

I. Introduction

- A. Who's ready for some good news?
- B. Well, that's the plan for today. Some of that is going to come from me hopefully, in this message.
- C. But, surprise, some is going to come from you. There's a microphone down here, and we're going to use it in a little while. Don't get nervous. Save your nerves for later.
- D. My talk is part 5 in a series, we're letting God speak to us through the Bible. The Bible is actually a library. It's not just one book. There are 66 books in the Bible. Taken together, these 66 books all tell one, beautiful, life-giving, interconnected story.
- E. We are looking at one book in particular. It's the book of Amos. Amos was a prophet way back 8 centuries before Christ. He was a maverick spirit, and that is what I'm calling this series. Even though he preached and wrote so long ago, he still matters today.
- F. My title today is a question:
 1. **What's Your Testimony?**
- G. Your testimony is your story. Specifically, your testimony is you speaking some words for Christ. It is you taking a stand for Christ and the gospel, even when doing that is uncomfortable.
- H. The Bible says that every believer is a minister. Every believer is an ambassador. Every day, your life is giving off a message. There are five gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the believer in Jesus. Most people never read the first four.
- I. They are reading you. Your story. Your vibe. Your testimony.
- J. For good or for bad, if you are a Christian, you are communicating something about your God all the time.
- K. The Bible says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Psalm 107:2). I'm wondering if you would be willing to rise above your fears and do that today.
- L. Whether you do that with your words or with your life, in every interaction every day, your life is a flashing neon sign declaring what you think and believe about your God.
- M. That is what was happening with the people of God in the days of Amos. Unfortunately, their lives were communicating something pretty awful.
- N. So God sends a profit to them. That is Amos. He has something to say about their terrible, horrible, no good, very bad testimony.

II. *"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, Who oppress the poor, Who crush the needy, Who say to your husbands, 'Bring wine, let us drink!' The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness: 'Behold, the days shall come upon you When He will take you away with fishhooks, And your posterity with fishhooks. You will go out through broken walls, Each one straight ahead of her, And you will be cast into Harmon,' Says the LORD."* (Amos 4:1-3)

- A. Amos is preaching a message pretty much nobody could preach today. But the funny thing is, his should be preached today, because our culture is guilty of the same offenses against God.
- B. Amos says, Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, as noble as you are. As rich as you are. As glamorous as you may be. You have set yourselves against your maker, and you have become an offense to him! Why?
- C. **Offense 1: Because you are materialistic.**
 1. Bashan was a region of rich pastureland, ranches that went on forever, and herds of cattle that were known for being especially fierce, and especially big.
 2. These are the women and men who ran the households in Samaria and Israel. They are spoiled. Overfed. Selfish. Ungrateful.
 3. Never forget that everything good in your life is there because God put it there.
- D. **Offense 2: Because you are predatory.**
 1. Whatever kindness they had is gone, because they oppress the poor.
 2. Whatever compassion they had is hardened over, because they crush the needy.
 3. It's one thing to be rich, which is actually a blessing from God. But it's quite another thing to use your wealth or power to suck the life out of people less fortunate than you.
 4. God has a heart for those who have a heart for the down and outer, the hurting, the lost, and the least of these.
- E. **Offense 3: Because you are hedonistic.**
 1. Hedonism is the quest for pleasure, and the quest for pleasure is a numbing agent for a heart with no purpose.
 2. Bring me a drink. Bring me another bottle of wine. Let's go to another party. Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.
 - a) They live in luxury, but there's no tenderness.
 - b) They have the best that money can buy, but that only makes them sophisticated animals.
 3. God put you on earth for a purpose. That is to receive his grace in good times, in tough times, in blessing, in adversity.
 - a) **Your purpose is to shine forth as an agent of grace in this world of confusion and pain.**
 4. To be a channel to heaven roaming across this giant pain machine of earth. That is your purpose. Help lost people find the treasure you found when you found Christ.
 5. God designed your heart to live for something bigger than yourself, bigger even than this space-time continuum. God designed your heart to live for an eternal and heavenly cause.

