

Pastor John Bronson

Order of worship for 10/13/13, title, “A Clear and Present Danger”, text, Amos 3:1-8

Opening song:

1-

Welcome and Invocation: Isaiah 2:1-5

Ministry Moment

Message Theme: God’s people must live according to God’s revealed word

Worship Theme: Thanks for and commitment to God’s Word

Opening Song:

“Everyday”

Overhead

Welcome

Invocation:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Special Music:

“I Will Follow You”

Oroville Christian School’s Worship Team

Ministry Moment:

Awana

Preparing the Heart in Song:

“Thy Word”

Overhead

“Open the Eyes of My Heart”

Overhead

“I’d Rather Have Jesus”

Song # 506

Offering & Offertory

Message:

“A Clear and Present Danger”

Amos 3:1-8

Pastor John Bronson

Response to the Word:

“Give Thanks”

Song # 170

Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer

Sunday Evening in the Word:

5:30-7 pm in the Church Library

Effective and Fruitful Faith: 2 Peter 1:16-2:1

Sunday Evening in the Word

Effective and Fruitful Faith: 2 Peter 1:16-2:1

5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Church Library

“The Prayer Closet”

September 15, 2013

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

Ian Carlisle and ARM: Thank you for praying as Roxanne and I struggle with health issues. I am slowly gaining back strength and feeling in my legs – thank You, Jesus! Please pray for the Lord to raise up workers from our Butte County churches for the harvest in the jail.

President Obama: the Lord will lay on his heart the need to serve rather than the desire for power; the Spirit will remove falsehood from his heart and mind; the Father will draw him to the Son

AWANA: the Lord will call up new directors and leaders to serve the expanded number of children who have come to this year’s club; the Spirit will open the hearts and minds of the children to love the Word and receive the gift of faith

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Chris Bowen, Army (son of Randy and Ruth): Praise! Passed Air Assault School and knee is holding up well. Please pray that God will put good Christian people in his life and for physical strength.

Young Adult of the Week: Caleb Bronson (son of Pastor and Nini): that God would supply financially and relationally during Caleb’s transition to living in Chico

Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family: Bob Boettcher, Carol Bernerd, Carol Gray, Carole Lindsey, Dick & Jane Miller, Ellen McNabb, Joe Avery, Myrtle Fullmer, Phil Peterson, Randy Bowen
(please call the office to request updates)

I.

The message title for today is “A Clear and Present Danger”. We are working though this minor prophet is sobering indeed. But it should not be any more sobering to us than listening to the radio, reading things on the internet or watching the news on TV. If we are attuned to our culture, if we are watching what is happening, whether you watch the political scene or, if you have access to information regarding the life of the church, the Body of Christ in America, you know that we have clear and present danger. There are tons of signs to say things are profoundly amiss. There are signs of danger all about us. The statistics of the collapse of the American family, the statistics of the degeneration of our children and how they fall into one form of vice and another: it is catastrophic. The most recent statistic that I have heard is that Americans on average are no longer at an equal level with Europeans in terms of general intelligence and knowledge. You may so, oh? But what you ought to say is, “What!” Since its inception, from the first days we were on this continent, the American public has had a higher level of education and a higher level of economic productivity and a higher level of prosperity than any other nation of the world. Not now! What is happening?

(3:1) *“Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you...”* Is that possible? Within our consciousness, within our understanding of God is it possible for us to come to the place where we say, “Ah, we have moved from being a privileged people of God to where the Word of God to America is “against you.”?

(3:1) *“Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: (3:2) ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.’ (3:3) “Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet? (3:4) “Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? (3:5) “Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? (3:6) “Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?” “But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, ‘You shall not prophesy.’” “For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. (3:8) the lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?”*

This is the third chapter. Amos begins by addressing God’s Word to the whole of the chosen people, both the northern and the southern kingdoms. As he says: *“The whole family that I brought up out of Egypt.”* If you have been with us [in our study of Amos] you know that as we have come down to this point in the minor prophet Amos has directed his comments to [the foreign nations], then he spoke to Judah in particular, and then he spoke to Israel in particular. What he is doing [here] is setting us straight, saying, “OK, now what I have to say I am saying to everybody, the whole of the nation that I am bringing up out of Egypt.”

