**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 5-21-2023
Majoring in the Minors – Amos**

I would like to start this time today with a quick survey. How many of you have heard of Famous Amos? Just raise your hand.

And if your hands are still raised, how many of you would say that you could describe what Famous Amos is all about in greater detail than the Book of Amos from the Bible? There is no shame in this question, but I hope it is an illustration of how little most Christians have read and understand many of the books of the Bible, such as Amos.

Famous Amos is a brand of a cookie. They are small in size and they are kind of hard in texture. But they are also rather tasty. I’ve had a few bags of Famous Amos cookies myself over the years. And they are sounding pretty good about now as well.

But to be honest, until studying this book of Amos in seminary, I was more acquainted with the Famous Amos cookie than with the famous Amos of the Bible.

Today we are blessed to dive into the Book of Amos a bit. And I hope you find this experience to be far sweeter and satisfying than any Famous Amos cookie.

To set the context for the Book of Amos a bit, Amos ministered and wrote his book at a similar time as Hosea, whom we looked at a couple of weeks ago. This was during the 8th Century BC. It is very possible that Hosea and Amos knew each other. Maybe they even ministered together at some point.

For Amos, his calling to be a prophet probably caught him by surprise. Amos was a shepherd living in the southern kingdom of Judah and specifically from the town of Tekoa, near Bethlehem. Shepherds were considered lower class, because they were constantly out in the fields with the animals and as a result would often be ritually.

But while shepherds were given little significance in the culture, God sees them as significant as everyone else. Long before an angel came to a group of shepherds in Bethlehem to announce the birth of Jesus Christ, the word of the LORD comes to Amos in Tekoa. And suddenly, Amos is called by God to be a shepherd in a very different way. He would be called to travel north from the Kingdom of Judah into the Kingdom of Israel. And there, he would shepherd through his preaching and through the Book that God inspired Him to write.

Both of these books – Hosea and Amos have many similarities. Some of these include God’s persistent love for Israel, God’s willingness to eventually and reluctantly let Israel reap the consequences of their sins, God calling out the hypocrisy of the spiritual leaders, and finally, God’s call for Israel to repent of its sins and turn to God.

But while there are many strong similarities between Hosea and Amos, there are some different emphases as well. As we now hear these words of Amos, we will begin to unpack these different emphasis. Please turn with me to Amos 5:21-24.

**“I hate, I despise your religious festivals;
    your assemblies are a stench to me.
22Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
    I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
    I will have no regard for them.
23Away with the noise of your songs!
    I will not listen to the music of your harps.
24But let justice roll on like a river,
    righteousness like a never-failing stream!**

In our passage from Amos chapter 5, Amos is speaking about how much God hates Israel’s religious festivals. Isn’t that a strange thought? The God who established these festivals and worship practices despises His people practicing them.

Why? Because of the hypocrisy. God is calling out their hypocrisy. God can see hypocrisy even better than children can see through hypocrisy.

Israel was called to be a light to the nations, but only by their devotion to God, but also by the way that they were to treat one another.

Verse 24 picks up one of the key differences between Hosea and Amos. Let’s hear it again – **“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”** Perhaps this reminds you of words spoken by Martin Luther King Jr. as he led in the Civil Rights movement. It was true in Amos’ day and is just as true today.

While Hosea focused largely on Israel’s failure in their vertical relationship with God and their lack of knowledge of God’s, Amos especially lifts up Israel’s failure in its horizontal relationship with one another.

To put it another way, Hosea emphasizes the greatest commandment and Amos the second greatest commandment. Remember when Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was, He said the most important is “To love the Lord Your God with all your heart and soul and strength.”

But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He continues on by saying that the second is just like it and that is “to love your neighbor as yourself.”

These two commands of God which Jesus puts of greatest importance are so connected to one another. Failure in one leads to failure in the other.

Israel could not love their neighbor as themselves if they do not love God. And Israel cannot love God if they did not love their neighbor.

And what was happening in Israel was lots of injustice. Injustice was the norm. People were cheating one another. People were taking advantage of one another. The poor and the weak would be mistreated by the wealthy.

