

The Sound of Silence

A Sermon on Amos 8

by

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1. Introduction

2. A People Ripe for Judgment (vv. 1-3)

a. The vision of the fruit basket and its meaning (vv. 1-2).

- i. Contrary to the narrative of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, who has rejected every word the prophet has said thus far as a message of a disgruntled farmer, Amos once again highlights the origin of his message.
 1. He bases the foundation of his message upon the revelation of God. His prophecy is from God; his visions are from God.
 2. Over and again, the prophet has been sure to relay the Word of God to the people of God, and this becomes vitally important as we consider this in light of our own lives.
- ii. God shows the prophet a basket of summer fruit and then explains the meaning to him plainly.
 1. The Lord again says to the prophet, “The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer.”
 - a. The point of this is to reveal that Israel’s time of rebellion had come to its end.
 - b. The point in this being that it is not a temporary judgment the nation can recover from.
 2. God will spare them no more, meaning quite simply that He will no longer overlook their offenses and give further time to repent.

b. *Like over-ripened fruit, the dead bodies will be tossed out (v. 3).*

i. “The songs of the palace will turn to wailing in that day,” declares the Lord God.

“Many will be corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence.”

1. On the day of judgment for Israel, the people will have two responses to the calamity at hand.

a. The first is that their songs will be turned to wailing.

b. The second response they shall have is silence.

ii. The reality of God’s judgment will be palpable upon them—and that’s what this verse really serves to show us.

1. The finality of judgment, the judgment they had so long ignored, can no longer be ignored.

2. Even in death, the wicked shall have no peace and their bodies will be left to vultures and scavengers to feast upon and rot in the open.

a. The stench of decomposing flesh will fill the air and dread will consume the living.

b. The implications of this upon the church today are startling. We must ask the question: where is the point of no return?

3. A Profane People Reigns (vv. 4-6)

a. *They oppress the poor and needy among them (v. 4).*

i. The prophet calls upon the people once more to hear his warning, but notice that he indicts them with this grand-sweeping generalization of what they truly love.

1. They are a people who trample the needy and seek to do away with the humble of the land.

2. In other words: they are a people who oppress the poor and needy.
- ii. The Law called the Israelites to care for the poor and vulnerable people of their society—especially their fellow Israelites—and this is one of the most basic elements of the Christian faith in general, is it not?
 1. James tells us that true religion is caring widows and orphans.
 2. Christ likewise spent an uncomfortable amount of time speaking about the need for us to care for the least of these—and He tied it to salvation.
 - a. The parable of the sheep and the Goats in Matt. 25 reveals two types of people.
 - b. The point of this is simply to say that this isn't some mysterious new teaching that the early church invented, or that Christ invented in contradiction to the Old Testament—but that this has been evidence of a genuine faith and love of God since the beginning.
- b. *They profane the festivals and Sabbath as they daydream of dishonest and inhumane gain (vv. 5-6).*
 - i. V. 5-6 depicts them as a people who say secretly in their hearts, “When will the new moon be over, so that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath, that we may open the wheat market, to make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, and to cheat with dishonest scales so as to buy the helpless for money and the needy for a pair of sandals, and that we may sell the refuse of the wheat?”
 1. The New Moon festivals and the Sabbath were to be days of worship and rest for the people of Israel.

- a. First we see that the Israelites were preoccupied with the question of “how long?” rather than worshipful adoration of their God.
 - b. Secondly, we see that their primary motivation is born out of the desire to enrich themselves through dishonest gain, and they did this in a few different ways.
 - c. Finally, v. 6 details their purpose behind doing all of this. They did it all to crush the poor into the dirt and they could then enter into the slave trading business.
- ii. They were a people who matched external conformity to the Law
- 1. They took a break from their commerce for the New Moon festival and the Sabbath, yet all the while they were scheming of how they might take full advantage of the poor and needy.
 - a. In other words: they honored the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him.
 - b. And many do much the same within the church today.
 - 2. What is it that occupies your hearts and minds as we gather on the Lord’s Day, and even throughout the remainder of the week as you conduct your business?
 - a. The sobering reality is that many of us can come to church on a Sunday and give perfunctory lip-service to God, but God sees the heart.

- b. The equally sobering reality is that many of us can conduct our private lives as if they are complete separate from the life we show at church on Sundays.

4. A Permanent Record of Deeds (vv. 7-10)

a. *The Lord has sworn an oath to never forget their deeds (v. 7).*

- i. There is a substantial amount of debate on what it means when the Lord says that He swears by the pride of Jacob.

