

Amos Judgement Has Its Limits

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It's an absolute privilege and a bit sad to be here this morning to preach my last sermon to you here. I remember when I first came to St. Paul's, I was asked, I'm not sure why I was asked to say this, but I shared with you all my passion for ministry and, I guess, why I do what I do.

Sorry. Sorry. I didn't plan for this. From Ephesians 1, Paul prays for the Ephesians, reminding of the hope that I have, all the benefits of salvation that I enjoy, and he says this, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you and my prayers.

I keep asking that God, our Father, Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

I pray the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you in the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. That's my prayer for you for the last two and a half years.

That's my prayer for you this morning as we look at God's word. So please pray with me as we open up his word once more. Heavenly Father, we give you great thanks and praise for the privilege it is to sit under your word.

[1 : 30] You're a God who is holy and perfect, powerful, mighty, and we ask, Lord, that you would give us eyes to see who you are this morning and the great privilege it is that we can come before you through your son, Jesus Christ, to worship you and to love you.

We give you thanks and praise that we can do this now. We pray this in your son's name. Amen. I'm going to just clean myself up here. Okay. You've been weighed, you've been measured, and you've been found wanting.

I first heard this quote from the movie A Knight's Tale. You haven't seen it. It's a fantastic film set in medieval times. The basic plot line is a young squire, a knight in training, Heath Ledger, dreamy, gorgeous Heath Ledger, who dreams of becoming a knight one day.

And he eventually does. By fraudulently taking upon his dead master's name and title as knight, he goes in as Sir Orlick von Liechtenstein, and he beats every single knight in every single jaspig tournament there is in Paris and in London, except for one knight, Count Adhemar.

Early on in the movie, he loses to Count Adhemar, and Heath Ledger's character says to Count Adhemar, Next time I face you, you will look at me from the flat of your back. And Count Adhemar, from his position of having just beaten Heath Ledger in this jaspig tournament, says to him, You've been weighed, you've been measured, and you've been found wanting.

[3 : 09] In other words, you've been tested, and you've failed. Your actions don't stand up to the measure set before you. Such a response is an appropriate way to describe the people of God in the book of Amos.

As we saw last week with the imagery of the plumb line in chapter 7, God's people did not measure up to God's standard set by his law and covenant. They had been found wanting.

They had not lived as God's people. Amos 9 comes to a boiling point. This chapter is probably the most devastating of all judgment oracles in this book, and yet towards the end of the chapter, there is hope.

There's a promise of restoration. It'd be easy for us to skip to the hope bit and focus on that, thinking that's what's applied to us.

But I believe God is still roaring through the book of Amos, and this roar of judgment is still declared, sorry, directed towards his people, Christians, and to us as a church today.

[4 : 15] It's something that we must hear and reflect upon, lest we end up like the nation of Israel. But we will all face judgment. We will be weighed.

We will be measured. But the question is, is whether or not we'll be found wanting. In chapter 9, we learn the full consequences and dangers of presuming upon God's love and status, that God must punish and judge sin.

But we also learn the extent of God's grace, that God's judgment is not forever. There are two main points this morning. Firstly, to those who presume upon God's favor and love, God promises to punish them.

In verse 1, Amos has changed in introduction. No longer is the prophet being shown something by the Lord or declared a vision, Amos now sees the Lord in action.

He is described as standing beside the altar. The phrase is very similar to the one used in chapter 7, verse 7, of God standing beside the wall of the plumb line.

[5 : 27] This conscious connection between God standing beside the altar is supposed to bring to mind the illustration of God standing beside the wall of the plumb line, measuring up the Israelites' obedience against the law itself.

And here now, more specifically, he measures their sacrifice upon the altar, against their lives, their hearts, and concludes that they are found wanting.

And instead of consuming the sacrifice and sparing them from his judgment, he instead rejects their sacrifice, and from the altar he pours out his judgment upon the people.

Strike the tops of the pillars, let the threshold shake, bring them down their heads. Of all the people, those who are left, I will kill the sword. No one will get away.

None will escape. It's a picture of God bringing down the temple whilst his people are inside it. Can you imagine if our building right now just collapsed in on us?

[6 : 37] That's what's going on here in this image. As we saw in our series in Leviticus, the altar was once a place where God's people could meet with them and experience his grace and love, his mercy, his forgiveness.

