

# Social Injustice

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Neil Stewart

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Christ Covenant Church

Amos 2:6-16

Please, if you would, turn with me in your copy of the Word of God to the book of Amos, chapter 2. We're going to begin our sermon this evening with a prayer from John Calvin, and we'll end it with another prayer of his as he prayed as he was preaching through this portion of Scripture in his congregation in Geneva in the sixteenth century. Let's pray together.

*Grant, Almighty God, that since we see so grievous punishments formerly executed on unbelievers who had never tasted of the pure knowledge of Thy Word, we may be warned by their example, so as to abstain from all wickedness, and to continue in pure obedience to Thy Word; and that, as Thou hast made known to us that Thou hatest all those superstitions and depravations by which we turn aside from Thy Word,— O grant, that we may ever be attentive to that role which has been prescribed to us by Thee in the Law, as well as in the Prophets and in the Gospel, so that we may constantly abide in Thy precepts, and be wholly dependent on the words of Thy mouth, and never turn aside either to the right hand or to the left, but glorify Thy name, as Thou has commanded us, by offering to Thee a true, sincere, and spiritual worship, through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

It's interesting reading Calvin's prayers. They always have the same form. He always begins with, "Grant, Almighty God..." and then he'll have an argument with God. *Grant that because You've said this, this, this, this in the past that You will therefore then grant, O God, this request.* It's a great example. He always prayed the same way and in the same form, but always with different arguments. It's wonderful.

Let's pick up the reading. I'm going to actually read chapter 1, verse 1 and 2, and then we'll drop down to chapter 2, verse 6. This is the Word of God:

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. And he said: "The Lord roars from Zion and

utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.” (Amos 1:1-2)

Then there are seven oracles against Damascus and Gaza and Tyre and Edom and the Ammonites and Moab and then Judah. And now the eighth oracle in verse 6, chapter 2:

Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined. Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?” declares the Lord. “But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, ‘You shall not prophesy.’ Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life; and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day,” declares the Lord. (Amos 2:6-16)

Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the Word of God endures forever.

It is desirable for every good preacher to know when to stop. It’s also a good thing if he knows when to start. I was in my study this afternoon and was lost in wonder, love, and praise. I looked at my watch; it was 5:32. I had to beat a hasty retreat from the study here again. I apologize for being late. You’ve got to know when to start and also when to stop. I heard a story recently of a Puritan minister who preached a very lengthy sermon in the morning, during which he said, “Seventeenthly.” In the afternoon his wife must have chastised him because he came back in the evening and said,

“Looking at all those points in the morning, my congregation, I have decided this evening in my sermon, for your good, that my sermon will be pointless.”

Well, Amos stands up this evening with an eighth point—an “eighthly”—which wasn’t a done thing. He had seven points. And remember, he’s a southerner up in Yankeedom, speaking to Israel. And he comes with his seven point sermon to these pagan nations. And the climax is—or so his audience in Israel thought—with their unruly, self-righteous little brother down in the South and condemns them. And they were packing up their Bibles, closing their hymnbooks, and about to get up and enjoy the benediction, I suppose, when Amos leans over the pulpit and says, “Eighthly, for three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment” (Amos 2:6). An eighth point. Every good Presbyterian sermon has three points—all beginning with “P”—and every good Jewish sermon has seven points, the perfect number. And Amos comes in with an “eighthly” for Israel.

And in this eighth sermon, we learn that he has two points really in this last sermon for Israel. The first point is: There is no partiality with God. And, secondly, there is no escaping God.

### **There Is No Partiality with God**

First of all, there is no partiality with God. Israel had been living like the world, the world that had this self-centered disregard for the poor and the needy and committed all kinds of oppressive, brutal war crimes, threshing their enemies with implements of iron and cutting open the pregnant ladies and so forth. God comes to Israel here in this eighth point and says, in a sense, *If you live like the world, you’ll be judged like the world*. But unlike the world that had only broken the law of conscience, Israel had not only broken the law of God but also despised His grace and walked away from it.

And Amos’ point this evening essentially is: To whom much has been given much will be expected. It’s really an Old Testament echo of Paul’s point to the Jews in Romans 2. You remember, Paul’s preaching to the church in Rome. There was a division in the church of Rome in AD 49. Claudius drove all the Jews out of Rome. All the Jewish Christians had to leave, too. So they left the church, and when they came back it had been overtaken by a majority of Gentiles. And they were sucking heads of crawfish and low-country boils and other kinds of things that really offended the Jews. And there was a great division in the church.

