**July 14, 2019 Amos 7:7-17**

***The Plumb Line***

**Scripture:** Amos 7:7-17 NRSV (7)This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. (8)And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; (9)the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." (10)Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. (11)For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" (12)And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophecy there; (13)but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." (14)Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, (15)and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' (16)"Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.' (17)Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"

**Notes:**

1. The northern kingdom was enjoying great ***prosperity***.
   1. Peasants were not permitted to enjoy the ***spoils***.
   2. Wealthy hired ***laborers*** to tend their fields.
   3. ***Justice*** went to the highest bidder.
   4. Amaziah felt ***threatened*** by Amos.
2. Theology, ethics and morality are ***important***.
   1. Beliefs have a significant role in ***shaping*** ethics and morality.
   2. God is putting a plumb line against the ***church***.
3. ***Faith*** is not about religious rituals but compassionate deeds.
   1. They were ***following*** all of the religious laws.
   2. Amos' contemporaries were going through the ***motions***.
   3. ***Worship*** is an act of religious devotion towards God.
   4. We should be ***focusing*** on the meaning.
   5. God has called us to worship him with our ***minds***.
4. ***Faith***is about deeds of serving, not rituals.
   1. The lawyer wanted a hard and fast set of ***rules***.
   2. ***Obedience*** to the rules is worthless unless the love of God is in our hearts.
5. We will all be ***judged*** according to God’s Plumb Line
   1. What is your ***theology***,
   2. ***Worship*** is working to give the glory to God
   3. ***Love*** your neighbor by demonstrating compassion, grace, and mercy.
6. We are called to ***emulate*** the Samaritan who risked his life.
   1. Those who we help need ***relationships***.
   2. God’s grace is extended to those in need by ***us***.
   3. Are you in ***alignment*** with God’s standards?

**Transcript:**

Have you ever used a plumb line? A plumb line was one of the first carpentry tools that I was acquainted to as a child. I have to admit that it fascinated me; in fact I would have to say I was intrigued. No matter how I used it, when I left it hang from one point it always pointed to another point directly beneath it. It was always perfectly vertical. It always points directly at the center of the earth.

Some of you may not know what I am referring to. But some of you know exactly what I am referring to a Plumb line is a cord with a weight attached to it. It is hung from a point and the weight is left to hang creating a perfectly vertical line. It is used in construction to make sure walls that are constructed are perfectly vertical, so a plumb line is a crucial tool in the construction business.

We all benefit from the plumb line. Carpenters and plumbers use them to keep their work straight. Our homes are stronger because of it. Objects that are constructed using plumb line are much more appealing. But a Plumb Line is a tool for checking if something is in alignment, alignment to what; alignment with the earth’s gravitational pull; if an object leans too much in one direction or another. Gravity will overcome its position causing it to topple over.

In our passage today we find God giving the prophet Amos a word for the people of Israel, and in this word there is a warning involving a plumb line. His word is full of symbolism, and if you are not vigilant, it will be confusing. God is judging the people of Israel to see if they are in alignment with His plans, Read with me from our passage in Amos 7:7-17

*(7)This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. (8)And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; (9)the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." (10)Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. (11)For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" (12)And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; (13)but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." (14)Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, (15)and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' (16)"Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.' (17)Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"*  (Amos 7:7-17 NRSV)

It is amazing that Amos' story and his messages to the King of Israel and the priestly hierarchy even survived. To better understand the story we should put it in its historical setting. Amos began his prophetic ministry about 750 years before Christ and about 250 years after King David ruled. The Jewish nation was divided into two nations; a Northern Kingdom and a Southern kingdom.

The tribes of Judah and Benjamin were bound together as the southern kingdom. They are referred to as Judah. They held control of Jerusalem and the Temple. The northern kingdom is referred to as Israel, Israel consisted of the other 10 tribes its central place of worship in Bethel, a village in Samaria.

