

I. Introduction

- A. A few years ago I visited a hospital deep in the jungles of Africa. I had been invited to speak to missionary doctors, and it was one of the greatest experiences of my life.
- B. It is truly one of the most amazing places I've ever been.
- C. Dr. Dave and Becky Thompson spent their lifetimes building up this outpost for the gospel. Tribal people who had nowhere else to go came to the hospital by the thousands. Our family here at Pathway has been financially supporting this hospital for decades. When you give to Pathway and our Great Commission Fund, you help make this incredible hospital possible.
- D. Here in the middle of Africa, there is an AIDS clinic, eye clinic, neonatal intensive care unit, and general health clinic. There are surgical suites, and a host of medical buildings and homes to house a thriving outpost for medical professionals, who would all be very wealthy living here, but instead they have given their lives, and their wealth, to serve people that the world likes to forget.
- E. On a tour of the facilities, David Thompson showed me a new apartment building they were building for visiting doctors.
- F. It was four units, two apartments on the first floor and two apartments upstairs. It was still under construction. Right away, I could see that something was off with that construction. David knew it too. He was smiling.
- G. Everything in this building was crooked. It was uneven. David said, "They build everything here by eye. The walls aren't plumb, the corners aren't square, and the floors aren't level. They just eyeball everything, and it's good enough."
- H. Cabinets didn't sit flat against the wall; there were gaps. Counters didn't mesh with the corners or the walls—more gaps. You can't do a good job just building by eye.
- I. Your eyes can trick you. You think that something is level, plumb, and square, but when you hold the right tool against it, you realize it is crooked, slanted, and completely out of alignment.
 - 1. In a minute, we are going to see God hold up a tool to his people to see if they are properly aligned.
- J. Welcome to part eight in our series. We are talking about a Maverick Spirit. To do that. We are studying one of the ancient prophetic books in the Old Testament. This would be the prophecies of Amos.
- K. Today we are in chapter 7. I invite you to think with me on the topic:

1. Measuring Up

II. Amos 7

- A. Amos is a rough, tough, working man. He was a rancher and a farmer. He was also a man who loved God and loved God's word.
- B. One day, the Lord spoke to him and told him to leave his homeland, ride up into Israel, and start preaching. God told him to warn the people that they have been spitting in God's face for so long their nation is about to be destroyed... but there's still time to get their hearts right with God.
- C. The basic problem was that God had called the Jews into a special covenant relationship with himself. In that relationship, God promised to bless them and protect them. Their job was to enjoy his grace, to share his grace with one another, and to show God's good news to a waiting watching world.
- D. That was the plan.
- E. Unfortunately, that plan didn't happen. Instead of looking to God, the people turned away from God.
 - 1. Instead of worshiping God, the people worshiped idols.
 - 2. Instead of showing grace to one another, the people took advantage of one another. They used people. They exploited people financially and sexually.
 - 3. Instead of showing a lost and dying world the way to God, God's people let the demonized nations show them the way to paganism and corruption.
- F. By the time of Amos, this twisted, crooked, shady way of life had been the story for generations.
- G. But now everything is going to change. The reign of fake religion was over. The days of taking God's blessing for granted were coming to an end.
- H. Amos is there to warn them to get right with God.
- I. In chapter 7, God shows Amos three visions. Here we go.

III. Amos 7

- A. *"Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop; indeed it was the late crop after the king's mowings. And so it was, when they had finished eating the grass of the land, that I said: 'O Lord GOD, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he is small!' So the LORD relented concerning this. 'It shall not be,' said the LORD."* (Amos 7:1-3)
 - 1. Amos has a vision of swarms of locusts. In these societies, locusts were absolutely devastating. When they come through, there's no food left behind. No grain. No crops. No food. No economy. Just starvation and death.
 - 2. If the locusts came through, that would be the ruin of the nation.
 - 3. So this was the vision God gave him, and it made Amos pray. He prayed.
 - a) **O Lord, God, forgive, I pray!**
 - 4. Of all the things he could pray, why pray for this? Why pray for forgiveness?
 - 5. Amos prayed for forgiveness because Amos followed the logic.
 - a) He knows why the locusts are coming.
 - b) It is because the justice of God has been activated. God is in full judgment mode.
 - c) Whenever God sends down judgments, it means that there has been serious sin. Serious, ongoing, unashamed rebellion against God. Disrespecting God. Ignoring God. Forgetting God. Disobeying God.
 - d) The problem isn't locusts. Locusts are a *symptom* of the problem. The problem is sin against God.
 - 6. So Amos doesn't pray against the locusts, the symptom. No. Amos prays over the real problem here which is sin.
 - a) **Wherever there is sin, there is a massive need for forgiveness.**
 - 7. So Amos prays for that. "O Lord God, forgive, I pray. Oh that Jacob [Israel] may stand, for he is small."