6. That may take you places you may not wanna go. That may bring you trials you may not want to face. Living for that transcendent purpose may even bring you to an old rugged Cross, like I did for our savior.
 7. The ironic thing is there is no better way to live, and there is no greater joy.
 8. When you turn your back on that, all that's left is living for the next paycheck, the next score, the next moment of pleasure, the next big deal, or — like the people of Samaria — the next drink.
- F. People become blind to how messed up they are.
- G. The only way to break through it is by delivering a shock to the system. Gentle measures won't work. It takes someone intense, saying something shocking to shake people out of their complacency, wake them up to the danger they are in, and call them to turn their hearts back to the Lord.
- H. Hello, Amos.
- I. **Offence 4: You have invited your own Doom.** Their fancy homes will be destroyed. Their jewelry will be plundered. That's the warning that Amos delivers, because that's the only warning that will break through their hard hearts.
- J. Just how hard does God have to knock at your door before he gets your attention?
1. They will be led into captivity like cows by rings in their noses.
 2. They will be captured by enemies like a fish hooked on a lure.
- K. This is the judgment of God.
- L. But the next paragraph is some of the best sarcasm in all the literature of the world.
- III. *"Come to Bethel and transgress, At Gilgal multiply transgression; Bring your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, Proclaim and announce the freewill offerings; For this you love, You children of Israel!" Says the Lord GOD.*" (Amos 4:4-5)
1. The people of Israel are guilty of inventing their own religion. They are not the only ones. We are still doing it today!
 - a) **Made up gods.** Bethel and Gilgal were cities with great shrines to Baal and other false gods. They worshiped the golden calf, the same idol the Jews made when they came out of Egypt. A lot of people are still making up their own miniature gods today, gods you can handle and ignore.
 - b) **Meaningless sacrifices.** Their sacrifices and tithes didn't do what they were supposed to do... Biblically a sacrifice was a parable of the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Not with these people. Their sacrifices and tithes were payoffs to get the gods to bless them.
 - c) **A missing core.** The one sacrifice not mentioned here is the Sin offering, the ultimate picture of Christ. They had a religion with no salvation, no redemption, no redeemer, no lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.
 - (1) What's your testimony? What's the story of your life with God?
 - d) **Offensive practices.** Leaven was yeast, and it was forbidden in the thank offerings, because unless it was burned it represented SIN. They were sinning all over the place, violating God's Laws left and right, and convincing themselves their religion still counted.
 - e) **Doing it all for Show.** Proclaim and announce... Make sure everybody knows how much you've given, how important you are? No. When you give, you give in humility. You give in private. And you give to the Lord as a thank you for his matchless, infinite grace.
 2. All of this was unreal in the sight of God.
 3. This thing we do when we come to church, it isn't a game. It isn't for show. It isn't make-believe.
 4. We are the church. Greek word *ekklesia*. The called out ones. Called out from the world. Different from the world. Different values. Different purposes. Different way of thinking about everything. We don't fit in. We don't conform. We don't bow to their idols.
 5. We let God be God. We say, as far as the heavens are high above the Earth, so are his thoughts, greater than our thoughts, and his ways greater than our ways.
 - a) **We do weird stuff because what the world thinks is normal is evil. If we're not doing weird stuff, we're fitting in with the evil.**
 6. That's the testimony your friends are dying to hear.
 7. If you don't think your friends want to have this conversation, let me set the record straight:
 - a) Research says that 66% of unbelievers are open to a conversation about faith with a friend. And get this, 51% are open to that conversation with a stranger.
 - b) Yes, there are people who will shut you down in a minute flat. But there are plenty of people who want to hear about Jesus. There is a great need. There's a great hunger. This world isn't working. This philosophy isn't working. It's broken. It's heartbreaking. It's sad. People are searching for answers. We have those answers. We have a testimony, and I'm telling you. Somebody wants to hear it.
 8. And so here comes Amos to preach it. And here comes a Chicago boy to preach the same thing. And in a couple minutes, there might be a few more people standing up to say the way of the Lord is awesome, even if other people think it's weird.
- B. God is patient with us. When we live under his grace, we reap what he sows. But when we push his grace away, we reap what we sow, and I can tell you you're gonna get what you want, but you're not gonna want what you get.

