

I. Introduction

- A. Who's ready for some good news today?
- B. Well, the first good news is that I want to welcome all of the students who are with us today. And all of your families.
- C. And especially will you join me in welcoming, all of the students and all of the families from Simpson University today. We love you. We are here for you. I would consider it an incredible honor if you would let me be your pastor. We believe in you. And we are incredibly excited to see what God has for you during your time here. And the same goes for Shasta Bible College, Shasta College, and all the high schools and middle schools. And all the teachers and administrators. We pray God's blessing on you. We pray that this would be a year of school that is so anointed by God that you can't deny it.
- D. Sitting in here today is the power to change the world.
- E. Here is the title of my talk today:
 - 1. Maybe It's Not Them—Maybe It's...**
- F. This talk is part two in a series called A Maverick Spirit.
- G. We are opening the Bible to one of the ancient prophets of old. His name is Amos. His writing is from 3,000 years ago. And you say what can a prophet from 3,000 years ago possibly say to me today?
- H. Amos has quite a lot to say to us today. I hope that you will see that. Because the use-by date on truth never expires. I pray that you will open your heart to God speaking to you today by his Word.
- I. So let's pick up from where we left off last time. And I have to give a little warning that this place in the Bible is rough.

II. Scripture

- A. *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazeel, Which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad.'"* (Amos 1:3-4)
 - 1. Like I said, it's a rough passage of scripture. It's pretty harsh actually. It's talking about the judgment, and the wrath of God being poured out on a place called Damascus.
 - 2. I asked a question last time and I want to ask it again. What should we do with this? If we believe the Bible is the Word of God, and I do—and I hope you do or at least I hope you're open to it—then what should we do with this? What should we do with the hard places in the Bible? Should we skip them? Should we water them down? Should we explain them away? Should we do some theological magic tricks, and make them no longer relevant?
 - 3. Personally, I say no to all of those things. May I respectfully suggest we do some thing else. Actually 3 steps to make sense of the hard sayings of God's Word.
 - 4. I think the first thing we have to do is always let the Bible speak for itself.
 - a) 1. Always let the Bible speak for itself.**
 - 5. I think we'll do ourselves a lot of favors if we make a commitment to adjust our thinking to the Bible rather than try to adjust the Bible to our thinking.
 - 6. The second thing we have to do is look really really really closely at what it says.
 - a) 2. Look really really closely at what it says.**
 - 7. So let's do that now. If you look closely at this verse, you will see that there is a word in italics. It is the word *punishment*.
 - 8. Normally, when we see something in italics, it means that it's being emphasized. But that's not how it works in the Bible. When the Bible has a word in italics, there's a totally different reason. Italics means that the word is not there in the original language, but the translators put it there to help you understand.
 - 9. Were the translators cheating? Were they putting stuff in the Bible that doesn't belong?
 - 10. No. It's the nature of translating from one language to another. Sometimes you need extra words to make things clear. We just have to look really really closely.
 - 11. Another thing you'll see if you look closely is that phrase "for three transgressions and for four." In a minute we're going to see that again. Actually, it's here 8 times. Three... actually four...
 - 12. God is basically saying, *I am patient. I am long-suffering. I have given you every opportunity (three). But you guys have crossed a line (four). You went too far. You pushed it too far. You just had to go there.*
 - 13. So, even in these oracles of judgment, we see the first glimmer of God's mercy peeking through. Whatever judgment is happening here is only happening after a whole lot of patience and mercy from God.
 - a) When you have a tough Bible verse you have to let the Bible speak for itself, and you have to look really closely at what it says.**

14. But the third thing you have to do with a difficult Bible verse is probably the most important of all. And I'll get to that. But I want to show you what comes next...

B. *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they took captive the whole captivity To deliver them up to Edom. But I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, Which shall devour its palaces.'" (Amos 1:6-7)*

1. So basically, you have the same thing as the first verse we read. Same words, same sentences. The only thing that's changed is the location. The first time it's for a location called Damascus. The second time it's judgment for a location called Gaza.
2. What's going on?

