to do this. No, not all of them, but some of them do.

In verse 5, that we learn some of God's people can't wait until the Sabbath is over to get on to their work. And some of you are here today worshiping. That's great. You're looking forward to work tomorrow, and you really like what's happening here, but not then.

And they're like, I can't wait until this thing is over that we're doing on Sabbath so we can get on with the rest of the week and press and push down the poor. That's what's going on for them.

[6 : 19] Interestingly enough, implicitly, this is a beautiful picture of a principle that comes to bear when it's related to our work. Good and glorious work proceeds from the rest and the peace that we have with God through worship.

Verses 5 and 6, the people of God don't value that rest and that peace that they have with God.

And after not keeping the Sabbath, though outwardly it looks like the error, but inwardly they're not.

They're not doing it in spirit and truth. They go to work to crush the poor. So the Lord is not going to permit this to go on indefinitely. So something of a bit of a takeaway for us is we leave from here after the rest and the peace and the word and the worship of the Lord.

We go into our life not to do what these people were doing then, but God noticed this. So that's the first thing. There's some oppression going on. There's also an outcome of this. It's kind of like a death dealing beginning in verse 4.

But ending in verse 10, this word end is there as well. Verse 10, we read, I will make in the mourning of an only son an end of it like a bitter day.

[7 : 26] Operative word here is end. There's the end at the beginning of verse 4. There's the end at the beginning of verse 10. Bringing the poor to an end, verse 4 is what it says.

So from start to finish, the section is really about death, mourning, and grief. And there's lots of death, mourning, and grief in this whole section. And it may sound like a bit of an overstatement, right?

But if you look down at verse 8, it says, everyone mourn who dwells in it. That is the land. Verse 10, I will turn your feasts into mourning. And it reminds me of Ecclesiastes, though I kind of want to reverse it, though.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3, verse 4 says, there was a time to weep and a time to laugh. Well, these people have had a time to laugh, and now there's a time to weep. It's coming. There's also a time to mourn and a time to dance, but they've been dancing, and the mourning is actually going to come.

The mourning, though, is the right response to the end, the end or death of what is good. And that's what's happening. And the people of God in Amos' time, in the reign of Uzziah, was good.

[8 : 34] It was beautiful. It was true. It looked like it was flourishing on the surface and prosperous. But they were taking that for granted. And God sees to it, then, that His people will mourn and

grieve for what they're about to lose.

Mourning is a gift from God. Given, even though it's a disturbing experience. We all know that. Things go sideways or sour or death is dealt.

It's so disturbing. No one likes to grieve because of the cause, but also the effect of it. But Jesus reminds us in the Sermon of the Mount that blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

In that, Jesus makes a promise for those who mourn their loss of relationship with God. And we admit our poverty of spirit, grieve over our sins.

The Lord comes and gives us His kingdom, salvation, His comfort. But that's the meaning of this vision of summer fruit. This relationship between God and His people that is at the end.

[9 : 38] Death. Something needs to change. That's what's going on. We're not finished with chapter 8, though. On then to verses 11 and 14. And just when it seemed like it was really hard, there is some other news to come about this related to the basket of fruit.

Amos' audience is far from grieving their sin against God. Verses 11 to 14. The vision then is developed further here. The end of summer fruit isn't just the season before autumn and winter. That's what we think of. Summer fruit. Well, okay. There's going to be autumn. There's going to be winter. There's going to be spring. And then it's going to be summer again. But that's something we find out in verse 11. We read, Behold, the days are coming when I will send a famine on the land. So, fall, winter, and spring are not something to look forward to because there's a famine that's coming. The reality and gravity hasn't actually hit them yet. But it's coming.

Okay? And it's very grave. Now, in our day when we hear famine now, we now have inserted a euphemism for that called food insecurity. It's a euphemism for famine.

[10 : 48] War and supply chains, though, in fact, growing, harvesting, distributing food, right, these days, has a real impact on our lives, our budgets, our livelihood, our survival. And I don't want to, though, and I think it's important that we don't minimize what it's like for other people who experience famines in the developing world.

