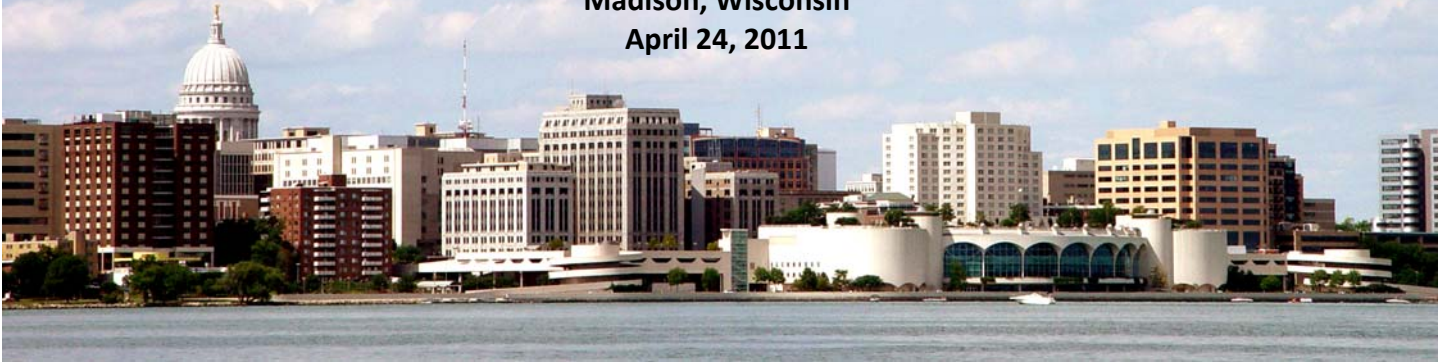


# ***“Politician vs. Prophet”***

**AMOS 1:10-17**

**Baxter T. Exum (#1112)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
April 24, 2011**



*"Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."* Most of us are probably familiar with what is commonly thought to be the creed of the United States Postal Service. The quote actually goes back to Herodotus and refers to the courier service of the ancient Persian Empire. And although we understand the thought, although we understand the mission, we also understand that those who deliver our mail will sometimes come up against some amazing challenges. Take, for example, some of the snow that we have had here in Madison. On our own street, sometimes the mail truck gets stuck, and yet he keeps on trying. Several months ago, not only did our garbage truck get stuck on the hill in front of our house, but the snowplow also got stuck. So, we understand that some messages are certainly more difficult to deliver than others.

With this in mind, I would like for us to conclude our two-part series of lessons from Amos 7. Last week, we looked together at a series of three visions that Amos passed along to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, almost like a parent counting to three as a warning before the punishment. We learned that Amos was a simple shepherd from the south, and yet we learned that God called him to go preach to the more sophisticated northern tribes. We learned that it would have been a little bit like Crocodile Dundee making a visit to New York City. There was animosity between the north and the south. Amos was a backwoods southern country guy minding his own business, but God had other plans. And so we learned last week that Amos listened to God and he delivered the message across the border to the north. The first vision was of a terrible locust attack, but Amos asked God to forgive, and so the Lord God decided to hold off. The second vision was of a terrible fire, and this time Amos once again begged God to stop, and the Lord did, in fact, hold off. But then the third vision was of God holding a plumb line among the people, and as we discovered last week, there was no arguing with the plumb line, and it was at that point that God promised that the Northern Kingdom of Israel would be completely destroyed.

Amos, therefore, delivered the message; however, as we move in to the second half of Amos 7, we find that Amos hits a brick wall. Like the letter carrier trying to get up the hill in front of our house in ten inches of snow, Amos faces a challenge. Do we ever face challenges when it comes to telling people about our faith? We know that we do, and so hopefully we will be encouraged by how Amos handles the situation in our lesson this morning from the second half of Amos 7.