III. Amos

A. You have this man named Amos. He's living his life. He's minding his own business. He is a believer in the Lord. He really digs into the Bible, and to God's truth. He studies the books Moses. He goes and listens to the preachers Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea, who all lived at the same time he did. But Amos is not a preacher, and he's not a Prophet. He literally says "I am neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet." I'm just a shepherd and a rancher, and I have a side hustle as a farmer.

B. But one day God puts this burden in his heart. This burden is so strong he can't shake it. God was telling him to leave his own land. His land is Judah. And God was telling him to ride to the neighboring land called Israel. There, he would call the people back to God.

C. So Amos does that. He hops on his horse and rides 25 miles from his small city, which is a fortress town in Judah. He gallops into Israel, and goes to a big, bustling urban center called Bethel.

D. Amos rides through Bethel, past crowds of people, past rows and rows of idols to false gods, past shops and businesses and restaurants. He is going slowly now, through the hustle and bustle of a thriving city.

E. Finally, Amos reaches the town square. He ties off his horse, brushes off the dust of the trail, stands up on a box, and he starts preaching, right there, in the market, in the open air.

F. Everybody thinks he's nuts. But he is a maverick. He is outside the box. He's not like everybody else. Amos is unlike any other prophet.

1. Because...

a) **It takes a maverick spirit to light a fire in hearts that have grown cold, complacent, and uninterested in God.**

G. So Amos stands there preaching.

1. As he's preaching, a man from the crowd calls out. "Hey preacher, who are you and where are you from?"

a) Amos says, "I'm Amos and I'm from Judah."

2. Someone else calls out, "Who made you a prophet? Go back to Judah and preach to your own people."

a) Amos says, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but God sent me from Judah to Israel—to you—to call you back to himself."

H. Amos preaches.

I. And he does something really really smart.

J. The first part of his message is against Damascus. That's 135 miles away. People who are totally unrelated and far far away.

1. And in the second part of his message, Amos preaches against Gaza. That's 50 miles away, again totally unrelated and far far away.

K. So now, everybody loves this preacher. That's because he's preaching hellfire and brimstone upon other nations. They are to blame. They are the ones who are messing up. They are the ones who have everything wrong. They are the bad guys. Them.

L. And that's how this message goes. In the first two chapters of this prophetic book, Amos preaches this about the badness of the surrounding nations:

1. **Damascus (Amos 1:3)**

2. **Gaza (Amos 1:6)**

3. **Tyre (Amos 1:9)**

4. **Edom (Amos 1:11)**

5. **Ammon (Amos 1:13)**

6. **Moab (Amos 2:1)**

M. Each time, for each nation, Amos follows the exact same pattern:

1. JUDGMENT: For three and for four, meaning, they have gone too far.
2. TRANSGRESSION: This is what they did wrong. Something heinous and cruel, they have done to their neighbors, especially to God's people the Jews.
 - (1) They have torn God's people apart.
 - (2) They have carried them into exile.
 - (3) They have captured them and sold them into slavery and sex trafficking.
 - (4) They have pursued their own brothers with the sword.
 - (5) They have ripped open pregnant women and killed the unborn.
 - (6) They have desecrated the dead and incinerated their enemies.
- b) These are not nice people. They are not doing good things. They've done truly pretty horrible things.
3. PENALTY: This is the divine consequence for that transgression.
 - a) And you can just imagine Amos preaching. He is going through the list, and one by one pronouncing judgment.
 - (1) God will send fire upon your house, Damascus and Syria!
 - (2) God will carry you off into exile, Gaza and you Philistines.

