

“Setting a Plumb Line”
Amos 7:7-15
July 15, 2018
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

⁷ This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸ And 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.

⁹ “The high places of Isaac will be destroyed
and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined;
with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.”

¹⁰ Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. ¹¹ For this is what Amos is saying:

“Jeroboam will die by the sword,
and Israel will surely go into exile,
away from their native land.”

¹² Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. ¹³ Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.”

¹⁴ Amos answered Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. ¹⁵ But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

INTRODUCTION:

**At the time God called Amos to preach to Israel,
the Southern Kingdom known as Judah
was made up of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah.**

**The Southern Kingdom contained Jerusalem
and the Temple built by King Solomon.**

**Amos was from the Southern Kingdom
but God called him to preach to the Northern Kingdom
which was called Israel
and was made up of the other 10 tribes.**

**God took issue with both Kingdoms;
they were failing to worship God as they had been taught.
God's patience had come to an end
and now it was time for God's judgement.**

**To express God's anger and God's decision
to judge the Northern Kingdom – Israel –
God sent a man named Amos to each major town
to tell them what was coming.**

**Prior to being called by God,
Amos was just a regular guy of his times
not a prophet, not a preacher
just a shepherd who also dressed fig trees.**

**God called Amos from his ordinary life
to deliver a message to the King.**

**Amos obeyed.
he spoke plainly using everyday words
to communicate God's wrath.**

**Amos started telling all the surrounding towns
how God was going to judge them for their sin.**

**The central theme of his message was
don't let religion get in the way of our relationship with God.**

**The people of Israel in Amos' day were very religious.
They had all kinds of places of worship
and were involved in all kinds of religious rituals.**

**However, they had lost sight
of their covenant relationship with God.
And their religious practices reflected that loss.**

**So, God called Amos,
and gave him the ability to see things from God's perspective
and to communicate that to the people.**

THE VISION:

This vision given to Amos to pass along, is one of judgment.

**The first time I became aware of plumb lines
was when my father hired the Dunlap family
to build a brick retaining wall around our patio.**

**To an 9-year old, this was fascinating work.
So fascinating, they allowed me to mix the mortar –
- one batch at a time.**

**The very first thing Mr. Dunlap did
was to build the corners.
Roy and Don carefully placed brick on brick
till they were about 6 or 7 rows high.**

**Then, Mr. Dunlap took a long string with a weight at the end –
- called a “plumb line.”**

**A plumb line is a simple tool –
- just a cord from which a metal weight is suspended
pointing directly to the earth's center of gravity.**

Using that tool,
Mr. Dunlap made sure the corners
were absolutely straight up and down.

He held the string next to the top course of bricks
and sighted along that line
and any brick out of place
was gently nudged back into place.

As soon as the Dunlaps finished the project,
I took a fishing weight and made my own plumb line.
I measured just about every brick wall in our town.

I was pretty obnoxious about it, too;
informing owners of the buildings
that their walls were out of plumb.

I don't think they were too appreciative of that news.

When God gave the vision to Amos, the Lord said:
“Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel.”

Spiritually speaking, God was going to determine
whether the people's character, behavior or doctrine is correct.

If character, doctrine or behavior is not true to plumb,
not only can it be dangerous,
it will eventually lead the people away from God.

The wall God had built represents the nation of Israel.
These scriptures indicate that the people God had built
were meant to be sturdy, straight and strong.

God was now going to “measure” Israel
by the objective standards of God

and not that of the people, which would be subjective.

**God is saying through Amos,
you are no longer “true” – in plumb – with what God expects.**

**God had given Israel a perfect standard, the Law,
which they had perverted,
and now God intended to measure them
by that same perfect standard.**

**God would measure their character, their beliefs, and their conduct.
All according to the “plumb line” of the Law.**

**Therefore, God will tear down the “high places”
and destroy the “sanctuaries of Israel.”**

**Now, that sounds harsh – and perhaps it is.
But it is not in any way unjust.**

**The Law of God is as unbending
and uncompromising as a plumb line.
It simply is what it is – without any compromise.**

**When God measured the people
according to the plumb line of the Law they would fail.
God doesn’t grade on a curve.
God had given them the Law
and they had strayed from it –
- they were no longer in “plumb.”**

**Notice how God measures the people.
God doesn’t compare them
to the people and nations around them.**

God isn’t impressed by their wealth

or their political power either.

