Amos’ Call

Summer Quarter: God’s Urgent Call
Unit 2: Calling of the Prophets

Sunday school lesson for the week of July 30, 2017
By Rev. Earnestine W. Campbell

Lesson Scripture: Amos 7:10-17
Background Scripture: Amos 7

Key Verses: Amos answered Amaziah, “I am not a prophet, nor am I a prophet’s son; but I am a shepherd, and a trimmer of sycamore trees. But the Lord took me from shepherding the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’” (Amos 7:14-15)

Purpose: To acknowledge that faithfully serving God often invites criticism from others.

Bible Lesson

This week’s lesson examines the fifth and final prophets’ call in this unit. The “Adult Bible Studies” author characterizes the definition of a prophet: the Hebrew word for prophet, Navi, means “one who is called” or “one who speaks;” one who speaks on God’s behalf to God’s people. I will interject that the prophets sometimes speak outside of the people’s borders to foreign nations. As we close “The Calling of the Prophets” unit, the summary of the lessons is: 1) the uncertainty and reluctance of the prophets’ calls and 2) the messages denouncing sin and the proclamation of cataclysmic consequences to the land, people, and the powers [kings, priests, governing authorities] and 3) the danger of threats, harm to the prophets, and obstruction of the message.

Amos’ Background

The Lesson’s author says that people sometimes think that the Old Testament prophets are fortunetellers, soothsayers, or ones that could see into the future. Their primary focus is to be the messenger of God’s word and not as a forecaster of local, national, and global events. They are the “preachers” proclaiming God’s message of judgment and hope. The prophets are God’s chosen people to convey His messages (Deuteronomy 18:9-12, 14-15). Amos prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel around 750 BCE, even though he is believed to have been from the southern kingdom of Judah. Uzziah ruled over Judah at this time, and Jeroboam II ruled over Israel, both having long and relatively successful reigns. Amos was an older contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah of Jerusalem.

Background Chapters
Amos 1 - 6 (*New Revised Standard Version*)

- Chapter 1: Oracles against the Nations, Judah and Israel, judgments on Aram, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, Moab
- Chapter 2: Judgments on Judah, Israel, Ruthless oppression of the poor, Profanation of religion, Contrasted position of the Israelites, Oppressive system will perish
- Chapter 3: Oracles against Israel, Judgment on the chosen people, God’s punishment announced, Announcement vindicated, Punishment Vindicated
- Chapter 4: Judgment on an unrepentant people, On the socialites, Perversion of religious life, Past calamities brought no repentance, No hope for a hardened people
- Chapters 5 and 6: Judgment on an unjust people, The death dirge, Indictment of injustices, Exhortation to life, Prosperity turning to grief, Announcements of exile, A message of woe against Israel’s perverted religion and complacent pride, Judgment on the proud and unjust nation

The “Adult Bible Studies” author states the following about the social justices, political and socio-economic climate during this period (Chapters 1 to 6):

> *Assyria, which had been a threat to Israel and Judah for many years, was experiencing a period of decline with problems of its own. With it posing less of a threat, and Israel having to pay less to a foreign power, Abraham’s descendants were able to benefit greatly by engaging more freely in international trade. This was especially true for the northern kingdom of Israel. As is often the case, the elite classes benefited the most from this increased wealth, leaving the poor behind. Amos insisted that God was not pleased by this unequal distribution of wealth.*

In our personal lives and the climate of today’s society, we must seek God’s word and hear from God’s authentic messengers as to what is true, just, and aligns with the will of God. As the author points to a better condition of international trade of that day, the abuse of the “powers,” the “elite” is made clear because it benefitted them personally by increasing their wealth. Unfortunately, the poor, the marginalized, and particular groups of people were left behind. As Christians, we are to be cognizant of the ungodly conditions and actions, resist them through open processes, and through civil discourse. We can use Jesus as an example, denouncing abuse, inappropriate gains and actions, and the “unequal distribution of wealth” in communities and countries. The call to action is never an easy call; perpetrators may elicit threats, forms of intimidation and persecution, but let us remember that our reward is from God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)
Reflection Questions:

- Consider when you’ve been in a position or place where injustices, abusive gains, dis-apportionment of equities were perpetrated. Did you speak truth to powers, or was it easier to ignore or excuse the actions?
- Where do you see abuse of power, inequality, and injustices today? Are you actively engaging in some way of improving the condition, if not, are you willing?

Background Scripture

Amos 7

In Chapter 7, the sinful nature of the people and God’s response through the messenger, Amos, continue a similar pattern to Chapters 1-6. The relationship remains tumultuous, and Amos relentlessly proclaims the message; a conflict between two wills. We see in this chapter that in times of conflict and disobedience, God gives retribution. However, He still has hope for His people and grants grace and mercy. The message in the chapter is:

(NRSV*)

- Visions of Divine Retribution (7:1; 9:10), Judgment Relented (7:1-6)
- Judgment Unrelented (7:7, 9:10), The Plumb Line (7:7-17), The Vision (7:7-9)
- Amos Challenged and Vindicated (7:10-17)

Amos’ messages from God throughout the book are a stern repudiation to the kings, priests and their families, and other governing entities. Amos also accuses the ones he categorizes as complacent. He states, “For those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria, the notables of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel resorts!” “Are you better than the kingdoms, or is your territory greater than their territory?” (Amos 6:1:1, 2b-d). Amos is stating that the powerful and wealthy are arrogant in their self-satisfaction. Even with their past and current disregard to God’s word, Amos asks in Chapter 7 for God to relent from his punishment and God does so. Even with that pardon of sins, because of the word of correction and destruction to the priest for their continual disobedience, the priest, Amaziah, complained to King Jeroboam (Israel) with an untruth of conspiracy against him by Amos. The priest responds with a message of banishment to Amos. Amos still doesn’t relent; he pronounces that the King, Jeroboam, shall die by the sword and the land of Israel will go into captivity. The question is, when will the people get right with God? When we, as a people, suffer because we have been complacent.

Closing
In today’s society, I can imagine that God and His messengers are asking the question, “When will we get right with God?” We must not retaliate and work to stop or shut down the agents that bring justice, truth, and speak truth to power. We must hold those that do accountable, just as God does in the Book of Amos and the other books of prophets. Let’s be careful to examine and pronounce correction of self, relationships, work places, churches, as well as our communities, country, and our bordering countries for ungodly behaviors, lest we fall onto the “sword” and perish as well as our land.

Closing Prayer

Holy Communion Liturgy, Confession and Pardon

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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