It was a divine barbecue on which the nation could bring the meat, the bull, the pigeons, etc., to sacrifice for their sins. These animals would take the judgment of God for Israel.

So Israel wouldn't have to experience the wrath and anger and judgment of God and instead enjoy his presence and grace. Here in Amos 9, the people still gather with this intention.

They still come to God and bring him sacrifice. They still come and gather these people to worship him, expecting blessing, expecting to enjoy his presence and grace and mercy, completely unsuspecting of what was about to happen the moment they brought their sacrifice to him.

It's kind of like in Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back, when Han Solo and the crew of the Millennium Falcon are seeking refuge from the Empire and Han decides to go to Cloud City to seek refuge from his friend Lando Calrissian in the Bespin system.

[8 : 02] I know my Star Wars quite well, for those who don't know me. But when they go to dinner that night and the doors are opened, before them is Darth Vader.

And in that moment, as soon as they see Darth Vader, they know they've been betrayed. And the look on their faces says that they had no idea.

They had no idea the whole time they were in danger. They were never safe, never secure. The place they thought was refuge turned out to be the most dangerous place of all to be.

In a similar way, the Israelite people thought they were safe. They thought that coming before the altar of God would mean safety and blessing for them, that they could find refuge in him, knowing that their sins might be forgiven.

But they could not be in any more danger now. As they approached a holy and awesome God, they presumed upon his goodness when in fact he was angry with them because of their sin.

[9 : 13] In chapter 5, we get an idea of what he thinks of their worship. I hate, I despise your feasts. I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. And the peace offerings of your fasting animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from the noise of your songs.

To the melody of your harps, I will not listen. The altar was once a place of grace and mercy, a place which allowed the people of God to escape God's judgment and enjoy his presence.

But here in Amos 9, the place, the altar, has become the place of judgment from which no one will escape. This scene is a devastating one.

You can imagine the terror and upheaval as people try to escape the Lord God Almighty. People will trample on each other to try and get out of the temple to escape the debris.

[10 : 15] But no one will escape his judgment. Though they dig down to the depths below, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens above, from there I will bring them down.

Though they hide themselves on top of Mount Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from my eyes at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them.

Though they are driven to exile by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. Nowhere is safe. God will make sure everyone is brought under judgment.

And he concludes in verse 4, I will keep my eye on them for harm and not for good. They presumed they were safe in the presence of God before the altar, when in fact they never were.

Their sin blinded them to the reality that they were fools to offer worship and sacrifice without recognizing their need for repentance. They were fools to think they could buy God's protection instead of devoting themselves to obedience and holiness.

[11 : 28] But the tables have turned and their foolishness has come to light. No longer does God look upon his people with blessing and good intention, but he intends to judge them and punish them.

The altar, once the place of receiving God's mercy, has now become the place of receiving God's judgment. It's a bit much to hear at the moment, is it?

The lot coming in through here. Can you imagine Aeolus' hearers being stunned at this? I mean, they were God's people, chosen, taken from Egypt. They thought God loved them.

It's a bit of a deer-in-the-headlights moment. It's a bit of a Han Solo-seen Darth Vader moment. What is going on? And then God interjects again in verse 7. Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel?

Declares the Lord. Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt and the Philistines from Kapdor and the Syrians from Kerr? The Cushites were a remote people who the Israelites considered as very insignificant, a small, tribal-type people.

[12 : 37] And so hearing that their God thinks of them like the Cushites, that they are an insignificant people, not worth a second look at or a second thought, would have stung them to the core.

But what is more stinging is the next question. God has not only saved his own people from Egypt, but the Philistines from Kapdor and the Syrians from Kerr.

There was nothing unique in the saving of God's people from Egypt that prevented them from facing judgment for sin. God has saved other nations from other nations as well.

They thought the Exodus in and of itself made them special and unique compared to every other nation, but it's very clear that God's sovereignty and care extends beyond just Israel to the other nations as well.

Any pride they might have had, any smugness they might have had about their status and favour was dashed away at God's impending judgement and not even their exodus from Egypt could do anything about it.

[13 : 53] We might look at the northern kingdom, the Israelites and think, such fools! What are they doing? But I wonder if we'd only be making ourselves out to be fools as well.

