

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 29, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Amos 6:1-7

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come! 2) Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours? 3) You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. 4) You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. 5) You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. 6) You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. 7) Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Consider the signs of the times: Peace in the land, relative prosperity, political corruption, and spiritual complacency and a falling away from the Lord. What is the time frame?

America, Plymouth Wisconsin September 29, 2013? It could be, couldn't it? But Amos was addressing Israel – Samaria about 755 BC.

His message was for God's chosen people not for those outside of the Lord's family. And today his words are a message for those who have been called to faith and are now a people chosen by God to declare his praises.

What is his message? The message is

- ✠ A call to repent
- ✠ A call to live our faith as we work and carry out our business
- ✠ An invitation to worship the one true God and serve him alone

The message is: Beware of the temptations that come with power, wealth & luxury. Our text for today specifically contains this warning:

Theme: Don't be taken in by a False Sense of Security

1. Strength and position don't offer security
2. Wealth and luxury are no guarantee of security
3. Security is found only in the Lord and his promises

At the time of Amos the 12 tribes of Jacob which we often call the Israelites were divided into two kingdoms – the Northern Kingdom known as Israel and the Southern Kingdom known as Judah. The capital city of Israel was Samaria. The capital city of Judah was Jerusalem – also known as Zion. The kings of both of these nations felt a sense of pride because of the peace and prosperity which their countries were enjoying. No foreign enemies threatened their power from any side. But the humble prophet Amos threatens them with woes from the Lord: **Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come! 2) Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours?**

Hamath , Calneh, Hamath. Today these are simply marks on historic maps. Each of the cities the Lord mentions have met defeat and destruction although they were once strong and powerful – that would be the imminent fate of Samaria and ultimately of Jerusalem. They were held up as examples and a warning to the complacent and secure leaders of God’s people (the notable men mentioned in our text). You may be well off now but you have forgotten the source of your blessings.

The leaders of God’s people, in particular, felt secure in their complacency. They were enjoying a false sense of security. They had become careless in their relationship with God – taking him for granted and even at times neglecting him and his worship. In this case complacency was simply another word for neglect – neglecting God; forgetting to give him the glory, praise and honor that he deserves because of his grace and mercy. Forgetting to trust and rely on him. They put themselves in God’s place – boosting in their strength, their abilities, and their power. They thought of themselves as self-made men. They were haughty and filled with pride as they bragged about their power and greatness.

We are not immune to the devil’s temptations to become complacent – to become careless in our relationship with God, to forget that he is the source of our strength. It’s easy for us to brag and boost about our accomplishments without giving credit to the Lord.

When I hear the Lord’s words of woe to the complacent – I can’t help but think of the fact that at times the devil’s temptations are somewhat more subtle than the temptation to put ourselves in God’s place. Often he’s content to let us enjoy the privilege of hearing the Word of the Lord in its truth and purity but then the temptation will be to lull us into thinking that once we have that Word that we’ll never lose our faith. And so he leads us to think that we don’t have to exercise our faith or that we don’t have to put the Word into action, that we can even neglect worship frequently because we are secure.

God’s OT people also had fallen into that trap – they felt secure simply because they were descendants of Abraham even though they did not have the faith of Abraham. They neglected the word. Such a feeling of security when God’s word is neglected – when we give other priorities a higher standing is a false security. The Lord promises his blessing to those who hear and do his word. The Lord threatens to withdraw his word from those who neglect his word and fail to live according to it and allow them to starve spiritually.

Later in this book Amos will sound this warning: **The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land--not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.** (Amos 8:11)

Not only does the Lord threaten the loss of our personal security but he also tells us that trust in our own strength, ability and power is a real threat to our spiritual well being. Without the word to nurture our faith; our faith will grow weak and die. We may still know all the facts about God but our trust, our reliance, our dependence on him for his forgiveness is gone. We may end up enjoying a false sense of security which leads to eternal destruction.

Through the prophet Amos the Lord warns us and even calls us to repent of our sins of complacency. Today instead of pointing us to Calneh or Hamath or Gath the Lord might say to us: Look at Zion and Mount Samaria – are you better than they? Take heed that you do not become complacent and secure in your own strength and power. This has been the down fall of many.

When Amos spoke words of warning to the Lord’s people, they closed their ears to them. They ignored them – they put any thoughts of his impending judgment out of their minds – choosing instead to enjoy his blessings with a reckless abandon. Our text warns us that wealth and luxury are no guarantee of security.

3) You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. 4) You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. 5) You strum away on your

harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. 6) You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. 7) Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.