In the passage we are about to consider, Amos runs in to Amaziah the priest of Bethel, a very powerful man who was basically a political appointment. And so we have the politician vs. the prophet. And please remember: The Northern Kingdom was completely engulfed in the sin of idolatry. They were prosperous, they were successful, but they had abandoned God, from the king to the priests as well as the entire nation. Amos, therefore, was facing a highly-trained religious and political leader with the message that his man-made religion was about to cause the downfall of the entire nation. As we study our passage, I would like for us to start by looking at the fact that Amos was persecuted. Secondly, we will notice that Amos was commissioned by God. And then finally, we will consider the fact that Amos, despite being threatened, continued to speak the word of God clearly and without apology.

I. **First of all, though, let us please notice that AMOS WAS PERSECUTED FOR PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD.**

If you will, please look with me at Amos 7:10-13, and please remember this comes immediately after the three visions we studied last week...

***<sup>10</sup> Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. <sup>11</sup> "For thus Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.' " <sup>12</sup> Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! <sup>13</sup> "But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence."***

And so we find here that Amos is persecuted. This tells us that the message was getting through. Apparently, Amaziah was listening. We find in this passage that Amaziah was the **"priest of Bethel."** Remember: When the original King Jeroboam broke away with the ten tribes to the north, he set up temples to make worship more convenient. He set up golden calves, and the worship of idols took hold of the nation of Israel. According to 1 Kings 12, Jeroboam made those golden calves and said, **"...behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt."** The Bible says that he **"...made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi."** Not only that, but Jeroboam **"...instituted a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; thus he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made."**

And so we find here that Jeroboam set up his own idols, he set up his own priesthood, and he declared his own feast days. Well, by the time we get to Amos (nearly 200 years later), the nation was set in its ways, and one of those priests hears the message and takes it to the king, King Jeroboam. By the way, this is a different King Jeroboam. We refer to him as Jeroboam II, but he apparently has a lot in common with Jeroboam I, because he allowed the worship of idols to continue. He allowed the politically appointed priesthood to continue. And so we have Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, hearing God's word through Amos, and apparently he gets scared. According to verse 10, he is worried that the land is **"unable to endure"** the words of the prophet. He fears that if the people hear the message, they may ultimately turn back to God, and so Amaziah takes the message from Amos to the king, and he puts a little spin on it. It's God's word...with a twist! Amaziah, then, tells Jeroboam that Amos is conspiring against the king. He doesn't tell the king that Amos (even though from the south) has been begging God to spare the Northern Kingdom. He doesn't tell the king that Amos has already prevented a devastating locust attack. He doesn't tell the king that Amos has already prevented a terrible wild fire. But Amaziah tells the king that Amos has predicted the king's death by a sword.

I cannot find that anywhere in the book of Amos. So, maybe he did say this or maybe he didn't, but the implication is that Amos is plotting something. According to Amaziah, Amos is a man to be feared. Amos is a man who needs to be punished. Amos is a man who is guilty of treason. It almost sounds like those who took Jesus to Pilate and basically said, "Hey, this guy is claiming to be a king." They were stirring up trouble. That is what Amaziah was doing.

But as we learned last week, Amos was only trying to save the Northern Kingdom from destruction. Amos was trying to save the king! Amos was trying to get the people to repent. For the past six and a half chapters, Amos has warned the people to turn back to God. The people, though, think they are just fine the way they are, and so for the first time, they turn on the messenger.

In verse 12, Amaziah turns directly to Amos. He tells Amos to leave, and then he follows up with a thinly-veiled accusation, ***"Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying!"*** The accusation seems to be, "Amos, you are only doing this for the money, and we are not paying for that kind of message up here in Israel! You need to go home, and maybe you can make a living with that kind of message down in Judah!" You see, Amaziah was attacking Amos' motives. Amaziah was chipping away at Amos' credibility. And then in verse 13, Amaziah says, ***"But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence."*** In other words, "You don't have permission to be up here! You don't belong here! This is private property!"

So, we have the accusation of treason, we have a personal attack on his motives, and we have a veiled threat that Amos doesn't have permission to be in the North and if he didn't leave perhaps something bad could happen.

