

April 13, 2025

Return: Interceding for the Nation

Amos 7:1-9

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction... What place does the Christian have among today's culture? In a culture that is rapidly running away from God, what function do we have in such a society? While this question can be answered in a variety of ways, I believe that two of the most important functions we, as Christians, have in our world today, and it's been the same throughout all of history, is, first, that of a herald or messenger, effectively communicating the totality of the word of God, both the bad news, that we are all sinners and stand condemned before God in need of a savior, and the good news, that God provided that savior in the person of his son, Jesus. And secondly, as people are wrestling with where they are on that spectrum of the good news and bad news, we have the awesome privilege and responsibility of being intercessors.

And by intercessors, I mean the crying out to God on behalf of others. And we see both of these functions on display in our text today in Amos 7 where we see the Amos communicate the truth about God's judgment, and his intercession for his people. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the word of God from the Book of Amos ch.7, vs. 1-9 [Read Amos 7:1-9]

We begin with the truth about God's judgment. And this is a point that we have already established in the book of Amos, and really all the minor prophets we've covered so far, rebellion brings the judgment of God. As Kathleen and I were reading this week, following the 2 year bible plan, I was reminded of the fact that God's judgment should not have come as a surprise to Israel for God had already told them what would happen if they rebelled and strayed away from him. In Deut. 4:25-27, as Moses is recounting for the next generation the commandments given to the first generation out of Egypt, who couldn't enter the promised land because of their sin, he says this to them who are about to enter,

"When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, and you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you."

We can see this play out in the three visions of judgment that the Lord shows Amos here in our text in ch.7. There's actually a total of five different visions recorded in chs. 7-9, but we're only looking at the first three today because I think they best describe what is going on and how Amos responds to these visions.

Now, all of these visions describe the same thing, God's Judgment on Israel for her rebellion. And the first vision the Lord shows to Amos is a vision of locusts. [Read vs. 1]

This is a vision of a locust plague that the Lord intends to send upon his rebellious children. This shows us that God can, and will, use nature and not just fire and brimstone

or armies to bring judgment. And the locusts, we are told, would come upon “the latter growth,” and the growth “after the king’s mowings.” This requires some explanation. There were two main crops each year in ancient Israel. The first was planted in the fall, watered by the late autumn rains and harvested in the spring. The second was planted in winter, watered by the spring rains and harvested in the early summer.

Now, the “king’s mowings” here is describing some or all of the first harvest which was a tax to the king. And so it's late in the second harvest, after the “kings mowings” that, then, Amos saw a swarm of locusts coming to devour the crops of Israel. This left the Israelites with nothing at all after the king took his taxes and the locusts took the rest which would result in famine and starvation for the people.

And this is a devastating picture of judgment for Israel. The locusts would destroy the latter growth and the Israelites main food supplies would be decimated by divine judgment in response to Israel’s sin.

Next, we have a vision of fire. [Read vs. 4] This is no ordinary fire, like a wildfire we have seen in the news, but more of the fire and brimstone type that I mentioned before. We can see this in the fact that it “devoured the great deep,” and “was eating up the land.” So land and water fall under the fire of God’s judgment. There’s not much else to say here other than in this vision see the totality of divine judgment, that God’s judgment will come and it will be total in its execution with no escape.

Third, and perhaps the most well-known of all the visions of Amos, we have a vision of a plumb line. [Read vs. 7-9]

What is a plumb line? It is a tool, a string with a lead weight on the bottom, that establishes a true vertical line. If you go and stand by a wall and hold the plumb line next to it you can tell whether or not the wall is straight or crooked. If it appears to be leaning in any direction, then the integrity of the wall is brought into question, because, by logic, the plumb line is straight. So, the integrity of wall or building is “judged” by the plumb line.

This is the image the Lord God is using in this vision. He is “setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel.” The question is, “How do we measure up?” Indeed, we all stand beside the plumb line of God. The plumb line is God’s character and God’s word. God is just, true, holy, and right. If our lives are not in line with the plumb line, it is not the fault of the plumb line. The plumb line is true. God’s character is true. God’s word is the great measuring standard. So, if we are not in line so to speak, it is because we have turned from God.

The point is clear enough: humanity is judged on the basis of our conformity to God’s character and his standards. And, in context, it means this, that Israel's turning away from God and his ways invites his judgment. And this is true for us as well. Again, this has been well established already in Amos: sin brings God's judgment and we cannot stand beneath it.

But there is a new element in Amos 7, something we have not seen yet in our look into the minor prophets, and that is that Amos intercedes for the people. After the first vision of judgment, the vision of locusts, we read back in vs 2: [Read vs. 2]

And after the second vision of judgment, the vision of fire, we read: [Read vs. 5] What is this, “O Lord God, please cease?” This is called intercession. It is crying out to God for mercy on behalf of a guilty people. In other words, Amos is saying, “do not do what you

intend to do!” And we have seen this before in scripture, more than once in fact, but one of the more famous instances is Moses’ actions in Exodus 32 after he came down from Mt. Sinai and found that made a golden calf and had begun to worship it:

“The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will, forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” (Ex. 32:30-32)

This is intercession. This is what true prophets do. They not only warn about the truth of God’s judgment, but they also intercede for the guilty. And, in fact, this is what we are all to do as followers of Jesus: intercede for others. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book, “Life Together,” wrote:

“Intercession means no more than to bring our brother [or sister] into the presence of God, to see [them] under the Cross of Jesus as a poor human being and sinner in need of grace. . . . [Their] need and [their] sin become so heavy and oppressive that we feel them as our own, and we can do nothing else but pray.”

