

“Recall”
Pastor John Bronson

Amos 2:6-16

October 6, 2013

Order of worship for 10/6/13, title, “Recall”, text, Amos 2:6-16, Communion
Opening Song:

Welcome and Invocation: Deuteronomy 8:11-20

Message Theme: When God recalls His people to holiness, He reminds them both of His perfect righteousness and His promises

Worship Theme: Thanks and praise to God for His Renewing Mercies

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

Opening Song:

“Blessed By Your Name” Overhead

Welcome

Invocation: Deuteronomy 8:11-20

Preparing the Heart in Song:

“Forever” Overhead

“Above All” Overhead

“Great is Thy Faithfulness” Song # 139

Offering & Offertory

Message: Amos 2:6-16 “Recall”
Pastor John Bronson

The Lord’s Supper

Coming to the table

“The Wonderful Cross” Overhead

Invitation to the Supper

Prayers of Confession and Consecration

Distribution of the Elements

Closing Song:

“Be Still and Know” Song # 585

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

“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:

Vance and Carol Johnson: Evangelical Theological college of the Philippines: the Lord will add many to the new church plant in the Johnson home; the Spirit will enable the Philippine leadership of the Free Churches will to be effective in planting many new churches; the Lord will enable the Johnsons and others to render clear and unmistakable the difference between Catholicism, Marxism and true Christianity

President Obama: the Lord will gather round him those who will give him wise and godly counsel; the Spirit will give him an understanding mind and a heart for justice and truth; the Lord will protect him and his family from all evil

Youth Ministry and Mexico Mission: the Spirit will open the hearts of many youth in the church and school for salvation and growth in faith; the Lord will protect the emotional, financial, physical and spiritual well-being of the Nybergs and the Wixoms; the opportunity to participate in the Mexico Mission will be a powerful motivation for spiritual growth

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Aaron Bowen, volunteer firefighter (son of Randy and Ruth): In the midst of background checks for the Sacramento police dept. and also the border patrol. Pray that God would guide him into just the right job for him; that his blood checks stay in control and be managed well, so they will want to hire him.

Young Adult of the Week: Alyssa Holland (daughter of Fred and Diane): for God’s healing hands regarding severe headaches and neck issue; please pray for peace that will pass all understanding

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

(please call the office to request updates)

1.

Please open your scriptures to Amos 2:6-16. We have been looking at Amos for a number of weeks. A number of people have been asking me, “How are you Pastor Bronson?” “I’m OK.” There are a variety of reasons as to why I am only OK as opposed to great. Amos is one of them. Beloved it is not an easy task to study my way through Amos. It is simple enough in terms of reading the verses, understanding what they say and agreeing. But to let the Spirit of God touch my heart and mind with this portion of His word is not an easy task, nor should it be for us as we gather together as His people and listen to what the Spirit has to say to us. For it is overwhelmingly the case that the condition of the United States of America today has profound and deep parallels to the condition of Israel when Amos spoke. That is why it is a burden for me to work through it.

Amos was a man called by God in the days when the covenant people of God were divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Though he was born in Judah, God sent him to Israel. Both kingdoms, north and south, had long since turned away from worshiping God in the way that God commanded. That was the reason God sent Amos, to call them back from the perils of judgment: that is the first meaning of the title, “Recall”. Turn with me to the verses, beginning at 2:6.

(2:6) “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— (2:7) 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; (2:8) 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.

(2:9) “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. (2:10) 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. (2:11) 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. (2:12) “But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying ‘You shall not prophesy.’

(2:13) “Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. (2:14) Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; (2:15) 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; (2:16) and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day.’ Declares the Lord.”

Amos first names some specific sins just as he had with the foreign nations that he has already condemned. These are the sins: those who are in charge, the wealthy and powerful, the elite who control the flow of goods and services in the nation: he says of them that they are more interested in gaining wealth than they are honoring the righteous or caring for the needy, the poor and the afflicted. Their priorities are wrong. One commentator that I read expanded on the sixth verse. He said this, “Human life was as nothing in comparison of personal aggrandizement to the extent of even a paltry sum. Officialism [the work of bureaucrats] to which the death of a human being is mainly a question of burial or registration fee was not unheard of. This principle has a bearing, not only on murder and the perversion of justice, but on slavery, oppression, the [drug and alcohol] traffics, and every method of making money at the expense of human life on earth or well-being.” That statement we would condense and simply say they have developed a culture of death. That is what we say of ourselves today; we profit off the death of other people. At the same time, he goes on to say, this is not the full extent of their immorality. They are flagrantly immoral. The “girl” in [verse 7] is most likely a temple prostitute who functioned as part of Baal worship. Baal worship was an exalting of sex as a quasi-divine experience, a form of worship by which the worshiper participated with the god in bringing about the fertility of the land.