Today, haven't we also faced ridicule when we talk about what we believe? Aren't we sometimes threatened with being cut off by our friends and even families? Some of you have faced some intense pressure even from your own families. All of us face Amaziah's in this life. All of us face people who tell us to go away, people who try to discourage us, people who try to get us to give up and quit. Amos knew what that was like. This is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 5:10-12 when He said, ***"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*** Jesus was talking about Amos. The world wants us to keep quiet about our Christian faith, but Jesus wants us to know that being ridiculed is simply a part of the Christian life. Jesus wants us to know that when we speak up and get picked on, we are in good company. First of all, then, Amos was persecuted.

II. **However, as we continue looking at the next two verses, we find that Amos overcame this obstacle with a reminder that HE WAS COMMISSIONED BY GOD.**

In other words, Amos wasn't making this up, and Amos certainly didn't ask for this. If you will, let's look together at Amos 7:14-15,

***<sup>14</sup> Then Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. <sup>15</sup> "But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'***

Amaziah says, “Hey, you just came up here for the big salary,” and Amos says, “Wait a minute! I was down south minding my own business, and God made me come up here!” We won’t spend too much time on this, but let’s just remember that Amos was commissioned by God Himself. In other words, the emphasis was not on Amos! Amos was a *“herdsman.”* Amos was a *“grower of sycamore figs.”* Today, we might describe Amos as a farmer, an arborist, or maybe even a migrant worker. From a worldly point of view, Amos was nothing. Amos was a man who would have worn his name on his shirt. Amos was a man who would have driven a bucket truck. Notice: Amos had no training as a prophet. Amos wasn’t born into the life of a prophet. In other words, he had no family heritage. And yet Amos knew that the message did not depend on him, because the message came from God. Nowhere in this book do we ever hear Amos say, “I have a message for you people!” But instead, over and over again, we hear Amos saying, *“Thus says the Lord!”* Just look at Amos 1:3, *“Thus says the Lord,”* 1:6, *“Thus says the Lord,”* 1:9, *“Thus says the Lord,”* 1:11, *“Thus says the Lord,”* 1:13, *“Thus says the Lord,”* 2:1, *“Thus says the Lord,”* 2:4, *“Thus says the Lord,”* 2:6, *“Thus says the Lord,”* and so on (more than forty times) throughout the entire book.

There is a lesson for us in this passage, and that is: It doesn’t matter whether we’ve been to prophet school, because the power is in the gospel itself. The message does not depend on us. And like Amos, we have been commissioned by the Lord. The lesson is: You can be God’s messenger as a herdsman. You can be God’s messenger as a migrant worker. You can be God’s messenger as teacher. You can be God’s messenger while driving a truck. You can be God’s messenger right there in your office. Think about some of the first disciples. Some of those guys were fishermen, some were accountants, some were doctors, some were tentmakers, and they were all able to preach the gospel right there where they were. Sometimes they were even more successful in their preaching because of what they did for a living. So, we learn that Amos was not a professional prophet, and yet he was commissioned by God, he knew that his message came directly from God, and he was able to overcome the obstacle that Amaziah was putting in his way.

**III. There is a third basic idea I’d like for us to notice from the last two verses in this chapter, and that is: AMOS HAD THE COURAGE TO SPEAK THE WORD OF GOD CLEARLY AND WITHOUT APOLOGY.**

Please notice how the chapter ends with Amos’ powerful reply to the threats of Amaziah in verses 16-17,

*<sup>16</sup> "Now hear the word of the LORD: you are saying, 'You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.' <sup>17</sup> "Therefore, thus says the LORD, 'Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.' "*