8. God hears. God answers. God forgives.
 - a) **So the LORD relented [repented, changed his mind] concerning this. "It shall not be," said the LORD."**
9. So no locusts. Aren't you glad you have a forgiving God?
10. You have to picture Amos actually preaching this. He's in the marketplace. He has all kinds of people listening to him. He even has priests listening to him.
11. He paints a picture of God up in heaven. Holy, perfect, and just. He paints a picture of the nation, here on earth. Spoiled. Immoral. Disobedient.
12. So now comes the wrath of God, the punishment they deserve, the devastation of the nation...
13. But, something interrupts the judgment.
14. An advocate arises to pray for them. They have an intercessor, a prayer warrior, who prays for their forgiveness.
15. So God forgives, and the hellfire of God's wrath is turned away. The only reason they are not destroyed is because God is a forgiving God.
16. Amos preached that, and I'm sure he got a lot of amens.
17. Everybody loves that part of his sermon.
- B. *"Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, the Lord GOD called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory. Then I said: 'O Lord GOD, cease, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he is small!' So the LORD relented concerning this. 'This also shall not be,' said the Lord GOD." (Amos 7:4-6)*
 1. In the first vision, it was devouring locusts. In this second vision, it is consuming fire.
 2. This fire is another tool of God's wrath. If God doesn't punish evil, then the Creator of the universe doesn't care about evil. The scales of justice are imbalanced. Evil wins in the end.
 3. The wrath of God is proof that the universe has a nucleus of moral righteousness at its core. There is something beautiful, even as there is something very frightening, about the blazing, fiery justice of God.
 - a) *"For our God is a consuming fire."* (Hebrews 12:29)
 - b) *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews 10:31)
 4. In the first vision, Amos prayed, **"O Lord God, forgive, I pray."**
 5. In this second vision, Amos prays, **"O Lord God cease, I pray."**
 6. In both prayers, Amos says the same thing about Israel. He says, Israel is **"small."** That Hebrew word means so much more than small. It means humble, last in line and least in importance.
 - a) This is funny, because last week we were in chapter six, and in chapter six, God called out their biggest problem.
 - b) Do you remember? Reminder: it was kryptonite to all the lovingkindness and grace God had in store for his people.
 - c) What was their biggest problem?
 - (1) Pride.
 - (2) They said, we are first in importance.
 - (3) Amos said, without God, you are last in importance.
 7. God said, **"I hate your pride."**
 8. If you read the stories about Jesus, you're going to find out that God has a special place in his heart for the humble. God gives grace to the humble. He calls them the little, the last, the least, and the lost.
 - a) **When you take your place among the humble, with the undeserving little ones of the world, that's when the grace of God flows to you.**
 9. To say I am little is to say God I need you. Lord help me. Father, I can't do it without you. Lord send your grace.
 - a) And to say, Thank you God... I'm so grateful for all your favor.
 - b) And to say, To God be the glory... I praise him for every good in my life...
 10. When the Lord hears that, Amos says: **So the LORD relented concerning this. "This also shall not be."**
 11. There's hope. No matter how much you have messed up, there is hope with Jesus Christ. Turn to him while there's still time. Turn to him before the bottom drops out. That's the message. That's the grace. Get right with God.
 12. Now, Amos has a third vision:
- C. *"Then he showed me another vision. I saw the Lord standing beside a wall that had been built using a plumb line. He was using a plumb line to see if it was still straight. And the LORD said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' I answered, 'A plumb line.' And the Lord replied, 'I will test my people with this plumb line. I will no longer ignore [pass-over] all their sins. The pagan shrines of your ancestors will be ruined, and the temples of Israel will be destroyed; I will bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to a sudden end.'" (Amos 7:7-9)*
 1. The world runs by physical laws. Gravity, chemistry, magnetism, mathematics, molecular order.
 2. The world also runs by spiritual laws. God. Salvation. Peace. Grace.
 3. The world also runs by moral laws. Right, wrong. Good, evil. Truth, deception. Moral, immoral. Righteousness.
 - a) These moral laws are the most powerful of all.
 4. When a house is built, the framers build a **frame** of 2x4s and 2x6s, and everything is built onto that. You can't build a lasting house on a poorly constructed frame.
 5. God comes down with a **plumb line** to see if the moral framework of your life is still straight.
 6. God says, **"I will no longer ignore all their sins."**
 7. What does that mean? It means righteousness.
 8. God is measuring are you level, plumb, and square according to the standard of righteousness.
 - a) He is not looking at your appearance. He is not looking at your popularity. He is not looking at your success. He is not looking at your wealth. He is not looking at your influence. He is not looking at your GPA. He is not looking at the number of your followers.

