

When God Calls The Common: Amos

Amos 6:4-7

Imagine with me for a moment that you are an event planner and you receive a request from a group of church people—600,000 or so—who need to put on a funeral banquet for a deceased friend. They pretty much know what they need—and they make it clear that this is to be a party to end all parties. Big time food and decadence. Yeah, there's food involved but other stuff too. Here's the comprehensive list of requests provided by their leaders: Grade A tender beef from 200 prime barley-fattened calves and young choice lambs; wine by the bowl: they will supply the punch bowls—the same as they use for their cultic rituals—and the wine they need will have to be the best; wine and meat, meat and wine; couches and beds inlaid with ivory from Syrian elephant tusks: think King Og's iron bed in Deu 3:11 or Solomon's ivory throne in 2Ch 9:17-19; they need multiples of instruments like King David used: the harp, lute, lyre, cymbal, tambourine, and horn, all mentioned in Psalm 150; the choicest imported lotions and oils to apply to the forehead of each guest; lots of security at the door—there are rumours of some prophet wannabe named Amos who opposes this funeral party and he may show up and disrupt the proceedings.

Beloved, you wonder why this epic party is being thrown in the name of some dead person. Where's the honour? Where's the respect? Well, these customers are paying you well—it's best not to say anything. Sounds like this prophet Amos will have plenty to say anyway...

Let's review this funeral banquet that the Israelites used as another excuse to party to excess. Call this: *when God's people go carnal*.

Amos 6:4

(KJV) That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;

(NIV) You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves.

Extravagance. Sex. Gluttony.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Does it surprise you that God's children could behave so badly? Or have you witnessed similar behaviour in self-confessed Christians that caused you to question their salvation?

*STUDY POINT: Find one verse in the Old Testament and one verse in the New Testament that demonstrate God's position on unrepentant sin. How does James 1:12-15 factor into God's will for us as His children?

Amos 6:5

(KJV) That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David;

(NIV) You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. Their jamming on new, strange, foreign music was hardly an homage to King David's anointed praise songs—in fact, quite the blasphemous opposite. Might as well substitute a death metal band for an angelic choir!

Amos 6:6

(KJV) That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

(NIV) You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.

Alcoholic binging and aromatherapy left little heart empathy for their morally imploding nation. When would the wake up call come?

Amos 6:7

(KJV) Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.

(NIV) Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.

No more. No more. No more freedom. No more excess. Their former first-place status as God's own nation, as God's chosen people would be suspended in favour of first-to-be-punished. God would not be mocked (Galatians 6:7-8).

This kind of party not only grieved Amos, but the heart of God too. In Exodus 32, we see how quickly God's people turn from God and hop aboard the idolatrous party wagon:

Exodus 32:1-35

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods,

Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp." Moses replied: "It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear." When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day." The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

This next passage in Luke 18:1-8 concludes with a harrowing question that should give us pause amidst a world bent on and obsessed with the distractions of entertainment, leisure, and escapism—even in the church!

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

So it bears asking, given that no one knows when Jesus is returning—when Jesus returns, will He find us far from God in perpetual party mode—like the Israelites in Amos—or living in unbroken communion with Christ and reverent fear of the Lord, face down in prayer?

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Have you had seasons in your own walk with God when you tired of waiting on Him, and instead turned to worldly comforts? What Scripture verses might prepare your heart for the waiting next time—and keep you close to Him with faith and in prayer?

So Scripture provides us with the correct heart posture as we wait upon the Lord:

1Peter 1:13-17

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

Ephesians 5:1-21

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be partners with them. For you were

once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Let me conclude today by pointing out that the Israelites planned for a carnal and temporal party on earth. Wise and obedient followers of Christ plan for an eternal party in heaven!

Revelation 19:1-5

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." And again, they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!"

Hallelujah!

*STUDY POINT: Find three other power Scripture passages that will help you maintain a heavenly, eternal party perspective as you live daily on earth.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland