

## MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER

***This is Pastor Wayne Mueller. The following is the Message from the Master sermon broadcast June 24, 2007. The sermon theme is "Amos: Flee From False Security" based on selected passages from the Prophet Amos. Part of series, "Ancient Messengers, Modern Message."***

Conventional wisdom states that those who refuse to learn from the mistakes of history are bound to repeat them. I am sure history professors everywhere hope that this truism will lead flocks of new students to enroll in their classes.

For the Bible scholar who treats the divine record of Holy Scriptures as real history, there are many lessons to be learned. Perhaps none is more compelling than the situation the prophet Amos faced in the Old Testament. Let me describe the situation Amos dealt with and see if you can find any parallels with life today. Amos lived in a time of gross spiritual complacency. People were resting on their riches instead of relying on God. Listen to Amos' description of how the people of his day reveled in their materialism: "You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions" (Amos 6:4-6).

Translated into today's lifestyle, Amos' words might sound like this: "You live in your large suburban homes and drive around in your zippy foreign sedans and domestic SUV's. You gorge yourself with such abandon that overweight poses a serious health risk. You have plenty of time to tune in your satellite radio, surf the net, hang on your cell phone to the peril of your fellow drivers, block out the real word with your ipod, surf the net, and call in your vote to American Idol. But, it seems, you have no time to worship the Lord, to read his word, or to seek his favor and forgiveness in prayer."

It wasn't that the people of Amos' time did not have things to worry about. The political tension among the neighboring countries was palpable. Egypt, Assyria, Syria, Israel and Judah were constantly at each other's doorstep with soldiers ready to slay and plunder their neighbor. Every country was constantly trying to form alliances to gang up on another country. In their society the poor were either ignored or taken advantage of. Bribery was common in their legal system so there was no consistent justice in their courts. Taxation was oppressive, and unpredictable weather changes indiscriminately destroyed their agriculture.

Even though Amos lived about 800 years before Christ, the political, social, and cultural climate in which he preached was little different from what it is today. Man's inhumanity to man and his refusal to account to God for his sins is exactly the same. That means that the message Amos brought to his people at that time is still a compelling message for today. Amos' audience, or congregation, if you will, had two powerful negative forces that they had to deal with. From the inside they had the pressure of their own conscience, because of their personal sin and guilt. Spiritual complacency, pleasure-seeking, materialism, lack of charity, disregard for the poor,

hypocrisy, and idolatry were a way of life. From the outside they had the pressure from taxes, bad weather, an unjust legal system, and constant military threats.

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You really have to read the book of the prophet Amos to catch the full flavor of his message. It is a short ten chapters. But a simple summary is that Israel and Judah, along with the surrounding nations, were looking in all the wrong places to gain relief from the internal and external pressures of life. They were looking to everybody and everything but God to gain comfort in their pain. They sought alliances with pagan nations to solve their political problems. They resorted to bribes to get around the unjust legal system. The oppressed the poor to gain relief from their economic woes. They retreated to the comfort of their plush homes and expensive furnishings to block out the realities of the world. They overindulged in food, drink, music and entertainment to divert them from their anxieties.

Any honest evaluation of life in America today has to see the remarkable similarities with Amos' society. Election after election we have the vain hope that some human hero will arise to solve the political tensions of the world, ease our tax burden, and bring justice to our court systems. It has never happened, and—unless we want to ignore history—we must admit it never will. Day after day the typical American seeks to build his personal wealth rather than build his relationship with his Creator. We seek diversion in our music, sports, entertainment, vacations, and poolside parties. We seek comfort in our investment portfolio, our insurance policies, our health care system, our retirement accounts, and our job security. But the more we rely on these things, the more they disappoint us. Not one of the outlets for our false security keeps us from going to grave. Not one of our diversions divert us from the eventual necessity of answering to God.

Those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are bound to repeat them. The voice of the prophet Amos is needed more than ever in our world today. That is why God by divine inspiration has preserved Amos' message word for word on the pages of Holy Scripture for nearly three thousand years. And Amos' warning not to replace our trust in God with the things of this world is repeated throughout Scriptures. Jesus said to the crowds that followed him: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:37-49).

