

When Silence Isn't Golden

Bible Reading:
Amos 2: 4-5

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Do you ever get impatient with a speaker - with me, for instance? Knowing why you came, suspecting the gist of what is going to be said, and wanting to get to the heart of it. Meanwhile the speaker just waltzes around the perimeter a bit here and there. You start to wiggle in your seat, fingers drumming on the hymnal -- "*Come on, Gehrels. Get to the point. You're talking about everything **BUT**...*"

Right? Listening to that is like listening to a politician do a jig around the issue. Frustrating. "*Drop the fluff and cut to the chase.*"

Ever get that sort of sense with Amos? This Sheep Rancher and Fruit Farmer out of Tekoa has been called by God to prophesy a message of dire warning to the people of Israel; calling them to examine their lives, to repent, to turn back to the Lord, and to do that before it is too late and God's judgement rains down upon them. And yet, here we are well into chapter 2, and we have yet to hear a single word spoken against the people of Israel!

In fact, Judah is the 7th nation at the receiving end of a prophecy by Amos. So what gives? Is he waltzing around the issue? Does he just enjoy hearing himself speak? Or what?

To understand it, we need to remember most of all that the words Amos speaks, **and** the order in which he speaks them all come from God.

God is the author.
Amos is merely the mouthpiece.

It's divinely reasoned that the prophecy against Israel is prefaced by

seven
other prophecies.

Seven -
the number of holy fullness.
full, complete holy warning has been given.

Think of it rather as the gathering of dark clouds before the storm.

When we see them billowing up over the Kanata sky line, we know it's time to take the laundry in, cover the BBQ and close the car windows.

Storm's coming!
Take action.

God's word is speaking judgement against those other nations who have flaunted disobedience, who have thumbed their collective noses against heaven.

The storm of judgement's coming!
Take action, Israel!

With the seventh warning -
Here's your final warning from the Lord -
one last chance.
With this one God's patience and waiting is completed.

Get the point, Israel - God means business.
There is no time to fool around.
Batten down the hatches of your life.
Clean up what needs cleaning up.
Repent!

The prophecy against Judah is the seventh warning.

So it is that as you and I listen to this prophecy some 2750 years after it first was issued we can see one of the timeless characteristics of our Unchangeable God, namely this:

The Lord is not one who rains down punishment in a sadistic or vindictive manner. Warning after warning is given.

He extends the times to complete fullness - seven - that all may repent.
He wants to see all people come to salvation.

Which is something that is shown not only here in Amos, but in prophecy after prophecy:

Think of Jonah -- angry that the wicked people of Ninevah are not destroyed, but rather spared after a last-minute repentance.

Remember God's rebuke to the sulking prophet, suffering from heat exhaustion under the withered remains of a dead bush?

Jon 4:11 *"But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"*

Or the word of the Lord through Ezekiel, chapter 18:

v.23 *"Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?"*

Or the apostle Peter:

2Pe 3:9 *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

Let's recognize that, brothers and sisters.

Let's recognize the pain,
the tremendous heartache,
which God experiences when his people go astray.
Recognize the longing which he experiences,
desiring them to turn back to him.

And perhaps as we leave here this evening, the Holy Spirit will work within us to bring that same pain and heartache and longing to the foreground in our lives as we watch our friends and relatives wander in unbelief.

May the Spirit work in us all to seize the moment when we are able to present the love and salvation available to them through Jesus Christ -- and to do that careful, gently, but earnestly.

May we tonight hear the word of the Lord through Amos.

May it grow in us a deepening passion to live out the Mission Statement of this congregation:
As members of a community that wants to glorify God, we are called to bring the life changing message of Christ to our neighbours as well as to each other.

Glory comes to God when our neighbours are won to Jesus.
When they turn from death to life.

This is the Word of the Lord – through Amos.

Hear another element of the prophetic Word -
something else we need to recognize about our holy God.
That "something else" we also see in this passage,
not now in the **fact** that he spoke to Judah,
but in **what** he said to them.

What is immediately striking about this particular prophecy is that no particular offense is listed, as in the case of the other neighbors of Israel. They had not committed any of the gruesome offenses of the surrounding nations. There were no mutilated bodies, destroyed communities, desecrated graves, thefts or the like.

In fact, as best as we can ascertain from historical records of the time, things in Judah were, by all standards, really quite respectable and civilized. They were decent people raising their families quietly in the suburbs and rurals of southern Palestine -
we'd see it as white picket fence, dog, bungalow, trips to the beach and grandma's house.
Businesses were prospering, bank accounts full, pensions secure.

Yes sir, things were going along really quite nicely.
It was a fine time to be alive in Judah.....
..... And yet they receive a harsh condemnation by God.

Why?

There's an old phrase -- *silence is golden*.
Parents of young children can tell you that..... or grandparents who've just had a visit from their young grandchildren.
When they finally are asleep in bed,
Or in the car rolling back home.....
peace and quiet --
aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhh.

Sometimes *silence is golden* in inter-personal situations. Things are better left unsaid. Or maybe it's just plain ol' good to be together, quietly.

But sometimes,
sometimes, silence is **NOT** so golden.

Sometimes by the silence you know there is trouble.
When your young children are playing in another room, and suddenly it gets quiet, don't you begin to get suspicious. It's **too** quiet.
Or there are times when children are wandering down the wrong path of life. You **CAN'T** remain silent about it.
Or when family members are silent to each other, not on speaking terms.

That's **bad** silence.
Then silence is **NOT** golden.

The Judean population, comfortable, content, well-off,
quietly living their respectable lives.
Silence.... but not a golden silence.
Rather, it was a wrongful silence, an awful silence.

