

Amos: Show and Tell

- Amos 8:1-14
- Some of you who went to public school may remember show and tell, where little Johnny would bring his pet boa to the second grade class and stand in front with it wrapped around his arm. Amos does a little show and tell for the people of Israel in this chapter, starting with the fourth vision (we looked at the first three last week), and then going on to tell them what God is about to do. In the process, he will show them again what their sins are that so grieve the Lord, and tell them the judgment that is coming.
- We are just about finished with our walk through the book of Amos, and the consistent theme continues in chapter 8: God will hold his people accountable for their sins because he loves them, and because he loves his glory most of all. When we order our lives to give him glory, that brings him honor he is due, AND it gives us the greatest joy. As John Piper says, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” Let’s look at chapter 8 under these two main points this morning: See the vision. Hear the word. Most of our time will be spent on the second point.
- **See the vision**
- Again, God shows Amos a picture that will illustrate the word of the Lord. This time it is a basket of summer fruit. Then he says, “The end has come upon my people.” In my reading, I have found that God is using wordplay here, because the word for summer fruit and the word for end sound almost alike in the Hebrew. I remind you that Israel is very prosperous at this time in their history, and food is plentiful and life is good...at least for the privileged. But God uses irony here to show them a basket of something healthy and fresh and easy, which is how THEY see their lives, and then points them to a time of great destruction and sorrow that is coming upon them because of their sin and their idolatry. God says in effect, “You bring me ripe fruit as an offering, but YOU are ripe fruit, more than ripe, and are about to be thrown out.” The songs in the temple will cease and be replaced with wailings. Dead bodies will be everywhere. Life, as you know it, will be silenced.
- Verse 8: He shows them a vision of the land trembling and the people mourning. The land will be visited by an invading army that will toss the land around, like a flood rearranges the landscape, and brings great destruction. Verse 10: the destruction that is coming will bring sorrow that God compares to the loss of an only son.
- Verse 9: He shows the sun going out at noon, so the land is darkened. This prophecy lines up with several prophecies in the Old Testament of God’s judgment on His people. **Jeremiah 4:23-28 Joel 2:10** There are more, but they all point to the final judgment, which Jesus talked about in **Matthew 24:29-30**.
- **Hear the Word**
- We saw last week that Amaziah, the false priest of a false religion, tried to run Amos out of town. The truth is that religion, in whatever form it takes, always tries to silence the preaching of truth. The truth we see so clearly in Amos is that the prosperity of a people who reject the Lord is a mirage; it cannot last. A people that truly prospers is committed to justice and righteousness, not just with their words but with their actions. God says it again, for at least the third time. I am reminded of what Paul said in Philippians 3, “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.” We kept the grandkids this week for Micah and Kari while they were away, and I am sure we said some of the same things to them over and over. “Finish your food.” “Hey, you guys settle down and go to sleep!” And, “Let your sister out of that headlock.” (OK, I made that one up). But you parents repeat yourselves to your kids a lot, right? Because it is no trouble to you, but it is safe for them! We got that parenting trait from the best source of all: God. Here’s what we hear Him say, again, to his people.