It is significant, if you study the word of God, that you will find in the entirety of scripture [the writers] are extremely careful to keep human sexuality and the worship of God separated from one another. This does not mean, however, that God is indifferent to the sexual life of His people. In the eyes of God the sexual union of a man and a woman is a creative act whether or not a child is conceived. Paul speaks of this precisely in I Corinthians 6:15-16. You might want to turn there. Listen to what Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. *“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’”* In our day we no longer need to look for prostitutes. This is an abomination in the sight of God. Let us be clear that this is not an unforgivable sin. Of course it is forgivable. It is not a sin against the Holy Spirit specifically, and only a sin that is directly against the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin. On the other hand it is a sin of profound consequence. That is what Paul drives home to us in I Corinthians 6:18. You might want to mark it down for reference. *“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”* The people of Israel had deeply corrupted themselves. And haven't we, beloved?

We do not use sex to worship the gods. However our culture has come to worship sex. Why do I say that? It is not a problem to explain. We now declare that sex is an unqualified or an absolute good. In addition, we say that all people have the right for whatever kind of sexual satisfaction they want. This overrides virtually every other moral and legal consideration, including the well-being of the children that may “unfortunately” be conceived. We have a culture ensured that those children are easily gotten rid of, their death being the price we willingly pay for our pleasure. We have deeply corrupted ourselves.

That is not all: we do not have to look very far to see that the exaltation of wealth and gain is scarcely hidden behind the rhetoric of free trade and capitalism. We are an avaricious culture. What do I mean by “avaricious culture”? We are a culture that exults in material worth. We are a culture that celebrates multiple homes, multiple cars, multiple gadgets, constantly upgrading our gadgets, endless amounts of clothing. Beloved, it means nothing for the condition of our hearts that we have managed to arrange things so that our hunger for material goods provides employment and income for others. Consider what would it mean for the proclamation of the gospel and the extension of the kingdom of God if we channeled our wealth to ministries of evangelism, church planting, compassion and the pursuit of justice for the oppressed? God knows that our hearts follow our desires. If a man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. That is the judgment of scripture. But we prefer not to believe that. Jesus said in Matthew 6:24. *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”* But we prefer not to believe that either.

In Amos 2:8 he makes reference to garments taken in pledge and to the wine of those who have been fined. You need to know that in the legal system of ancient Israel pledged garments were the collateral of the very poor who were driven by necessity into indebtedness. As regards the wine taken as fines, the law then specified that the fines were paid to an offended party, not to the state or its officials, as is the case in the United States. The clear implication of these [statements] is that there were people who enjoyed an extraordinary level of benefit from fines, benefits most likely gained when those with wealth and power would manipulate the laws and the court rulings for their own gain. In the law the covenant people of God were directed to show special concern for the poor, and they were forbidden to keep the pledged garments of a poor person overnight as it was all that the poor had to sleep in. Further they were to charge no interest on monies lent to the poor of the covenant people. And if the year of Jubilee – every fifty years [there was supposed to be] the year of release and freedom – all debts were to be

cancelled and properties returned and enslaved people were to be set free. It is clear in reading the Old Testament from one end to the other that the intention of God is that the poor were to be cared for and benefitted by those who could afford to do so. But that had ceased to be the case in Israel. It had in fact become the exact opposite: they were consuming the poor and using them for their own benefit.

Before moving on to verses 9-12, a summary of God’s grace in dealing with His people, it is of the greatest importance that we know that at this time there was no actual pagan worship in either Judah or Israel. One commentator says, “In the time of Jeroboam II [the days in which Amos preached to Israel in the north] there was no heathenish idolatry in the kingdom of the ten tribes, or at any rate it was not publicly maintained.” What was happening in Israel especially was pagan worship in the name of the true God. Everybody praised and prayed to Yahweh, but it was not the God of the Covenant.

