



Sermon: God Still Calls For – And Longs For – A Change! - Todd Goldschmidt

Sunday Service 9:30 am – July 15th, 2012 – At [Living Hope Lutheran Church](#)

Lesson/Sermon Text: Amos 7:7-15 (NIV1984)

Vision of the Plumb Line

⁷ This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸ And the LORD asked me, “What do you see, Amos?” “A plumb line,” I replied. Then the Lord said, “Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. ⁹ “The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam. ”

¹⁰ Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. ¹¹ For this is what Amos is saying:

“Jeroboam will die by the sword,
and Israel will surely go into exile,
away from their native land.”

¹² Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. ¹³ Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom. ” ¹⁴ Amos answered Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. ¹⁵ But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’



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The more things change, the more they stay the same—at least that’s what they say. But is that really true? The world has changed an awful lot since the days of the prophet Amos, who lived in the 8th cent. BC. Surely the conditions of his day in Israel bear little resemblance to our times in 21st cent. America. But while that might ring true in most regards, there are several very important ways in which it rings hollow. God hasn’t changed. Neither has His relationship with His people nor their relationship with Him. And the very same message God sent Amos to proclaim to Israel in the 700s BC is as true for us today:

GOD STILL CALLS FOR—AND LONGS FOR—A CHANGE!

In Old Testament times, God often communicated to His prophets through dreams and visions. God gave Amos a vision in which the Lord was standing beside a straight wall with a plumb line in His hand. If you’ve ever built a fence, you’ve likely used a plumb line. *Wikipedia* describes it like this: “A plumb-bob . . . is a weight . . . that is suspended from a string and used as a vertical reference line, or plumb-line. The [instrument](#) [is] used . . . to ensure that constructions are ‘[plumb](#)’, or vertical.” When God measured the attitude and behavior of His people, Israel, against His moral standard of perfection they came up way short! Greed, sexual sins & idolatry topped the list of flagrant sins they were guilty of. God was justly angry! He told Amos: “Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam. ” Jeroboam—the 1st king of the northern kingdom of Israel—set up calf-shaped idols at Dan up north and at Bethel down south to make worship “convenient” for his people and to prevent them from travelling to the temple in Jerusalem in Judah to worship according to God’s prescribed will. Each successive king of Israel followed in his evil footsteps.

But before we judge these ancient Israelites too harshly, let’s make an honest assessment of our own spiritual situation. Are we any better—*any different*—than they were when you get right down to it? Hardly! Not when God uses the same “plumb line” to measure our attitudes and behavior that He used with them. His standard of moral perfection hasn’t changed over time! He still demands of us: “Be holy, because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2). When you and I compare our lives against the “plumb line” of the Ten Commandments, we realize just how far out of plumb we’ve become. Instead of living morally upright lives before God and others, we’ve allowed ourselves to sink into the muck and mire of sins so unspeakably immoral that we’re ashamed to even think about them. Either that or we’ve become so calloused and jaded that our conscience no longer feels even a twinge of guilt when we succumb to temptation. That’s particularly true, I’m afraid, when it comes to the “pet sins” we each commit and excuse as not really “all that bad” in the grand scheme of things—especially compared to others’ sins!

Summer Sunday Worship Service: 9:30 A.M. (June thru September 2nd)

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God wants us to change! He wants us to repent! He wants us to turn from evil and do good! He wants that for us because He loves us and desires what's best for us! "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?" the Sovereign LORD asked through His prophet, Ezekiel. "Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" ([Ezekiel 18:23](#)). In our day, as in Amos', God threatens to punish those who refuse to repent. Amos proclaimed God's judgment, making it very clear that sin—failing to match God's "plumb line"—had dire consequences! The house of Jeroboam—the king who was responsible for the actions of his people—would be destroyed by the sword, and Israel would go into exile in Babylon, driven from the Promised Land of Canaan.