N. And for each one of the people start shouting, Amen! Preach it! That's right! Give it to 'em, Amos!

1. God will kindle fire upon your walls.

O. You tell 'em, Amos! Yes! Hey, I like this preacher! This is a great sermon!

P. Every preacher knows that the easiest way to get your audience to cheer is to preach about how bad other people are. It just makes sense, doesn't it.

Q. Amos is doing that.

R. But what these people don't know, is that Amos has a plan.

S. He's preaching with a strategy. It's actually epic. All of this just might turn out to be a trap. We'll have to see.

IV. Tough Passages of Scripture

A. As I am preaching today, we are on the tail end of two really influential movies. I'm talking about *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*. I know a lot of you want to see both movies. You look really good in pink.

B. Hollywood knows something about the human heart. It's not just Hollywood, it's authors, social media, influencers, marketers, politicians, everybody.

1. The only way to make sense of our lives is by understanding how our story fits inside a larger story.

C. Life is hard. We all have a thousand things coming at us fast. Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Why is all this happening to me? What am I supposed to do?

D. So psychologically, we all create stories. We do that through life experiences. We do that through movies and YouTube and TikTok and Instagram. We do that through literature and books. We do that through conversations. We do that through counseling and therapy. We do this through religion.

E. We are all wired to put together a story that makes sense of our lives.

1. A movie like *Barbie* can help some people do that by talking about the struggle of women to find a voice and to get the respect they deserve and the struggle of women and men to define themselves as themselves and not through the eyes of the other.

a) I'm not approving. I'm not disapproving. I'm just saying what these stories can do.

2. A movie like *Oppenheimer* can help us by exploring what it means to put too much explosive power in the hands to people too unready to use it.

3. I could say the same thing for the Star Wars franchise, the Marvel franchise, Cinderella, the Jack Reacher novels, and Louis L'Amor.

F. Another word for this is *worldview*. Your brain, your heart, your soul, is creating a worldview. A philosophy of life. Your heart and mind assemble this philosophy piece by piece, like snapping Legos together.

1. Here's my world, how do I fit into it? Here's my universe... Here's my relationship with God... Here's my origin story... Here's my history... Here are my relationships... Here are my dreams... Here's my destiny... Here's my eternity... How do all these things fit together and make sense?

G. Philosophers call all of this a narrative. That's just another word for a story. A narrative.

H. May I respectfully suggest that the Bible offers the definitive, most comprehensive, most coherent, and most life-giving story ever revealed to the mind of humankind.