But the greater threat here is, Amos wants us to know, is a different kind of famine. A famine of God's word. Notice the prophet's message.

Verse 12. He says, A famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Wow. He says, And then, after that, they shall run to and fro, verse 12, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.

They're going all over the place looking for the word of the Lord, as they should. Maybe. I was about to say, and maybe we should too, but maybe we shouldn't. Maybe we should stick right to actually where it's actually being proclaimed and respond to it with faith.

But what did they expect? I remember last week when Aaron was preaching, he told us about this relationship between the priest and the prophet. Right? And the priest said, you know, just get out of here.

[11 : 59] Kind of go back to your hometown and peddle this somewhere else. Preach this somewhere else. We don't want to hear this word of the Lord brought to us in this place. And so, the end of this is kind of a death of spirit-filled biblical preaching for God's people.

God lets his people know that if they don't listen here, then the end or outcome is silence. It's actually up in verse 3, but it's in this section here, these verses 11 to 14.

So, the Spirit of God who filled and sent the prophets, and the prophet Amos in this case, right, to God's people is actually grieved.

The word of truth, repentance, forgiveness, coming from God and his prophets and to his people was coming to an end.

Because the people wouldn't receive it. It's being sent, they wouldn't receive it, so they wouldn't hear it any longer because they wouldn't actually receive it. That's what's going on.

[13 : 06] So, friends, that's why we place such a high regard on preaching here at St. John's. That's why we place such a high regard on Bible study. That's why we put great emphasis on training our Tidzo interns to preach God's Word.

Because there can be a famine of the hearing of God's Word. Not only the sending of it, but just the hearing of it too. Which takes great humility and hunger on our part to receive that from God.

So, this is a summer fruit. It's the fourth vision. And now off to the fifth vision. It's the Lord at an altar. So, Amos sees the Lord now in this final vision.

Chapter 9, verse 1. And he says, I saw the Lord standing beside an altar. Just imagine that. Like Moses could only see the end of God just as he passed by. God fills his spirit in Solomon's period in the temple. And they see the glory of the Lord. And here's Amos who sees the Lord at the altar.

[14:10] Just imagine that. And Amos doesn't give us a snapshot or a photo with the Lord. He describes Israel trying to save themselves, but to no avail. Verse 1, though.

He warns them. They're going to die by the sword. This isn't the first time they've heard that. Verse 2 says 4. They're trying digging. They're climbing. They're hiding. They're doing everything to save themselves and get away from the Lord.

But even a serpent and a sword is actually going to come to them. It's the end of their days. And it's amazing at what lengths they and we will go to preserve ourselves and sometimes quite successfully.

Even for Christians, we can practice a kind of atheism, though, on the outside. Yeah, it looks like we're following the Lord. But we're doing things without him. But still, God's grace extends our life for a time that he only knows.

God's grace. These verses convey the greatness and the power of the Lord. In verse 5, he speaks of the impact of the Lord if he were to just touch the earth.

[15:12] We're reminded that if the Lord chose, just by putting his hand on it, it would melt. It's pretty astonishing when you think about the impact that we have on the earth. We couldn't actually do it like that, could we?

But ours is nothing compared to the power of the Lord to destroy, but also to deliver. So, destruction and death is in view.

It's still in the vision, yet there is grace right next to the grief of this vision. Look down at verse 8, chapter 9. It says, The eyes of the Lord of God are upon the sinful kingdom. He sees all.

He knows all. Never escapes. And I will destroy it from the surface of the ground. I'm going to destroy it. Full stop. Right? No. Not full stop. Accept. Operative word, accept.

That I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob. God's grace. Actually, in this judgment, there's more to come later, but here it is now. God is so gracious.

[16:11] So good to us. That's where our hope actually comes from. Humbly when we come to him, hungry for his word. This is God's grace. But here's the thing that's really important, that we can't presume God's grace.

Paul, in chapter 2, verse 4 of Romans says, 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? Do you presume? Do you presume? I used to say this to myself. Why should I just act and ask for forgiveness later? I know none of you have ever said anything like that. Right?