The northern kingdom thought they were in the right because of who they were by the fact they were sacrificing and worshipping, by the fact that they were God's people taken out of Egypt, doing all the right things, but they were proven to be fools.

Their sacrifices were measured and weighed and they were found wanting. I wonder if we think we are in the right with God when in fact we might be dangerously presuming upon Him as well.

Do we think we are safe as we gather here now before Him praising Him and praying to Him and reading His word when in fact maybe we're not? It depends upon our picture of God.

Do we think that we can buy God's favour and love like the Israelites did by showing Him our good works and our good deeds that we come to church every Sunday that we read our Bibles and pray that we serve at morning tea or throughout the week?

[15 : 08] Or do we think God doesn't care about sin? That He doesn't want to judge you? He's not angry at you? He doesn't want to punish you for your sin. He's all sugar and spice and everything nice.

He says come as you are no need to change. The problem with both those views with both those responses is they presume upon who God is based on what we think He is from a human point of view.

And surely this passage so far teaches us to never do that to never presume upon who God is and what He is like from our point of view from our perspective. Anyone who tries to measure up upon their own thinking they are in the right with God whilst remaining in sin will be destroyed.

And anyone who thinks sin is irrelevant God will destroy them as well. Only a fool would presume to be in the right with God based on his own status and actions or based upon sin not having any consequences at all.

A misunderstanding of what God's love is. Such a fool will discover in the same way the people of Israel did God's awful judgment. As Jesus says Himself in Matthew 7 many will say to me on that day Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and your name drive out demons and your name perform many miracles then I will tell them plainly I never knew you away from me you evil doers.

[16 : 47] At the heart of the issue is being presumptuous upon God's love and favour towards them. Amos warns us to not to never presume upon God's love and favour because God promises to destroy all who do so promising to judge and punish them for ignoring and not acknowledging their sin.

But God is also faithful to His promise that He's made to His people in the past which is my second point here this morning. God remains faithful to His promise of salvation even when His people remain unfaithful.

Verse 8 Behold the eyes of the Lord God are upon this sinful nation and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob declares the Lord.

God will not destroy His people completely. His promise to remain faithful to His covenant by saving a few. God is always faithful to His promises that He made way back in Genesis chapter 12 that Abraham and the nation that would come through Him would be a great nation would be a blessing to all the nations.

He remembers His promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 when He said that He would always establish His throne forever. and so despite the sin of the people how far gone they are we know how far gone they are God is still going to make good on His promise by being the one to do the work Himself.

[18 : 28] He is going to remain faithful when His people remain unfaithful. He will establish a better king. Verse 11 In that day I will restore David's fallen shelter I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins and rebuild it as it used to be.

The language of repairing broken walls and restoring ruined cities is figurative. The kings that had come before did not measure up to God's standard.

They had failed the test of the plumb line. They did not execute their office of king in a worthy manner. required by God. Thus they crumbled and failed and became ruined.

The nation therefore as a result also became ruined in shambles. But God will repair and restore the kingship to one who would uphold the office with integrity and in a deserving manner.

He would love justice and love mercy. He would protect the poor and the vulnerable. He would love righteousness and hate evil.

[19 : 37] He would uphold the righteous and punish the evildoer. He will be the king Israel has longed for since David.

But he will be a better king for this king will have a kingdom that's much vaster than the one that's gone before. Verse 12 said to Edom.

The grand plan of this restoration was to include the surrounding nations who will bear God's name also.

The mercy and grace of God will not only extend to Israel but to Edom and to all the nations as well. The same God who punished and judged the nations in the opening chapters of Amos will also extend his mercy and his grace to them also.

That they might be included as his people and receive salvation. For as God told us a few verses earlier, his care and his sovereignty goes beyond just Israel.

[20 : 43] And through the work of Christ we enjoy this reality now ourselves. For we are those nations as well, as Australians.

We enjoy being part of God's restored people who have received mercy and grace with Jesus as our promised king on the throne. And if that is what we enjoy now as believers, for indeed we are those other nations, verses 13 and 15 then are what we are to anticipate for the future.

This agricultural picture of fruitfulness, dwelling in God's kingdom as bountiful, perfect, wonderful, a site for sore eyes, a place that is untainted from the corruption of sin, where everything is growing, a place where we will never again be uprooted and taken away.