I. The Scriptures provide the best story.

J. Not stories. Not set of stories.

1. Story.
 2. Singular.
- K. I'm going to throw a nerdy term at you. Some of you will like it. Some of you will roll your eyes. It's okay.
- L. But the term is meta-narrative. The meta-narrative is the big story. The grand story. The one story that explains every other story. It's the story of stories. One story to rule them all.
- M. When you read the Bible, you begin to assemble the one storyline that makes sense of every other story, including yours, including mine, including everybody's.
- N. When we read the Bible without the meta-narrative, we don't understand what's going on.
1. This is why you can read some things in the Bible and you say I don't understand. That is so offensive. Why would God do that? How could that be true?
- O. That's what happens when we read segments of scripture divorced from the meta-narrative.
- P. So the meta-narrative of the Bible is that there is a creator. God, there is a fall, there is redemption through Christ on the cross, and there is the restoration of all things.
1. **Creation**
 2. **Fall**
 3. **Redemption**
 4. **Restoration**
- Q. The Bible has thousands and thousands of stories. But they all come together to tell that one story.
1. I have read a lot of books, all types, all genres. I stand amazed at the Bible.
 2. **Look at this image.** It shows across the bottom all the books of the Bible, 66 books, Genesis to Revelation.
 3. Each of these colored lines shows how one place in the Bible connects to, and refers to another place in the Bible. There are 63,779 cross references.
 4. And it's not like one person, sat down and wrote all this. The lengths to which God went to get this book into our hands is nothing short of miraculous.
 5. **The Bible is...**
 - a) 66 books...
 - b) Written over a period of 1500 years...
 - c) In over a dozen countries...
 - d) On 3 continents...
 - e) By over 40 different people...
 6. **And it wasn't just one kind of person.** It was Poets, Prophets, Princes, Queens, Kings, Sailors, Soldiers, Lawyers, Doctors, Farmers, Scholars, Shepherds, Priests, Historians, Fisherman, Tax collectors, Business leaders.
 7. **It wasn't written in coffee shops.** It was written in caves, prisons, tents, homes, on ships, and in temples and deserts.
 8. **It's genres include** history, law, poetry, songs, sermons, letters, adventure stories, prophecy, proverbs, parables, and epics.
- R. And here's the question I have for you. How do you get that many people in that many places, over that long of time, in that many nations, and in that many genres, saying the same thing about the meta-narrative... across a span of centuries that had no internet, no text, no phones, and no way to coordinate their message?
- S. I can suggest and answer. The Holy Spirit. That's how. One beautiful mind put together the whole thing.
- T. So that's how you can know you're not an isolated bit of driftwood, floating on an infinite sea. No, your life is an interconnected part of a grand glorious story. And inside that story you have meaning and purpose and value, and destiny and clarity and goodness and blessing and treasure and pleasure that will one day take your breath away.
- V. Amos
- A. What does all of this have to do with Amos?
 - B. I said there were three things you have to do when you have a difficult place in the Bible.
 1. **Always let the Bible speak for itself.**
 2. **Look really really closely at what it says.**
 3. **Set every part of the Bible in the flow of the great big story.**
 - C. That's what Amos is trying to do for these people!
 - D. So, if we read Amos blasting and damning and burning down these nations, and then if we divorce that message from the meta-narrative, honestly, his message is offensive.
 1. And what if we put it alongside the message of Jeremiah?

- a) *"If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned."* (Jeremiah 18:7-8)
- 2. But what if we put the message of Amos alongside the message of Jonah? He goes up and down the length of Nineveh declaring "In 40 days none of them will be destroyed."
 - a) *"The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow. . . . When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened."* (Jonah 3:5, 10)
- 3. And what if we put it alongside the message of Isaiah?
 - a) *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.'"* (Isaiah 1:18)
- 4. And what if we put it alongside the message of Jesus?
 - a) *"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."* (Luke 15:20)
- E. And if there is that kind of merciful, tender-hearted, forgiving, freely-bestowed grace for that messed up, broken down, disloyal, immoral, bottom of the barrel, prodigal son, and if there is Grace for the sinners of Isaiah's day, and if there is Grace for the city Of Nineveh, and if there is Grace for any nation or kingdom or person, or place that turns in humility and faith to God, and if there is Grace for Moab, and Ammon, and Edom, and Tyre, and Gaza, and the Philistines, and Damascus, and the Syrians, and for all the outcasts, and all the sinners, and all the rich and all the poor, and all the lepers, and all the anyones... then maybe, just maybe, there is Grace for me, and for you, and for our family, and our friends, and our neighbors, and everybody else who's willing to take it too.
- F. The burden of the message of Amos is so simple and so pure. Seek the Lord and live. Well, that says the Lord, seek me and live (Amos 5:4,6). And all of the fire, and the brimstone is a wake up call to complacent, smug, self-satisfied, holier than thou, successful, rich people to get on board God's Ark of salvation, because time is running out.
- G. Because when you set the prophecies of Amos in the flow of the Bible's great big story, you realize that he is preaching an urgent, desperate, in-your-face-but-still-loving plea to reach out to Jesus and take hold of salvation while there's time.
- H. God created a perfect world. But we fell into darkness and sin. God loved us too much to leave us in that darkness, so he sent a Savior. Jesus effected in three dark hours on a bloody cross mankind's eternal redemption from sin. And all who believe in him will be saved. One day—one transcendent, miraculous, glorious day—he will come again for the restoration of all things. And we who know him will dwell in paradise again.