- IV. *"Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. And lack of bread in all your places; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the LORD. "I also withheld rain from you, When there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, And where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, But they were not satisfied; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the LORD. "I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, Your vineyards, Your fig trees, And your olive trees, The locust devoured them; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the LORD. "I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; Your young men I killed with a sword, Along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the LORD. "I overthrew some of you, As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the LORD. (Amos 4:6-11)*
- A. This paragraph is a tapestry in two colors.
- B. There is a thread of grace and a thread of judgment. The five judgments are:
1. **Famine**
 2. **Drought**
 3. **Mildew (agricultural disease)**
 4. **Pestilence (medical disease)**
 5. **Urban violence, cities destroyed**
- C. What is this? This is the justice of God. This is the lion roaring. Everyone one of these judgments shows the power of God AND the weakness of Baal. Baal was supposed to handle these things but he couldn't.
- D. As long as you're still alive, God's judgments are God's invitations.
- E. The five invitations of grace are:
1. **Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.**
 2. **Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.**
 3. **Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.**
 4. **Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.**
 5. **Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.**
- F. What's your testimony? Some of you have been fighting the Lord. You know what that feels like. And you know how empty it leaves you. And when you came to Christ, everything changed. It didn't make your life perfect. I didn't make your problems go away. But Jesus gave you hope you never had before. Jesus gave you purpose you never had before. Jesus gave you forgiveness, love, healing, and wholeness.
- G. Jesus snapped you out of the devil's trance. He brought you back to reality.
- H. There's your testimony. All life long, the Lord has been drawing you.
- I. Just like he was drawing the people that Amos was speaking to.
- J. He had to shock them. He had to wake them up.
- K. And now, he closes his hard and gracious sermon.
- V. Testimonies
- A. But I'm not going to do that yet.
- B. We're going to do something different... actually something weird, that can turn really weird really fast.
- C. I want to open the floor to you. I want to hear your testimony. I want to hear your story. What weird stuff did you do?
- D. A couple of weeks ago a lot of you stood up and you took the Maverick Spirit pledge. Remember? You got deputized.
1. **I accept God's call**
To become
An ambassador of Grace and Truth
In a culture of confusion and pain
Even if it means
Doing weird stuff
By grace through faith
Amen
- E. So, do me a favor... let's all stand...
- F. While you're standing, do you remember I gave you a list of weird stuff to do? Just some suggestions. Here's that list again.
- G. If you did any of that stuff, let me hear you clap... if you just clapped, I'd like you to tell us what you did. Just move out into the aisles and go over that way. Come on down from the top everybody standing so you can get out easily. You don't have to climb over anybody. Come on down come on over against the wall and lineup over here and we're gonna hear some stories. Who's up for some weird stuff stories?
- H. That's good news!
- I. Don't wait don't wait coming down lineup. Even if the line is long, don't worry because if we don't get to you in the room we're going to get to you on video. We're gonna record you out in the lobby with your weird stuff testimony.
1. While we're getting lined up, who's up for doing the Maverick Spirit pledge again?

- J. It could be as simple as I brought my Bible to work and people thought it was cool. That's all we need. So let's hear it come on down.
 - 1. Has God answered a prayer? Come and tell us.
 - 2. Did you just get saved? Last week even? Come and tell us what it means to you.
 - 3. Did you just re-dedicate your life to Christ? Let us know.
- K. A couple ground rules:
 - 1. I'm gonna ask you keep it short.
 - 2. It will kind of be a dialogue between me and you.
 - 3. You gotta respect confidentiality of other people. So don't give out anybody's name but your own.
 - 4. Glory goes to Jesus! Right?
- L. The Bible says:
 - 1. *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, [a peculiar] people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."* (1 Peter 2:9)
- M. Comments
- N. Let me wrap up this chapter in Amos.
- VI. *"Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; Because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" For behold, He who forms mountains, And creates the wind, Who declares to man what his thought is, And makes the [darkness into morning], Who treads the high places of the earth—The LORD God of hosts is His name."* (Amos 4:12-13)
 - A. Look at this verse.
 - B. I told you that I have a history with this Bible verse.
 - C. **Here's a picture** of the church where I grew up. From infancy till I was 20 years old. I went to this church. This is in Chicago. It was called grace gospel church. It's something different today.
 - D. But right over here, they used to be a window air conditioner.
 - E. And they had some weird insulation around it. Someone had shoved in a little cardboard sign. And it looked like this.
 - 1. **[slide] Prepare to Meet Thy God. Amos 4:12**
 - F. That thing scared me. I lived with a constant state of fear that when I met God it would be nothing but hellfire and brimstone. It would be nothing but hot lunch forever with no cold beer to wash it down.
 - G. But when I look at this verse today, I don't see God's wrath here. I don't see hellfire and brimstone.
 - H. I see Grace. I see an invitation.
 - I. Prepare to meet your God.
 - 1. Wherever the idea of **meeting God** is found in the Bible, there's always Grace there. In the situation, you have this glorious Almighty God, who treads the high places of the Earth, the Lord of Armies is his name, and yet he wraps himself in humility, and comes down to us. And invites us to meet with him. And to be with him. And just stay with him.
 - 2. And look how Amos identifies him. He is **your God!** Even as messed up as these people are, the prophet still says he is your God. This is a word of intense comfort and assurance, and there's no explanation other than that this speaks of hope.
 - 3. Amos includes that beautiful phrase. He makes the **darkness into the morning**. And just when you think it can't get any darker, you have a father in heaven, who says the sun will come up again on your life.
 - 4. Amos speaks in the name of **Yahweh, the God of hosts**. And you can't say that name of God, without putting mercy and redeeming grace in the front of the picture.
 - 5. And finally, there's that word, **Prepare**. As high and lofty and infinite and glorious and majestic and transcendent and otherworldly and glorious and awesome and frightening God may be, he is not out of reach of anybody. There is a way to be prepared, through Jesus. There is time to be prepared, because you're still breathing. And there is a finality to being prepared, because once you have Jesus, you are qualified forever, once and for all.
 - J. So whoever put that little sign there in my church window, you should've told me. There's hope. This is beautiful. Thank you for doing weird stuff. Keep it up.