That is the glorious plan of restoration God has in store for his people in the book of Amos. Though whilst there is judgment coming, this is going to be the result.

What are the people of Israel to do with this prophecy? For nine and a half chapters, all they have heard is judgment. Judgment.

[22 : 07] And now towards the end there is hope. Why does Amos finish with hope when judgment is still to come? I think Amos wants to leave his hearers, his Israelite people, with a bigger picture in mind.

God's judgment is not capricious or vindictive, but an extension of his love and jealousy for his people to obey him, to be his, and to live with him and for him.

The role of judgment then plays a part for the sake of restoration, for the sake of bringing back his people into alignment with his way of living. And so here Amos wants to remind him that judgment is not the goal, but restoration is.

And God will restore those who seek him. The heart of the book's message to Israel and to us here this morning is literally in the heart of the book, in the middle, in chapter 5 from verse 4.

This is what the Lord says to Israel. Seek me and live. Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba, for Gilgal will surely go into exile and Bethel will be reduced to nothing.

[23 : 26] Seek the Lord and live. Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.

Hate evil, love good. maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

The book of Amos can be summed up as a judgment is coming, seek the Lord and live. With all negativity and devastation prophesied, it would be easy for the Israelites to lose sight of the bigger picture here, to think that promises have failed.

God has forgotten us. Judgment is the end. The promise of the end of Amos 9 shows that judgment is not the end.

God will restore his people. He will do good on his promises, that if you seek him, you will live. Even though you face the pain of judgment, the devastation of your homeland, the suffering and death of loved ones, the loss of your livelihood, even though you see all these things happen before you now, foreign occupation, exile, do not take your eyes off the Lord.

[24 : 56] Continue to seek him. He will make good on his promise as he did to Abraham and to David. He will restore the kingdom. The end of chapter 9 is to encourage them to keep going.

Despite what is coming for them, seek God and they will live. In the same way, the message is for us as well. Judgment is coming. Seek the Lord and live.

Do not presume upon his love and mercy. Do not be so smug and proud of who you might think you are in God's sight. Instead, be humble thankful for the salvation that God has worked in you through Christ, through his death and resurrection on the cross, in light of his work to save you from God's judgment.

Continue to live in faith and repentance in these dark days. For these are dark days where the impact of sin in our lives makes living for God, seeking him very difficult and tough.

Some of us here live day-to-day with pain in our bodies. Some of us live day-to-day struggling with depression and anxiety. Some of us live day-to-day with uncertainty about our jobs or our health, about our future.

[26 : 21] Some of us live day-to-day with the pain of broken relationships. There is increase in pressure on Christians to conform to the status quo of secularism.

Increased pressure for us to give up the faith that has been declared by the public as archaic and useless, as a threat to modernity and progression.

Vitriol and hate towards Christians is increasing, and slowly but steadily we are losing our influence in the general public, shunned from them, considered by some as a plight on society, as those who cause wars and conflict.

There's a great struggle ahead for Christians in this growing secular age, a struggle for us to seek the Lord. But the great hope that Amos reminds of is that God is going to make good on his promise to those who seek him, to those who are humble themselves before the Lord, who acknowledge their sin, that they don't measure up, to seek him, and you will live.

In him, in Christ, we place our trust and hope. It is in him we seek, and when we do, we will live, for he has come to give life, and life to the full, life eternally.

[27 : 50] For those who doubt God will make good on his promise, Amos 9 says he will and he always has, and so you can be sure of that. In fact, the coming of the Son, the coming of Jesus shows that he has done so, and so we can look forward to that future that's been talked about in verses 13 to 15.

For those who fear that they will face the judgment of God, that like the Israelites, they have presumed for far too long upon God's love without recognizing their sin, Amos 9 says there is still time.

Seek the Lord and you will live. But judgment is coming, so seek the Lord, seek Jesus and you will live. God promises us, for those who do seek him, they will live.

The message we might take away from Amos from this series is this, never presume upon the love of God based on who you are, for those to be complacent and foolish.

Instead, humble yourselves before God and repent of your sin. Give thanks to God who in Christ Jesus has made a way for you to know God's love and mercy.

[29 : 06] Seek Jesus and you will live. I pray that you would continue to seek God, St. Paul, that you would not presume he ever arrived before God, but you would continue to seek him in repentance and in faith, for by doing so you will live.

Amen.