The northern kingdom of Israel was enjoying a time of great prosperity at the time of Amos, largely at the expense of its neighbor Syria. Assyria had laid waste to Syria about 40 years before Amos. The King of Israel, Jeroboam II, took advantage of this and also attacked Syria. Israel won some very impressive victories. According to Amos they were feeling very cocky about their military prowess. In Amos 6:1 we find; “*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!*  (Amos 6:1)”

Military victory meant plunder and an extension of land holdings. However, this prosperity was not shared across all social classes. Only the warrior land-owners were entitled to a share of the plunder and new property. Amos writes in 3:10, “*They do not know how to do right,” declares the LORD, who hoard plunder and loot in their fortresses. (*Amos 3:10)”

The peasants may have been drafted into military service but they were not permitted to enjoy any of the spoils. They also suffered hardship because of their military service. They had no one to work their own fields. While they were away fighting for their country their land laid barren. Some fields were never planted and the crops suffered neglect.

The wealthy hired laborers to tend their fields while they were off fighting. When they returned they took advantage of the desperation of the poor; they hired those who were financially strapped below a fair market value. In Amos 2:6-7 he tells them, “*For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.  They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. (*Amos 2:6,7)” The rights of the poor were trashed and justice went to the highest bidder. *Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, (*Amos 8:4)

The success of the few meant failure for the many but Amos came with a very harsh message to the privileged few. He told them that they would lose all that they had gained. Their success would turn into failure. *I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,” declares the LORD. (*Amos 3:15)

The social climate also influenced the spiritual life of Israel. The religious duties were not being neglected: they continued to offer sacrifices the first day of every month; they continued to celebrate the three main holy days Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. *Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more.  Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings— boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,” declares the Sovereign LORD.*

But they reshaped their religious views to support their economic and social lifestyle. They discarded the worship of Yahweh and substituted idolatry. The erected to gold calves and put them on the altar in Bethel that had been used by their ancestors when they finally entered the Promised Land after wandering through the wilderness for forty years. *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.* The amazing part of Amos' ministry is that King Jeroboam and the chief priest Amaziah felt threatened by him. If a self-styled prophet strolled unto Wall Street the day after the news media announced bonuses given to the bankers who contributed to the “Too Big to Fail” disaster, denouncing those bonuses that Goldman Sachs employees received, I cannot see many people paying attention to him. The same would be true if that same self-designated prophet walked into a grand mega church and denounced their worship style or music. Amazingly, though, Amos had just the opposite impact. The religious leader of the day, Amaziah, accused him of conspiring against the King.

Some may be asking what is the practical message from this passage? It is a fair question. This was a nice review of ancient history but how does it help me live the Christian life? In reviewing the story of Amos we may find three major lessons.

Theology Matters: the first lesson to be taken from the book of Amos is that theology, ethics and morality are important. Religion is not just about loving others. All religions are not the same. This is the message of Stephan Prothero's book, God Is Not One. Prothero taught religion at Boston University Prothero points out that every religion approaches the critical questions of existence and God from very different perspectives. Their roads to God are not one and the same. He says that religious beliefs have a significant role in shaping ethics and morality.

We cannot just accept simple Sunday school lessons that we learned a long time ago. They need to be understood for what they represent in our day and age. They need to be viewed as the learning opportunity that they are. Learning why we do the things we do, earning why the sins that we have committed are considered sin; learning how we may be redeemed of these wrongs. God is indeed putting a plumb line against the walls of the church to see if we still match his standard; His standard in what we believe and how God’s standards shapes our lives.

Worship is Work; the second lesson we find; faith is not about religious rituals but compassionate deeds. Amaziah was furious with Amos for challenging his religious practices. They were offering the sacrifices on the holy days. The people were bringing their tithes to the store house. They were adhering to the dietary laws. They were practicing the Sabbath. They were following all of the religious laws just as they were written. What more did Amos expect?

The spiritual climate of Israel had Amos' contemporaries going through the motions; going through the motions without understanding their meaning. They had forgotten the underlying message of the sacrifices. They had forgotten the reasons for the festivals of Passover, they had forgotten the reasons for the festivals of Pentecost and they had forgotten the reasons for the festivals of Tabernacles but they kept celebrating them, they did not know why but they did it anyway.

We find this in churches today when they argue over worship style; they defend their favorite style of worship saying that people do not pay attention to the message. They just mumble the words. While that may be true, it applies to every style of worship. People are not seeking the meaning of the words, instead they focus on how the worship makes them feel.

