

Theme: God's Judgment

Series: A Theology for Living

WHEN GOD HAS HAD ENOUGH

Literally it was the best of times. Not since the days of Solomon had Israel and Judah experienced such power and prosperity. After Solomon's death, Israel was divided into Israel in the north, and Judea in the south. After the split, the king of the north turned Bethel into a worship center to compete with the temple in Jerusalem. So, there were rivalries between the two sister nations. And for years they both had problems being faithful to God.

In the years around 760 B.C., Uzziah was king of Judah, and Jeroboam was the king of Israel. Both men were successful rulers as politics go. Uzziah is called brilliant by writers of commentaries. Both brought prosperity to the land. Money flowed through Israel and Judah like water. There was security and peace. They were preoccupied with eating fine meals and drinking much wine accompanied by novel music. They lived the good life. Their wives stayed home and demanded that their husbands keep the liquor cabinet well stocked. Some of the people had summer and winter homes. And they did not neglect the art of worship. The attendance at worship was at record highs. Sacrifices are being offered and the tithes and offerings are rolling in. The Temple precinct was always full of people who came to worship and spend money. Things were going quite well.

Imagine Bethel is busy as any modern city. The crowds gather daily at the temple to sacrifice, pray, make contacts and hear the latest news. In the midst of this walks a man in shepherd's clothing probably carrying his shepherd's staff with him. The man's name was Amos. Somehow he got the people's attention and began to speak. He had a word from God. Later he would say that he is neither a prophet or the son of a prophet. Yet, God's word roared in him and God called him out of his quiet life, away from his fig trees and his sheep and goats.

The people gathered around as he started his prophecy. His formula was always the same, for three transgressions and for four I will not revoke the punishment. The first words were spoken against Damascus. The people of Syria would be exiled. Fine, they thought in their minds, they need to be judged. Next was Gaza, the land of the Philistines. God's judgment was a consuming fire. Then, next were Tyre and then Ammon, and then Moab. These were all enemies of Israel and Judah. There must have been great delight as they listened to these devastating judgments against their enemies. Certainly this was a sign that God was pleased with them and was taking care of their enemies.

But the smiles were soon slipping from their face. Amos had the audacity to speak against them. “Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of Judah and for four I will not revoke its punishment.’” Their mouths must have dropped open. Prophets were not supposed to speak against Judah, we are God’s people. But God had been sending prophets to Israel for a long time. He warned his people while they still wandered in the wilderness that he would not put up with their sin forever. Now, their punishment would not be revoked.

Judah had rejected the Law of the Lord and had not kept his statutes. Their lies lead them astray. Judah had the temple. They had religion. It was religion redefined according to their own desires, a religion that made them happy. Judah continued to think like that and now promises to bring down fire and burn the city, even Jerusalem, the very city of God.

Amos now turns his prophecy to Israel. The Israelites have become obsessed with greed and materialism. They think the poor are there to exploit and use to their own benefit. If there is one thing that God hates it is how people treat the poor. Their exploitation of the poor is large scale. An ordinary man may owe them the price of a pair of shoes. So they enslave them, take advantage of them. It is like charge outlandish fees because someone is poor and powerless and doing it simply because you can.

Amos, goes on. They pant after the very dust on the head of the helpless. When one sees the other person as a sucker to be had, a mark to be taken, it is the height of self centeredness, a kind of outrageous selfishness, the kind that marks our society today. TV advertisers and others are constantly trying to create in us, a desire for something we don’t need. But when casinos and gambling boats present themselves as your friend, as the happening place to be, as the place where a poor man might get lucky. It is insidiously evil.

Their exploitation of the poor includes sexual abuse. They exploit sexual favors for money owed. Their exploitation even went with them to the temple. There they would lay on the garments of the poor that they had taken as a down payment for a loan and used it for a picnic blanket in the temple precinct. According to the law, you could not keep a man’s cloak as surety over night because a man’s cloak was his blanket. Furthermore, they were going to the temple and getting drunk on the wine of the poor whom they had fined—infractions they had conveniently invented to abuse the poor and make a buck.

God tell them of what he has done for them. He had guided and protected them. He had raised up prophets to call them to order. Yet, they commanded the prophets to be silent. If you can’t give us a religion as we want, be silent, say nothing at all. Their sins weighed on God like

overloaded wagons.

There is no escape, their judgment is sure. The speed of their fast men will perish and the strength of the strong will fail. No one will be able to flee, judgment is coming and it will not be stopped because the people had gone too far. They had killed the prophets and thumbed their noses at God.

It is not popular today to talk about the wrath of God. We want sweetness, we want someone to tell us how to continue to be materialistic, self-centered and ungodly and yet be happy and wise. We want how-to sermons, how to be happy, how to be prosperous, how to have it all.

I am convinced that God's wrath is coming to his people. Being the people of God does not give us license to ignore God or his rules in our lives. We cannot go on treating God and the things of God as if they are optional. Our spiritual failure has consequences.

I see it in our children. They are biblically ignorant but they know all the ball scores and all the things that culture teaches them. Parents have been so busy with their own selfishness, they have failed to teach their children.

Immorality runs rapid in our society, even among church going Christians because no one has regard for God's law, we think our feelings and our wants should rule us. We are no longer shocked by the immorality of our culture and may even add to it.

We are so materialistic that we think our day of worship is unimportant. We allow society to dictate our work schedules and ball schedules and practice schedules so that it keeps us out of church or it keeps us from meeting our obligations we have with each other. And we fail to bring God his tithe while living it up on what belongs to God.

Have we no fear of God? Do we really think that grace means we can continually sin against God and he is just going to overlook it? Grace abuse is doing the same sin over and over again, never repenting or changing our ways.

There comes a time when God has had enough. I fear that we are close to that time. We Christians, we Baptists, even we members of Trinity need to heed God's call to repentance. God is weighted down by our sin. Our eyes are dry and our hearts are cold and we are not broken by the things of God. We bow-up at his discipline and we take no heed to his warning.

When God has had enough of our sin, we cannot expect any better treatment than Israel. God calls us to repent. Let us repent while we can.