There is something important for us to appreciate in that statement given by Amos. God is not constrained by the divisions and distinctions which make amongst ourselves. Perhaps rather relevant in a sort of way is that it doesn’t make any difference if we are evangelicals, Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Nazarenes and even Baptists: none of us are determined in our standing before God by the group we identify with. When we stand in front of the Lord Jesus Christ the first question He is going to ask is not going to be, “What denomination are you from?” It doesn’t make any difference at all if you have turned away from the God of the Bible. None! The Bible is the standard of faith [and practice]. Our lives will be judge by what has been revealed and written down in the Bible, the Word of God. We took note of this [in an earlier message]: God will judge us according to what we have been told, not according to what we remember. Further, it is a basic tenet in God’s Word that those who are blessed with the grace and truth of God are for that very reason held to a higher standard of holiness. This is brought home to us in I Peter 4:17, *“For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God, and if it begins with us what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And ‘If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’”*

The standard for those who have received the Word of God includes an adherence to the revealed truth of God which is given through His prophets. It is important for us to understand and appreciate the whole issue of the

prophets. All Spirit-filled and guided preachers of the word are prophets. You can establish that in your understanding by reading I Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. When Jesus stated the principle, “To whom much is given, from that person much is expected or required,” its primary application is in reference to the extent of revealed truth given to a person or people. We need to understand that when God gives, He gives freely: it is grace that gives. But we are held to account for what we have received. So when we have received the Word of God in its entirety we shall be held to account for whether or not we have responded in faith driven obedience to the Word.

Paul said this in Romans 11:29, “*The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.*” Isn’t that good news!? This indeed is the fearsome good news of God’s electing love. Our usual understanding of election, if we are willing to accept it (many are not), is, “Oh, it is so fantastic to be amongst the chosen of God!” May I say “Amen” [to that]; God loves us with His tender and longsuffering mercy. He draws us to Himself regardless of what miserable creatures we are. Amen! And regardless of how often we stumble and fall He continues to draw us to Himself. His mercies are renewed – how often? – every morning! Some of us need it mid-day! However, we need to understand that God’s electing love also means that God is our grim or dread champion. Why [do I say that]? Oh, beloved, God is absolutely determined to remove sin from our lives. Surely the determination of God to perfect His people in the righteousness of faith is at least as harrowing, frightening as it is reassuring. We have already heard this. Can we recall what we read in Hebrews 10:31, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God!*” The connection, which I confess I have never heard from a pulpit, is this: the grace of God puts us into the hands of [the Living] God. So consequently those of us who have heard and received now understand that we live our lives in the hands of the Living God, and that is a very fearful place to be.

The fact of God being present even if and when He is ignored or suppressed and His voice is silenced – may I say that silencing God is one of the standard and terrible perversions of the rituals and ceremonies that men carry out and call religion. [They are] to silence God. This is what Amos is addressing in verses 3-6 in chapter 3. Look at those verses again. Remember, he is talking to people who have silenced the voice of God; they have silenced the prophets. They have said to the prophets, “Can it; we don’t want to hear it; talk about something else.” This is what Amos says to them:

(3:3) “*Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?* (3:4) “*Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?* (3:5) “*Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it?* (3:6) “*Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?* [Well no; of course in our day this wouldn’t work, but in those days when a trumpet was blown the people of the city knew there was danger on the horizon and they needed to take action.] *Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?*”