Against the callous and grasping behavior of Israel Amos in chapter 2:9-12 reminds God’s people of the generous blessings he had given to Israel. What had He done? It is the same story, we hear it again and again. He had eliminated those who dwelt in the land before them even though they were a people vastly stronger than Israel. This was, as the Israelites knew, God’s judgment on an exceedingly wicked people. It was their wickedness and not Israel’s righteousness in any sense which explained why Israel was able to conquer and occupy the land. That was what we heard from the reading in Deuteronomy 8 earlier today. Not only that, but even more profoundly it was God who had brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt and cared for Israel for forty years in the wilderness, a beautiful example of balancing of discipline and mercy - you might want to read Psalms 105 and 106 next to each other; they give both sides of Israel’s experience in the wilderness. Exodus was the defining experience [of God’s saving grace] for Israel. Moses not only secured Israel’s release from Egyptian slavery, he also provided for Israel the terms of the covenant which made of the tribes a united people distinct from all others, defining their relationship with God as well as with one another. What we are told is that He raised up prophets, speakers of God’s truth, and Nazirites, holy men dedicated to God who were to live in the midst of Israel as exemplars or samples of true righteousness. Both the prophets and the Nazirites were established by God’s own decree as you can see in Numbers 6:1 and 12:6. Notice the last comment: *“Indeed is it not so, O people of Israel?”*

In 2:12 Amos returns to God’s indictment, now listing the ways in which Israel had abused these blessings. They had corrupted the Nazirites, undermining their dedication to holiness symbolized in their refusal to drink wine. Further, they silenced the prophets. One of the commentators pointed out what a profound betrayal this is of the privileged positions the Israelites enjoyed with God. They are in effect seeking to silence the voice of the very God Who has blessed them and in Whose favor they think they stand. Another commentator made this observation: “Israel’s sin was the compelling others to sin. This was soul murder, and therefore guilt of the darkest dye.”

What Amos does when he starts speaking to Israel is he says, this is the third and the fourth transgression of Israel in God’s eyes. What that means is that this being the case the future for Israel lies only through judgment. There is no other way; she cannot go to the right, she cannot go to the left. She must go through the path of judgment that will now fall upon her. Historically we know that this [proved] true. It will be the complete destruction of the nation.

Amos says all of this to a nation, by the way, to a nation enjoying great wealth, great political power, a life of ease and steadily increasing wealth for the rich, and a reputation for military prowess. This is the only time in the history of the northern ten tribes that Israel reached again the full extent of the Davidic and Solomon eras. After this, she crumbles.

Who can deny at least a partial parallel to various aspects of American life? Not only are we staggeringly wealthy as a nation, but there are many fabulously wealthy churches in our land and more than a few of these preach a deeply

compromised gospel. In our nation we have millions who profess faith in Christ but they directly deny the place of the Law. They scoff at the need for holiness. They choose to remain ignorant of the Law. They do not wish to hear it. I read a little article on the Internet this morning about Joel Olsteen. How many know who he is. He is the pastor of a church of some 40,000 people. I was very encouraged because in that little article it said he will not perform a wedding for same sex marriage. I said, “Yes!” Other than that I don’t know if he reads his Bible or not. Why do I say that? I say that because what he says is, “God surely wants all of us to be perfectly happy, perfectly prosperous, fulfilling all of our dreams.” Really? Do you read that in your Bible? You do only if you “cherry pick” this verse, this verse and this verse. Wow! This is what I read in the Bible: James 4:4, *“You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”* But isn’t just this was we would expect if the people have silenced the voice of God? Christianity today partakes deeply of the cultural ideals of self-fulfillment, the need for emotional self-expression, and we put in question [by holding to] these values the standards of self-restraint and self-control, we become without comprehension of what it means that we are to put to death the self in preference to taking on the characteristics of Christ; and what on earth does it mean that we are to follow the way of suffering for love of others if we are in constant pursuit of self-fulfillment? Perhaps a reminder would be helpful. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* That is not the motto of the faith-lives of very many.

