

I. Introduction

- A. I've got some good news for you today. Who's ready for it?
- B. My talk today is part 9 in a series. The series is called A Maverick Spirit. We come to meet with God, every week. And the way we meet with God is by opening our Bibles together. God meets with his people in the pages of Scripture. Amen?
- C. So we have been meeting with God week after week in a book in the Bible called Amos. Amos was a prophet. He preached in the open air markets and the town squares of Israel.
- D. These chapters are his sermons.
- E. Today, we are going to start in Amos chapter 8. I would like to read the first paragraph of that chapter, and then we'll get into it.
 - 1. *"Then the Sovereign LORD showed me another vision. In it I saw a basket filled with ripe fruit. 'What do you see, Amos?' he asked. I replied, 'A basket full of ripe fruit.' Then the LORD said, 'Like this fruit, Israel is ripe for punishment! I will not delay their punishment again. In that day the singing in the temple will turn to wailing. Dead bodies will be scattered everywhere. They will be carried out of the city in silence. I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken!'"* (Amos 8:1-3)
- F. Yes, so far this is bad news, but we'll get to the good news, I promise.
- G. The title of my talk today is:
 - 1. **The Countdown Clocks**
- H. So let me back up and set up some context so we can know what God is telling us.
- I. There are three countdown clocks running over every person. They're right above your head, if you have eyes to see them. They are counting down to zero, and every person has them.

II. The Countdown Clocks

A. The day you die.

B. The day Jesus comes back.

- 1. When those clocks tick down to zero, two things are true of these countdown clocks.
 - a) They are **UNPREDICTABLE**.
 - (1) You don't really know when either clock will tick down to zero.
 - (2) Very few people know the day and hour of their death, and nobody knows the day when Jesus will return.
 - b) These countdown clocks are also **IRREVERSIBLE**.
 - (1) Once you die, or once Jesus comes back, whatever your spiritual condition is in that moment gets locked in forever.
 - (2) If you are saved, you will stay saved forever... and that means eternal life.
 - (3) If you are not saved, you will stay unsaved forever... and that means eternal condemnation.
 - (4) You can't reverse your eternal destiny.
 - (a) *It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.* (Hebrews 9:27)
 - c) So, one way or another, you're going to meet Jesus. You're going to meet your Maker. Either through death, or through the Second Coming, you're going to face your Judgment Day.
- 2. So here's the gamble. Will you make your decision for Jesus before one of those clocks runs out?
- 3. Anybody putting off salvation is making a really big gamble... the consequences last forever.
- 4. Speaking of consequences, there's a third countdown clock running over every person's life. This is the one I want to focus on, because this is the one Amos is pointing us to.

C. The day your spiritual consequences catch up to you.

- 1. That is what the vision of the ripe fruit means. Amos sees a basket of ripe fruit. Summer fruit... so the crop is finished. There will be no more harvest. This is it. This is the end. The clock has counted down to zero. Time is up.
- 2. God says so: *"Like his fruit, Israel is ripe for punishment! I will not delay their punishment again."*
- 3. Then he goes on and describes devastation and destruction for the whole nation. It's the end.
- 4. It will literally be the end. Because not long after this, the nation is destroyed, the capital city is plundered, and the people are either killed or exiled all over the known world.
- 5. That is what Amos was warning about. Every single message. Every single conversation. Every single chapter in this book.
 - a) It was a warning.
- 6. But why did this destruction happen? Why was there a countdown clock on the nation anyway?
- 7. I don't care how young you are. I don't care how old you are. Here is some mental programming that needs to be the core code that runs your life:
 - a) **If you don't walk in God's design, you can't walk in God's blessing.**
- 8. There is a way of life that comes from heaven. This way of life is designed by God.
 - a) This way of life is the **ONLY** way of life that brings out your truest, deepest, most authentic self.
 - b) And this way of life is the **ONLY** way of life where you're not bashing yourself against the solid rock of God's truth over and over again.
- 9. You don't get to design the world; God did that. And when he did that, he designed the most beautiful, life-giving paradise imaginable. He designed an abundant life for you. He designed beauty, majesty, joy, honor, grace. It's so awesome, it's described as a feast, as a Promised land, as liberty, and as love.
 - a) That's the blessing.
 - b) That's the goodness.
 - c) That's the design of God.
- 10. So it's just a fact of life: If you don't walk in God's design, you can't walk in God's blessing.
- 11. That's the law. That's the rule. That's the physics of the spiritual realm.
- 12. So, just to give you a taste, this is how the people were walking... meaning living their lives... in the days of Amos.