What do we say? Two important realities about God and His rule are set before us. The first is that the judgments of God are predictable. They are not irrational. They are as trustworthy as the regularities of nature, which are themselves a reflection of the inherent lawfulness of God. You see it is not God’s judgment that is surprising; it is God’s grace. It is grace which is the unanticipated reality. Grace does not flow as the reasonable consequence of who we are and what we have done and who God is. What is the natural consequence of who we are and what we have done and who God is? The logical consequence of being sinners is judgment, not grace. We have an overwhelming need for grace, but that does not mean that grace is logical. Indeed it is not. Grace is given without concern for the merit or the demerit of the person who receives it. But what about judgment? Judgment is meted out in an exact proportion as the person deserves. That is the nature of judgment. What is the logical consequence of being a sinner? It is judgment, not grace. The world of sinners is a fallen world. It is a world in which death woven into the fabric of creation. Amos’ point in verse 3-6 is the operations of nature are as directly the work of God as are the actions of men. All too often the seeming absence of God is actually wishful thinking on our part, just as it was for the Israelites of old. When personal love and trust in God fades away, when faith no longer engenders obedience, and life is lived by repressing the knowledge of God’s truth and resisting the claims of God’s holiness in defiance of God’s revealed will in law and wisdom, then the soul of a people spontaneously alters the meaning and motives of their religious practice. (Repeated) What happens to religion in this circumstance? No

longer do their practices embody true praise. No longer do their practices embody true thanksgiving. No longer do their practices embody sincere repentance as the prelude to a return to the path of righteousness and reconciliation with God, because they are silencing God and resisting God, and they are pulling away from God, and they are asking God to stay at a distance from them. So instead, religious activity becomes a combination of on the one hand demonstrating one's goodness toward God and on the other hand buying God off just in case He has been offended. That is a complicated definition of legalism or [a religion of] good works. The net result is to keep God as far away as possible while at the same time near enough to bless. What is wanted at this point is a well-managed god, a god who fits nicely inside of our plans and expectations, and doesn't make trouble for us along the way. Indeed, the best arrangement is if he will just bless us. When personal love and trust in God fades away...

This is why Amos points directly to God's direct personal involvement in the events which govern our lives. Where do you think God was when those two jet airliners destroyed the World Trade Center Towers in New York? He wasn't on the back side of the moon! He was here, of course. It is God Who brings disaster: wind, hail, fire, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, droughts, earthquakes; it is God who brings disaster. That would include the acts of terrorism by which our lives are shredded. Amos does not expand on this immediately but it is critical to his message and is foundational to what we will read in chapter 4:6-13.

Meanwhile, Amos returns our attention to the place of prophecy in caring for the life of His people, the very prophets [to] whom the people have said, "Don't talk." *"You made the Nazirites to drink wine and commanded the prophets saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'" Amos counters with this statement: "For the Lord God does nothing without revealing His secrets to His servants the prophets. The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?"* We find that there is a privileged position for prophets as God's spokesmen in the plan of God. As a parallel turn to 2 Timothy 4:3. This is what Paul writes to Timothy: *"The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching..."* What does that mean? "Shut up! Don't talk! Do not trouble me! I do not want to listen to what you have to say!" That is what it means. It is unendurable. What is unendurable: sound teaching. *"But having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening from the truth and wander..."* Second, we hear Amos affirming God's perfect faithfulness: he faithfully lets His prophets know what is to happen before He acts. This is mercy. God deals with us as rational beings capable of hearing and rightly responding to a message. Even the roaring of a lion is mercy because it gives at least a split second of opportunity to take evasive action. That is spelled out for us in one of the most beautiful, precious verses in all of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 10:13. *"No temptations has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."* You never have to sin. You can always choose out of it, for God Himself provides the way of escape.

Think about this: could anything be more dangerous than to silence the one source of warning regarding what the God of heaven intends to bring to pass in His dealings with us? Again we are confronted with the frightening reality that the Lord speaks with the terrifying roar of a lion. Amos does not lessen or relieve the extreme urgency of the message. The purpose of the message is not to comfort the sinner, but if I may use an uncouth phrase, it is to scare the hell out of them! But we don't like to be frightened. We far prefer to have gentle and soothing messages that imply perhaps we might think about sometime making a few little step by step, not too much changes. How many people in the World Trade Center Towers do you think at some point before the end finally engulfed them in flames cried out to God and said, "Oh I can't believe...why didn't I listen before!" Not that they would escape death – nobody escapes death in the end – but that they could stand as a humble recipient of the merciful love of God having met with Him already?