Now while there is nothing wrong in and of itself to having wealth, God desires that those that have wealth and power use it to be a blessing to others rather than to leverage their power to take advantage of others.

Some of the sins of Israel included the following: The courts had become corrupted. The godly and the prophets were being persecuted. Taxes were heavy and particularly took advantage of the poor, the people were selfish and full of pride.

Throughout this prophecy, it is the lack of justice and lack of love for one’s neighbor that is bringing about God’s judgment. And while the focus is primarily on Israel’s failure, the beginning of the book also lists various ways that Israel’s neighbors were also failing to treat their neighbors as themselves. Even without the Law, God has given all people a conscious to know basic right and wrong. These neighbors of Damascus, Gaza, Edom, Ammon, and Moab had all failed to follow their God-given conscience and instead had committed atrocities of various kinds to one another.

All of this matters a great deal to God. Amos makes it abundantly clear that God sees everything. God is aware of every unjust action. Nothing goes unnoticed by God.

While injustice abounded in Israel and elsewhere, Amos makes it very clear that eventually God will bring justice.

At the very heart of the book of Amos there is a call to repentance. That is the main theme of the book – to repent – to turn away from sin and to turn to the LORD for His mercy.

While Amos’ messages, and Hosea’s for that matter, would be largely ignored, if anyone would repent, the LORD was ready and eager to pour mercy to that person. That’s God’s heart.

In one passage in Amos, Amos sees God and God is holding a plumbline in His hand. A plumbline is a measuring tool to help builders build things that are straight and correct, rather than crooked. And God is using this picture to teach Amos that just as God built Israel soundly, God will also just as soundly bring destruction on Israel because of its sins.

Ultimately, as we look ahead to the New Testament, we find that God Himself, in the Person of Jesus Christ, would offer Himself as a sin offering on humanity’s behalf. Sin must be atoned for. It is that serious to God. Jesus, our loving savior, willingly bore the sins of the entire world and throughout all time on His body. Sin would be punished. But God would willingly take that punishment upon Himself. Isn’t that amazing? All who put their trust in Him and submit to Jesus as their master, their slate is wiped clean. The vertical sin and the horizontal sin – all wiped clean.

Friends, as we consider the Book of Amos and its relevance in our lives today, what is the main thing to remember and to take with us? And I believe that it is this – how we relate to others is hugely important to God and should be hugely important to us – we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

As much as God wants our love and affection and devotion more than anything, a close second is that He wants us to actively love our neighbors as ourselves.

So what are some ways that we can live this out well?

One way is to look at ourselves. Am I loving my neighbor as myself? Am I treating everyone with fairness and honorably? Pray about it.

And it is not just in the blatantly negative things, but also in the more subtle things as well. Am I walking in kindness to my neighbor? Am I showing patience and grace to my neighbor? Am I forgiving to my neighbor?

If there is someone that we are not relating to well in any of these ways, let us repent and ask for God to forgive us. And God may lead us if we are to apologize to the other person as well.

A second way is to seek to actively promote a more just world by resisting evil and injustice. Pray against corruption. Pray against mistreatment. But also, take other actions as the Lord leads. One thing that we do here is to support Operation Underground Railroad as our 2nd mile mission in August & September. That is a ministry dedicated to ending human trafficking, particularly among children. Our support of them is one way that we fight for a more just world.

And third and finally, we can ask ourselves ‘what is the plumbline that I am building my life on?’ An answer besides God and God’s Word is the wrong answer. The more that we tend to our walk with Christ and to our growing in our knowledge of God’s Word, the more that we will naturally love our neighbors as ourselves.

Again, there is nothing wrong with liking Famous Amos cookies. But our Famous Amos is the man in this book that we read from today. May all the books of the Bible be famous to us as we treasure them and seek to live out a faithful walk with Christ.

Resources:

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

Class Notes – Prophets Course – Evangelical Seminary 2014

# <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-is-a-plumb-line-in-the-bible-and-what-does-it-mean-for-christians.html> - What Is a Plumb Line in the Bible and What Does it Mean for Christians? – by Rev. Kyle Norman