And so Paul writes—and one of the reasons he writes to Rome is to get money so he can go to Spain and preach the Gospel—but he also writes, you remember, to try and heal the divisions in the church. That makes then perfect sense of why he’s constantly speaking to the Jews and the Gentiles. You remember he begins chapter 1 of Romans talking about the Gentile sins: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). It’s plain in the heavens, written in the stars, that God is there. He’s the Creator, and He has spoken to us. Even the darkest, most benighted pagan has received the Word of God in creation and the Word of God in conscience, and these Words should have led them to worship and to give thanks. Instead, the Gentiles suppressed that truth, turned aside from it, and God gave them over in the hardness of their hearts to all manor of sexual depravity, including promiscuity, homosexuality, lesbianism, and other kinds of unnatural behavior.

And the Jews in the congregation, I could imagine them rubbing their hands with some glee that Paul is giving it to these Gentiles who should be very thankful they even got a part in the church at all. Then, you remember, in chapter 2 Paul turns his attention from the Gentiles to the Jews. He says, “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Rom. 2:1). *You condemn the Gentiles’ sexual immorality, but you use pornography*—that kind of argument. You can imagine him saying it. And Paul says:

But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:2-4)

All this grace that you have received as Jews over the years was designed by God to lead you to repentance. But, he says:

In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: eternal life to those who by patient

continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil... For there is no partiality with God. (Rom. 2:5-11)

The gospel comes to the Jew first and also to the Greek, and the judgement comes to the Jew first and also to the Greek as well.

And so this southern boy from Judah takes up his prophetic mantle and unleashes a tirade of rebuke against Israel for their sins. Just like the rest of the world, God has been watching these Israeli sins pile up. And the rest of the world got three transgressions, and for four...which isn't literal—God gave them one, two, three, and then four strikes; they're out—but it's a prophetic metaphor. "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him" (Prov. 6:16). It's a list that's kind of filling up like a bath filling up, like the iniquity of the Amorites not yet being full. And eventually it does become full, and the time for patient watching comes to an end. And the time for judgmental talking is about to begin.

And Amos says, "Thus says Yahweh: 'For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment'" (Amos 2:6a). Well, what are the sins that God points out in Israel? There are really three. You can put them in three baskets, you might say. The first is social injustice; secondly, sexual immorality; and thirdly, spiritual ingratitude.

First of all, God through Amos points out their social injustice, verse 6: "Because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted" (Amos 2:6b-7a). We'll stop there. What's going on here? Well, one of two things. Either it's possible—the commentators are divided, but it's the same family of sins—that in the law court it is no longer a case of who has the right cause, but it's a case of who has the most money. And so when you come before the judge, there's a rich Jew and a poor Jew, and they're arguing their case. And it's plain the poor Jew is right, but the rich Jew has oiled the palm of the judge with silver, and he bends justice away from truth. That's one possible explanation.

Another possible explanation, which I favor, is that these people are selling the righteous poor. This poor man owes the rich man a debt, and it's a great debt—silver, money. And he's unable to pay. And the poor man, like the parable of the unforgiving servant in Jesus' time, is begging for mercy, begging for more time. And the rich man, no, he just drops the hammer on the man and sells him into slavery for silver. He hardens his heart to the need of his brother and shows him no mercy whatsoever. And that is always the case: such hardness tends to grow. When you harden your heart to God, your sin never diminishes; it always increases. You need to bear that in mind; that's an eternal principle. You never stand still in your Christian faith. You either are growing or you're decreasing. You're either getting better or getting worse.