It was the silence of a child who has left home and never bothers to call back to mom & dad,
ignoring them,
for all intents and purposes behaving as though they were dead.

It was Judah, the covenant people of God, raised in the history and tradition of His Divine Fatherly protection over them, watched by God in heaven with the tender care of a mother watching the child at her breast;

It was Judah, leaving home, and quietly rejecting their upbringing, rejecting God. Silence. No communion between heaven and Judah.

And it is **that** horribly un-golden silence, a silence of distance that is condemned by the Lord:
I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem!

*All that has been keeping you so safe and cozy,
all that which has taken up your time and attention
and kept you from calling home,
everything that has pulled you so far away from me --
all that is going to be ripped away from you and destroyed. And you, Judah, will be
left in another form of silence,
the silence of desolation.*

Those are harsh words, terribly harsh words, words that if spoken to you or I would have to come as a rude, most unwelcome shock.

And probably there were some within Judah that were genuinely upset by such a condemnation.

"Say what? I haven't rejected God.

Haven't really become a full fanatic for him, but - hey - I haven't pushed him out of the picture either. I mean - give me a break."

If there weren't such people in Judah, there sure are today. I can't tell you how many people I talk with who give this kind of a response. *"I haven't accepted a faith in Jesus... yet. But understand, I'm not really against it either."*

Then off they go.

Now, please understand me. I don't mean to speak in any way against those who are honestly struggling, who are wrestling with real spiritual issues in their lives, who are truly seeking and are not ready to commit yet.

God has all kinds of time and room for such people.

The problem is when you or I or people we know figure that we can get by in life with less than a full, whole-hearted acceptance of Christ's Lordship over our lives;

with less than a complete submission
to the rule of God in our hearts.

For in the eyes of God
having a **lack** of active **assent**
is the same as **dissent**.

Silence, as far as obedience goes,
is the same as **rejection**.

With such silence God is not pleased.

How can I say this so unequivocally? Because of God's words to Judah!
Look at v.4 -- notice how he parallels the two phrases

- i. rejected the law of the LORD
- ii. not kept his decrees

We cannot say, "No I have not really rejected the LORD, but I am not ready to live by his commandments at this time."

Impossible.

When you refuse to live God's way, by his decrees & commandments, you are *de facto*, in reality, rejecting Him.

Lack of active obedience equals disobedience.

Get the message, Judah. Get the message, Ottawa.

With God - "Silence is **NOT** golden!"

Loud, active, visible obedience **IS** golden!

A second objection is - "*Well, sure I believe in God. And yes, I buy that stuff about the Golden Rule. I'm a Christian. God's law is OK by me.*"

Do you see this one - now we are dealing with one who says, "I **do** practice active obedience. I have **not** rejected God's law."

Many in Judah were definitely in this camp. Definitely!

To them comes the second part of the parallel statements

rejecting the law = not keeping God's decrees.

We've talked about the first part where passivity, not keeping God's decrees is the same as active, deliberate rejection of God. But now the second part.

Which is this:

It's one thing to look at the call to commitment and see God's law as some vague, general commandment to love in life. It is one thing to view it as a whole. It is quite a different thing to go into that Law of God and begin to apply its standards one by one to our lives.

Think of it this way. When we pray in church, "*Lord forgive us for the many times we have transgressed against you, the many times we have broken your law*", then how often don't we silently think, "*Well, for me it hasn't been too bad. It's actually been a pretty good week. I've been pretty clean.*"

But what if we were to start digging a little deeper, looking at specific commandment, specific decrees. What if we were to start praying, "*Lord, you call us to not covet. And yet, I see that home which my co-worker has, or their stereo. I see the good job they have... and Lord, there are times when I get so jealous of that...*"

Lord, you call us not to murder. But there have been times when I could have just killed my kids this week. And some of the words I used towards them, words intended to maim their spirits, cruel words...."

Ouch, right?

When we get beyond the **generalities** of Law to the **specifics** of Decree, suddenly we cut through a whole lot of pretense and expose the heart of our devotion to the Lord for what it really is. Which is what Amos does with Judah.

1. You **reject** God when you **don't keep** his decrees.
2. Get beyond small talk in vague generalities about **Law**, people, and start dealing in specifics about **decrees**.

And I would suggest tonight, brothers and sisters, that God's Word of warning then is just as applicable today. It is a storm cloud that perhaps we can use personally to evaluate our own lives, our own personal obedience to the Lord.

Are we fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ?

Or do we, to one degree or another, reject him by not keeping his commands? Do we get complacent with vague, general talk about "God's Law" without moving to the more rigorous scrutiny of examining our lives by his specific decrees, and subjecting ourselves to live by them?

As Israel needed to heed the gathering storm clouds, so do we who live in the closing decade of the twentieth century.

You know, the bottom line problem for Judah, and I would submit, the bottom line problem for a lot of people today is this:

a failure to take God seriously.

To honour God as God.

supreme, most powerful being in the Universe.

"They have been led astray by false gods."

In other words - they have let other things squeeze God out of the picture.

They have treated him as an optional extra,

as some nice quiet elderly gentleman whom they would acknowledge and visit on occasion --

if they have time,

if they have the money to go,

if it is convenient.

If it fits in, fine. If not, oh well, we can still get by quite nicely.

And Amos says - *"No! Stop kidding yourselves! Stop playing foolish games with dynamite! Take God seriously! Honour him thoroughly, deliberately, as the Supreme Judge and King of Creation that He is."*

So let that be the message to you and I tonight, as well.

And let us leave here determined to live in full subjection to the Lord, full devotion, full dedication,

And to call others to follow this same road with us.