

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH IN TIME OF CALAMITY (Amos 9)

Note: I delivered this sermon in the Fall of 2017, when a devastating fire passed through our home town, Santa Rosa, CA. d

I. WELCOME / TEXT / PRAYER

A. Welcome

B. Today's Text (HSL: Read and Comment on each paragraph)

- A bit about the Amos and his book (HSL)
- Text:

Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, O sons of Israel, against the entire family that he brought up from the land of Egypt: ²“You only have I known among all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit you *with judgment* because of all your iniquities.” ³Do two men walk together unless they are in agreement? ⁴Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured *something*? ⁵Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all? ⁶If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people tremble? *If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?* ⁷Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless he reveals his secret counsel to his servants the prophets. ⁸A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy? – Amos 3

This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up. ¹When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!” ²So the LORD relented. “This will not happen,” the LORD said. ³This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. ⁴Then I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!” ⁵So the LORD relented. “This will not happen either,” the Sovereign LORD said. ⁶This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁷And 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. ⁸The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam.” Amos 7

“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and I will wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, ¹so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the LORD who does this. ²“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the plowman will overtake the reaper, and the man who treads grapes him who sows seed; when the mountains will drip sweet wine and all the hills will be dissolved. ³I will also restore the captivity of my people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live *in them*; they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they will plant gardens and eat their fruit. ⁴I will also plant them in their land, and they will never again be uprooted from their land which I have given them,” says the LORD your God. – Amos 9

C. Opening Prayer

II. INTRODUCTION

A. My prophetic impulse: Issue to our city a loving call to repentance for our many sins

B. My friend Lawrence's wise and cautionary words:

Since you're asking for my opinion, I won't be shy. I've heard several people very angrily state that if they hear somebody ascribing this disaster to God judging us they are going to be extremely upset - and that was from believers. I know the cross is an offense, and God's wrath a reality, but I think that at this point bringing it up would be perceived as rubbing salt in the community's eye. My opinion is that we should prayerfully wait on the Lord to give release for the timing of that message. Being prophetic to the community of believers is always right and needful; but public proclamation is much more sensitive and bears a heavier price; much sensitivity is needed.

C. The GREAT importance of the Church FULLY embodying both the Spirit and the Way of Christ in time of calamity. As we see in the NT:

- Jesus spoke hard truth
- Jesus spoke soft truth
- Jesus demonstrated love, compassion, mercy, and grace in all he said and did
- MP: AND BY GOD'S GRACE, WE MUST DO THE SAME!

D. Conclusion: With the help of today's text in Amos, and others in the NT, let's look at *how the Church is to minister to the world in time of calamity*

III. FOUR KEY POINTS TO UNDERSTAND

A. (#1) God is the First Cause of all calamity

- Amos: *If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?*
- What are "Second Causes"? (HSL)
- God is the First Cause of all that happens (Rom. 11, Eph. 1)
- (The example of the Cross)
- The Great Question that we all ask in time of calamity: Why? What is God doing, saying?

B. (#2) In time of calamity, the Church is called upon to prophesy

- If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people tremble? *If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?* ⁷ Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless he reveals his secret counsel to his servants the prophets. ⁸ A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy? – Amos 3
- But how exactly is she to do this? What is she supposed to say and do?

C. (#3) In all calamities prior to the Consummation, there is a wise and compassionate mixture of Judgment, Mercy, and Grace

1. Prior to the Consummation

- The Consummation defined
- For unrepentant sinners, the Consummation is an *unmixed* calamity (Rev. 20)
- All prior calamities point to the Consummation, but fall short of it, since they are mixed with divine mercy and grace (more in a moment)

2. A Wise and Compassionate Mixture (HSL)

- In most calamities, God is still “striving with all flesh” in love, mercy, and grace
- Thus, there is mixture. The Church must always keep this in mind
- She must lean hard on the Holy Spirit to see the mixture and to know when and how to emphasize a given element in the mix

3. The element of Judgment

- “Judgment” Defined: A display of divine displeasure against sin
- Two kinds of Judgment:

a. Judgment can be the *punishment* for sin, which is death

- Death, Hades, Final Judgment/Eternal Punishment in the Lake of Fire
- The bowls of Revelation 15-17

b. Usually, however, judgment is *chastisement* for sin, with a view to repentance, faith, and amendment of life, so as to escape final judgment and/or grow in holiness