We know this of course about temptation and the way of escape. We know that for a long time as we wander there are options, many options, turning points when we could have said, "Enough of this, I am going back. I am done

with this; it is over, I am looking again for the face of God. I have walked into the shadow far enough; by the grace of God and in His mercy I see a glimmer of light. I am going for the light.” But we also know, don’t we, that there does come a point in time when there are no longer any options. The options are gone. At that moment the way forward is to simply take the consequences of our poor choices and then try and pick up the pieces of our broken lives. You all know full well that I have talked with many people who are at the pick-up process. Do you know what is amazing about the pick-up process? God is there. Now let me say that just because He is there doesn’t remove the consequences: broken lives, broke homes, damaged hearts, shattered dreams, opportunities to become something that are no longer possible. There is an incredibly high price for sin. If you and I think in terms of our personal experience, now I want you to shift gears, I want you to come and get right inside of Amos 3 and I want you to say, “What will be the consequence for the United States of America that she has turned her back on God, has pursued a course in which she not only protects but favors sin and walks as an arrogant presence across the face of the earth pretending to a righteousness she no longer as any reason to claim. What will God do to us and what will happen to you and me when God acts? Because that is what Amos is talking about. And when it is over, God will be with us, helping us to pick up the pieces.

When the Israelites told the prophets not to speak, it was God they confronted, not the prophets. This is no less true under the conditions of the New Covenant except in this regard, God has spoken and caused His once for all word for our salvation to be written down. This is the message that we get from Hebrews 1:1-3. Read the whole section, the core is [underlined]: *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. . .”* Now that Word has been written and God calls men to open His word to His people. But just as in the days of ancient Israel and the Old Covenant there were false prophets who departed from the revealed truth of God and instead proclaimed their own thoughts and made their own predictions and dreamed their own dreams, so in our day men stand where God’s spokesmen should stand and instead of opening the Word which has been revealed they preach their own thoughts and make their own predictions. Instead of light and truth emanating from those pulpits there is darkness and confusion; there is deception taught by those who are both deceiving and self-deceived. Consequently in this age it is the responsibility of the Spirit filled believer to exercise discernment and turn away from false teachers. Whose responsibility is it? It is yours, not mine. I cannot come into your homes, I cannot turn off your internet, I cannot turn off your radio, I cannot take and haul the books out of your libraries. I have no power to do that, I have no right to do that, would not if I was given the opportunity because it is your responsibility, not mine.

In this context we need to hear Paul’s counsel to Timothy in First Timothy and Second Timothy. Those letters were written to Timothy as the young pastor of the Ephesians church. In I Timothy 2:15 this is what Paul writes: *“That you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the Living God, the pillar and buttress of the truth.”* If you go to a church and you hear things that are not true, you are not in a church, because a church is by definition a pillar and buttress of the truth. In line with this the defining role of the pastor was one who proclaims and teaches the Word of God, I Tim 4:6, 11-16. Talking to Timothy [Paul says], *“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the god doctrine that you have followed.”* Then skipping down to verse eleven: *“Command and teach these things, let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”* Why do we take action against a man who has fallen into sexual sin if he is in the pulpit? [It is] because he is no longer pure. Why do we take action against a man if he has fallen into the habit of looking at pornography and yet he seeks to preach and teach the Word of God? [It is because] he is no longer pure. Purity is a part, an essential part of the ministry of God’s Word. No one who is struggling with sexual sin should stand in the pulpit and seek to open the Word of God and teach it to God’s people. He needs to attend to the issue before

he would ever dream to do such a thing. You and I should not want them to. *“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*

We can readily imagine how a pastor should respond to these words of Paul. How should they respond? They should respond with urgent attention and disciplined care. They should seek to benefit from the best thinking that has been done in the course of years by others who were also dedicated to the task. By the way, this is why you want to have a well-educated man in your pulpit. You want a man who will benefit from the best possible thinking so that they will bring that to you. Why do you want to have men like that? A sober minded congregation should want to have this kind of man in the pulpit, not for intellectual pride, but for the depth of understanding and the rigor of the application of truth to life. You should want that! Because it is pleasant? It is not, but it is necessary. It is with the consistent and disciplined study of the Word of God, that which is written on the page and that which is written in the life of the church, both past and present. When I leave this pulpit I will have one constant prayer for this church: get someone who is absolutely dedicated to preaching and teaching this word. Not somebody you like, but somebody who will preach and teach the truth.