And these Jews, they begin selling a man to slavery because he owes them a bag of silver, but before long he'll sell a man into slavery because he owes him two Birkenstock sandals. Birkenstocks are expensive—a hundred bucks, you know, and even more now with inflation. So there's no concern, no mercy. Calvin says about that in his commentary:

When once men begin to turn aside from the right course, they abandon themselves to evil without any shame. When an attempt is first made to draw aside a man that is just and upright and free from what is corrupt, he is not immediately overcome; though a great price may be offered to him, he will yet stand firm. But when he has sold his integrity for ten pieces of gold, he may afterwards be easily bought, as the case is usually with women. A woman, while she is pure, cannot be easily drawn away from her conjugal fidelity. She may yet be corrupted by a great price; and when once corrupted, she will afterwards prostitute herself, so that she may be bought for a crust of bread. The same is the case with judges. They, then, who at first covet silver, that is, who cannot be corrupted except by a rich and fat bribe, will afterwards barter their integrity for the meanest reward; for there is no shame any more remaining in them. This is what the prophet points out in these words—that they sold the just for silver; that is, that they sold him for a high price, and then that they were corrupted by the meanest gift, that if one offered them a pair of sandals, they would be ready without any blush of shame to receive such a bribe.

How has sin gained ground in your heart this evening? Maybe it used to take a great temptation to cause you to stumble, but now just a little temptation is enough. Sin's hold upon us is never content with equality; it wants to take over our whole heart and bring us into full domination.

So the first sin then was social injustice. And it's a constant reminder to us: God cares about how we treat the little people of this world, where there are no little people who bear His image. And that should concern us; that should concern you and me when we walk past beggars in the street. And I know there are reasons why we don't necessarily give every beggar lots of cash. It may not be helping them. But are we concerned for them? Do we always think the worst of them? Are we always, you know, jaded and cynical when we see them? Do we always think, *It must be their fault they fell into poverty*? And do we forget the grace of God that has kept us from such degradation? How easily we can buy ourselves a new whatever—a new toy, a new accoutrement to wear—and we can always find money for it if we really want it. And how hard it is for us to have such liberality with others.

But also, you brothers and sisters in this congregation—maybe an older brother, an older sister—maybe you bully your younger sibling because you can. They're small, and you can bully them and then threaten them into silence. And you think, *Nobody sees. Mommy doesn't know; Daddy doesn't know. I don't get in trouble*. You need to realize that the God of heaven sees. He sees how we treat little people, where there are no little people on this earth. There is no partiality with God. Social injustice.

Secondly, sexual immorality. Verse 7b: "A man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined" (Amos 2:7b-8). This sexual immorality is unnatural. A father and a son go in to the same girl. They're lining up like parents and children to go into a ride at Disneyland or Six Flags, but they're not looking to ride a rollercoaster. And they go in to the same girl. It's an unnatural depravity that a man and his son would have the same woman.

It's amazing, though, how many sons learn this sin from their fathers. How many of my friends at school would take porn magazines from their fathers' secret stash? You have one man—not a member of my congregation, but a man in the town that I pastored in some time ago, not this town—who promised his son he would take him to a strip joint if he got good grades at school. It actually wasn't a strip joint; it was a restaurant where the women are famously under-clothed, but nonetheless. The learned depravity that filters from father to son. And it's here in this text. Unnatural.

It's unrestrained. "They lay themselves down beside every altar" (Amos 2:8a). It was part of the religious custom in those days. It was part of the custom in Cana, that if you wanted the gods of Cana to smile on your crops and to cause rain to fall on the crops, you had to encourage them to get into action. And so the religious services were essentially an orgy of godlessness and immorality. Essentially the hope was that as the gods looked down upon the pornographic show in the church they would get their act together and send fertility rains upon the earth. And that was exactly their theology. Ideas have consequences. It was just the thing you did. If you want to have a bumper harvest, this is one of the things you've got to do. It was unnatural, unrestrained.

And it was also, again, unmerciful. "The garments taken in pledge" (Amos 2:8a). You know, if a poor man owed you money, and he couldn't pay it, you could take his garment, but only during the day. At nighttime, you had to give him the garment back; that's all he had to cover himself. You could take his garment during the day as a pledge that he would pay you, and then at nighttime you give him the garment back again. And then the next morning he'd give you the garment back again. You'd take it and hold it in pledge until the full payment was made. But these men take that garment that they took from the poor man and are using it, essentially, as a bed in a two-bit motel so they can go and have sex with these prostitutes. They're ill-gotten gains.

And then, "The wine of those who have been fined" (Amos 2:8b). Similarly, they might go and the poor man couldn't pay, so you take his wine, and they used that wine to fuel their debauchery. And God sees it. It's unnatural; it's unrestrained; it's unmerciful. But it's not inconsequential. As is always the case with our sin, it's not so much the sin we commit against one another that's the greatest offense. The greatest offense is the sin we commit against God. You see that there: "A man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned" (Amos 2:7b). The unholy nations all around watched Israel do this—Israel, whose being was connected to the holiness of God. And they thought, *Well, if the people are like that, their God must also be like that as well.* And it profaned... it dragged God's holy name through the mud.