- a) *“Listen to this, you who rob the poor and trample down the needy! You can’t wait for the Sabbath day to be over and the religious festivals to end so you can get back to cheating the helpless. You measure out grain with dishonest measures and cheat the buyer with dishonest scales. And you mix the grain you sell with chaff swept from the floor. Then you enslave poor people for one piece of silver or a pair of sandals.”* (Amos 8:4-6)

- (1) **They exploited the poor.**
- (2) **They harmed the needy.**
- (3) **They cheated the helpless (as soon as church was over).**
- (4) **They used dishonest scales.**
- (5) **They sold contaminated wheat.**
- (6) **They enslaved the poor over nothing.**
 - (a) And in earlier chapters...
 - (7) They demoted God and turned him into idols.
 - (8) They turned young men and women into sexual objects.

13. None of this was God’s design for life. None of this was faith. All of this was against the generous, gracious, sane way of life God gave them.

14. Now, destruction is knocking at their door, and they wonder why? No. It doesn’t work that way.

15. So let me lay out another bit of mental programming that needs to run through your life:

- a) **Sin hurts. Every sinful choice fuels a nasty little engine that will eventually spit pain into your heart, your psychological state, your relationships, your family, and your world.**

16. The operative word here is *“eventually.”*

17. Because, for a while you get away with it. That’s the ticking countdown clock. That’s the ticking moral time bomb a person triggers when they indulge their dark side. When they give in to temptation.

- a) What starts as a sinful pleasure ends as: addiction, loneliness, STDs, bankruptcy, divorce, embarrassment, shame, a mountain of debt, bitter feelings, and on and on. It adds up.

18. If you don’t walk in God’s design, you can’t walk in God’s blessing. And even though it sometimes looks like God’s blessing — people doing bad things can seem like everything is awesome in their lives — in the end, the ticking clock of consequences always catches up.

III. *“Now the LORD has sworn this oath by his own name, the Pride of Israel: “I will never forget the wicked things you have done! The earth will tremble for your deeds, and everyone will mourn. The ground will rise like the Nile River at floodtime; it will heave up, then sink again. “In that day,” says the Sovereign LORD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth while it is still day. I will turn your celebrations into times of mourning and your singing into weeping. You will wear funeral clothes and shave your heads to show your sorrow—as if your only son had died. How very bitter that day will be!”* (Amos 8:7-10)

- A. The Countdown Clock reached Zero. Time’s up.
- B. Amos is speaking on a national level. I think his warnings perfectly mesh with where our country is at today. Unless we Christians get tight with God really fast, we’re asking for some very sad days ahead. That’s at the national level.
- C. But Amos is also speaking at the individual level too.
- D. It’s only a matter of time before the day the spiritual consequences of your personal choices catch up to you. Even the secret choices. Even the hidden choices nobody knows about.
- E. It’s a law of nature.

IV. The Promised Land

- A. There’s an epic story in the Bible. It’s a pattern, a paradigm, a template for what I’m talking about.
- B. Amos is writing and prophesying 8 centuries before Christ.
- C. If you wind backwards in time about 7 centuries... so 1,500 years BC...
- D. God’s people are slaves. They have been stuck in Egypt, and life is hard.
 1. In the back of their minds, they have these memories of a beautiful promise from God. It was the promise of a prosperous and fertile land. In that land, they would be a nation at peace. In that land, they would be blessed to the maximum. The Bible called it a land flowing with milk and honey, which means very prosperous, very wealthy, very fertile. God promised they would enjoy houses they did not build, vineyards they did not plant, and blessings they did not deserve.
 2. This land was called, the Promised Land, and it’s modern day Israel, with expanded borders.
 3. The Promised Land is a paradigm. It’s a pattern or a template in the Bible. It represents the place where God’s people would enjoy maximum blessing from the grace of God.
 4. That was their hope, and that was their prayer.
- E. So God led them out of bondage to slavery, and he led them to the Promised Land. Finally, their prayers would be answered and their generational dreams would come true.
 1. So God set them free. God led them to this Promised Land.
 2. And God said, Go up and take the land. I have already given it to you. It belongs to you. Your name is on the title and deed. Go enjoy a life of blessing.
- F. Great deal, right? What would you do? Wouldn’t you go in and take hold of what God has given you?
 1. But that’s not what happened. The people made excuses. They were afraid. They were so used to slavery, they couldn’t handle freedom.
 2. It happens, you know.
 3. And so they did not go into the promised land. Instead they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, which is the story of life for some people hearing my voice.

