

September 18, 2016
Sermon for The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Amos 8:4-7

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Amos 8:4–7 (ESV)

⁴ Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, ⁵ saying, “When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, ⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?” ⁷ The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: “Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Israel is on the edge of disaster.

In 930 BC, King Solomon dies, and the kingdom is divided.

Jeroboam, king of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, builds a temple in Dan (in the far north) and in Bethel (near the southern border of his kingdom), so the people will have a place to go to worship without having to travel to Jerusalem, in the Southern Kingdom, to worship there.

For 180 years, the Lord sends prophets to Israel, warning of the idolatry in these temples, calling the people to repent, and threatening destruction if they refuse.

Now Amos is there, in the year 750, in Bethel, Israel, preaching against the people's idolatry, warning them of the destruction we know was only twenty-eight years away, for the Assyrian army would destroy Israel in 722 BC. Amos stands on the edge of disaster and preaches. His message: Only repentance will turn away God's wrath.

Israel trusted in their wealth instead of in God.

It was a time of prosperity in Israel, but God's people completely misunderstood His blessings. They were indeed blessed but they credited their blessedness to themselves. They began to act and to do as they pleased with no regard to God's laws; with no regard to their Creator. They saw themselves at the center of their universe. Sure. God had created them and all that they saw, but they no longer needed Him. They had outgrown their Creator. Or so they thought.

A series of strong kings had enabled Israel to grow in affluence. But instead of seeing this prosperity as opportunity to serve the neighbor, the people saw their wealth as proof of God's love. Of His approval of them living as they were.

And if riches are a mark of God's favor, then poverty must be proof of God's rejection. The Israelites, then, felt no guilt in abusing the poor. Again, they saw poverty as God's rejection and they saw themselves as kings in their own right because their wealth was their idol.

They invented any number of exotic ways to break the Seventh Commandment (vv 4–6). Yes, they were stealing, but in such a way that it appeared that they were not. The appearance of doing right was all that mattered. My scale, my weights...they don't lie.

They cheated, lied, used false weights, sold bad products, and even put their neighbors into slavery when they dealt falsely with them and when they couldn't pay their bills.

They went to church or to the temple but they couldn't wait for the service to end so they could get out and make more money. Hurry up rabbi, get to the benediction so we can grab some lunch and get to work. Even in their religious lives, it was all about appearances and nothing about substances.

They were hypocrites; their religion was a sham to cover up their sin.

Jesus warns about the idol of money, "Mammon." As we heard in our Gospel this morning:

"You cannot serve God and money" (Lk 16:13).

Dr. Martin Luther said that money is the most common idol in the world, and we see this in our world, even our own hearts. We aren't innocent either. We trust wealth and think it makes us safe, secure. But like the eagle on the dollar, wealth quickly flies away.

Greed is not simply breaking the Seventh Commandment, but also the First; it is having another god. When we put money, gold or any other thing before God so that we are ready to break the Seventh Commandment by stealing, even when we try to rationalize it to ourselves we are breaking the First Commandment.

And God is angry about such sin—with real wrath! Just look at Israel, in their pride they didn't think God would destroy them. They were His children, His favorites. God had been good to Israel. Why would He change now?

After all, we go to the Temple, give sacrifices, say our prayers. God's wrath and anger seem so far away, and this leads to a false security in ourselves rather than God.

The same is true today.

We think God is a “nice guy,” that He isn’t troubled with our sins. He probably doesn’t even notice them. And since we get away with it, we then, think that there are no consequences for our sin and our unbelief.

However, God’s wrath is real.

The threat of destruction was a real threat to Israel, and in fact it came about in 722 BC when the Assyrian army swarmed all over them and destroyed them utterly.

The threat of hell is real too. It is the eternal punishment for all unbelief.

All of this is a result of unbelief, of not having faith in God as He invites us in the First Commandment. So what are we to do?

Amos preaches repentance—to Israel and to us—to turn away God’s wrath.

The Lord does not want to destroy Israel, so He sends the prophets to warn them (v 7).

God’s anger is His “strange work” (*opus alienum*, Is 28:21).

“For the Lord will rise up as on Mount Perazim; as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused; to do his deed—strange is his deed! and to work his work—alien is his work!”

God does not want to punish you or anyone else, He wants to love you

God’s anger is preached precisely to prepare an escape from that anger.

You see, Amos is preaching the Law with such severity only so that the people would repent and God would turn away the threatened destruction.

As God sends preachers today to warn with the Law, so they preach to save with the Gospel.

God’s anger is preached so that the Gospel can assure that His anger has been satisfied, can assure the sinner of God’s mercy.

And does repentance at the preaching of Amos turn away God’s wrath? Israel doesn’t repent and is no more.

We do repent, we turn from our sin, when we despair of our efforts to earn God’s favor and we trust in what Jesus Christ has done for us through His suffering, death, and resurrection.

There we see the wrath of God spent, not on us, but on Jesus. All the anger of God for all the sins of all the people in the world is poured out on Him in our place.

By the death of Jesus, God does forget our sins (Jer 31:34) and gives us the gift of eternal life. A free and eternal gift of life. We flee from sin, straight into the forgiving arms of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

We've seen the wrath of God—the flood, fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of Israel. We heed these warnings.

We know God has a hot wrath that burns against sin, against *our* sin, and we repent. But we also know that the Lord has spent that wrath on Jesus; that His anger is turned away from us, and we rejoice.

We rejoice because our fear of judgment has been replaced with the hope that can only come from the Gospel. We are not left hanging in terror but are given a confidence in which we can rejoice.

We rejoice in the Lord's forgiveness of our sins and that, in the place of His anger, we have His smile, His delight, His mercy. Salvation through faith.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Sermon Outline

Only Repentance Will Turn Away God's Wrath

(Amos 8:4-7)

- I. Israel trusted in their wealth instead of in God.
- II. God is angry about such sin—with real wrath!
- III. Amos preaches repentance—to Israel and to us.