That's Paul's words, you remember, to the Corinthians when he said, essentially, *You can't check your union with Christ at the door of the brothel.* You know, Wyatt Earp would make men, I'm told, check in their firearms at the sheriff's office in Dodge City before they'd go out for a night on the town. You'd check in your firearms, and you'd go and have fun at the saloon; it would stop the shooting.



But you can't do that with Christ. You can't check your union with Christ at the door of the brothel and go in as a private person by yourself and have sex with a prostitute. Paul says to the church of Corinth: *You bring Christ in there with you. Your sexual organs are Christ's sexual organs. And you're joining yourself to that girl, and you're joining Christ to that girl. Your eyes are Christ's eyes. Your ears are Christ's ears. And how have you polluted the holy name of Christ before the angels and demons, licking their chops and rubbing their hands with glee?* Our ideas have consequences when we profane the name of God, and it bothers God greatly.

It's amazing how often our sexual proclivities reveal our true theology. When it talks about the list of the flesh in the New Testament, it's always sexual immorality and impurity and sensuality that head the list. How we respond to our sexual urges, how we steward our sexual energy, is always a testimony of whether we know God or whether we don't. As Paul says to the Thessalonians, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel"—his own body—"in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess. 4:3-5).

What we do with our sexual urges reveals whether or not we know God or whether we don't; whether we're walking with Him in the light or walking against Him in the darkness. But if you say that you know God and walk in the darkness—men, we did this on Friday morning—"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6-7). God takes sexual immorality very seriously. It reveals what are the true priorities of our heart.

Are you guarding your heart against that? Are you guarding your heart against every slippery path into sexual immorality? You might not be going to some pornographic website, but are you going to the search place in Instagram or Facebook and allowing the devil to take you by salami tactics, just one thin slice at a time, as you go from bad to worse and worse still? Thomas Watson said, "He that will dally in the occasions to sin will in due time dally in the sin."

So there's social injustice; there is sexual immorality. And, lastly, there is spiritual ingratitude. These weren't the acts of pagans; these were the acts and actions of the redeemed. Their sin is against the God of their redemption, the God of exodus. And in verse 9 to the end of the chapter, you'll see

the word “I” and it’s very emphatic in the Hebrew. “Yet it was I myself who destroyed the Amorite before them...” (Amos 2:9a) Why the Amorite? Well, the Amorite was the very reason for the judgment of God upon Canaan. You remember in Genesis 15:16, God says, *I’m going to delay four hundred years. Why? Because the iniquity of the Amorite was not yet full.* God was waiting patiently, hoping against hope—taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked—that these Amorites would repent, but they never did. And He’s waiting until their sin reaches the top of the bath, and then He is going to act in judgment. God isn’t hasty; He’s not quick off the mark. His patience is legendary but not eternal. “God’s love has a heaven and His wrath a hell to extend themselves to all eternity,” Thomas Watson said. “But His patience has a brief-lived earth.” Are you sporting with God’s patience this evening?

Their sin, then, is against a God who had conquered unconquerable enemies. “Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars”—these tall, massive trees like the Californian redwoods—“and who was as strong as the oaks.” And God destroyed them, root and branch. “I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath” (Amos 2:9). He wiped them out. These were enemies Israel could never have conquered. “We were like grasshoppers in their sight,” the spies said (Num. 13:33). We could never have beaten this enemy. And God wiped them out, root and branch, before Israel. All that was forgotten though.

Their sin is also against a God who has broken not just unconquerable enemies, but He had broken an inescapable bondage. Verse 10: “Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness...” (Amos 2:10) with great patience as they sinned and grumbled against Him. But He bore with them and carried them as a father carries his son who fears him in his arms. Like a little toddler, God carried them. As a shepherd carries a lamb in his bosom, a father carrying a son, God carried Israel through the wilderness to possess again the land of the Amorite.

