

Sermon for September 29, 2013 – Pentecost 19

Amos 6:1-7

Theme: Where do you find your comfort?

- 1) *In your gifts, or*
- 2) *In your God?*

Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria, notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes!² Go over to Calneh and see; and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?³ Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near;⁴ who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall;⁵ who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David;⁶ who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.⁷ Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, and those who recline at banquets shall be removed.

I want to read to you some summarized snippets from an article printed in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, dated February 10, 1969. This article was in response to a United Press survey about “the typical” American of the 60’s.

“The “typical American” is a twenty-seven-year-old who does not read one book a year. He is materialistic, satisfied with small pleasures, and bored with theological disputations. Although he may attend church twenty- seven times a year, and leave his offspring at the church nursery school, he isn’t interested at all in the transcendent or supernatural or the life everlasting. Of all the men interviewed in this survey, not a single one would confess that he meditated or worried about heaven, hell or personal immortality . . . apparently our typical American couldn’t care less. According to this survey, his principle interests are football, hunting, fishing, and tinkering with automobiles.”

So let me ask you: has our nation gotten any better since 1969? I don’t think so. In response to this survey, the author of this newspaper article concluded:

“A people who don’t worry about the destination of the soul soon becomes a soulless people. Men whose whole interest in life is petty amusements and petty possessions do not deserve that immortality for which mankind was made. “Seek and it shall be given unto you.” But for those who never look up from their round of trifling diversions, there remains the descent into the hell of indifference.”

That was over 40 years ago. What about today? Is our nation becoming a nation of soulless people – descending into the hell of indifference? If so, what does our future hold? To answer that question we need to look no further than our sermon text from Amos for this morning, and ask ourselves the important questions: **Where do you find your comfort?** *In your gifts or in your God?*

Part One – In your gifts?

The prophet Amos lived during a period of prosperity for Israel and Judah. Unfortunately this was not a result of their faithfulness to God. You see, under the veneer of prosperity lay corruption, greed and contempt for God’s commands. Instead of taking care of the poor, Israel’s leaders took advantage of them. Instead of leading people to the LORD, they led them into idolatry. They ignored God’s call to repentance,

spoken through the prophets. All they cared about was their pleasures – with no thought about the God who created them.

And so Amos preaches: *Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria, notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes!*

Zion represents the capital of Judah, and mount Samaria of Israel. The people of Israel and Judah would look to their princes and king for direction, justice and help. Having recently won some victories, these leaders considered themselves on top of the world. They were at ease – feeling mighty secure in themselves- treating themselves almost as gods.

But Amos offers this warning. He says: *Go over to Calneh and see; and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?* ³ *Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near*

The LORD points to other nations around Israel – proud and mighty nations that fell. Would Israel's fate be any different?

But the leaders of Israel laughed away these warnings. They call the prophets who spoke them fools. Instead of repenting and reforming, they oppressed the poor and committed ever more injustice. It is interesting to note that while the Israelites, God's chosen people, were ignoring God's warnings; another nation, Assyria, was listening to the prophet Jonah. Nineveh repented and reformed. They were spared from God's wrath. Not only that, they would also serve as the very nation that would execute God's judgment upon Israel.

Amos continues the LORD's charge against Israel: *Woe to you . . . Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall;* ⁵ *who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David;* ⁶ *who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*

And herein lay Israel's problem - the same problem that is affecting our society today: Luxury lulled them into a deep spiritual sleep.

Here is the picture Amos paints: Israel's leaders are all sprawled out on expensive dining couches. They gorged themselves with the best and fattest meats. They drink wine like water – and even use the sacred bowls to do so. They anoint themselves with the oils reserved for temple service. They make a farce of religion and simply indulge in whatever they want to indulge in. They love pleasure and entertainment. They consider themselves as great as King David. But the thing they refused to care about was this: *the ruin of Joseph.*

Joseph is another name for the northern Kingdom of Israel; and Israel was a spiritual disaster. Greed and materialism ruled the day. The poor were being taken advantage of, justice was being perverted and worst of all: the Gospel was not being proclaimed. The leaders of Israel – the priest and aristocracy – cared only for themselves and their gain.