Nor does God care about their religious piety.

The people had strayed from the Law
in their religious practices
in their character and their actions.

And now they were going to pay a price for their disobedience.

Yet if you look closely that what God said through Amos,
you'll see that not only is God saying what *will* happen,
God is also *still* calling the people –
“*MY* people.”

In spite of Israel's disobedience,
God intends to keep an intimate
and persistent presence with the Israelites.

RESPONSE:

What Amos had to say did not go unnoticed.

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel –
one of the high places God has sworn to tear down -
sent a message to King Jeroboam.

Amaziah accused Amos of conspiracy
and reports the divine death sentence Amos has announced
for the king and the kingdom.

Then Amaziah tries to evict Amos from Israel
and to go back to Judah, where he came from.

But listen to the eviction:

¹² Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to
the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your

prophesying there. ¹³ Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the KING'S sanctuary and the temple of the KINGDOM."

Did you catch that?

**Whose sanctuary is it? Whose kingdom?
Not God's; but Jeroboam.**

**The self-interest that is revealed in those words
are the very reason the people have failed the plumb line test.**

**Amaziah wasn't finished with Amos,
in order to shift the focus from himself,
he mocked Amos,
misrepresenting the prophet's motives in preaching.**

Flee for your life (he implies).

**After all, stipends are better in Judah.
They will no doubt be glad to hear your words
against the northern kingdom
down there in the southern kingdom.**

Get your treasonous words out of the king's cathedral!

The reply of Amos demonstrates his own obedient tenacity.

**Amos does not pretend to be anybody other than who he is,
he describes how he was just going about his business
as a tender of sycamore fruit and shepherd
when the LORD called him.**

**The authority for Amos' work
is rooted in God's call,
not Amos' biography.**

APPLICATION:

This is the point in the sermon where everyone begins to ask:

What has all this to do with *me*?

This has been a good history lesson –

- but how does it apply to *me*?

First of all,

God has not removed the plumb-line from us.

We are still being judged by God according to that line.

And . . . we are falling short of God's expectations;

we are out of plumb.

What do you imagine God thinks about

the people on both sides of the political aisle

who can't refrain from calling each other names

and who can't treat each other with civility

and common courtesy?

What does God think about all our civil unrest

that results in rioting, destruction and harm?

What does God think about the preachers and evangelists

who continually preach a message of prosperity?

“God wants you to be wealthy.”

“God want to fulfill your every desire.”

God calls us to stop comparing ourselves to others

and conclude we're really pretty good;

at least, we're better than they are.

The message of Amos is one of judgement –

**- not just for the people of Israel –
- but for us, as well.**

The message of Amos

**calls us to examine our willingness -- or unwillingness –
to live lives reflecting God’s deliverance and mercy.**

The good news in Amos’ message is

**God maintains an intimate and persistent presence in our lives.
God doesn’t give up on us.**

God calls us beyond being “religious.”

**The “religious stuff” – making a commitment to Jesus,
going to church,
reading our Bibles, praying –
that’s all relatively easy.**

**What God wants is for us to develop
a relationship with Jesus**

and takes a lot more effort and time.

**And our human nature is to gravitate to the easier way,
the one that takes less time and emotional energy
so we have a tendency to focus on religious things
rather than our relationship with God.**

There is actually nothing wrong

**with any of those “religious” things–
going to church, reading your Bible, praying.**

**It’s just that when we substitute those things
for a deeper relationship with God,**

we are drifting away from God's will for us.

**The key is to make sure that we just view these activities
as tools to be used to build our relationship with God;
rather than ends in themselves.**

CONCLUSION:

**We can rejoice in knowing that God has not abandoned us!
If we earnestly and truly repent and ask forgiveness,
God will forgive us.**

**None of us can actually fully know how much God loves us.
But that does not diminish God's love for us.**

**We have been called God's people;
chosen to reflect the love of God in our lives.**

**With God's help,
we can accomplish that.
We can cultivate a deeper relationship with God.**

And we will find ourselves back in plumb once again.

PRAYER:

**Truly You love us far more than we deserve, Loving God. You have
shown that love to us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us the
courage – and the faith – to do the work it takes to deepen our
relationship with You. Let Your Holy Spirit be our guide on that
journey. In the Name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.**