

The Target On Your Back

Amos 2

Today's message is named the target on your back. The name might make you think that the target is there because you are a Christian and people are out to persecute you. Well, let me tell you a little story and then we will see what you think.

Somewhere in a church, two women were sitting together on the front pew listening to the preacher bring a fiery message about sin. He started off by talking about using liquor in excess and the two women yelled, "Amen pastor, preach the truth." You see the ladies knew that several members of the congregation worked at breweries or bars.

Next the pastor began to preach about the use of tobacco and was attacking the ills of chewing and smoking. Again, the two ladies shouted, "Amen pastor, preach the truth." The ladies knew that several of the members worked as tobacco farmers.

Then the preacher got on the sin of gambling and the ladies jumped up on their feet and yelled again, "Woohoo! Go on preacher! Ground them horses! Give it to 'em good!" Because the ladies knew that some of the congregation raised race horses.

But when the preacher condemned the sin of gossip, the two ladies sat down and got very quiet. One turned to the other and said, "He's quit preachin' and now he's meddlin'."

Isn't that just the way it goes? When the preacher is pointing out the sins we perceive someone else is committing, we call that "preachin'," but often when he begins to convict us or call us out, we call that "meddlin'."

We might even sit back and tell someone something like, "I really hope brother so and so was listening to that message because he really needed to hear it!"

Christians tend to think that sermons are great as long as they believe it is directed at someone else. So let me ask you this, does anyone remember what Jesus said to the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount?

In Matthew 7:3 it says, ³ *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”*

Perhaps a better title for today’s sermon would be the target we put on our own backs. However, long before Jesus preached these words, the prophet Amos dealt with this dynamic. If you recall, last week, we talked about how Amos began his sermon by directing his prophecy toward the judgment of Israel’s neighboring nations. He pronounced divine judgment on Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, and Ammon. Today we start off with Moab.

This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not relent. Because he burned to ashes the bones of Edom’s king, ² I will send fire on Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth.^[a] Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet. ³ I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him,” says the LORD.

Moab was a southern neighbor to Judah, and this is the last of the six judgments Amos proclaimed against the Gentile nations in this region. God promised judgment against Moab because of their cruelty to Edom and her king. Remember that last week Palestine was judged for their sins against the future, because of the abortions, but here Moab is being judged because of their sins against the past. This is because they desecrated the remains of the King who was an Edomite.

Here's the deal, and why I named this sermon this way. While Amos confronted these nations for the horrendous atrocities they committed against human beings, the Israelites, God’s chosen people, sat back and cheered for Amos to unleash fire from heaven against them.

Can you hear them shouting? “Come on now preacher! Amen, Amos! Devour Damascus! Burn the gates of Gaza! Make mayhem in Moab! Give it to ‘em good!”

Now in the rest of chapter 2, Amos shifts his focus from these foreign nations and sets his sights on Judah and Israel. He moves from preachin’ to meddlin’ as he

confronts the sins of his fellow Israelites. As God's prophet to people of Judah and Israel, he's about to upset their sense of security by looking them square in the eye and saying, "Now it's your turn!" Amos is about to pronounce God's judgment on God's people. He is about to teach them the important lesson that, "When you turn your back on God, God puts a target on your back!"

⁴ This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not relent. Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods,^[b] the gods^[c] their ancestors followed, ⁵ I will send fire on Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem."

In these verses Amos is speaking to the people of Judah. Remember that during this time that God's people were divided into the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. Amos was born and raised in Judah, so he is speaking to his own people.

Judah's sin was different from the sins of their neighboring nations. They did not commit atrocious acts against other human beings, like they had done. Judah's sin was the rejection of God. They flat out refused to obey the stipulations and instructions outlined in God's Word. They completely turned their backs on Him.

In Deuteronomy 8:1-20, which you can read later, Moses warned the people not to forget what God had done for them in the past and what God said to them on Mount Sinai. If they did forget, they might soon become proud and self-sufficient, thinking that they really didn't need God. This presents a high standard for Judah, since they were given the full revealed truth of what God wanted them to do. But in spite of such privileged knowledge of God's Word, Judah bought into lies that led them astray from God. Like their ancestors before them, they abandoned God's moral and ethical standards, and instead adopted social, economic, political, sexual, and spiritual principles from their neighboring pagan cultures.

Instead of worshipping the one true God who created the heavens and earth, they began worshipping false gods whom they thought would satisfy their immediate desires. They bought into the lie that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence.

The people of Judah turned their backs on God, so God put a target on their backs. Look at God's promise of judgment in verse 5, "I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem." No special mercy will come, and

no second chance is mentioned. Their secure fortresses will be destroyed, and their capital city of Jerusalem would be devoured in flames. The political and spiritual leaders living in Jerusalem will be punished for leading the nation astray.

The same is true for us today—when we turn our backs on God, he puts a target on our backs. In many ways, Christians today are a lot like the people of Judah but worse. We have total access to God’s Word, we have printed Bible’s in our homes, we can attend church and Bible studies, and our culture still holds a general knowledge of God’s ethical standards even though it tends not to use them.