This is why God says: ⁷ *Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, and those who recline at banquets shall be removed.* Judgment was coming. Assyria would reduce Israel to a memory. Their wealth would be destroyed. They themselves would become slaves to a foreign people in a foreign nation. They would become the lost tribes of Israel – never to be heard from again.

Now take a moment to consider the following: if this is how God judged his chosen nation whom he delivered out of Egypt in mercy with an outstretched arm, how do you think he will deal with our society, which refuses to repent and turn from its wicked ways?

But there is more: before we think that this warning only deals with those people outside these church walls, but not us, let me read to you how Professor Eichmann, the author of People's Bible on Amos, applies this text. He writes:

“It is not difficult for us in prosperous times to look around and see an all-consuming concern for pleasure in the citizens of our country. We need to remember that Amos is speaking to God's chosen people Israel, and that today his words apply particularly to Christians. We who call ourselves disciples of Jesus in this favored land also enjoy the prosperity of our times. We buy comfortable furniture, eat and drink at expensive restaurants, listen to beautiful music on fine stereo systems.

We say that our wealth is a gift of God. But is it also true that we do not grieve over the ruin of his church? Are we unconcerned whether our pastors are teaching what the Bible teaches, as long as our congregation has an impressive physical plant? Do we take no measures to protect even our own families against the moral laxity that rules the world? Do we wrap ourselves so tightly in a soft cocoon of luxury that we live unaware of people suffering for lack of food, clothing, and a roof over their heads? Do we spend so generously on ourselves that little is left to give for preaching the good news among those who have not heard it? Then Jesus reproves our unbelief and warns us with the words he said to the unbelieving elders of the Jews: “I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matthew 21:43). “

I don't know about you, but Professor Eichmann's application of this text makes me cry out in repentance: “Lord have mercy on me: a selfish sinner! Forgive me for Christ's sake!”

Part Two: In your God.

And crying out in repentance is exactly where the Lord wants us – for it is only when we acknowledge our total corruption and need for His forgiveness that we are ready to receive His salvation.

The LORD knows our hearts better than we know them ourselves. He sees the evil lurking there. This is why he threatens – so that we might see it too and turn to him for help.

And He certainly offers helps. Where? In his Son, his one and only Son, who took on human flesh and blood in order to save us. And how did he do that? First of all by living the life of perfect obedience and love that we all failed to lived. He preached the Gospel. He fed the hungry. He had compassion the sick and showed mercy to all. Jesus dedicated his life to saving us. He is love personified.

And all this love Jesus showed was more than just an example for us to follow. It is the very righteousness that covers our sins and makes us right before God. Jesus' record of love is our record love. How is that possible? Because Jesus took all our sins upon himself and went to the cross. God punished his Son for all our sins – for our lack of love, our living luxuriously instead of loving our fellow man. Jesus died for those and every other sin we have committed. God's wrath has been appeased so that now, when God looks at those who believe in him, he sees his Son – his perfect Son – who lived unselfishly and fulfilled His law perfectly.

Through faith in Christ we stand forgiven – no matter how sinful we have been; as the Scriptures say: ⁴ *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,* ⁵ *even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . .* ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and*

that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:4-5,8,10 NKJ)

And this last verse I just read brings me to the last point I want to make. Because we are saved through faith in Jesus, because God washed us clean through the waters of Baptism – declaring us to be his dearly loved children, because the Lord has sent His Spirit to dwell with us and guide us in holy living, let us then do the good God wants us to do. Let us love one another as Christ has loved us. Let us live unselfishly – ready to help and give – knowing that the LORD is watching over us and is pleased when we respond to his unselfish love by loving others unselfishly. Let us support our synod's schools and world missions effort with the funds God has so graciously entrusted to our care. Let us pray for the Church, help the helpless and be ready to dedicate our lives to the LORD as He has dedicated His life for us – putting Him first, our neighbor second, and ourselves last.

Where do you find your comfort and security? In yourself and your possessions? May it never be! Let us find our comfort and security in the LORD and live for others as He lived for us. Amen.