

“Collateral Damage”  
Pastor John Bronson

Amos 6:1-14

November 17, 2013

Order of Worship for 11/18/13, title, “Collateral Damage”, text, Amos 6:1-14  
Opening Song:  
Welcome

Invocation: Psalm 32:1-11

Message Theme: Godly wisdom is always alert for dangers without and within and does not fall into the trap of pride, complacency and contempt

Worship Theme: Thanking God for His gracious patience when we forget humility, praising Him for His forgiving and renewing love

Sunday Evening in the Word  
2 Peter 2:4-10  
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm, Church Library

**Opening Song:**  
“Everlasting God” Overhead

**Welcome**

**Invocation:** Psalm 32:1-11

**Ministry Moment:** Missions & Angel Tree

**Special Music:** “We Fall Down” by Emily Cagnacci

**Preparing the Heart in Song:**  
“Great Is the Lord” Song # 140  
“Trust and Obey” Song # 571  
“Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” Song # 33

**Offering & Offertory**

**Message:** “Collateral Damage” Amos 6:1-14  
Pastor John Bronson

**Response to the Word:**  
“Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus” Song # 340

**Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer**

**Sunday Evening in the Word:** Library, 5:30-7 pm  
2 Peter 2:4-10

“The Prayer Closet”

November 18, 2013

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

**Joel and Virginia Cook: Awana has made some program changes, please pray for the adjustment and implementation; Praise - all clubs up and running with 3 new starts including an Assembly of God denomination church in Northern California!**

**President Obama: the Spirit of God will guard his mind and his heart from all evil; the Lord will direct his feet in the way of truth and righteousness; the Father will draw him to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior**

**Angel Tree and the Deacons funds: as we approach the holiday season there is an increases awareness of the neglected, the marginalized and the needy in our community. This goes along with the change in weather which makes the homeless vulnerable to cold and wet. Ask the Lord to give us all wisdom in compassion, generosity in kindness, faithfulness in serving others**

**Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Caleb Hammonds, Army Reserves (son of Tom and Cindy): that he listen to God’s voice in his decision making**

**Young Adult of the Week: Danielle Sands, Cox College, Nursing School, Springfield MO (daughter of Stephanie): for strength and endurance**

**Please pray for our homebound family members: Fred & Jean Pauly, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Hilda Chapman**

(please call the office to request updates)

I.

We are continuing in our study of Amos. If you are newly arrived let me encourage you to find that text. It is one of the Minor Prophets between Matthew and Psalms. It is towards the end of the Old Testament. The title for today's message is “Collateral Damage” and the text is Amos 6:1-14. I will be reading that whole section, verses 1-14 and you might want to follow that in your scriptures. You might be a little puzzled at the title, “Collateral Damage”. Let me make sure we all understand what the word “collateral” means. “Collateral” is the unintended consequence; it is what happens on the side of what you intended to have happen. So when you have collateral damage, it is the unintended negative consequences which come to those who are close to the primary target of attack. We most often hear the word used when a bomb or a rocket or something like that has been launched into enemy territory and sometimes it blows up things you didn't intend to hit, but there they were and there they go. You have to kind of accept that. Making some other applications, you might think that if you were involved in an industry or some kind of organization and you have a portion of the organization that is not functioning well, you may proceed to eliminate that part of the company and the unintended consequence is the loss of some good employees; but what do you do? The same thing might be true if you are a manufacturer and you produce a number of lines of product and one of those lines is not making a profit. So you eliminate it, but unhappily you eliminate a number of customers, loyal customers that have been with you for years; but what do you do? When planning an action then it is important to calculate what is the potential damage which is part of the cost of that action.

I am actually wanting us to think about the term not from the perspective of the one who is going to create the action, but on the other side, that is those of us who might be hit. So the question that I would like us to think about is, wherever we are and whatever we do, we should always ask this question amongst a variety of others: what is the risk in being associate with, or close to, or dependent upon, or remaining as a part of this team, people or organization or project, what is the risk in the event that they get hit? Let's drop that into our file as we begin to look at this portion of Amos.

