

The Plumb Line Of Judgement 1

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[0 : 00] Now, I want to continue in the book of the prophet Amos, and so I would like, if you would, to have you turn to the prophet Amos, and I'll show you the parts that I want you to look at particularly as we go through.

And the prophet Amos begins, well, I'd like you to turn to page 808 to begin with. As I read over this book from day to day, I'm almost sorry that I got myself into the problem of preaching from Amos for the month of August, because so dreadful is the judgment that he brings on the people of Israel, so terrible is the pronouncement, that it is, I think, an embarrassment to present it to such nice people as you, not because I don't have very strong charitable instincts towards you, but you might take it to apply to one another, and that would be dreadful.

For instance, if you were to turn to chapter 4 and listen as Amos described, some women who were wealthy, aristocratic, culturally superior women, he describes them in chapter 4 in the most dreadful terms, when he says in verse 1 on page 808, Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are in the mountains of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, Bring that we may drink.

The Lord God has sworn by his holiness, that behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, like so much meat.

That's the terrible kind of judgment that Amos pronounces. And then if you want to see what he says to the distinguished men of the community, it's in chapter 6, verse 1.

[2 : 08] Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountains of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come, pass over to Kalna and see.

And then he describes the terrible things that are going to happen to them. And he describes the life of luxury of this country at a time when they were enjoying great prosperity.

And he pronounces another woe upon them in chapter 6 and verse 4, when he says, Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory and stretch themselves upon their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and, like David, invent for themselves instruments of music who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oil but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.

And so he describes this life in which they are totally careless about the reality of judgment which is coming upon them. And you see, the picture of judgment is that basket of summer fruit.

And the basket of summer fruit represents a people who have come to the point where they must be judged. If you were the farmer who grew that apple, it's today that you would bring it and say, Here it is.

[3 : 50] It's come to perfection. The day of harvest is here. Now, a church, presumably, as a group of people, must come to a point of maturity where they must face judgment.

An individual must come to a point of maturity where he must face judgment. Judgment is something that has to happen.

But while you look at the dreadful judgment that Amos brings on the people, let me remind you of this, that the very transcript of the book of Amos was preserved by the people against whom this judgment was spoken.

I visited a man who took me through his house and showed me the pictures of his notable ancestors and their considerable achievements.

And these family heirlooms had been passed down to him through all the years. So you and I are often in the position where we have our medals and our crests and our achievements and our diplomas across our walls to show what we've done.

[5 : 05] But this people, they went and preserved at great trouble and expense and pain the record of their failure and of their disobedience against God.

That's why we have the book of Amos. They kept this terrible indictment against themselves and preserved it from generation to generation.

And we are the, as the church, are the inheritors of this. That's why I, for one, I'm not really afraid of the kind of criticism that the church gets from the people outside the church.

Because the people outside the church don't know the problem and aren't nearly as eloquent as that criticism of the church which comes from the very scriptures which are at the center of the life of the church.

So you don't have to be afraid of how others might criticize the church because the most devastating criticism has been preserved in the scriptures and we have to live with it.

[6 : 15] And that's how the church has constantly to be renewed is by facing up to this judgment. So the thing that I want to contend for this morning is that judgment for each of us is a very, very important part of life.

It's something we all have to come up against. And I'm not saying that as something we unwillingly come up against. It's something that we are really going to demand that there must be judgment in our lives.

Now, nobody wants to live under the arbitrary judgment of his fellow man. Nobody wants to live under the arbitrary judgment of a crabby school teacher who wants you to fail anyway.

Nobody wants to live under the judgment of a miserly bank manager who thinks you're going to fail when you know you're going to succeed.

that we have these points of judgment all the way through our lives. And what happens is that in the course of our lives we face higher and higher judges.

[7 : 31] In other words, we keep appealing to a higher and higher court. At one time, we're satisfied to be judged as good little boys and girls by our mothers and fathers and then perhaps by our teachers and then perhaps by our peer group and then perhaps by our business associates.

And then we hope that the community as a whole will begin to recognize that the contribution we've made to the community and that they will judge us to be good citizens. But all that fails and we want some ultimate criterion of judgment which will really tell the truth about us and we don't really ultimately want to escape it.

So the fact that the Bible is full of judgment shouldn't really surprise us. You couldn't run the Olympic Games unless there were judges there to judge between the world's best and the world's second best and the world's third best.

Even though hundreds of a second might divide them, you want the judge there to say you are the winner. And we need judges in athletic events.

We need judges who are employed by ICBC to tell us that the other guy was at fault. And we want those things.

[9 : 00] We need them at horse shows and horse races. All through our life we're coming up against some kind of judgment. Then we shouldn't be surprised that what God does supremely is to bring judgment upon people.

Upon individuals like you and me. He's concerned with us. And he also brings judgment upon groups of people as cities or provinces or nations or ethnic groups.

there is a judgment of God that falls upon them and is quite inescapable. One writer says, what makes a man human is the fact that he is a responsible being.

He knows that he ought to do right and that he deserves punishment if he does not do so. That isn't an arbitrary imposition from God on us.

It's an insistent demand by us on God that we want judgment in our lives. We want to know where we are.

[10 : 16] We want to know how we stand. And so, though the judgment of Amos is terrible to behold, there is a certain glory to it, and that is that God is ultimately the judge of the hearts of all men.

And that you and I are free from the judgment of our fellow men because we make ourselves subject to the judgment of God.

And that's a very great freedom indeed. And that's why we have the basket of summer fruit which represents that there comes a time in everybody's life when judgment is required.

There's another picture that Amos uses, and that is the Lord taking a plumb line in his hand and holding the plumb line against the wall to measure and see if the wall is straight.

The wall was built with the plumb line, and now it says that the Lord takes the plumb line and sets it against the wall to see if it's straight.

[11 : 33] And if the wall has gone out of plumb, the plumb line will show it. And so that's the fact of a standard of truth by which judgment takes place.

And what's happening in our world is that we're trying to dismiss the possibility of a standard of truth and that every man can live according to his own conscience in whatever way he wants to.

And we have created chaos because there is no plumb line. And that's why these people who lay on their couches and drank their wine and massaged themselves with oil and ate lamb and calf and all those things, they had lost any standard of judgment.

And so the Lord comes among them with a plumb line and says, this is the standard of judgment and this is the time of judgment. Well, the more I talk about judgment, the more solemn I become.

I'm sorry about it. It's a dreadful subject in one way. and a glorious subject in another way. Because the very meaning and the very possibility of purpose in our lives is dependent upon judgment.

[12 : 59] Now, if you take the picture of the plumb line and say, this is how God judges, then for us as a Christian community, there is a plumb line which has been set in the midst of us, which is the cross of Jesus Christ.

That's how the church has been built. That's how people have been gathered together in response to the proclaiming of the cross of Christ. And that's how the world is going to be judged.

and the judgment is not going to begin with those sinners out there. It's going to begin with the people of God, with the church of God.

So, look at the picture of judgment that is given to us in Acts chapter 17 and verse 31. And this is page 130 in the New Testament section of your Bible.

Acts chapter 17 beginning at verse 29. Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold or silver or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man.

[14 : 33] That God is not the product of our minds and of our hands and of our skill and of our technical ability. That's not the God that we believe in.

Says, the times of ignorance God overlooked. But now he commands all men everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead. the man whom God has appointed to be the judge and he has put him in front of us and endorsed him as the man whom he has appointed by having raised him from the dead.

So that the Christian community is the community that lives under. Unfortunately this sermon was recorded on a short tape and the balance is missing.