9. He is looking at your deepest core identity and the moral foundation of your deepest being.

IV. Measuring Up

- A. Are you righteous?
- B. Let me define that:
 1. **To be righteous means to be good enough for God. It means to comply with the moral standards of a God of infinite perfection and holiness.**
- C. I can't tell you how much this messed with my mind as a kid growing up in church. There is a Bible verse that punched me in the face again and again... because my little church used it again and again. I'll say it the way I learned it, in the old King James Bible:
 1. *"Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."* (1 Peter 1:16)
- D. I was very sincere, and this wrecked me.
- E. I could never measure up. If God were to check me for level, plumb, and square, I was doomed. God scared me. Even though I was saved, I felt guilty. I felt unrighteous. I didn't know what to do.
- F. There are three directions you can take to measure up to God's holy standards.
 1. **Try harder... maybe if I can work harder, I can measure up.**
 - a) I'd guess maybe half of people go this way. That's what I did. I served God and worked for God with all my might. I went to church Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night for prayer meeting. From the time I was 16, I helped with our Awana kids clubs on Tuesday night and again on Thursday night. On Friday night, I helped lead our youth group. At Sunday School and on Sunday nights, I helped with music. I swept and vacuumed. I got training in evangelism. I did it all.
 - b) I was very sincere. But most of what motivated me was fear. I was trying to be good enough for God. The Bible described me in Romans 10:13, which will make more sense in a second.
 - (1) *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God."* (Romans 10:3)
 - c) That was me. I was seeking to establish my own righteousness.
 - d) The problem is it was never enough. I always felt guilt of not doing enough, and I always felt afraid. This is the problem with religion. Every religion. Every system that bases God's love on your moral performance. You just can't be good enough.
 - (1) **There is no such thing as self-justification before God.**
 - e) I can tell you, that was a very tiring and very frustrating hamster wheel to get stuck on.
 2. **Walk Away... I can never be good enough for God, so I'm not even going to try.**
 - a) I have seen this again and again. People give up on religion because the demands are too high.
 - b) I can never be that person. I can never be good enough.
 - c) So people check out. They walk away. They give up.
 - d) If going to heaven depends on being good enough for God, and if being good enough for God depends on my own moral performance, then the whole thing is impossible and that means the whole thing is ridiculous, and that means, "I'm outta here."
 - (1) *"Remember... that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."* (Ephesians 2:12)
 - e) I think most people go that way.
 - f) I didn't go that way, because I discovered the third way, which is actually what Jesus taught and really what every author of the Bible teaches.
 - g) Instead of trying to produce your own righteousness by your own performance...
 3. **Receive the gift...receive Jesus and he will put his own righteousness in you.**
 - a) This is the out of the box, maverick teaching that people either love or hate.
 - (1) What if instead of your adjusting yourself to God's plumb line, God made all the adjustments for you.
 - (2) What if instead of righteousness by works, God is offering you righteousness by grace through faith, apart from works?
 - b) The Bible teaches this in so many places and in so many verses that it's hard to know where to stop. So here, just 3 verses to prove it.
 - (1) *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us..."* (Titus 3:5)
 - (2) *"Not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith"* (Philippians 3:9)
 - (3) *"Those who receive... the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."* (Romans 5:17)
 - (4) *"And their righteousness is from Me," Says the LORD.*" (Isaiah 54:17)
 - c) Okay, that was 4, not 3, but I told you it was hard to stop. Again and again, Jesus and the prophets and the apostles invite us to give up trying to produce righteousness by performance and they tell us to receive righteousness as a gift.
 - d) That's the verse I showed you earlier...
 - (1) *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God."* (Romans 10:3)
 - e) It's a gift. It's grace.
 4. All of this stuff finally clicked with me and made sense one really awesome day. I remember it clearly. I was sitting on the wood bleachers of my gigantic high school in Chicago reading a book, and it hit me that all the work I was doing wouldn't make me righteous.

