

Amos 7:10-15

¹⁰Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel:

Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to endure all of his words. ¹¹This is what Amos says: “Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into exile away from its own soil.”

¹²Then Amaziah said to Amos, “You seer, get out of here! Flee to the land of Judah. You may eat food and prophesy there. ¹³But you must never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the sanctuary of the king and the national temple.”

¹⁴Then Amos responded to Amaziah:

I was not a prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet. Rather, I was a sheep breeder and I took care of sycamore fig trees. ¹⁵But the LORD took me from tending flocks, and the LORD said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the times they are a-changing. You may recall that song from Bob Dylan from the 1960s. It was a song about rebelling against authority and the way things always had been. It was about the next generation living how they wanted to live and doing the things they wanted to do, no matter what the older generation thought or had to say about it. He wrote, “*Your old road is rapidly aging, please get out of the new one if you can’t lend a hand, for the times they are a changing.*” Many would say it was that mentality that led to many of the problems of today.

And, when it comes to Christianity, we might be tempted to think that the times are still a-changing. We can’t have the 10 Commandments in public places anymore. No praying in public schools. People crying out against having “In God We Trust” on our money and police cars. And even putting what God says in his Word into practice in our own buildings and institutions is met with sometimes violent outbursts and lawsuits. On and on we could go, worse and worse things get as the times seem to keep on a-changing.

But do they? Have they changed all that much? It’s never been “this bad” you say? I think the prophet Amos would beg to differ. He preached the Word of God and a priest ratted him out. Times were so bad that God’s message that Amos delivered to his people was, “**The king will die by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into exile.**” And Amaziah’s response, which was likely the king’s response, was, “**Get out of here! Go prophesy somewhere else. This is the King’s sanctuary and the**

national temple.” What an incredible thing to say. They were in Bethel, the name given to that place by Jacob the morning after he had the dream with the ladder to heaven. He named it Bethel because it means, “House of God,” and this priest just called it the sanctuary of the king, and a “*national temple.*”

Times have changed? Not really. Religion for the people of Israel had largely become just their national heritage. They talked about it and knew about it, but it wasn’t something they actually believed in.

Times haven’t really changed at all. It was bad then, it’s bad now. And the world wants us to react in fear, to be more tolerant, or else! To exclude more and more of what God says, or else! It’s the trap the devil uses to turn us away from God. When we see how the world lives, how it hasn’t changed in 6000 years, and it isn’t going to change, wouldn’t it just be easier to go along with them as much as we can? Not in everything, but in some things that really aren’t a big deal? If we can’t beat them, let’s join them — for the good of the church! As long as 2 people love each other, they should be able to live together before marriage. As long as 2 people love each other, they should be able to get married in our churches, no matter their gender. Wouldn’t it be easier? Wouldn’t it be easier to change the doctrine of the roles of men and women that God has laid out in his word, or of church fellowship, or the real presence — Certainly not anything having to do with what Jesus did on the cross, still by grace through faith alone, but just those things that don’t really matter...

Some have asked from time to time in Bible class, “How do these false teachings come about?” Many are from attitudes like this, this trap of the devil, which isn’t the kind of trap that springs suddenly, but gradually over time. That attitude that we have to do something to preserve the church. As if God’s Word stands forever, only by our doing. Times have changed. The church must change too, or die.

Wouldn’t that have been easier for Amos? I mean, his message was pretty harsh. I doubt many people would survive a trip to the king in which they tell he’s going to die. And yet that’s the message God gave to Amos to deliver. I doubt Amos was winning any popularity contests in Israel after proclaiming God’s Word that they were going to be carried off into exile. And yet that’s the message God gave to Amos to deliver. And so he delivered it.

Was it a difficult message? Yes. Are God’s teachings today still difficult to understand and live out in our sinful world? Yes, and yet what is the alternative? To walk right into the devil’s carefully laid trap, thinking you

are supporting God's Word and helping God's people and preserving the church, when really you're tearing it apart and forfeiting your own faith.

Lord, give us a faith to trust your word even when we don't fully understand it. To hold on to your truths even in a world that despises them and makes it so difficult.

Because while those issues the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh struggle with seem to not really matter, they do. They are the solid foundation on which we build our faith — All of God's Word. If we start chipping away at any of these truths of God's Word, where does the chipping stop? When does our foundation crumble?

Instead of running to chip away at that foundation when we don't understand it, when we don't like it, or when we think it just easier, may we run to it and find the strength to continue to strive to uphold all of what God's Word says, to be his witnesses in a world that couldn't care less. For there at the heart of it all, we see our Savior who saved us when we couldn't have cared less.

Look at the patience of our God here in our text. God knew the king wasn't going to change his ways, he knew the people weren't going to listen to his warning, and yet he gave it one last time. One final call to repentance, to stop dismissing what God had said and turn back to him. That same patient God waits for us to do the same, to turn from our sinful and selfish ways, to turn back to God's Word and the Savior he reveals to us there. That foundation of Christ and Christ alone, living, suffering, and dying because of our sins. And rising on the third day in glorious victory, our victory, "Because I live you also will live," he declared.

It is that wonderful gospel truth that leads us to say, "If God did that for me, sent his son to save me, to forgive me, to make me his forever, maybe, just maybe, all that God says in his Word does matter, and is a big deal. It's the gospel that makes us see the trap the devil has laid before us, to step over it and around it, with such a firm respect and resolve for all that God says to us and for us in his Word.

It can be tempting to change what God's Word says to attract more people. And if our goal was only to have more members, or to please the mainline thinking of the day, then yes, we would probably do things differently. If that was our goal, it wouldn't matter. But our goal is to preach and teach all that God has said, to adhere to all of it, that they might be saved.

When we make our own benefit the reason for reaching to to people, we are no longer reaching out with the gospel. We are no longer seeking the

lost. God help us if it's for gimmicks that people walk through these doors. God help us if the lost we seek are only walking budget contributors. They are souls in desperate need to hear the truth of all God has to say — about their sin, and his grace; about the hell they deserve, and the heaven he won for them; about the completely messed up world in which we live, and the incredible blessings of peace, security, well being, a clear conscience, and confidence in the future, as we strive to hold to all of his Word. This is the message they need to hear. May they always hear it here.

Family Fare was packed last week. So was Walmart. Everywhere was. There were a lot of people up north. Why were those places so packed? They had things people needed. And so do we. They just don't know it. They don't know how much they need what we have here. How do we make that need known? by sharing the truth of God's Word — all of it.

The World, the times, they have not really changed. And neither has our God and his Word and promises. May God, through is Word, give us the faith of Amos, to boldly and confidently declare the greatest message in all the world — the Gospel — to the world around us, the people who so desperately need to hear it, that as many as possible would heed his warning, hear his gospel, and be saved. In Jesus' name, amen.