It was the sin against the God who had conquered unconquerable enemies, who had broken inescapable bondage, and who had given undeniable light. Good words and a good example. “And I,” verse 11, “raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites” (Amos 2:11)—prophets to give you the Word of God, and Nazirites to give you an example of consecration to God. These Nazirites, not only were they not allowed to drink wine—that’s got nothing to do with alcohol being bad; it’s a sign of absolute consecration to God—they couldn’t

even eat raisins or grapes. Even the fruit of the wine was forbidden. They couldn't touch a corpse. Sampson was a Nazarite, you remember, and he breaks all of those vows.

God gave them light in word and light in deed from their own children. And it was undeniable. "Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" declares the Lord" (Amos 2:11b). Undeniable light. How did Israel respond? Verse 12: "But you made the Nazirites drink wine." *You made them defile their consecration.* "And commanded the prophets, saying, "You shall not prophesy"" (Amos 2:12).

I was listening to a fantastic lecture by Ian Hamilton, a mentor of mine some years ago, who was a pastor in Cambridge; he was also a pastor in the Church of Scotland. He watched that church go into disarray as they, first of all, ordained women to the gospel ministry. And he warned them: When you do that, it'll only be a few years before you ordain homosexuals to the ministry. The people said, "We'll never do that. The Bible says you can't ordain homosexuals to gospel ministry." And he said, "Well, the Bible also says you shan't ordain women to gospel ministry. If you'll deny the Bible there, you'll deny the Bible everywhere."

And the saddest thing was—really, it's well worth your time; go to the Gospel Reformation Network on YouTube and recent conference in Birmingham, Ian Hamilton. You'll find it. It's well worth an hour of your time listening to it. He talks about the Church of Scotland slipped from its early years of faithfulness under John Knox through various downgrade controversies into downright heresy and denying the gospel. But what's saddest of all is how good men hung on into that church year after year after year, and they resolved not to rock the boat. And he said, "You know, in the Church of Scotland, you can be anything. You can be a high Calvinist; you can preach anything you want as long as you don't preach against the particular sins of people, as long as you don't mess with baptism and the Lord's Supper."

He went to a church in Newmilns in Scotland, where he pastored for a long time. The previous minister would baptize anyone with a pulse. If you moved, he'd baptize you. And there were like 400 baptisms in the year before Ian went there as a pastor. The year after he went, there were four baptisms. And those were baptisms of charity, he said. And then he went to this man's house—and this was in the '80s, maybe the '70s—and he said, "I haven't seen you at church." He goes, "Oh, no." He said, "I don't go to the kirk. But I'm a member, of course, but I don't go to the kirk. But I was baptized into the kirk, and I was married in the kirk, and I'll be buried in the kirk," the man said. Ian

said to him, “When was the last time you attended the kirk?” “Oh,” he said, “A while ago.” “When?” “1942,” he said. And Ian looked at him and said, “I’ll bury you, sir, but you’ll not be a member of the kirk anymore unless you repent.” That was the unforgivable sin, to deal with the membership of the church and to actually take God’s Word seriously.

And that’s what’s going on here. *You can point out the sins out there, but don’t dare point out the sins in here.* Early in my ministry I pastored a church, and when I went, this church was famous for loving hard preaching. Al Martin and many other hard-preaching men would go and they’d preach the thunder against the wrath of judgment. And people loved it. But, as I think I’ve told you before, there’s a difference between a drive-by shooting and an execution. When a visiting preacher comes in and thunders against gossip... Mrs. Jones, sitting in the front row—name made up entirely—Mrs. Gertie Jones in the front row, she’s the gossip of the town; everyone knows it. Her coffee’s only sweet if someone’s condemned over it.

And Pastor Martin thunders against gossip. She feels really convicted. He doesn’t know her; it’s a drive-by shooting. If someone’s driving by and you’re sitting in McAlister’s, and you get shot as they’re shooting some drug dealer from another gang, and you get hit in the crossfire. It’s painful, but you don’t take it so personally because they didn’t mean to kill you, right? And you go to the hospital, and you know it’s bad and inconvenient and so forth. But it was a drive-by shooting. But when a pastor gets down from the pulpit and walks across with his 44 Magnum, cocks it, and puts it to the head of Gertie Jones and pulls the trigger, that’s not a drive-by shooting; that’s an execution. She takes that very personally indeed.