*(6:1) “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes! (6:2) Pass over to Calneh, and see, and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory, (6:3) O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence? (6:4) Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, (6:5) who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, (6:6) who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! (6:7) Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.” (6:8) The Lord God has sworn by himself, declares the Lord, the God of hosts: ‘I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.’ (6:9) And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. (6:10) And when one's relative, the one who anoints for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of the house, ‘Is there still anyone with you?’ he shall say, ‘No’; and he shall say, ‘Silence! We must not mention the name of the Lord.’ (6:11) For behold, the Lord commands, and the great house shall be struck down into fragments, and the little house into bits. (6:12) Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood—(6:13) you who rejoice in Lo-debar, who say, ‘Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?’ (6:14) For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, declares the Lord, the God of hosts; and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah.”*

Now I suspect that if you have not already had time to kind of go over this and think about and perhaps look up a thing or two that this does not readily make sense. But I think that as the sense is made you will find that God is speaking most powerfully.

The people of Israel did not believe what Amos said. If they had, if they had responded with repentance to all that has already been given to us all the way through this chapter, Amos would have shifted his message. He would have ceased to speak words of judgment and instead he would have begun to apply to them the balm of forgiveness and assured repentance to the people, the renewing love of God, for that is God's way. When God sends a word of warning, a word of caution, and a word of judgment, it is almost without exception saying, “Wake up, pay attention, set your heart on the true paths, get your mind straight and return to the way of faithfulness. Then the question is always, will we listen. Israel did not believe what Amos said.

Consequently Amos goes on speaking; he has to. He does not give the same testimony as Jeremiah but I do not doubt that [his situation] was the same as it was for Jeremiah said. Jeremiah had the same assignment; he had to give a hard message to the nation. At one point Jeremiah says, *“If I say that I will not mention [the Lord], or speak anymore in his name, there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”* Beloved, this is what it means to be called by God. The Apostle Paul said the same thing in I Corinthians 9:16, *“If I preach the gospel that gives me no grounds for boasting, for necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”* When God calls, when He calls you, you soon realize that you are not the master of your own life; you are His, and He will command you as He will. Grace places us in the hands of the Living God; His hands now direct your steps. So as you think about Amos, you should think about a man who is now under constraint. He is driven, pushed, pulled, shaped, directed by the Living God. And it is simply not reasonable to think that Amos enjoyed what the Lord has sent him to do. When challenged by one of the apostate priests who served the golden calf in Bethel, Amos will declare (7:16), *“I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me...and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now therefore hear the word of the Lord.”*

You might want to stop right here and meditate on these things. There is pervasive attitude in the church that calls itself the church of Jesus Christ, the attitude that salvation is all about us reaching our full potential, that salvation is all about us coming to self-fulfillment and having a wonderful life. That is not what salvation is about. We are not talking about self-fulfillment or self-realization or living up to your full potential. What we are talking about is the obedience of faith. Amos is obedient to what God has called him to do, and it didn't make any difference if he liked it or not: he was under constraint, as Paul was. What about us? How lightly do we take the notion that we have been called to salvation, as if having received that lovely gift from the Lord we can now drop it into our accounts and proceed on our own way, expecting that now that we are the saved, we shall surely be blessed in whatever we [choose] to do.

Amos starts talking once again, chapter 6:1. He begins talking to these wealthy people, powerful people, the elite of the nation. He warns them about the dangers of complacency. *“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes!”* Presumably this is how the leaders, the ruling elite of Israel saw themselves. They were at ease. The king at this time was Jeroboam, and king Jeroboam had defeated all of their enemies and had expanded the kingdom of Israel to its largest extent, equaling the days of David and Solomon. They were wealthy; they were powerful; they were the notable men, the men of reputation. They were the ones to whom others came and sought counsel and advice. They were at the top of all the nations surrounding them. It was to them that their neighbors looked for aid. It was to them that their neighbors looked for advice, and above all it was to them that they looked with admiration: they have got it, they have made it! At least that was the opinion they shared amongst themselves.