However, many Christians today have bought into the same lies that Judah believed. We are more interested in being like the world around us than conforming our lives to God’s Word. Like the non-believer, we are prone to worship at the altars of wealth, power, popularity, success, and sexual immorality. We focus on a god that conforms to our image rather than us conforming to the image of the one true God.

Listen to Amos’ prophecy! Learn from Judah’s mistakes rather than repeating them. Don’t buy into the lies that you can live without the Lord! Obey his Word and follow his path! Don’t go through life with a target on your back!

Let’s move on....

⁶ This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. ⁷ They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. ⁸ They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines. ⁹ “Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them, though they were tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below. ¹⁰ I brought you up out of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness to give you the land of the Amorites.

¹¹ “I also raised up prophets from among your children and Nazirites from among your youths. Is this not true, people of Israel?” declares the LORD. ¹² “But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy. ¹³ “Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain.

¹⁴ The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life. ¹⁵ The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life. ¹⁶ Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day," declares the LORD.

After Amos fires his prophecy against Judah, he then marches toward Samaria, the capital city of the kingdom of Israel, where he takes a prophetic aim toward Israel's sins. He levels Israel with a litany of abusive actions against the weak. In verse 6, the issue is financial abuse. Merciless moneylenders were taking advantage of the poor by foreclosing on insignificant loans. If the poor debtors couldn't pay on demand, the financier would confiscate their land and add it to their own wealth. They were literally selling the poor over a measly pair of sandals.

You don't have to look very hard to see this same financial abuse today. Wall Street sharks, predatory lenders, the subprime mortgage brokers are on the prowl again. They are currently trying to tax us out of our own homes just so the rich can add it to their wealth. Those who govern over us are taking systematic control over every aspect of our lives. The very same thing that was happening back then. Be financially gracious toward people or you will find a target on your back!

In verse 7, Amos emphasizes physical abuse against the weak and helpless. "Trample the head of the poor into dust" is a metaphor of power for how someone treats someone else like dirt. "Turn aside the way of the afflicted" is a figure of speech for actively turning a blind eye toward justice and not sticking up for the oppressed. As a whole, this verse is referring to powerful people manipulate the weak and afflicted, pushing them around, controlling their lives, and depriving them of the rights that every human being deserves.

Again, we see how the wealthy and powerful manipulate the poor and powerless all the time. If you are in a position of authority over someone else, be careful how you treat your subordinates. Treat all people with dignity and respect or you will find a target on your back!

In the last line of verse 7, Amos shines the spotlight on Israel's sexual abuse. The shocking phrase "a man and his father go in to the same girl" refers to sexual mistreatment of household employees. God's law prohibited a father and son from having sex with the same women, but female employees were often

vulnerable to multiple men in a household. Powerful men would often threaten women with severe financial consequences if they did not cooperate with their deviant desires. These despicable deeds profane God's holy name.

Amos' indictment of sexual abuse is certainly pertinent in light of the recent #MeToo movement in America. If you didn't already know it, sexual violence is still a pervasive problem that plagues our nation. If you perpetrate sexual abuse, God will place a target on your back!

In verse 8, Amos highlights the Israelite's spiritual abuse. They would wear garments that they repossessed from the poor to a worship event. A similar irony is seen in the way the wealthy and powerful Israelites would impose fines on the poor people and then use the money to buy wine and get drunk in the name of worship. This was blatant spiritual abuse! The same could be said for a church that uses money given for a purpose in a different manner.

Can you even imagine? This would be like stealing a coat from a homeless person and then showing it off to your friends at church. When a believer, especially a church leader, spiritually abuses the weak and defenseless, you better believe God will put a target on your back!

In verses 9-12, God uses Amos to remind the Israelites what he had done for them in the past. He delivered their nation from the clutches of the Amorites and Egyptians. Although the Amorites were as tall as cedars and as strong as oaks, God cut them down and liberated them from oppression. Likewise, God brought the Israelites up out of Egypt and led them and fed them for 40 years in the wilderness.

God even raised up prophets to teach and to preach his word and Nazarites, holy men who dedicated their lives to the Lord's service, to be examples of faithfulness. But Israel even abused them—"they forced the Nazarites to drink wine and they would not let the prophets preach. The people who were once abused had now become the abusers. The oppressed were now the oppressors.

And make sure you don't miss the end of Amos' prophecy. He gives us a vivid view of the target he put on Israel's back. Notice the graphic images of judgment in verses 13-16—even the strongest, fastest, and bravest warriors won't be able to escape God's judgment. They would be crushed like a cart under a heavy load of grain.

When we turn our backs on God, when we manipulate and abuse other human beings, when we forget what the Lord has done for us, when we take advantage of God's grace, he puts a target on our backs!

As we reflect on Amos' prophecy together today, I don't want to hear anyone say, "Great sermon pastor, this would have been perfect for my brother-in-law!" The Holy Spirit is using Amos' prophecy to speak to all of us!

Let us always work hard to keep that target of judgement off our back!