But that's presuming someone else's grace or God's grace. And so as we continue to read in verse 10, though, here's what Amos says. He warns the audience, Do not presume that disaster shall not overtake or meet us.

Because they're just saying, look, we're getting along fine. Everything's going okay. God's not actually going to judge. God's not actually going to do what he actually has said.

[17:17] But he says, don't presume that disaster shall not overtake or meet us. So this is the end of the vision of the summer basket and the Lord at the altar.

But that's not where the prophet ends, does he? So the last five verses then. This is what we've all been waiting for. Aaron's been doing amazing preaching. Others, too, about all this vision of judgment and the justice, really, of God.

And his mercy as well, which is actually right there with it. Highlights his mercy. But now here we are, these last five verses. The Lord's promise in verse 8 that he will not put to death Israel is not the final word of this.

That would be a great word. But there's also words of grace and hope here. The word of hope from God through Amos comes in verse 11 and verse 3, or the hint of it when he says, They, which begin with, in that day and the days are coming.

Not here yet, but they're coming. Even though there's so much drift, so much grief, so much loss, the Lord will not make that the end. There's life.

[18:27] There's hope. Priests and kings are failing God's people. They're falling short. They're not keeping the commandments and the covenants with God.

They may not want anything to do with God's word. However, that's not the last word or the end of the story. God specializes bringing from death life.

God makes the promise here, right? You can see it. I won't read all the verses. But to raise, repair, rebuild, restore his people. It's a work of hope based on God's word.

And this raising, he says, will come from, verse 11, the booth of David. And what does that mean? Now, there will be some kings that will come later that will be faithful to God.

Hints of what God actually wants from his people in responding to his word. But ultimately, right, he's just saying a king is going to come. This king is going to come through the line of David.

[19 : 30] David, the man after God's own heart, who couldn't pass his faith down reliably to his children. David's sons and offsprings couldn't remain faithful to the Lord. But someone will be raised up full of grace and truth.

Who's going to booth? Who's going to dwell? Who's going to abide with us? You know who that is, don't you? This points us in the direction of Jesus.

Only Jesus is the one who can fulfill this prophecy. He who identifies as the son of David will be the one who comes. It's only what Amos can imagine, but we actually know to be true.

This small piece of Israel is going to be preserved. And they're going to be prepared to receive the Lord. So, the way the rebuilding then in verse 11 and restoration in verse 4 will take place is not kind of magical.

But it's a messianic man-God. It's Christ Jesus who will come and he'll actually take the judgment that's pronounced in Amos in our place.

[20 : 41] He's going to receive that for us because we can't endure it ourselves. So that we can hear that word. We can see that work. Know that we're not saved by works, but by Jesus' work, his death on the cross in our place.

But it requires that we mourn our sin. That we hunger for his righteousness. And that we're humble for the goodness of God. And that's where our hope lies.

So, this is the end of the Lion Roars series. We've learned lots about the Lord from the prophet Amos.

Chapter 1, verse 3, 2, verse 1. I won't have you read it, but it's about God's righteous and he's good in all his ways. Most of chapter 4, a part of chapter 5, is that God is sovereign over all of creation.

Today, in verse 9, chapter 8, we learn that God is actually infinitely power in the midst of death. He can bring destruction, but he also brings deliverance.

[21 : 47] And also in chapter 9 here, God's presence is boundless. It's just boundless. Let me just re-read this for you.

It sounds like Psalm 139. He says, If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them. If they climb to the heavens, from there I will bring them down. If they hide themselves at the top of Carmel, from there I'll 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. Nowhere we can go apart from God's presence. It's a pretty scary thing if you're not keeping in step with him. But man, what a wonderful thing if you are.

There's nowhere that we go that he isn't with us. And he directs even the nations. Verse 7 today. So finally, when we hunger for God's word, including his judgment and his mercy, we'll see his justice. It'll inspire our corporate worship to be centered on his word. It'll impact our work day in and day out. When we leave gathered worship like this, it'll soften our hearts. It'll give us a lasting hope, not just for the children of God, but for all the nations of the world.

[22 : 59] And for all the nations that we policemen go away. Amen. Amen. Thank you.