

<sup>7</sup> This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. <sup>8</sup> And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?"  
"A plumb line," I replied.

Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

<sup>9</sup> "The high places of Isaac will be destroyed  
and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined;  
with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam."

<sup>10</sup> Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. <sup>11</sup> For this is what Amos is saying:

" 'Jeroboam will die by the sword,  
and Israel will surely go into exile,  
away from their native land.' "

<sup>12</sup> Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. <sup>13</sup> Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."

<sup>14</sup> Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. <sup>15</sup> But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' <sup>16</sup> Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say,  
" 'Do not prophesy against Israel,  
and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.'

<sup>17</sup> "Therefore this is what the LORD says:  
" 'Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,  
and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword.  
Your land will be measured and divided up,  
and you yourself will die in a pagan <sup>[a]</sup> country.  
And Israel will certainly go into exile,  
away from their native land.' "

-- Amos 7:7-17

During high school, I was obsessed over U2's *Rattle and Hum*. I would listen to *Angel of Harlem* before every race. *All I Want Is You* was the second song I learned to play on guitar. And to this day, when no one's looking, I try to sing the gospel choir part

for *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*. I used to think it was all about the music, but the more I think about it, the reason I have been enamoured with U2 all these years has been their prophetic viewpoint.

You may know that the band itself is named after the spy plane that the CIA used to soar over Soviet territory during the height of the Cold War. The principle behind the design of the plane was that it was meant to fly so high that it would escape radar detection. However, it turns out that this was not the case at all. Soviet radar *could* often detect the spy planes gathering information about key military installations, but the U2 flew so high and fast that no missile could reach it. Both the band and the plane are similar in their vocations as providing perspectives on life “on the ground”. Both the plane and the band, then, are prophets in their own way.

I used to think that a prophet was someone who simply told the future; like the Oracle at Delphi breathing volcanic fumes and dispensing military wisdom to Alexander the Great. Yet what we see from this text in Amos is that a biblical prophet has little to do with mystically-acquired knowledge of the future, but instead lives out a vision that gives perspective on the present. The call of the prophet, then, is one who speaks to the present based on a vision of the Kingdom of God.

In chapter 7, we meet up with Amos after he has given a number of speeches that condemn the lifestyles of the rich and famous. It is worth noting that Amos, speaking for Yahweh, does not condemn the status of being wealthy itself. Rather, the word he casts aspersion upon the hoarding of wealth at the expense of the poor

and the perversion of justice<sup>1</sup>—which in the biblical sense means being right-related with one’s neighbour. Archaeologists who have excavated near the area where Amos was prophesying have found that two hundred years before Amos, the houses were all on lots that were relatively equal in size. However, by Amos’ time, the distribution of land had become so uneven that a wealthy few lived in mansions while many more lived in cramped slums. So while some got fat, others got thin.

The central message of the book of Amos is that you cannot possibly be worshipping Yahweh while ignoring the mandates of right-relatedness—of loving your neighbour—that are central to right worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is not interested in personal piety when it is only a matter of empty religious show. What matters to God is love for Him and love for others—the latter law being one that is like the first.<sup>2</sup> Israel was doing its best to keep up religious appearances by observing all the festivals and sacrifices, but their hearts were hard and they had ceased to love. The ancient religion of Israel was corrupted into becoming a part of the establishment, and the Levitical priesthood was now working for The Man—and The Man’s job, as it ever has been, was to keep people down.

Amos, a prophet by calling, has his mouth opened by God to speak into this mess of injustice and asinine religiosity. He condemns Israel for not only forgetting who God really is, but what God really cares about—people. He reminds The Man of the consequences of the covenant that was struck between Yahweh and His chosen people, the one that we read of in Deuteronomy 28. There, God promises His people that if

---

<sup>1</sup> “To establish the heavenly norm or pattern on earth.” – Waltke

<sup>2</sup> Mt 22:39

they continue to follow Him and practice His commandments—the majority of which deal with loving your neighbour—blessing would continue to follow all of Jacob’s children. However, should they turn and forget Yahweh’s heart and cease to pursue the laws of loving God and loving neighbour, curses would follow. It is the cursedness of life to come that Amos speaks to the establishment. In the time of Amos, the unfaithfulness of Israel to the laws of love will now result in Israel’s cursedness and ruin.