In his first letter, St. John similarly urges his flock: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires will pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

St. Paul invites us to see the positive blessings of thinking long term as we pass through this life. To the Colossians he wrote, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:1-4).

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Unfortunately, there is one more parallel between Amos' day and our own. And that is that nobody is listening to the message. Nobody listened to Amos. Amos, at his own peril, faithfully preached the judgments of God on Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations. Amos called God's people in Judah and Israel to repentance. He asked them to abandon their worldly security and turn to God for spiritual salvation and deliverance from earthly ills. Amos warned the countries of his time of the terrible judgments and destructions that would come upon them if they did not turn from their sinful ways. He offered details of how cities and whole countries would be destroyed. But nobody listened.

History records what happens when nobody listens to God. All the terrible things Amos predicted eventually came true. It happened to Egypt, to Syria, to Assyria, to Israel, and to Judah. God used the armies of invading countries to carry out his judgments against the complacent and the idolatrous. The northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity and never returned as a nation.

Another one of the specific judgments Amos predicted also came true. Amos predicted a famine. Let him describe this famine for you: "The days are coming, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it" (Amos 8:11,12). The famine of the word of God in the Holy Land lasted six hundred years. For six hundred years God sent no prophet to warn or encourage his people. For six hundred years no word of inspired Scripture was recorded. For six hundred years God punished those who would not listen to his word by removing his word from them. Martin Luther once commented that the gospel is very much like a rain shower. It stops over a certain area for a while and richly blesses it with moisture, refreshing the countryside, greening all the foliage, and raising the crops. But then the shower passes on to another locale, and the place once blessed by it begins to dry up.

Those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are bound to repeat them. The sad parallel of Amos' time to our own is that nobody is listening today either. Preachers of a Bible-based gospel are marginalized, if not ridiculed. Even many who claim to be Christian live in unequalled wealth without sharing with the poor or promoting the kingdom. It is no secret that the influence of the Christian message is waning in our part of the world. The shower of the gospel is passing by us and blessing other parts of the world as it once blessed America. Along with the passing of the gospel is the increase of immorality and the every-growing complacency that depends upon the comforts of this present life instead of God.

Because we are not listening to the warnings of modern day prophets like Amos, we are also destined to suffer the eventual judgments of God against ungodly nations. Solomon wrote, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but is a reproach to any people." As long as we ignore the voice of God, the more our people will lose their political, economic, and military strength. Little by little, as we ignore his voice, God is imposing his judgments.

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It is amazing that the doom and gloom that Amos utters through nine of ten chapters is suddenly broken at the end of his book. In his closing words of prophecy, Amos talks about the day when God will restore his people. He predicts that God would bring back Judah from exile as he eventually did. Amos' closing words remind us that in spite of his many warnings and judgments, the predominant message of God is gospel. It is God's good news. It is the announcement of forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ and the restoration of God's people.

This is also a lesson of history for the faithful Christian to remember in these last days. Yes, God will punish sin on the individual and on the nations who persist in ungodliness. Yes, God will bring destruction to those individuals who fail to heed his prophetic message and on those nations who depend upon their political wiles for salvation. But, above all, God seeks to forgive and restore people and nations. It is not time for the faithful in America to throw in the towel of evangelism. Like Amos we will continue our faithful witness to the Word of the Lord even though we know much of our message will fall on deaf ears. God still has his seven thousand faithful in Israel and he still wants to use their voice as his instrument to draw repentant sinners to himself. Your mission, should you accept it, is to be that instrument of God to the world around you. Amen.

## **PRAYER**

*I praise you, Holy Spirit, for the faithful preachers of your Word that you have sent into the world at all times in its history. Above all, I thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, into this world of sinners to proclaim peace and forgiveness. By his holy life and his sacrificial death, I have confidence in your abiding forgiveness and the promise of your protecting hand. Teach me in faith, day by day, to trust in your care for my body and soul. Forgive me for the times I have relied on the world and its pleasure and treasures instead of the one thing needful provided alone in Jesus. By your power, Holy Spirit, make me as brave as Amos to proclaim your truth, not hesitating to warn of judgment, but always looking forward to the announcement of peace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. In his name I also pray:*

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,**

**your will be done on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,**

**now and ever. Amen.**