The third verse is key for understanding Amos at this point. He says, *“You who put far away the day of disaster...”* This is complacency. They say to themselves and to one another, “Nothing bad is going to happen to us.” They say to themselves and to one another, “We are not in danger.” They say to themselves and to one another, “All is well.” The walls are high, the gates are strong, the armed forces are many and well-trained and equipped. All our neighbors are as afraid of us as much as they trust us. It is possible that Amos is speaking in verse 2 with irony when the leaders boast of their superiority to Calneh, Hamath and Gath. We don’t know about those towns but they did. It was about the equivalent to us in Oroville boasting about how much better we are than Los Molinos or Biggs or Berry Creek.

Boasting is dangerous. Amos continues with the last half of verse three. This is the way the whole verse reads: *“You who put far away the day of disaster, and bring near the seat of violence.”* What is going on? This is similar to what Amos said in chapter 3:10, *“They do not know how to do right’, declares the Lord, ‘those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.”* In chapter 3 Amos’ point was that if you ruin your own people by oppressing them and overtaxing them and getting graft out of them and you ruin your own people, they will eventually ruin you in return. Here Amos’ point is that if you boast in strength and threats of violence, and treat your neighbors with contempt, eventually someone is going to come along who will be bigger than you are, stronger than you are, and more ruthless than you are. Or, as you and I would be more likely to put it, the chickens come home to roost, or what goes around comes around. But the ruling elite of Israel is too far gone. They cannot hear what Amos has to say. They are too busy enjoying themselves. That is what Amos talks about in vv. 4-6.

*“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on 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 oils...”*

I hope by now you are hearing something familiar, about the United States.

Complacency in a fallen world is folly. This is no less true in spiritual terms than it is in any others. Israel was surrounded by nations who were frequently her enemies. And there were more, and more powerful potential enemies further off. So here we have a ruling elite bragging about how much stronger they are than their neighbors while they progressively impoverish their own people. And more profoundly, they alienate the God who has blessed them. In some ways, looking at those same verses, 4-6, we could say there has been something of a cultural flowering in Israel, at least amongst the wealthy and leisured class, as they devote themselves to creativity in housing, furniture, gourmet eating, musical improvisation in both instruments and style and of course the delights of fine wines. It is not these aspects of the culture per se to which God objects, although a rough-hewn farmer and herdsman such as Amos may have had some problems with them. God’s objection comes instead at the end of those verses: *“They are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.”* Joseph was another name for the northern ten tribes, the kingdom of Israel or Samaria, and the ruin was that being inflicted on the poor and even more [by] the empty religion being practiced by the elite. “The oracle in chapter 6:1-14 comes before us as a final reminder in this part of the book of Amos [and this is what it reminds us of], of the fearful solemnity of religious error. Their particular error was to isolate two components within the true religion which had been revealed to them and to act as if there was nothing else to the question of being religious: sincerity and ceremony. We should not think that these people who gave lavishly at the religious ceremonies were hypocrites. We cannot make that judgment. Overwhelmingly generous, they were constantly about the business of worshiping their god. No doubt [they were] deeply grateful for all the wonderful things that they enjoyed, the high position that was theirs. There is not a reason in the world for us to assume that they were not sincere in being thankful that they were so richly blessed. But their sincerity is out of step with the truth about God. It was a sincerity devoted to a god of their own making. What had they left out? They treated the ceremonies as ends in themselves, done in and for the automatic benefits [believed to be] achieved by the ceremonial act. But in the meantime they are divorced from their God-intended context of a life of moral obedience, righteous principle and just conduct.” (Motyer, p. 140-141) There is no transformation of

character. They celebrated their good fortune; they were indifferent to the ruin and misery of others, they were blind to the claims either of justice or mercy. In this they demonstrated their divorce from God.