- G. Here is how that Old Testament moment is analyzed and taught in the New Testament. This is for us. This was the basic problem that kept them in the wilderness, and kept them out of the Promised Land:
1. *"So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest [the spiritual Promised Land], let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it."* (Hebrews 3:19-4:2)
- H. Question: when God offers a person incredible blessing and joy, why don't they take it? When God offers a spiritual Promised Land, why does a person NOT move in? What is the diagnosis of heaven?
1. Answer: because of **unbelief**.
- I. Last week I did some teaching on the righteousness of God. I showed you that, when you got saved, you got righteous. God gave you his own righteousness. In that nano-second, you became good enough for God. Totally accepted. Totally perfect. Totally clean in his sight.
1. When God measures you, you measure up. When God holds up his plumb line against you, you pass the test.
 - a) *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* (2 Corinthians 5:21)
 2. Can you say something out loud? Say, "I am the righteousness of God." Good days, bad days, holy days, unholy days, sinful days, sinful moments. I am the righteousness of God.
 3. Stay with me. Here's the follow up:
 - a) **Can you say something else out loud? Say, "the Lord will bless the righteous."**
 - b) **Now say, "I am the righteousness of God."**
 4. See how that works?
- J. There are two ways. A way of death and a way of life. A way of cursing and a way of blessing.
- K. The way of blessing is God's design for you.
- L. And if you don't walk in God's design, you can't walk in God's blessing.
1. So what is it that keeps a nation, a family, a person stuck in the wilderness of death? Unbelief.
 2. What is it that keeps a person outside the promised land? Unbelief.
 3. Why does a young man turn to porn instead of building relationships that leads to marriage? Unbelief. You don't believe you're worthy, or you don't believe it will work, because you don't believe you are the righteousness of God... and you don't really believe you are actually bless-able.
 4. Why does a married woman turn to a man who is not her husband for affection and love? Unbelief. She does not believe that the design of God will actually work for her blessing and grace.
 5. Why does a comfortable middle-class family drop out of church? Unbelief. They have decent money, a nice home, who needs God?
 - a) Meanwhile, there's a Promised Land just waiting there for you, with a God-blessed life and with a mission in this world with a transcendent purpose that ties you to eternal rewards that will one day take your breath away.
- M. **"So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."**
1. Why did the generations of Amos' day invent their own rules for life, and exchange them for God's laws? Unbelief.
 2. Why were they under judgment? Because you can be blessed with every blessing in God's inventory, but if you walk in unbelief, you will not feel like it.
 - a) You are rich but you feel poor.
 - b) You are protected but you feel exposed.
 - c) You are loved but you feel abandoned.
 3. The problem is never that God stopped blessing you. That would be impossible because you are in Christ and God can't stop blessing Christ.
 4. The problem is not that God stopped blessing you. The problem is that you stopped feeling the blessings that grace has poured all over you. That's the problem. You have stopped sensing the blessings dropping around you every single day... and that is because you have hardened your heart in unbelief.
 - a) And so the devil has convinced you to turn away from God because he has let you down.
 - b) This is the generation of Amos' day.
 - c) And now the fruit is over-ripe. The countdown is at zero. And their nation will be destroyed.
- N. As a Child of God, you are blessed. The blessing of God may not be obvious to you, but know you are blessed.
1. God's blessing may not be visible to the naked eye. But you need to know that you are blessed.
 2. All throughout the Bible, God gives assurances of his blessing. So there is no need for you, or for any child of God, to fear. God will supply. God will provide.
 3. As David declares,
 - a) *"Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry, but those who trust in the LORD will lack no good thing."* (Psalm 34:10)
 4. God's blessing is real, and it needs to fill our minds, so it can fuel our faith. A mindset of abundance is your birthright. A mindset of blessing and of grace.
 5. But a spirit of deficit, is not anything a child of the Most High God should have. A worry that God will not provide, this is a mindset the enemy uses to attack us.
 6. To try and break us. To try and break us down. To try and take us off of the path of a God-blessed life, and put us on the path of the self-blessed life—the self-made life, with very little reference to God that actually matters.
 7. As children of God we need to have Psalm 34:10 imprinted in our hearts and in our minds: "those who trust in the Lord will lack no good thing."