Worship is work. The word actually means “to work.” Worship is an act of religious devotion directed towards God. The word is derived from the Old English worthscipe, meaning worthiness or worth-ship to give, at its simplest, worth to something. Evelyn Underhill defines worship thus: "*The absolute acknowledgment of all that lies beyond us… It is the response that conscious beings make to their Creator…* " Worship asserts the reality of its object and defines its meaning by reference to it. An act of worship may be performed individually, in an informal or formal group, or by a designated leader. No matter the style of worship, we should be focusing on the meaning. When we sing we should be contemplating their message. I wonder how many of us here have read the message of a hymn or song? Have you ever tried to connect the words we sing with the words of Scripture and apply them to your lives?

God has called us to worship him with our minds. That requires intentional thought and mental activity. Worship is work. Is our worship in alignment with God’s Standards? Why do we worship, are we going through the motions, or, are we authentic about the words we say in worship?

Deeds of Serving, the third lesson we learn from the prophet teaches us that faith is about deeds of serving, not rituals. This lesson is somewhat of a continuation of the first lesson. The people of Israel felt secure in their rituals but they had missed a major theme of the law. They had also missed the most essential piece of their rituals The relationship that it has to God, the relationship we have with God.

This passage actually connects to a gospel lesson. One day an expert in the law stood up and asked Jesus, what did he have to do to inherit eternal life? Jesus told him to follow the two greatest commandments: ‘*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ This was not good enough for the lawyer. He wanted something specific. The lawyer wanted a hard and fast set of rules to follow. He wanted to know how many bulls he had to sacrifice. How much of his income did he really have to give to the priests. And did they calculate that from the pretax income or post tax income? He was looking for the minimum requirements that would qualify him for eternal life.

Jesus would not give him the answer he wanted. Instead Jesus told a story. We know that story as the story of the Good Samaritan. When he concluded the story Jesus asked the lawyer which of the three men was a neighbor to man who fell into the hands of robbers. Obedience to the rules is worthless unless the love of God is in our hearts. We can follow all of the law but if we do this, without loving the one who gave the law, it is a deed in futility.

Israel at the time of Amos had forgotten the importance of loving the person in need. Israel at the time of Amos had forgotten the importance of loving God. They were enthralled with their religious performances, but they failed to understand why they did them. Amos challenged them to look around and to see the suffering of the poor. we must not reduce this message to a simplistic level of merely helping a friend. Some day we will all be judged according to God’s Plumb Line. The Plumb Line of God is here to measure where we stand in alignment with the standards of God. To help us gauge what we need to change and what we need to do in order to be in a right relationship with him.

What is your theology, what are your ideas about who God is and where do you stand in alignment with him. Why do you believe what you do, and why do you do the things you do? Worship is working to give the glory to God. Is that why you come to church on Sunday; to come and give glory to God to sing songs of praise from your heart to the Lord of your life; to set an example for others to follow; to lead others to Christ?

Loving your neighbor is not about some silly emotion. Loving is about demonstrating compassion. Loving is about exercising grace. Loving is about extending mercy. Loving is about doing these three things to all of humanity, even those who do not deserve it. Loving in the form of action and service

We are called to emulate the Samaritan who risked his life, a man who was considered and outcast by Judah, a man who sacrificed his time and went to considerable expense to help the man in need. How often can we say the same? Yes the church here reaches out to those in need; giving to those in need, buying food for those who are going without, helping to pay bills for those who do not have enough, picking up those who have fallen on difficult times. Yes it is nice and neat, it is anonymous, when you contribute to the church and allow somebody else to do the delivery.

But those who we help need more than material items, they need relationships. They need people to share their problems with. They need people who are willing to listen. They need people who aren’t afraid to get their hands dirty. Yes it is a challenge, but that is what each of us are called to do.

When the church is called to love the Lord and our neighbors, it is talking about the church as a whole, but it is also talking about us, the church, as individuals. We are to reach out to those in need and create personal relationships with them so that our faith will be demonstrated to others. And God’s grace is extended to those in need by us who are His church

The Parable of the Good Samaritan and the teaching of Amos are quite consistent. The plumb line of God is hanging before you; are you in alignment with God’s standards?