Satan knows how to distract human beings from contemplating unpleasant topics like sin and judgment. He busies us with all kinds of distractions and earthly pleasures and responsibilities. That's the situation Amos describes in our text. The people who prided themselves in being the Lord's own had busied themselves with enjoying the blessings he had given them but failed to recognize him. They lounged in luxury and physical comfort, they consumed the choicest foods and drinks, enjoyed musical entertainment, pampering their bodies with the finest lotions. It was with such concerns that they filled their days, neglecting the Lord and his word. And for that neglect the Lord threatened to lead the leaders of his people into exile. But the leaders of God's people ignored this word of the Lord too. That threat wasn't just empty words. The northern tribes of Israel and the city of Samaria would be attacked by Assyria and their leaders and people would be taken into exile never to return. Israel and the leaders of Zion would spend time in exile in Babylon. It seems as if these notable men of Zion and Samaria had it all. What was missing however was a spiritual concern on the part of the people's leaders. The kingdom which seems so fortunate is actually ruined because it has decayed from within. The society which thinks it is enjoying health and prosperity is actually sick unto death. Yet the kings and leading citizens of the land refused to grieve over the fact that their kingdoms were morally rotten and ruined. And so they would be among the first to go into exile.

Surely Amos words about wealth and luxury must strike a familiar cord with us – we have been blessed to live in a land of plenty and abundance. We are among the wealthiest people who have ever lived in this world. It's not a sin to enjoy what the Lord has given us but it is a sin to forget that what he given to us still belongs to him. It is a sin to become so absorbed in earthly pleasures that we ignore our spiritual needs. Have we allowed the wealth and luxury of the present to distract us from preparing for eternity?

It's not difficult for us in times of prosperity to look around and to see the citizens of our nation reveling in that prosperity and perhaps to point an accusing finger. But we need to remember that Amos is addressing these words not to the nations of the world but to God's people. And so it is to us – not the people of our society that the Lord is speaking through this text today. We who call ourselves the Lord's people in this favored land also enjoy the prosperity of this land. We buy and enjoy comfortable homes and furniture. We eat and drink at expensive restaurants. We listen to music on our stereos, ipods and smart phones. We enjoy all kinds of expensive entertainment.

We say that our wealth is from God but often we fail to grieve over those who are separated from God. Do we show more concern about the physical needs of our families than we do about their spiritual welfare? Are we concerned about the moral laxity that shows itself even among those who call themselves Christians? Are we wrapped up so tightly in our own little comfort zones that we are unaware of those are lacking some of the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter? Do we spend so much on ourselves that we've little left to support the Lord's work of sharing the good news at home and abroad? Is the support for our local congregation weak and the work of our synod hurting while we're enjoying all of our pleasures?

Do our life styles confess or deny the faith we profess? Are we a light and a leaven in the world which we live? Do we point others to the truth of salvation and eternal security in Christ? Do our actions have a positive and god-pleasing impact on those around us as we live in keeping with the Lord's will? Do our family budgets testify that our treasure is in heaven? Do we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and trust that all these things like clothing, food and drink will be given to us as well? Is a generous portion of God's blessings poured back into the kingdom of God or is his work neglected?

These are haunting questions, aren't they, -- questions which prick our consciences and make us squirm. But they are questions which need to be asked if we are taking the warnings of our text seriously.

Amos words are meant to call us to repentance. They are a call to live our faith as we work and carry out our business without neglecting the Lord's business. And they are an invitation to worship the one true God and serve him alone. They are a warning

Don't be taken in by a False Sense of Security

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Texts like this section of God's word which warn us about our sins need to be tempered with the rest of God's word which points the repentant sinner to the Lord and his promises of forgiveness. Assuming that we are hurting at this point because we have allowed ourselves to be taken in by a false sense of security at times or because we have misplaced our trust in strength, position, power, wealth and luxury it is appropriate for us to hear, understand and believe that these warnings are the Lord's way of disciplining us.

Proverbs 13:18 reminds us: **He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.** And the Lord Jesus himself says in Revelation 3:19 **Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.**

To a people living in exile for the sins Amos mentioned in Daniel said: **The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.** (Daniel 9:9)

The Lord's mercy and forgiveness provides us with true and eternal security. We come to him with our sins and lay them at the foot of Jesus' cross confident that Jesus had carried them all. We trust the forgiveness that Christ Jesus won for us in spite our rebellion and sin. And once again our focus is directed to Christ and our priorities have shifted away from self and to the Lord.

Trusting in the Lord and his promises let us stand and join together to pray:

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**

**Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**

**Restore unto me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with your free Spirit. Amen.**