8. The same goes for Psalm 23:1:
 9. You must tell yourself,
 - a) The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want (meaning I shall not lack anything I need).
 - b) My cup runneth over.
 10. His supply is enough and more than enough.
 11. Paul asked,
 - a) *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"* (Romans 8:32)
 12. And
 - a) *"...All things are yours.... And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."* (1 Corinthians 3:21b, 23)
 13. If in God's design, all things are yours, why would you craft a life of your own design?
 14. You must tell yourself that fear is not from God. Doubt is not your portion. It is not of God.
 15. You have an inheritance. You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. All things are yours that pertain to life and godliness. There is nothing missing. There is nothing lacking.
 16. Your Father is good to you.
 - a) You do not need to go hunting for your blessing from anyone else.
 - b) You never need to redefine his laws or his ways. He knows you best and he loves you best.
 - c) And he causes all things to work together for your good.
 17. This is the great confidence of the child of God. This is your hope. This is your courage when life is hard. This is your peace when the makings of war are all around. This great confidence is your victory when the devil assaults you in the evil day.
 - a) You may be intensely pressured on every side, but you are not crushed.
 - b) You may be confused, but you never give up.
 - c) You may be persecuted, but you know your Father is with you.
 - d) You may be knocked down, but you are never knocked out. (Paraphrased from 2 Corinthians 4:8,9)
 - O. The book of Amos had to be written, because the epidemic of unbelief had to be stopped. The epidemic of unbelief had to be stopped, because unbelief traps a generation in the wilderness outside the Promised Land.
 - P. And that wilderness is where the downpour of God's justice rains down and the seduction of demonic doctrines locks you in.
- V. Conclusion
- A. I said there were three countdown clocks running over every life:
 1. **The day you die.**
 2. **The day Jesus comes back.**
 3. **The day your spiritual consequences catch up to you.**
 - B. But we didn't finish talking about them.
 1. The first clock is unpredictable and irreversible.
 2. The second clock is unpredictable and irreversible.
 - C. But here's some good news.
 1. The third clock is **predictable**....
 - a) You actually see it coming. God has some built in alarm bells for you when you're on the wrong path. Wake up calls. Warnings from friends. Sermons like this one. A praying mother back at home.
 - b) All throughout your life, God has been calling you. God warns you. Your own conscience adds its warnings. That little voice inside tells you this will not end well.
 - c) It's predicable. No honest person is really surprised when their spiritual consequences catch up to them. It is predictable.
 2. Which means is is **reversible**.
 - a) How? End your unbelief.
 - b) You can turn around. You can turn around today. You don't have to hit rock bottom. You don't have to go all the way to destruction. You don't have to make it worse than it already is.
 - c) You say, Bill I've wasted so much time, so many years.
 - (1) And I say to you, only God can restore the years that the locusts have eaten.
 - d) God says there is hope for you. He promises there is life for you. There's forgiveness for you. There's a new start for you. There's a better way. His arms are open wide. Run home to him.
 - e) You've spent a long time running down a dead end road. You've been trying to fill an emptiness inside your soul. But you've never found what you were searching for.
 - f) I'm here to tell you only Jesus can satisfy your soul.
 - g) He's calling your name. No more running in circles. Bring your life back to perfect righteousness and perfect love in a walk according to God's design for his glory and your joy.