Some people might say, “Wow, Amos is really being vindictive here! He is really making it personal!” And yet we notice in verse 16 that Amaziah was directly contradicting the Lord’s message. God was telling Amos to speak, and Amaziah was telling Amos not to speak. In verse 17, therefore, we have God’s word, and we find in verse 17 that there are some tragic consequences for opposing God’s spokesman. Remember: Amaziah was the priest. Amaziah was supposed to be representing God. Amaziah was supposed to be the intercessor between God and the people. But Amaziah did not care what God had to say. And so the punishment was going to be severe. And when we really think about it, the punishment is nothing more than what was promised back in Deuteronomy 28. Back in Deuteronomy 28, God promised blessings, but if the people refused to hold up their end of the covenant, God promised that all kinds of terrible things would happen. Amos, therefore, was not just trading insult for insult, but Amos was simply telling Amaziah what would happen. This is what happens to those who live by their own rules and refuse to listen to God. This is the way

it is. Amos, therefore, was persecuted, but he realized that his message came from God, and so he continued preaching it no matter what. He preached it despite the threats. He preached it despite being misrepresented to the king. He preached it despite the attacks on his motives. Like the letter carrier on the hill in front of our house, Amos did everything in his power to plow through the obstacles, because he knew he was on a mission from God.

And so the lesson comes back to us now. God has also given us a message to deliver: the good news that Jesus died for the sins of the world, He was buried in a tomb, and He was raised up on the third day. We face a lot of obstacles when it comes to delivering that message, but we realize that the message is from God, and that gives us the courage to plow through it. Do we ever hold back because we're afraid of what someone might say to us? Do we ever hold back because we're afraid we don't know enough? Do we ever hold back because we're afraid that someone might challenge our motives? Amos knows about those challenges, and he would encourage us to keep on pressing forward. Amos would encourage us to recommit to speaking up as we should.

By the way, I didn't tell you this before, but the name Amos literally means "burden bearer." In other words, Amos had a serious message, it was a heavy message, but he kept on keeping on. Remember: Paul warned the young preacher Timothy that there was a time coming when people would "***not endure sound doctrine,***" but Paul's charge to Timothy was to "***preach the Word***" anyway! As brother Marshall Keeble used to say, "Preach it when they like it, and preach it when they don't." A lot of things we believe are offensive to the world—God's message on homosexuality, God's message on divorce, God's message concerning the one church, God's message on the six days of creation, God's message on the role of women in the public assemblies of the church—these things go against so much of what we are taught in school and are against just about everything we see in the media. But let's remember: The message comes from God. Like Amos, we didn't make this up, but we have been commissioned by God. The world may refer to us as small-minded religious bigots, but that's okay...we're in good company. We are right in there with the prophet Amos, the non-prophet prophet!

If you are just an ordinary person, please remember: Amos was an ordinary person. There he was watching those herds and trimming those trees, and God basically said, "You need to speak up." And that is God's message to us today.

The message we have is true, just as the message Amos had was true. Last week I said that Amos prophesied in the mid-700's BC. History tells us that in 722 BC, the Assyrian army came in and completely wiped out the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and unlike the Southern Kingdom, the Northern Kingdom never came back, they vanished, they were completely wiped off of the face of this earth. The words of God through Amos came to pass.

### **Conclusion:**

This morning, then, we have a choice: We can be like Amaziah, the selfish priest, the political appointment, who opposed God's message, or we can be like Amos, the humble prophet who took time out of his career as a shepherd and tree-trimmer to pass along the word of God faithfully, even though the message was not popular, and even though he had to overcome a number of challenges. My prayer is that all of us will aim to be like Amos, that we would not get discouraged. The most important thing Amos ever did in his life was to preach the word of God to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Those flocks and those fig trees are long gone, but his message is still with us. I hope that we will be known as people who listen to God's word and then have

the courage to pass it on to our friends and families. My prayer, then, is that we will be like that mail carrier who keeps on trying to get up the hill, because the message is extremely important.

The message is that Jesus offered Himself on the cross as a sacrifice to pay for our sins. We respond to that sacrifice by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be briefly dipped in water so that our sins will be forgiven. We come up out of the water as new people, having been born into God's family. If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, we would encourage you to write it down and bring it to the front. We'll be glad to go to God on your behalf as a congregation. If you have any questions about God's word, please let us know, and we would be glad to study it together. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)