Think for a moment: how should the congregation that reads these verses respond? The people of Israel in Amos’s day responded by silencing the prophets and by corrupting those devoted to the Lord. Paul is even more emphatic in 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Listen:

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

How do we silence God’s spokesmen? Well, sometimes it is by persecution. Sometimes they are silenced by well-reasoned counterarguments. That happens. But most of the time in our age, especially in our age, God’s spokesmen are silenced by the frivolous and the trivial: football, baseball, soccer. Oh, why should I waste my time listing sins that nobody in this congregation would commit? What attracts us and holds us away? Shopping, on the internet, or how about bathing our minds in mindless music? I told you I wasn’t going to be nice!

Notice that Paul says Timothy is to be sober minded. I looked up sober: “sparing in the use of food and drink, abstemious, not addicted to food and drink, not drunk.” That is the definition we like. How many of us are drunk, very often? But this is the definition that begins to bother us: “marked by a sedate or gravely or earnestly thoughtful character or demeanor.” Or this one, skipping a couple: “Showing no excessive or extreme qualities of fancy, emotion or prejudice.” We want doctors and lawyers and accountants to be sober. We almost desperately wish politicians would be sober. But when it comes to our leisure time activities we want life to be painted in lighter tones. In short, we have a great appetite for good times and fun. Just where religion fits in our lives is not all that clear. I think that I am safe to say that we like laughing better than weeping, and that we even prefer weeping to sustained reasoning; sober thought in matters of the Spirit, in questions of right and wrong is hard work. We prefer the emotional highs of music and song, the stimulation and pounding rhythms and driving beat. We like stories that capture our hearts and carry us forward in the drama of the tale rather than studies of the revealed doctrines of God and Christ and the Trinity, of sin and salvation and all the building blocks of faith to be lived by listening to the Spirit, Who reminds us of the truths revealed by the Son by which we know the Father. We want to enjoy ourselves.

So the question is, how do we silence the spokesmen of God? It makes no difference at all how they did it in Israel; we answer for our own behavior.

Please pray with me: Father in heaven, there is no point at all in listening to Your Word if we intend to ignore it thereafter. Grant, our Father, that that shall not be the case. We thank you, our Father, that You have given to us the immense, the immeasurable riches of Your Word, and we tremble. We tremble when we consider that having received so great a treasure, so great a resource that we neglect it. Indeed at times, Father, we prefer to not pay attention at all. We know our nation is collapsing, rotting from the inside out. But what of the church, the leaven of Your truth: what has happened? May we be as the prodigal son, who when he came to his senses said, “I will return to my father, not in pride, but in deep humility, not for the privileged place of a son, but just to be the lowest of servants by his grace. It is in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Do you identify with any social, ethnic, religious or sort of group? Is a sense of belonging important to you?
2. How might a person distinguish between being good and being Biblical?
3. Have you ever considered that there might be something deeply challenging and difficult about the grace of God?
4. Has it been your experience that our worship practices help you to hear the voice of God? How might worship practices be used to silence God’s voice?
5. Why should judgment not be surprising whereas grace should be? Has this been your experience?

When personal love and trust in God has faded away, when faith no longer engenders obedience and life is lived by repressing the knowledge of God’s truth and resisting the claims of God’s holiness and in defiance of God’s revealed will in law and wisdom, then the soul of a people spontaneously alters the meaning and the motive of their religious practices.

6. What should be the effect or result of genuine worship in the life of the believer? What does the “works worshiper” seek?
7. Do you believe all disasters are the direct action of God?
8. How are New Covenant preachers like Old Covenant prophets and how do they differ?
9. “God deals with people as rational beings capable of hearing and rightly responding to a message.”
Comments?
10. Why does Hebrews 1:1-3 rightly lead to the conclusion that there is no additional revelation to be expected from God regarding the way of salvation?
11. What kind of pastor should a congregation desire and why?
12. How are prophets/preachers silenced especially in our day?