You and I are evangelical Christians. We tell ourselves that we take the Bible seriously. I believe we do. But are we clear as to what we mean by this? We like to hear it preached, of course, and many of us have our favorite passages, passages which for the most part emphasize God’s love for us and blessings that He has sent our way, and the forgiveness of our sins by His grace. Those are good things. You should know them. We know that we are sinners. We know that we are saved by grace, not by the merits of our actions, words or thoughts. But as a culture, as a church, as Christians today, where are we when it comes to the issue of personal holiness? What has happened to us when it comes to the issue of separating from the world and not being the world’s friends as James speaks? Do we even understand what those phrases mean? We are quick, of course, to renounce and denounce legalism; are we equally quick to embrace holiness and the disciplines of faith and commend the way of service and sacrifice? Are we willing to commend those who devote themselves to holiness? Remember what they did in Israel? They corrupted the Nazirites; they said, “Oh, knock it off, don’t be a legalist. Go and enjoy yourself. God is not going to care about that! Certainly you can drink this. Certainly you can do that. Oh, come on!”

The purpose of the Nazirite was stated by one of the commentators in this way: “The raising up of the Nazirites was not only intended to set before the eyes of the people the object of their divine calling, or their appointment to be a holy nation of God, but also to show them how the Lord bestowed the power to carry out this object.” Oh! If I dedicate myself to personal holiness, if I separate myself from the way of the world, if I find my satisfactions in my closeness to God rather than in my conformity to the current cultural trends and fads and passions, then God will communicate a special power to me to endure and stay on path and to live righteously in the midst of an unrighteous people? Yes, that is exactly right. That is the promise. Why do we have a powerless church that seems incapable of penetrating a culture that is overwhelmingly powerful and reshaping us, not us them? What has happened? As evangelical Christians we are serious about proclaiming the gospel and leading people to Christ – at least relatively so – but where are we when it comes to caring for the poor and defending the lives of those who are marginalized in our society and largely defenseless.

These are harsh words; I know they are. I don’t intend to soften them. I would be betraying God if I did. They are hard for us to hear, I suspect, hard for me to listen to as I hear myself, living in the context of a culture that is devoted to personal privacy, personal comfort, personal security and personal happiness. The corruption of faith and the preaching and teaching of heresies or falsehoods as if they were the truth derive their effective hole on us because they retain some substantial elements of the truth in them. Beloved, if you go back again to Deuteronomy

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8, what exactly is it that Moses says to his people? He says, you're going to build houses, you're going to plant fields, you're going to build barns: you are going to make a nice life for yourself. Is that wrong? No! It is right! We are made to want those things, to need those things, to rejoice in those things, to enjoy those things. Of course! They are not, however, the goal of the Christian life. They are instead the gift of God to those who are devoted to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Beloved we are living in the day of the dramatic de-Christianization of our nation, not only in the massive attempt to erase Christianity from the public life of the nation, but also from the hearts and minds of our children. In the face of that concerted effort do you and I try to live our faith as if it wasn't happening? Are we, like that old song talks about, those who walk through the deepening darkness whistling, pretending we are approaching the dawn? Do we flirt with the devil on the weekdays, play with demons on Saturday, and then attempt to be devout on Sunday? Yet, says God, I sent My Son to die for you so that you would not be slaves, but be free. We are going to be taking the Supper together. What I would like us to do is to take counsel with the Holy Spirit of God and simply say to him, “You know, I want You to set me straight so that as I go on from here down the road I am walking in a pathway that is increasingly bearing the mark of Jesus Christ and less and less the marks of the world around me. I want to be faithful.” I do not want what I have said here today to say, “I wonder if I am saved”, but I do want you to ask this question: “What does it mean that I am saved, and what does God want me to do now that I am?”

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Do you think God is calling our church, the Body of Christ in America, or the nation as a whole back from the perils of judgment in our day? What is the basis for your opinion?

2. What do you see as the most obvious or perhaps the most pervasive sins in American life? What do you see as the most obvious or pervasive sins amongst American Christians?

3. How would you describe God’s view of and purpose for human sexuality?

4. Why is sexual sin distinct from all others? What might be some reasonable responses to knowing this?

5. What seems to be the culture’s view of human sexuality and what are some of the consequences of this?

6. What is a practical definition of the concept or moral category of greed?

7. Would it be fair to say that aspects of life in America tend to compel others to sin? What are some of those aspects?

8. Is there evidence in contemporary church life that it has been deeply influenced by the cultural ideals of self-fulfillment and the need for emotional self-expression? Why might these ideals tend to compromise a commitment to scripture’s call to holiness and service?

9. How far do the typical evangelical priorities in church life, ministry and missions fulfill God’s call and purpose for His people according to scripture?