The heart of the matter is found in verse eight which stands at the center of the chapter and is in fact its governing truth. *“The Lord God has sworn by Himself, declares the Lord, the God of Hosts: ‘I abhor the pride of Jacob. I hate his strongholds and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.’* That is the key phrase: “I abhor the pride of Jacob.” There is a Proverb that says pride goes before a fall. Pride is an especially potent form of self-centeredness. Pride is in love with its own voice. Pride is enamored with its own opinions. Pride is enthralled by its own judgments. Pride is captivated by its own estimations. For the man of pride all things are measured against his own exalted self and nothing quite matches. Complacency is not the only manifestation of pride, but it is common. Another of pride’s expressions is contempt. Contempt dismisses others as worthless. They can be used or ignored but they [need] never be considered in serious terms. They pose no threat. Amos is pointing out to Israel that this is how it was with them. They told themselves they were beyond danger. God says He will deliver them to ruin. Like the farmer in Jesus’ parable in Luke 12:16-21, they thought they had filled their enlarged barns with sufficient wealth for many years of leisured enjoyment. Jesus’ comment is, *“Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*

It is understandable that every person wants to have a positive self-image. The difference comes in how we go about this. The person who says, “I am a sinner saved by grace. I am loved by God, called to serve in the strength and the wisdom which He supplies; I am a willing and gifted servant of the Lord whose entire hope is found in the gospel of our salvation through faith in the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross.” That man could and should have solid self-esteem as one chosen by God. But the person who says, “I am a cut above the ordinary; I stand beyond the crowd; I am rich and powerful and superior in my abilities and possessions and I have no need of others for I am in control of my life and I have arranged my world for my own satisfaction”: that person is trapped in the echo chamber of self-admiration. They will be deaf to the warning sounds, the warning voices of impending disaster. Self-esteem should never forgo self-doubt; humility is always the path of wisdom, for no one can foresee all contingencies, just as the bankers and financial wizards who deluded themselves and many others in the housing bubble in our country. [They persuaded people to invest vastly beyond their financial means], buying homes, telling them there was no danger, for surely the value of that house [would soon] surpass their indebtedness. And then came the collapse. Wham! Suddenly millions of Americans found themselves utterly broke.

Whether or not God orchestrated the bursting of the housing bubble and the collapse of the financial markets I do not know, but Amos tells us that God did orchestrate the shattering of complacent and idolatrous Israel, so in love with herself and complacent in her sin. The description given in verses 9 and 10 describes the reversal of what was written in verses 4-6 and the fulfillment of what was written in v. 7. This is what he says, *“If ten men remain in one house, they shall die. . . [Remember the houses: great houses, houses of ivory, summer houses, winter houses] . . . and if one’s relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of the house, ‘Is there still anyone with you?’ he shall say, ‘No’: and he shall say, ‘Silence! We must not mention the name of the Lord.’”* What do we have described for us here? What we have is that the houses of ease and luxury have become houses of death. What we have here is that where they had boasted of their privileged position in the Lord’s favor there is now suddenly an enforced silence. What we realize is that now they know what they then refused to know, and that is the truth about God, that He abhors their pride and the oppression and injustice that flowed from it.

There is a profound and stark lesson in v. 11 for any who read Amos. In vv. 12, 13 and 14 Amos confirms what he has already said to the ruling elite. First he says, “You know, there is a rightness about things which is obvious unless one has become so saturated with sin that you are deaf and blind.” This is what he means when he says you

don't run horses on rocks. How many of us own horses? What happens when you run horses over rocks? End of horse! He also says you don't use oxen to plow that field full of rocks. Those agricultural economies would have known that without a moment's hesitation. Just as obviously justice should lead to good health and righteousness, to that which is pleasing to taste and nourishing to eat. But those who govern and rule in Israel have done just the opposite, and all the while they have been lavish in what they told themselves was worship. Verse 13 nails it as the footnote for the verse tells us. “Lo-Debar”, as the footnote tells us, means “nothing”. So they rejoice in nothing. As Ecclesiastes will put it: “Vanity of vanities.” Forgetting God's covenant promises of blessing, they claim the credit for their victories and conquests for themselves. But amidst the victory celebration for having slain the neighbor's cat, they have failed to notice the approaching lion: *“For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, declares the Lord the God of hosts: ‘and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah.’”* What he describes is the entirety of the nation, from Maine to Southern California, from Florida to the uttermost reaches of Alaska: you shall be crushed! So that is worth thinking about.