These people are saying, *You shall not prophesy against our sins.* That’s what they’re saying to their sons. They hate the light and don’t come to the light for fear that they might be exposed. And you can imagine the excuse: *You’re our son. We know you, you little squirt. We cleaned your diaper and we wiped your nose as a child. Who are you to tell us what’s wrong with our lives?* And the longer you know me and even the longer you know Kyle, you’ll see our faults. You’ll know that we are sinners, too. And it’s easy to say, *Well, who’s he to tell me how to live my life?* If I were speaking in my own name, I would agree with you entirely. But I am not speaking in my name, and neither is Kyle. We’re speaking to you in the name of the Lord God of Hosts.

So there's no partiality with God. He comes after His people because of their social injustice, their hardness of heart, their sexual immorality, and their spiritual ingratitude. God had blessed them in these very physical ways.

## **There Is No Escaping God**

And then in the second place, there is no escaping God. The God of grace becomes the God of judgment. Verse 13: “Behold, I...”—notice again, their salvation came completely from God, and so will their judgment—

“Behold I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life; and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day,” declares the Lord.” (Amos 2:13-16)

The picture is of inescapable judgment; that's the theme. When you look at those verses, you stand back, the overall image is an inability to escape from the coming judgment. “I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down” (Amos 2:13). What's the picture there? It's a picture of a cart weighted down in a muddy field, and the wheels can't get traction. He's saying, essentially: *It's like you running out to escape the tsunami of judgment and your getaway car has flat tires.* And it's not just nails in the tire; it's the hand of God pressing it down, preventing your escape.

Speed and strength won't help you. “Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; he who handles the bow shall not stand” (Amos 2:14-15a). What's that mean? Well, they would use the archers when an army was escaping. They would use the archers to cover their escape. It was really essential. The archers would hold their line and fight to the last man to keep the enemy at a distance with their arrows so the rest of the enemy could escape. And God says, *But when God is against you, true courage becomes impossible and the archers—even these bravest of special forces soldiers— will turn pale and run and leave the rear of the retreating people of God exposed and vulnerable from behind.*

When you reject God as your Savior, you reject your only hope of salvation, and you will not be able to save yourself. “He who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life” (Amos 2:15b). The only hope of salvation has always been God. It was God who rescued Israel. Israel was never able to rescue herself. And if God is for us, who can be against us? But if the hand of God comes against us, none can save us.

Now, in an illustration of that, you know our church has been growing in recent years. It’s been very encouraging, people coming in. And one of the temptations for pastors and elders is: don’t rock the boat, especially in a time when you’re building and need people to be giving. You don’t want to drive people away. And so it’s so easy to look at a man... you know, there are some people who are always more disciplinable than others. A pastor at a church once—not this one—it was that way in the congregation. There were some people who were regarded as troublemakers and nobody liked them, at least not on the Session. They had hair triggers just waiting to riddle these people. But there are other people, the spiritual Joneses, who are wealthy and influential, the big givers; you daren’t go near them.

And that kind of thing will work for a time, but you’ve got to pay the ferryman. God sees and God knows. And God has a thousand ways of undoing us if the hand of God is against us. When God is against you, no one can be for you. Even your stoutest soldier, verse 16: “He who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day” (Amos 2:16). Here is a strong Marine, and he’s wearing—and no, I’m not talking about Kyle here, of course—but 45 pounds of equipment, magazines and all kinds of webbing and so forth and weapons. He’s running away, but when you’re carrying that much weight, it limits how fast you can run. And so he starts stripping off the ammunition and the webbing and the rucksack and the rifle. He still can’t run fast enough. Off come the boots and the trousers and the shirt and everything, even his tighty whities. He’s left running naked. Even then he can’t escape. All he succeeds in doing is exposing his shamefulness—nakedness, like Adam in the garden, naked and ashamed.

It reminds me of a story I heard once from the first pastor in Yazoo actually when I was there as a student. He preached the story of this woman he knew—true story, he says. And this woman had been out running, as some of you ladies do, and she got back to the house. It had been raining, and she was muddy and covered in sweat and everything else. And so she goes into the house and takes off her shoes, and she wants to go down to the basement where the washer dryer was to do all the

washing. And she looks for the laundry basket; it's full of dirty clothes. So she strips off all her clothes upstairs and puts them in the laundry basket and picks up the laundry basket and is carrying it downstairs, naked as the day she was born.

