

When God Calls The Common: Amos

Amos 6:8-11

Newsflash! God is not like you. God is not like me.

Isaiah 55:8-9

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

And aren't you glad that God is greater?

We'll see in today's passage that the same faithfulness to covenant promises that followed Israel through their wilderness years is now just as steadfast concerning the oaths to punish their disobedience.

Indeed, we *thank and praise* God when He is ever true to His every promise in Scripture.

2Corinthians 1:18-20

But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

And we *hate* the hardships He allows to fulfill His perfect Fatherly correction and discipline in our lives.

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Beloved, look around. You won't find pure truth and honesty anywhere on this planet. Oh, but look up and find God—the keeper of oaths and promises—seated on His throne of grace, and Jesus the Way and the Truth and the Life at His right hand.

They've always been. And They will always be.

Holy Spirit come teach us.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: How would you reconcile Genesis 1:27, which declares that we are made in God's image, with Roman's 3:23 which describes how we have all come short of God's glorious standard? How does this tension between two truths play out in your own walk with Christ?

Amos 6:8

(KJV) The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

(NIV) The Sovereign LORD has sworn by himself—the LORD God Almighty declares: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it."

In Amos' time, oaths and vows were meant to be seals of authenticity and finality. God's very character is at stake when He speaks an oath of judgment over Israel. He cannot go back on His Word once it has been declared—even, in this case, through the mouth of prophet Amos.

In stark contrast to our world of broken promises today in 2022, the keeping of oaths, vows, and promises in Biblical times meant that the person making the promise would keep it, even to their own hurt.

Psalm 15:1-5 A psalm of David.

LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor, and casts no slur on others; who despises a vile person but honors those who fear the LORD; who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind; who lends money to the poor without interest; who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

So, we see here this is a spiritual person who is walking in the truth, who is trustworthy, who is intimately connected to God and His Word. It is only through *this* kind of man or woman that an oath, vow, or promise is worth the air exhaled to speak them.

In Genesis 26, we see how a God-ordained oath allowed for a peaceful parting between Isaac and Abimelek:

Genesis 26:27-31

Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?" They answered, "We saw clearly that the LORD was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us'—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the LORD." Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.

When God swears an oath by Himself, it is irrevocable. When we swear or make a vow or promise to God or by God to another person, it is a serious matter of keeping our word for His namesake.

Numbers 30:2

When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5

When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it.

*STUDY POINT: Write down two passages from the Old Testament where God-ordained oaths were broken and God-enforced judgments were subsequently exacted? What, if any impact does this have on your theology and understanding in the New Testament?

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Do God's seemingly harsh punishments for disobedience on Israel in the Old Testament in any way affect the way you walk with Christ today? Should His revealed wrath really be of any concern to us, now that we are inside the grace and mercy of Christ Jesus (2 John 1:3)?

So the oath of coming judgment declared here in Amos 6:8 is motivated by God's anger and disdain towards Israel's ill-gotten palaces and fortresses, in which their full trust, confidence, and pride are founded. Their Father God figures no place in their attention or affection. He has been ousted in favour of looming but frail rock formations—which God will soon consume!

Amos 6:9

(KJV) And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die.

(NIV) If ten people are left in one house, they too will die.

While it is possible after the Assyrian enemy invasion for there to be a remnant of survivors, God will see to it that even those remaining will be consumed—by God Himself!

Amos 6:10

(KJV) And a man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the sides of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue: for we may not make mention of the name of the LORD.

(NIV) And if the relative who comes to carry the bodies out of the house to burn them asks anyone who might be hiding there, "Is anyone else with you?" and he says, "No," then he will go on to say, "Hush! We must not mention the name of the LORD."

This verse is telling of the empty, loveless motivation of backsliders and apostates to seek after the Lord, *after the fact of judgment*. Here is the dark, hopeless scene of relatives sent to collect and carry out dead bodies to cremate them (to help prevent the spread of disease). In doing so, they inquire as to if any other survivors may be hiding amidst the smouldering structures. *Hold thy tongue: for we may not make mention of*

the name of the LORD. The understatement here is palpable: The God Who just facilitated His oath of fiery judgment on Israel's proud shell of stone *will not* be called upon now in the presence of death and destruction.

(Seriously) beloved, we always want God in our lives on our terms, or *not at all*. Then, after living a whole life deceiving ourselves—but in reality far from God—we sit in the seat of mockers (Psalm 1:1) still. And here is the awful truth: *we don't want God, and we never did*. Hell is reserved for just such a people:

Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: How do you currently pray for those in your sphere of influence who appear to be far from God?

*STUDY POINT: Write down six Scriptures that would be helpful in your understanding of how to pray, and how to witness to the spiritually blind and lost.

Amos 6:11

(KJV) For, behold, the LORD commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts.

(NIV) For the LORD has given the command, and he will smash the great house into pieces and the small house into bits.

Rich people live in big houses. Poor people live in small houses. Generally speaking. In this verse, the Lord makes it soberingly clear that Israel's cancer of spiritual callousness has eaten away the hearts of both social classes, rich and poor. Idolatry of *lots*, idolatry of *lack*—it doesn't matter, because this is a matter of the heart. So, lest we lament only the super-rich in our land and their independence from God, Amos in this verse makes

sure that we are aware that the abominable spiritual condition of our present world—and the worldly church—spans across centuries, demographics, cultures, religious traditions, and reaches into today's headlines.

So, we all have a choice. We can go God's way. And again, this is God—keeper of oaths and promises—and experience His eternal blessings.

Or we can go our own way, and forfeit forever every good thing He has for us in Jesus Christ.

We will finish up today by allowing Paul to theologially frame the seed of today's message:

Romans 3:1-8

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge." But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

*STUDY POINT: Follow through Paul's argument in Romans 3:1-8. How does this passage specifically underscore the uncrossable chasm between a holy God in heaven, and a fallen race on earth? And can we ever cross this chasm?

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: How might the revelations He gives you from this passage inform and inspire your worship of God?

Amen.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland