

Pentecost 8
July 15, 2018

Amos 7:10-17
542-546-315/569-324

The Choices Are Clear

- I. Consider the choices.
- II. Consider the consequences.

Dear Christian friends,

As I thought about this sermon I thought it would BE INTERESTING to look up “churches” in the yellow pages of say a Madison or Milwaukee phonebook. Think how many pages - how many CHOICES – of churches there **must be** in those phonebooks! If somebody couldn't find a **church they liked** out of all those **choices** that person must be an **atheist**.

These Israelites HAD A CHOICE to make. Do they listen to the **priest** Amaziah or **this guy** named Amos? There was a WORLD OF DIFFERENCE between the two men AND their **messages**. We also have that **choice to make** – and THE CHOICES ARE CLEAR. But before making your choice CONSIDER 1)the choices and 2)the consequences.

I. Consider the choices.

Amos takes us to the **700s** BC. For over 200 years the Israelites had been divided into **two separate** nations – the **BIGGER northern kingdom** of **Israel** and the **smaller southern** kingdom of **Judah**. Jerusalem and the temple were in the **southern** kingdom of Judah where David's dynasty still ruled. Amos was from the kingdom of **Judah** but God sent him to **preach in** the northern kingdom of Israel.

WHEN the northern kingdom of Israel had first split away from Judah **King Jeroboam realized he had** to DO SOMETHING about the **religion issue**. God required His people to WORSHIP ONLY at the **temple in Jerusalem** with its priests, sacrifices, and festivals. Jeroboam realized that if his people kept going back to Jerusalem to worship they'd eventually want to REUNITE as one kingdom. To stop that from happening Jeroboam set up temples to RIVAL the one in Jerusalem. We're told in 1 Kings 12, ***“The king made two golden calves. He said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods who brought you up out of Egypt.’ Jeroboam ...appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made.”***

There's some real irony – SADNESS – here. **Bethel** is where God had appeared to Jacob in that **vision of a ladder** stretching between heaven and earth. The name Bethel means **“house of God.”** Now it was the center of the worship of idols by God's **chosen people!** God sent Amos to preach right there at Bethel – to **preach** GOD'S JUDGMENT on Israel's **idolatry**. Read Amos in your devotions this week. It's only nine chapters long but it's NOT EASY reading. God was FED UP with His unrepentant people. The time for judgment – GOD'S judgment – was **fast approaching**. THE CHOICES WERE CLEAR for the Israelites. It was time for them to SERIOUSLY CONSIDER those **choices**.

One choice was the message of **“Amaziah, the priest of Bethel.”** Amaziah offered the people a MAN-MADE – man-CENTERED – religion. Notice how he calls the temple at Bethel **“the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.”** The king established this temple. The king decided the MESSAGE to **be preached** – the god to be **worshipped**. With man-made – **man-centered** – religion I SET THE TERMS for **my relationship** with God – I tell God, “THIS IS HOW we're going to do things.” Amaziah offered the people a religion of CONVENIENCE – God is there to help but NOT CONTROL us. God can offer advice and **suggestions** but not issues commandments or orders.

Needless to say, Amaziah's **message** is a VERY APPEALING choice to our sinful natures! It's **still** very POPULAR. Look how many people and **churches** – JUST LIKE Jeroboam and Amaziah – push aside what **God clearly says** and substitute instead **their own** ideas and opinions. Some call it

smorgasbord or BUFFET Christianity – you pick and choose what you **want to believe** in the Bible. If you don't like something **God** says IGNORE it. That goes for CLEAR TRUTHS of Scripture and moral issues. They do it to be ACCOMMODATING – **open** – understanding – NON-JUDGMENTAL – more welcoming, etc. **After all** you don't want to TURN people OFF to God/church.

Then there's Amos and **his message**. Amos wasn't worried about STEPPING on anyone's **toes** or hurting anyone's **feelings**. That's NOT TO SAY Amos was hard-nosed – **unloving** – obnoxious. But Amos offered a clear DISTINCT CHOICE. Amaziah's was a MAN-CENTERED – **man-made** – message. Amos was a GOD-CENTERED – **God revealed** message. As you read Amos in your devotions try adding up how many times he writes, ***"This is what the LORD says – says the LORD – hear this word the LORD has spoken – the Sovereign LORD has sworn – the LORD God Almighty declares – this is what the Sovereign LORD showed me."*** Get the POINT? God sets the **terms** for our relationship with Him. God decides WHAT we are to believe and HOW we are to live our lives. If we have a HARD TIME with something **God says** – tough luck! GOD has spoken – the matter is SETTLED. Period.

Oh the choices are SO CLEAR! But before making your choice...

II. Consider the consequences.

First the consequences of **choosing** Amaziah's MAN-CENTERED – **man-made** – religion. Where do you even **start**? It's GREAT! You don't need to **"repent"** or **"deny yourself"** or **"crucify"** your sinful nature. You can "HAVE FUN" – enjoy yourself and not get all worked-up about SIN and GUILT and **hell** and all those other negative and NOT SO NICE things. This is a HAPPY choice. **After all**, who's to tell me I'm WRONG – I'm BAD, etc.? Hey, I'm calling the **shots**. AS POPULAR and politically correct as this was BACK IN **Amaziah's** day it's ALL THE MORE so today.

There's **just one big problem** with this **choice**. IGNORING God – OVER-RULING God – doesn't make God disappear. God never gave anyone **permission** or the **authority** to overrule Him. God remains the **"holy – righteous – just"** God who **"will not be mocked."** Again, READ Amos this week. To say God was **not in** a GOOD MOOD is putting it lightly. Listen again to Amos tell Amaziah, ***"This is what the LORD says: 'Your wife will be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be parceled out with a measuring line, and as for you, you will die upon unclean soil. And Israel will certainly go into exile far away from its own soil.'"*** A few verses after that God says, ***"I will never forget anything they have done."*** In Hebrews 10 we're told, ***"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"*** and the book of Amos SURE MAKES that **clear**. Anyone who thinks they can PLAY GAMES with God and **win** is only fooling himself. Oh, the sinful nature clamors for **Amaziah's** message but please understand the **consequences!**

OK, but what about the consequences of **Amos'** message? AS STERN and UNRELENTING as Amos' message is it's also one of such AMAZING LOVE and **grace** on God's part. God still calls these stubborn Israelites **"MY people Israel."** God is reaching out to them ONE MORE – one LAST – time. Earlier Amos had preached, ***"This is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: 'Seek Me and live; do not seek Bethel ...for Bethel will be reduced to nothing. Seek the LORD and live.'"***

Choosing Amos' message is taking that call to **repent** PERSONALLY. Before talking about all the **idolatry** and **wickedness** OUT THERE in the world we need to deal with all the **idolatry** and **wickedness** RIGHT HERE in our own hearts and lives. Do you see yourself as GUILTY of **idolatry**? **Sure**, we haven't worshipped a **"golden calf"** as they did here at Bethel. Our "golden calf" is that PERSON WE SEE when looking in the mirror. Sure, we don't pray to **ourselves**, but we often do put ourselves BEFORE – AHEAD – of God in our daily lives. When we tell God, "YES, BUT..." – when we make exceptions for ourselves to what God says – "I KNOW I should/shouldn't BUT..." – when we

doubt God's **promises** – criticize God's **ways** – when we break any commandment in any way – we are PUTTING OURSELVES OVER God. That's idolatry – JUST AS BAD as worshiping this **“golden calf”** at Bethel.

Choosing **Amos'** message is taking his message PERSONALLY. We certainly don't want to **hear God** say it but God has every right to look us STRAIGHT in the eye and say, **“I will never forget anything you have done.”** That's devastating – DAMNING. That's being HONEST.

Taking that message personally we'll ALSO TAKE personally the call, **“Seek the LORD and live.”** The answer to our **sin** and **guilt** is **not** RUNNING AWAY from God but running TO God for His grace – mercy – **“steadfast love”** – in Jesus. Taking God's law SERIOUSLY and PERSONALLY there is nothing more fantastic or COMFORTING or PRECIOUS than God's **gospel**. The **very God** we have dared to defy and **disobey** took it upon Himself to DO EVERYTHING to **save us** from our sin and guilt, from death and hell. God's own **eternal Son** was born one of us to take the place of all of us under God's law. Giving us all the credit Jesus actually lived that life of **perfect love** and obedience that we owed God. Jesus willingly took the blame for the sins of the whole world and was punished in our place. **On the cross** Jesus shed His precious blood – sacrificed His own innocent life – all to **“take away the sin of the world.”** Jesus personally did all that FOR YOU – **for me** – for **all** – so TAKE ALL THAT personally! **For Jesus' sake** God has forgiven all our sins. Trusting in Jesus we are reconciled with God and we're now going straight to heaven when we die. **In the gospel** Jesus looks us straight in the eye and FROM THE BOTTOM of His heart He says, **“Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you. Because I live, you shall live also.”** TOP that off with Jesus personally inviting us again today, **“Take eat, drink – My body, My blood – given/shed FOR YOU for the FORGIVENESS of sins.”**

Oh, the choices ARE CLEAR and so also are the CONSEQUENCES. ONLY in that GOD-CENTERED – **God-given gospel** of Jesus do we have forgiveness, life and salvation. Don't go looking in a **phonebook** or on a **website** for a church to suit you. Look first in GOD'S WORD and then look for the church! Amen.

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