What about us? What dire consequences does God hold out for us if we refuse to turn from sin toward Him? Through His same prophet Ezekiel, he declares: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (18:20). And the "death" God's talking about is more than just the kind that ends in cremation or a casket. It's eternal death in hell. That's what we deserve for our rebellion against God! Some sins bring with them natural earthly consequences: you do the crime, you do the time. Other sins can be indulged in for decades without anyone save the sinner and God aware of what's going on. But ultimately, the Judge of all mankind sees all and He knows all. And Scripture says of Him: "He does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:7). Come Judgment Day, our Ascended Lord will return to judge all mankind. His angels will separate humanity into two distinct groups: believers and unbelievers. Believers will be on Jesus' right; pagans on His left. To those who by the power of the Holy Spirit were led to trust in Him as their Savior from sin He will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." To those who did not believe in Him, He will declare: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels . . . Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matt. 25).

In Amos' day, most of his hearers rejected God's call to change. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, complained about Amos to King Jeroboam. He sent a message to him saying: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying: 'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.'" As far as Amaziah was concerned, it was flat out blasphemy to prophecy that Israel would be exiled. After all, God had promised the land they were living in, on oath, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for crying out loud! But he conveniently "forgot" that that pledge was based on Israel's keeping of God's holy law. This covenant was conditional: *if* Israel honored the Lord and walked in His commands, *then* He would continue to bless them in the land of the patriarchs. On the other hand, *if* they wandered from His ways, *then* they could expect to be cursed by Him for their disobedience. Led by their wicked kings, the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel had trampled that covenantal relationship with Jehovah underfoot. God continually attempted to bring Israel back to Him. Yet they refused to repent and return.



In fact, in Amos' case, Amaziah told him: "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." He foolishly thought that if Amos went away, if his voice was no longer heard in Bethel, that they could avoid the consequences for their rebellion. But that's not the way it works: not then, and not now. It's not like we can plug our ears to the truth of God's law. No matter how "advanced" civilization has become, no matter how "enlightened" we human beings think we are, we cannot stop death in its tracks or undo the damage caused by mankind's initial fall into sin. C.S. Lewis said it well: "We're not sinners so much because we commit sins; rather, we're commit sins because we are, at heart, sinners." That truth remains unchanged. But so does the truth that "God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). That's why He sent Amos to Israel and why He still sends His spokesmen today. He calls on pastors to preach the truth of His Word—both law and gospel—so that His Holy Spirit can put sinners to death and then raise them to life! Pastors are called by God to afflict the comfortable and to comfort the afflicted. That's our life's work.

But in our time, as in Amos', a change of heart changes everything! It changes God's judgment to His forgiveness. Amos replies to Amaziah's animosity by explaining that it wasn't his idea to come to Bethel to call God's people to repentance. It was God's! "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees," Amos informed him. "But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" God had one goal in mind—the same goal He had in mind when He called Ezekiel to be His prophet among the exiles in Babylon years later—the same goal He has in mind for His spokesmen today. He wanted Amos to declare judgment so that Israel would have a change of heart and turn from their sin back to Him in faith. And He would eagerly forgive them! And so He says to us what He said to His people so long ago: repent! Change your evil ways! Turn to me, and I will heal you! To that end, He had John pen this promise in his 1st epistle: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1:8-9).

God's heart toward us—sinful though we are—is evident in His sending Jesus to die for us. He still wants that good news to ring out loudly and clearly for all to hear. With that saving goal in mind, He continues to call "prophets" to proclaim both law and gospel so that the Holy Spirit can work through that "bad news, good news" message to miraculously transform sinners like us into saints in God's sight. As a called pastor, I love to announce God's absolution to you, the flock that He's entrusted to my care! I love to dismiss you in the peace of your forgiveness after you've received Christ's true body and blood in His Holy Supper, and I love to baptize young and old alike in the soul-cleansing washing of water and the Word that takes place at the font! And as we change, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through these amazing Means of Grace we know that God is faithful to His covenantal promise that He will "forgive our wickedness and will remember our sins no more." What a blessing! Unlike impenitent Israel in Amos' day, we won't be carried into exile because Jesus already suffered our exile when He was forsaken by His Father on the cross. We needn't worry. We're forgiven! And that'll never change! Amen.