- **They loved things and used people.** (vs. 4, 6) How does someone trample on the needy? In this case, the wealthy who controlled the prices for food would charge exorbitant rates so the needy had to spend everything they had just to survive. Then their money would run out; the rich businessman had it all. Using the very money the poor man gave him for his overpriced food, the rich businessman now BUYS the poor man for pennies on the dollar. He can buy a man for the price of a pair of sandals. This is not a call by God to reject fair market capitalism for socialism. It is a condemnation of those who would use unfair market practices at the expense of the vulnerable. We see it in two ways in verse 5.
- **They loved money more than God.** They couldn't wait until the Sabbath was over so they could open their shops again. By God's law, which surprisingly they still kept in this regard, they could not buy or sell during a new moon or a Sabbath. But though they kept the letter of the law, they broke the spirit of it by oppressing the poor and the needy. Today there is no law that prevents people from buying and selling or working on Sunday. That's fine. We can all have different opinions about what we can and cannot do on Sundays, as some will work, some will not, some will shop, some will not. But when we replace the gathering together for worship with anything else on a regular basis, then we do so to our own harm. We need a Sabbath rest, and we need corporate worship. We need to hear the Word preached, and we need to fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not an optional extra that some need and some can go without. The church in Jerusalem met daily, and broke bread together from house to house. Just one generation later, the author of Hebrews felt it necessary to write, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- **They loved money more than their own integrity. (5b)** They used deceit, with false balances. God hated this, still does. **Deuteronomy 25:13-16.** "That your days may be long in the land." I remember hearing about a woman who came to the meat market at the end of the day to buy a chicken for supper. That was when the meat was put on a scale, and the butcher, if he wasn't honest, could push down with his finger on the back of the scale so that it appeared the chicken weighed more than it did. On this day, he only had one chicken left, and he was anxious to sell it and go home. The woman asked for a chicken, he put it on the scale, and it came up to a little over a pound. "I was hoping for a little bigger one," she said. No problem! The man put the chicken back in the ice behind the counter, made like he was digging around for a bigger one, pulled up the same chicken, pushed down on the scale so that it read 1.5 pounds. "Is that good?" he asked. "Well," the woman, replied, "go ahead and give me both." Your sins will find you out! Those who cheat others may get better deals, but they lose much more in the process.
- **They will wander the earth for the Word of the Lord. (11-12)** This is the worst judgment of all. Worse than famine, or flood, or enemy soldiers, or even death. The word of the Lord will not be heard. After judgment comes, the people will long to hear the Word that before destruction they had rejected and scorned and even mocked. But it will not come. How does this apply to us? On a personal level, it is a warning that when we harden our hearts to God's Word, we put ourselves in a very dangerous place. Hebrews repeats it several times, this word that comes from Psalms and before that, from stories in Exodus and Leviticus: "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." The watchword on subways and in bus terminals and airports is, "If you see something, say something." The idea is that we need to say something to an official if we see something suspicious. It may save lives. That's good, but we also need to put this into practice: "If you hear something, do something." If you hear the Word of the Lord, then do what God is telling you to do. Otherwise, each time you don't respond with obedience, you harden your heart a little more. We must be people of the Word. There is a famine in our nation today "of hearing the words of the Lord," and the famine started in the church. There are fewer and fewer churches which practice preaching the whole counsel of God, and biblical illiteracy is at an all-time high. I wrote a column for the newspaper recently where I addressed this. Here's part of what I wrote.

- A candidate for church membership was asked, "What part of the Bible do you like best?" He said, "I like the New Testament best." Then he was asked, "Which book in the New Testament is your favorite?" He answered, "The Book of Parables," and began to recite his favorite to the members of the committee.
- "Once upon a time a man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves; and the thorns grew up and choked the man. And he went on and met the Queen of Sheba, and she gave that man a thousand talents of silver and a hundred changes of raiment. And he got in his chariot and drove furiously, and as he was driving along under a big tree, his hair got caught in a limb and left him hanging there. And he hung there many days and many nights. The ravens brought him food to eat and water to drink. And one night while he was hanging there asleep, his wife Delilah came along and cut off his hair, and he fell on stony ground. And it began to rain, and rained forty days and forty nights. And he hid himself in a cave. Later he went on and met a man who said, 'Come in and take supper with me.' But he said, 'I can't come in, for I have married a wife.' And the man went out into the highways and hedges and compelled him to come in. He then came to Jerusalem, and saw Queen Jezebel sitting high and lifted up in a window of the wall. When she saw him she laughed, and he said, 'Throw her down from there,' and they threw her down. And he said, 'Throw her down again,' and they threw her down seventy-times-seven. And the fragments which they picked up filled twelve baskets full. Now, whose wife will she be in the day of the Judgment?"

The membership committee agreed that this was indeed a knowledgeable candidate.

- That fictional story illustrates a sad truth: more Americans than ever before are biblically illiterate. Jay Leno once asked members of his audience about the Bible while taping his late night show. "Name one of the Ten Commandments," he said. "God helps those who help themselves?" someone ventured. (Uh... wrong) "Name one of the apostles," Leno asked. No one could. "Name the Beatles," Leno said. Without hesitation, the answers came from many, shouted almost in unison: "George, Paul, John and Ringo!" The numbers are staggering. According to the Barna Research Group, 41% of Americans read the Bible once a year or never. Only 16% of Christians say they read their Bible daily. The numbers are also embarrassing. Twelve percent of Americans think Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Fifty-percent of graduating high school seniors, in one survey, thought Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.
- Why do we need the Bible? We saw last week that the Word of the Lord is our plumb line. It is the only way we can know that our lives are upright and godly. But it is also the sustenance for our very souls. Deuteronomy 8:3, "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."
- Prayer