5. Just believing in Jesus was enough. Faith was enough. Because faith was how I received Jesus, and when I received Jesus, he brought his own righteousness with him when he came to live inside me.
 - a) He made me righteous. He made me everything God required. That meant I was good enough for God forever. And that meant there is no condemnation for me. And that meant I never had to fear his judgment and wrath again. And that meant God could bless me with abundance and every good thing... because... even though I didn't create it, there was a new worthiness inside me, and a new qualification inside of me, all wrapped up in the righteousness of God.
6. I became confident before God, and to me, that was a miracle. I wasn't afraid of him anymore.
- G. Righteousness as a Garment
 1. *"Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all who believe."* (Romans 3:22)
 2. In the very moment that you receive Jesus as your Savior, you receive the righteousness of God. In fact, the righteousness of God is draped over you like a robe or a shimmering garment. This is what it means to say that the righteousness of God is upon all who believe.
 3. The prophets and apostles draw this picture in the Bible in many, many ways.
 4. For example, the prophet, Isaiah basically throws a party because he has been dressed in the righteousness of the Lord. He breaks into a song singing:
 - a) *"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."* (Isaiah 61:10)
 5. If you fast forward to the end of the Bible, you see the same thing again Saint John sees the glorious vision of the church, clothed as a bride for the coming of the heavenly bride groom, ready to meet the Lord.
 - a) *"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints."* (Revelation 19:7-8)
 6. One of the great hymns of the church, we sing it here in all of our services:
 - a) **When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh may I then in Him be found,
Dressed in His righteousness, alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.**
 7. I am saying that when God measures you, by the plumb-line of righteousness, if you have Jesus, then you will measure up. Every believer in Jesus, every saved person, will measure up.
 8. But what if you don't live like it? What if you're still ungodly? You'll still measure up. Because the whole gospel is that God measures Christ and counts it for you.
 9. I am saying that the basic problem with the people of God in the days of Amos is that they didn't remember this, didn't believe this, didn't care about this, and instead of seeing themselves clothed in the garments of righteousness, they began to clothe themselves in garments that the Bible can only call filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).
 10. And I am saying that when the righteousness of God really hit me, something broke inside me that had kept me stuck for years.
 11. Romans 8:1 became one of the theme songs of my life:
 - a) *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1)
 - b) For me, this was a miracle.
- H. The Outflow
 1. But then there was one more miracle, and it's part of God's whole plan. The grace of God did something to me psychologically and spiritually.
 2. **The gift of righteousness unleashed in me a natural desire to serve God, not out of fear but out of gratitude, and not for blessing but from blessing.**
 - a) The solution to a culture that's turned away from God isn't pushing that culture to be moral, it's calling that culture to salvation. They need Jesus.
 - b) The solution to Christians who are lukewarm isn't preaching at them to more efforts for Jesus, it's calling those Christians back to their true identity and their first love in Jesus.
 3. No one wants Christians to act like Christians more than me. It makes my job easier. But how do we make that happen?
 - a) Should we guilt and shame Christians into the life of holiness? Should we embarrass them and call them out?
 4. As fun as that would be, it doesn't work.
 5. Do you know what does work ?
 - a) Reminding you again and again of the love and grace of God.
 - b) *"What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?"* (Psalms 116:12)
 - c) *"For the love of Christ compels us..."* (2 Corinthians 5:14)
 - d) *"We love Him because He first loved us."* (1 John 4:19)
 6. When God stretches out a plumb line, there is only ONE person in all of Earth's history who stands in perfect alignment with it. That is Jesus Christ, and when you take your stand with him, you will pass God's test with flying colors.
 7. This is the teaching of Amos. This is the invitation of Amos. Bring your heart back to God. Bring your heart back to grace. Bring your mind back to the saving gospel of Calvary Love.