VI. It's Not Them...

- A. Amos preaches against Damascus. And they're so far away and so foreign and so despised that all the people cheer.
 - 1. And then the Philistines. And again the people cheer. Yeah Amos! You tell 'em.
 - 2. And then comes Tyre, a major trading center, heavily engaged in trafficking slaves. Oh yes, everybody says. God ought to damn them.
 - 3. But then, Amos comes closer to home. In verse 11, he denounces blood relatives of Israel. The Edomites descend from Israel's brother Esau. At first the crowd is a little quiet... these are their cousins after all... but in the end, they cheer. They weren't good cousins, so go get 'em God.
 - 4. When Amos comes to the Ammonites, it's the same thing. They're descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot (Genesis 19:38). So they're kind of family too. But Amos is on a roll, and the Ammonites slaughtered the Israelites in Gilead, doing horrible things to pregnant women (Amos 1:13).
 - 5. And then Amos comes to Moab... more relatives descended from Lot.
 - a) But still, the people Amen, and shout and clap.
- B. But what they don't realize is that Amos is drawing a map. And with each city he is spiraling closer and closer to the people of Israel, and closer and closer to Bethel, the very city his is preaching too.
- C. Because the next nation he hits is Judah. Right next door.
 - 1. *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they have despised the law of the LORD, And have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, Lies which their fathers followed.'"* (Amos 2:4)
- D. Wait one minute, Amos. Now you're stepping on our toes. These are our brothers and sisters. These are fellow Jews. Yeah, we've had a falling out, but really?
- E. And finally Amos springs the trap on the people of Israel, there in Bethel, listening to him preach. .
- F. Do you really want me to preach against all those people? Do you really want God to punish them and to judge them?

- G. Well, why shouldn't he punish you, because you are doing the exact same things.
- H. So now, he hits the bullseye.
 - 1. *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, And pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, To defile My holy name.'" (Amos 2:6-7)*
- I. The list goes on and on.
- J. But this time, Amos isn't talking about somebody else. He's not talking about them out there. He's talking about about us in here.
- K. And so am I.
- L. **Maybe it's not them. Maybe it's me.**
 - 1. Maybe it's me that God is calling to.
 - 2. Maybe it's me who's off track.
 - 3. I want to complain about the government or the teachers or liberals or conservatives or the Seahawks or the Raiders.
 - a) But maybe it's me.

VII. Conclusion

- A. Maybe it's time...
 - 1. To let God search me.
 - 2. To let God know me.
 - 3. To let God have me.
 - 4. To let God heal me.
 - 5. To let God deliver me.
 - 6. To let God save me.
 - 7. To let God sanctify me.
- B. God says, My child, give me your heart.
 - 1. Do you ever feel God tugging at your heart?
 - 2. Are there any doors where you've locked him out?
 - 3. That's where some good news is missing.
- C. He's saying, I love you. I want you. I see you. I'm here for you. I only want you to step into the riches of grace you found when you found Christ.
- D. If we want revival, it starts with me.
 - 1. With me repenting.
 - 2. With me reconciling.
 - 3. With me getting to Celebrate Recovery.
 - 4. With me getting back into church, and small group, and Bible study.
 - 5. With me letting go of the drugs, the porn, the sex.
 - 6. With me ending the affair.
 - 7. With me getting engaged.
 - 8. With me getting sober.
 - 9. With me getting in the Word.
 - 10. With me getting prayed for.
 - 11. With me speaking up for Jesus.
 - 12. With me praying for a lost friend.
 - 13. And with me, shedding my guilt and shame and despair and fear, and leaving it all at the foot of the cross.
- E. I think if there's one thing I can say to wrap this up it is this.
 - 1. The same Jesus who said Come to me for salvation, also said, Abide in me for a life beyond your wildest dreams, one that takes your breath away.