Amaziah is one of these priests who not only works for the establishment, but works at the national chapel, the center of the Northern Kingdom’s religious life at Bethel. At that time, it was normal for the royal courts to employ personal prophets and priests. Prophecy itself was a profession for a number of people who went to school in order to become one. However, Amaziah’s priesthood has lost its teeth because he presumes that the Temple exists for the King, not the King for the love of God. Amaziah is a part of the establishment—he’s working for The Man. Amaziah has a vested interest in the continuation of the status quo. Amaziah is the string quartet on the deck of the Titanic that keeps playing even as the ship goes down.

So Amaziah goes to The Man. He says *“Do you realize that Amos is predicting the end of your government and a disruption to the status quo? The land—the people—are getting all riled up because of his gloom and doom. And you, O King, know that a people whose happiness is interrupted is a restless people, open to rebellion against the state.”*

Then Amaziah turns to Amos: *“Get out of here rabble-rouser! Go back to your hometown and speak there—but how dare you do it here where everyone is happy with the way things are going. How dare you harsh our mellow.”*

The reply of Amos to Amaziah is one that sheds light on what it means to be a prophet. First, a prophet is one who is called by God by means of renewed vision. Second, a prophet is one who speaks this vision, naysayers be damned.

Amos replies in this way: *“I’m not a prophet like you’re a priest. I’m not part of the prophetic guild of yes-men that the King gathers around himself. I’m a shepherd and gardener from down south—a farmer. But here’s the real difference between you and I, Amaziah: I’ve been listening to God and obeying Him. You’ve been listening to yourself and following your own way.”*

Amos is a prophet by calling, not by profession—and what fuels his calling is his God-given vision. Three separate visions spur him into speaking against the establishment: turn from your empty religion. Turn from your greed. Turn, because of the suffering of your people. Turn, Yahweh’s had enough.

You have to wonder what gave Amos the guts to go up against The Man. What was it that enabled him to persevere in his calling? Was it because Amos had some guarantee of angelic armies coming to his aid? No, Amos was enabled to stick to the propagation of God’s word to Israel simply because he was faithful to his calling. He stood outside the established power structures and then spoke truth to them. It made Amos an outcast from proper society—an alien and a stranger to the way of the

world<sup>3</sup>—but this is where all faithfulness to God will lead us in the end. Living in a vision of the Kingdom of God always puts us at odds with the world.

So what Kingdom vision are we to live in?

As the inheritors of the covenant between Yahweh and humanity, we the People of God are now to be for God a people set-apart<sup>4</sup>; a sign and instrument of God that He has heard the cry of the world lost in darkness and now is doing something about it.

You may ask, “*how on earth can a little church that meets in the upper room of a West Side community centre be a revolutionary people?*” The answer is that we are to be a people who live out the counter-culture of God’s Kingdom in the midst of the world that has rejected Him. We, the People of God, live out the law of love: to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*”; and, to “*Love our neighbours as ourselves.*”<sup>5</sup> This is the fundamental calling of those who follow Jesus.

Amos followed his calling by speaking this vision against the establishment of his day. What, then, is our calling—and more importantly, how are we to speak this vision of the Kingdom to our world in our time? We may think that only pastors are allowed the privilege of preaching the good news of freedom from status quo in Christ, but the reality is that we are *all* given voices. Our *life* speaks for us as we follow our individual calling and as the beloved people of God together—the Church. It is in this way we begin to understand that our life’s calling has everything to do with living prophetically

---

<sup>3</sup> Heb 11:13

<sup>4</sup> Ex 19:6, 1 Pet 2:9

<sup>5</sup> Luke 10:27

both as individuals and as the Body of Christ. We reject the way of the world for the way of the Kingdom.

What does this mean? It means that as we individually discern our specific vocations within the Kingdom, we are then called to live out our Kingdom citizenship together. But make no mistake: living this out is not a matter of becoming a holy huddle, but of radical engagement with the world that does not live according to the laws of love. We are not just high-altitude spy planes that never touch the earth—rather, we are a people who get dirty as we live out the counter-culture of God. We will meet our shares of Amaziahs who want only to maintain the status quo—but if we are to be the people of God, this means that we are to continually challenge the way of the world and offer an alternative vision of reality.

As a community of people living out prophetic lives together, we are all called to live in such a way that as the world watches us, they can only come to one of two conclusions: either these followers of Jesus are deluded fools, or they know and love the living God and each other. It has always been this way: the prophetic power of Israel to the world at large was spoken largely through the quality of their love for God and for each other.<sup>6</sup> It is to be the same with us. We are all to live for something worth dying for.

- 1.) What does it mean to live prophetically, both individually and corporately?
- 2.) Given the God-granted perspective you have on the world, what is your Kingdom calling?

---

<sup>6</sup> John 13:35