The apostle Paul makes this point very clear in 1 Tim. 2 that we are all to engage in heartfelt intercession on behalf of others. He says, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.” (1 Tim. 2:1) God calls all Christians to be intercessors. It is God’s desire that every believer be active in intercessory prayer. What a wonderful and exalted privilege we have in being able to come boldly before the throne of Almighty God with our prayers and requests, not only for ourselves, but especially for others. Whether its for the salvation of specific people or for an entire nation, we can make intercession for people by pleading for mercy through Jesus our Lord.

Now, notice, in both vs. 2 and vs. 5, Amos’s rationale for mercy is the same: “How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” Hear the pity in these words. How on earth can humanity, even though guilty, withstand the judgment of God? The truth is we can’t and the Lord is asked to consider the weakness and frailty of human beings.

The heart of intercession cries out for mercy, for pity, even though such is not “deserved” by the guilty party. Amos did not defend Israel by saying they were innocent. Rather, the prophet appealed to the gracious nature of God, pleading for a guilty people, asking that his grace be greater than his wrath. Which leads us to our last point this morning, the heart of God.

We discussed the truth of God’s judgment and Amos’ intercession for the people. But, how does God respond to Amos’ intercession? In the first two instances when Amos intercedes and asks for mercy, God relents and does not execute the judgment he showed Amos in the visions in vs. 2-3, 5.

In both cases, the Lord says, “This shall not be.” Meaning, “This judgment shall not come to pass.” He hears the cry of his prophet. He agrees to withhold judgment. Here we see the mercy of God.

In Micah 7, this is put so beautifully, “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.” (Micah 7:18)

This is true. God delights in showing mercy. The Lord is not cruel. His judgment always emerges out of His love. He would be perfectly just to bring judgment every time and his judgment is even a painful communication of his love, his calling us back to himself through ways that shake us to the core.

As an example, notice after the third vision, the vision of the plumb line, God says he will not show mercy. He will not relent. And this is very important. Why will God not relent? Listen again. [Read vs. 8-9]

An important point is being made here, and the point is that the plumb line is God himself. Judgment, then, is not merely isolated responses to isolated actions. The problem is more fundamental than that. We, by our very sinful nature, are ever in violation of God’s standards. We stand before the divine plumb line at every moment, and the result is not good. We are crooked. We are fallen. The problem is deeper than just the surface. It’s more fundamental. In the words of the NASA official during the Apollo 13 mission, “Houston, we have a problem,” and the problem is us.

So, no, the Lord will not relent. Judgment will eventually, and does, come upon Israel. It has too. It will not be plague of locusts or fire and brimstone, but judgment would come for God is holy and just and cannot let sin slide. Our lives of sin are not “plumb” when compared to God’s standards of holiness. And so we’re stuck.

But there’s hope. Let me bring you back to Deut. 4 after Moses tells Israel of the judgment that would come if they sinned against God, we read this is starting in vs. 29, [Read] There’s hope of a restoration here, one that will be brought about by God himself. Why would he not totally destroy Israel? Because of the covenant he made with them and they being his chosen instrument to bring forth the Messiah into the world to save it. You see, Moses and Amos and every other example we find in scripture of men making intercession for other people are all great examples, but they are in complete. Why, because they were all human and could not make intercession of a scale large enough to take care of the problem.

But, let me ask you something: What if there was One who could make constant, perpetual, eternal intercession for His people? What if there was One who never stopped crying out for mercy?

This brings us back to Heb. 7, and a portion of the passage that was read earlier today. “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb. 7:23-25)

Jesus “always lives to make intercession” for “those who draw near to God through him.” If you are in Christ today, Jesus never stops speaking your name to his Father. Jesus never stops making intercession for you. And on what basis can Jesus, our Prophet, Priest, and King, offer this unending intercession? On the basis of the sacrifice he offered of his own life, on the basis of the cross, on the basis of the empty tomb, which we will celebrate next week, “He always lives to make intercession.”

Christ is pictured in the New Testament as the ultimate intercessor, and because of this, all Christian prayer becomes intercession since it is offered to God through and by Christ. Jesus closed the gap between us and God when He died on the cross. Because of Jesus' mediation, we can now intercede in prayer on behalf of others. "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34).

So as believers, let us take our place with great courage to bring the message of the good news of the Gospel to a world that needs to hear there is judgment coming but that God has made a way of escape through faith in his son Jesus. And in the meantime, let us be a people that intercedes for others, by bringing them before the throne of God to plead for his mercy. Let us pray.

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Amen.