- Painful providences: (HSL)
- Warnings to sinners (the trumpets of Revelation 8-11)
- Discipline to saints (Heb. 12)

c. How we see both of these in Amos:

- There were two preliminary judgments, in which God was *chastening* Israel/Judah

- There was one final judgment, in which he punished many with death; *but even then, there were mercy, grace, and glorious promises for a remnant of penitent captives to Assyria and Babylon*

d. How we see both of these in the Santa Rosa fires:

- Punishment of a few (a portion of the 40)
- Chastisement of many
 1. A wake-up call to sinners
 2. A wake-up call to saints

4. The element of MERCY

- Mercy defined: Not getting what we do deserve
- How we see this in Amos:

⁴This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. ⁵Then I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!” ⁶So the LORD relented.

- How God shows mercy today:

a. By not destroying the world (which he justly could!)

⁴Or do you think nothing *at all* of the riches of God’s goodness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that the goodness of God *is meant* to lead you to repentance? ⁵But in accordance with your stubbornness and *your* impenitent heart you are treasuring up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed. – Rom. 2

Note: This highlights the ugliness and absurdity of an entitlement mentality

b. By giving us time to repent:

²¹I gave her time to repent, but she is unwilling to repent of her immorality. ²²See, I am throwing her into a sickbed, and *will cast* those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works; ²³and I will destroy her children with death *itself*. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches *the* minds and *the* hearts; and I will give to each of you according to your works. – Rev. 2 (Thyatira)

- How God showed MERCY in the Santa Rosa fires:

- a. Despite our many sins and his longstanding wrath:
- b. Minimal loss of life
- c. Manageable loss of property
- d. The holding back of the winds
- e. The good success of firemen, police, and EMT’s

f. MP: This could EASILY have been MUCH worse (think of Sodom and Gomorrah, Dresden)

5. The element of GRACE

- Grace defined: Getting what we don't deserve (free gifts)
- How God shows grace to the world today:
 1. By sustaining physical life (Gen. 9)
 - 2. By sending his Church—the Mother of the living—to comfort the nations with the Gospel**
 3. By sending “death throes” and “birth pangs” designed to motivate the nations to repent! (HSL)

‘And as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things take place; and what *will be* the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?”
‘In reply, Jesus said to them: “See to it that no one leads you astray. ‘For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. ‘*And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed; for these things must take place, but the end has not yet come. ‘For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. ‘All these are only the beginning of the birth pains.* - Matt. 24

- How God showed grace in the Santa Rosa fires (a mere sampling)
 1. By granting an abundance of skilled and compassionate first responders
 2. By renewing community spirit, in which everyone is eager to help out
 3. By sending his people into the mix to pray, preach, and perform works of mercy
 4. By reminding *us all* of certain VITAL biblical truths:

a. The uncertainty of life

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, and engage in business and make a profit,” ¹⁴ *when in fact* you have no idea what your life will be like tomorrow, for you are *merely* a wisp of smoke that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills *it* we shall live and do this or that.”

¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. – James

b. The uncertainty of riches

”“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; »but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. »For where your treasure is, there your heart will be as well. »The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your

whole body will be full of light. “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is *that* darkness! “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

c. The supreme priority spiritual life and growth

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. “And having fasted forty days and forty nights, He hungered. “And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.” “But he answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” – Mt. 4

IV. CONCLUSION: A better letter to my neighbors in Santa Rosa

A. Dean’s Letter to the Editor:

I would like to offer a word of encouragement to my Santa Rosa neighbors. We have just passed through a great crisis. Fittingly, we are now attending to the physical needs of all who suffer. But in time—for many it has already come—we will find ourselves asking, “Why? What was the meaning of this?” Permit me to suggest an answer.

You may recall that at the Last Supper, Jesus Christ was surrounded by all his disciples. But one of them—John the Beloved—was leaning his head upon Jesus’ breast. This is a picture of the true spiritual Church, of all who lean upon Christ for all things. But might it not also be a picture of God’s purpose in these fires? For surely they invite us to ponder afresh exactly what we ourselves have been leaning upon for our security, comfort, purpose, and hope, both for this life and the next?

And could it be that God, who loves us better than we love ourselves, is using these fires to lift our eyes from every ephemeral earthly support, so that, beholding the breast of Christ, we may eternally rest our heads there?

B. MP: By words of truth spoken in love, and deeds of mercy done in love, let us invite all to come and rest once and for all upon the all-sufficient bosom of Christ (cf. Mt 11)