Verse 11: *“For behold the Lord commands and the great house shall be struck down into fragments, and the little house into bits.”* So far Amos has directed his fiery denunciation against the great houses, the houses of ivory, the summer and the winter house of the elite. But when destruction comes the destroyer will not discriminate between the proud houses of the great and the little houses of the common man. When destruction comes it will be the whole nation that suffers. Many of the little people in Israel suffered, and often suffered cruelty under the oppression and injustice of the grasping and arrogant elite. But there were also those who prospered, enjoying certain benefits, the spill-over of prosperity, as it were, even if it was only crumbs from the tables of the wealthy. There were enough of these to ensure that the whole system kept going and did not collapse under the weight of its own corruption. These had as it were, waved the flag, sung the songs and took every opportunity for personal advantage and gain, even though they surely knew something was terribly wrong. But what can a man do? So they went along, doing the best they could, hoping they were not crushed by the chariot wheels of oppression. But ask yourselves, what did they hear when they listened to Amos preach? Did they think quietly to themselves, “This is what the great ones deserve! When the day comes it will be different for us. We are just victims. Surely we will be alright. Maybe we will come out on top once God hauls off the bums who have been enriching themselves by ripping us off!” But what Amos says is, “The little house – their houses – will be broken to bits.” In a different context but equally applicable to Israel Amos's day and to America in ours are the words of Jeremiah to the exiled people of God living in Babylon, having been deported by Nebuchadnezzar when he conquered and destroyed Judah and Jerusalem and Solomon's temple: Jeremiah 29:4-7.

*“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.’”*

The clear implication of this is that they will also suffer loss and ruin if they do not seek the welfare of the nation where they live. It is gloriously true that God is able and does distinguish between the good and the evil in the world, and that He does preserve His people amidst the sorrows and losses of those who reject Him. But this glorious reality does not mean and should not be used to mean that God's people are exempt from responsibility to serve the needs and seek the good of their neighbors, whom Jesus said we are to love. Nor does it mean that God's people will escape unsinged from the fire of God's judgment on the nation when the day comes. Do we think there will be no judgment, and do we think that if judgment comes we will enjoy our comforts? Or are we willing to go to work and do everything we can to bring righteousness and truth and justice with mercy and the gospel of God's grace to our community? We are called to serve. We should be about it.

Please pray with me: Our heavenly Father, it is easy, of course, and in some sense it is almost pleasurable to hear of the thundering judgments of a great prophet speaking against a wicked people in a place long ago and far away. But

that is not at all Your intent when we come to Your Word. Your intent is that we would hear Your Spirit speaking through the word and applying these truths to us in our time and our pace. By Your grace, our Father, we would not fall under the hammer of Your judgment, but rather under the sweet rain of Your refreshing and renewing grace. But we understand, Father, from these words of Your servant Amos, that if these rain showers of blessing are to come to us, then we must work hard to see that our city is blessed, that Your truth is spoken into the counsels that govern this community, that the people who live here will have the opportunity to see Your grace and goodness at work through Your people. Forgive us, our Father, for being hard-hearted, from holding in contempt those whom we consider to be the lost, for standing apart from the needy, and even the rebellious, and certainly the lost. Work in us a fresh mind and a new heart of compassion for our neighbors, for Father we understand in the most practical of terms that our well-being will be found in the well-being of the city. So may we be Your servants for their good. We ask it, our Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Do you think American Christianity has added rules and expectation to what the Bible actually requires of believers in order to be rightly seen as “serious” about the faith? If so, what might some of those rules and expectations be?
2. As you see it, are there issues of justice, mercy or faithfulness which American Christianity tends to ignore? What might some of those be?
3. Under what circumstances or how are we tempted to substitute people’s admiration for heaven’s blessings in our spiritual disciplines?
4. What to you are the clearest evidences of God’s active presence in the world today?
5. How does the issue of personal holiness tend to affect you the most?
6. Have you known people who have openly declared they prefer to not have God active in their life? Though we may be reluctant to admit it, I think most people feel this way now and then. What are some times when people generally feel this way?
7. Do you think there is evidence that God is attempting to recapture the attention of our nation as a whole? What might some of those evidences be?
8. Many people express an interest in and some claim to have had a direct encounter with God. Why is this risky and what is the Biblical answer to this problem?
9. What most deeply affects you regarding God and how does this play out in your spiritual life?