And as she's going down the stairs, she almost trips over her son's football helmet. She sees it there and kind of balances the basket, reaches down, and picks up the football helmet and thinks, *Well, I can't put it in the basket; it was full of clothes.* So she puts the helmet on her head and walks down into the basement, and she's there putting the washing into the basement. And suddenly she hears, "Ahem," behind her. She turns around and it was the electrician. Her husband had let him in earlier in the day to do some work on the fuse box. He didn't tell her, and she was standing with only a football helmet to cover her shame. It was the wrong thing in the wrong place, of course—entirely not up for the job. And she was standing there just utterly ashamed.

There's a lesson there somewhere, I think. The illustration is, lest you forget it: These men didn't even have a football helmet to cover their shame. And you know, neither did Jesus. On the cross, the Son of God was stripped naked. The medieval painters graced the Savior, for obvious reasons, with a loincloth, but on the cross the Romans didn't even give them that. They were hung up naked and exposed before a watching world.

But this is what sin is and this is what sin does to people. There is no partiality with God, and there is no escaping God. And coming to church doesn't fix it. Having the right name, Reformed Presbyterians, doesn't fix it any more than having Israel as your name or Judah as your name doesn't fix it. Even going to the temple doesn't fix it. That was the Jews in Jeremiah's day: *The temple of the Lord. God won't judge us. We've got Solomon's temple.* You know, the only thing that can fix our sin and our shame is coming to God and fessing up, crying out for a just mercy, in the hope that somehow Someone who is big enough and good enough to bear the naked shame of who we are and what we have done as far as the east is from the west from our sorry souls.

And on the day of judgement, my brothers and sisters, my pulpit gown won't cover me. And your garments won't cover you. And there will be no football helmet supplied to you. It'll either be the naked shame of who you are and what you have done, or it will be the robes of Christ's righteousness. Those are the only two ways we'll appear before God in the day of judgment. And God has given us these books in the Old Testament to show us how seriously He takes sin. There is

no partiality—you don't get by because you're his friend or his child or whatever it is; because your father was righteous or a minister or godly or an elder or a deacon or whatever; it doesn't get you by. You only get by if you trust in the righteousness of another.

But if God was so enraged with Israel, who neglected the picture of salvation in a lamb—the passover lamb—and in the physical blessings of being redeemed from physical bondage and being brought into the physical land of peace and plenty and paradise in the Promised Land, what will happen to you and me if we dare to appear before Him having neglected the much greater blessings of the reality—not the blood of a lamb, but a beast of nobler blood, the very Son of God with the blood of Yahweh Himself coursing through His veins?

Do you see what's at stake, young people, older people, everybody here? Do you see what's at stake, walking away from the gospel? Maybe some of you are tempted to do that to get the smiles of men, which is a very real thing—wanting the smile of men at work or at school or at college, wherever. And you want the smiles of men, to be thought of as cool by men. And so you walk away from Christ. You're ashamed of Christ the Man for the smiles of mere men. That's a very real thing. The frowns of mere men are terrible, for people to look at you and be ashamed of you. But think about that. What would it not be like to have the frown of the God-Man and His holy angels upon you because you walked away from Him and His astounding grace? That would be a mistake of monumental miscalculation, don't you think?

Let's come to God and bring our broken, sinful, selfish, hard, cynical hearts to Him; our lustful, envious, covetous hearts to Him; and say, "Lord, I need You to fix me from the inside. Cleanse me. Forgive me. And break the power of cancelled sin, O God. And be of sin the double cure. Cleanse me of its guilt and power." And if you'll do that this evening, it'll be done for you. Were it not so, Jesus would have told you. Let's pray together.

*O God, our Father in heaven, we come this evening and we ask you, O Lord, to have mercy upon us, O Lord. I lift up before You, O Lord, the prayer of Your servant long gone. Grant Almighty God, that as Thou hast not only redeemed us by the blood of Thine only begotten Son, but also guide us during our earthly pilgrimage and supplieth us with every spiritual need. O grant that we may not be unmindful of so many favors and turn away from Thee and follow our sinful desires. But grant that we may continue bound to Thy service and never burden Thee with our sins, but submit ourselves willingly to Thee in true obedience, that by glorifying Thy name, we may carry Thee both in body*



*and soul until Thou at length gatherest us into that blessed kingdom which has been obtained for us by the blood of  
Thine only Son. Amen.*