- 1. I believe the most faithful way to understand this is that He is swearing an oath by Himself, meaning He is making a formal oath against His own name
- 2. In other words, God swears and binds Himself to judge the sins we just saw in vv. 4-6.

- ii. God is unchanging, He is unrelenting, and when He makes a promise—especially one where He swears by His own name, it is an irrevocable oath.

- 1. That oath He makes here is to never forget the sins of Israel, and that is a terrifying word of judgment.
- 2. There are many other passages which speak to God “remembering our sins no more,” yet here we find the exact opposite is promised.
 - a. Not one sin will be overlooked on the day of their judgment.
 - b. God will bring to remembrance every single thing they have ever done, and it will only provoke Him to more wrath.

b. *Creation and order will be catapulted into destruction and chaos (vv. 8-9).*

- i. The Lord says, “Because of this, will not the land quake and everyone who dwells in it mourn? Indeed, all of it will rise up like the Nile, and it will be tossed about and subside like the Nile of Egypt.”
 1. Every depiction of the Lord’s return for a covenant-keeping Israel has tranquility, peace, and everlasting joy under the rule of their Creator in mind, and obviously this is the same for the church.
 - a. It is a time of freedom from sin and the effects of sin and Christ dwells in the midst of His people to rule.
 - b. Yet seldom do we keep in mind that all of this takes place *only after* judgment is poured out upon the evildoer.
 2. The Day of the Lord then is not simply the return of Christ to usher in an era of everlasting righteousness and peace—it is also a time of horror. Much of the same language is present here against the Kingdom of Israel.
- ii. “It will come about in that day,” declares the Lord God, “That I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight. Then I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring sackcloth on everyone’s loins and baldness on every head. And I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son, and the end of it will like a bitter day.”
 1. There will be a profound fear and anxiety as Creation itself rebels against the laws of physics and everything they know to be normal.
 - a. Furthermore, it will be a time of perpetual darkness, from which the light of a new day will never come.

- b. In addition to this, the complete reversal of their fortunes will take place.
- 2. The danger of Israel ignoring God's pleas for repentance is that it will not simply be a time of temporary judgment, where the Assyrians raid and destroy their kingdom.
 - a. It will be time where God Himself will forever be their enemy as they are judged alongside everyone else who is not a child of God.
 - b. And that is the real threat here; it is not that they shall somehow escape the judgment to come simply by being judged now.

5. A Poverty of the Word of God (vv. 11-14)

- a. An unquenchable famine for the Word of God & no relief shall be found (vv. 11-13).
 - i. The most severe form of judgment to fall upon them would be the deafening silence of God (v. 11).
 - 1. The Lord promises to send a famine, but this time, it is not a famine where they are left without food and water.
 - 2. This famine shall be utterly different. It shall be a famine for hearing the Words of God.
 - a. God shall not speak to them through the mouth of the prophets.
 - b. The reason for this is quite simple: when they had the Word of God delivered to them, they rejected it.
 - ii. Verses 11-12 show their dire search, but it ultimately ends in futility.

1. They will stagger from sea to sea and from the north even to the east, meaning they will go all throughout the land to search for some Word from the Lord.
 - a. They will desperately seek the Lord—and yet they will hear nothing.
 - b. The Lord’s silence is a deafening indictment against this crooked and perverse generation of Israelites, because He has essentially said to them, “You are not my people.”
 2. Likewise, their sons and daughters would faint from thirst for the Word of God.
 - a. The young are always seen as the strongest—the ones who can endure the harshest of conditions, and yet they too would stumble and fall for lack of spiritual sustenance.
 - b. In all of it, the idea is that there is this insatiable desire to be filled and fed by the One they rejected—yet that desire will never be realized.
- b. The idolater shall be abandoned by their gods and God alike (v. 14).*
- i. The Lord says, “As for those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, who say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’ and, ‘As the way of Beersheba lives,’ they will fall and not rise again.
 1. Israel’s problem was not merely moral, it was profoundly theological.
 2. They swore oaths by the names of Pagan deities who were powerless to do anything, let alone save them on the day of God’s wrath.

- a. On that day when they would fall to be consumed in judgment, they would not rise again.
 - b. They had forsaken the Lord their God for false gods, and so He would forsake them to their gods who were powerless to save.
- ii. What we're seeing is simply the reality of the covenant curses play out.
 - 1. Like their fathers before them who died off in the wilderness for their rejection of the Word and God Himself, this profane generation will fall under the condemnation of the Lord.
 - 2. We see much the same in the church today with its various institutions and parachurch organizations.

6. Conclusion