

At Ease

Introduction

- Jesus said, “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.” (Rev 3:17-18, ESV)
- We live in incredibly affluent and peaceful times in the United States of America, especially compared to the standards of living throughout the rest of the world, and even compared to Bible times. Though we thank God that we experience this time of wealth and stability, are there unique challenges we face as we are **at ease**? Jesus, after all, rebuked the church at Laodicea for becoming too comfortable with their riches which had caused them to become lukewarm!
- Let’s look back to a time where God’s people experienced a similar situation in their lives during the ministry of Amos the prophet, examining three specific problems they encountered because of prosperity, and learn the lessons from their mistakes.

Vision Problems [Amos 1 – 2]

- **Blind To The Poor**
 - The class division in Israel had reached such a point that the rich no longer helped the poor, instead they oppressed them and took advantage of them, regarding them as nothing. “Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted ...” (Amos 2:6–7, ESV)
 - So intertwined is generosity with the character of a disciple of Jesus, that one of the first things we see the church doing after it was established in Acts 2 was supplying the needs of the poor among them by selling their possessions. Is generosity a part of your spiritual service? Do you look for opportunities to help your brother, to care for them in a material sense? Too often we can adopt the “go in peace, be warmed and filled” idea that James speaks about (James 2:16) without ever *doing* anything to help them. What good is that?
- **Blind To God’s Power**
 - The Israelites bowed to the idolatry of their own wealth and forgot that it was God who brought them to such prosperity and power. ““Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?” declares the Lord.” (Amos 2:9–11, ESV)
 - God has truly blessed us all individually, but beware that the enjoyment of your treasures doesn’t distract you from their source! As Jesus told the rich man in Mark 10 to sell all that he had and give it to the poor, would you be willing to part with your possessions if asked? God

is the best giver there can be, and the way we give to others will determine how much He continues to shower upon us (Luke 6:38). As He took away from them His blessings to try and get them to return (Amos 4:6-11), He may very well do the same to us someday.

Worship Problems [Amos 3 – 6]

- **Seeking Neither God Or Good**

- Israel had lost their focus on God to bow down to false idols and creations of man. “For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: “Seek me and live;” (Amos 5:4, ESV) “Seek the Lord and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel,” (Amos 5:6, ESV) “Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said.” (Amos 5:14, ESV)
- Do you serve God alone or materialism? Are you consumed with His word or with the concerns of heaping up more physical treasure into your storehouse? When we truly put our priorities in order and seek Him first, Jesus has promised that all of the material concerns of life will be provided (Matt 6:33), but do you believe that? What are you most worried about, gaining the whole world or gaining your soul (Matt 16:26)?

- **Going Through The Motions**

- It's not that Israel had completely abandoned the worship of God, but were merely going through the motions while living unjust and unrighteousness lives. “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:21–24, ESV)
- The application of these verses is so clear and necessary today! Our songs, prayers, observance of the Lord's Supper, and all of our worship to God is NOTHING without the undercurrent of justice and righteousness cleansing our hearts. God is not like the idols of materialism, He searches the heart (Jer 17:10) and knows our every motivation and thought. Is your worship merely a “noise” (1 Cor 13:1) to God, or is instead the heartfelt expression of your love and devotion to Him?

Security Problems [7-9]

- **Unafraid Of The Judgment**

- It's hard to understand, but Israel somehow felt so confident in their standing before God that they were actually wanting the day of the Lord to come! “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:18–20, ESV)
- Many religious people will stand before God in the judgment and hear, “depart from Me, I never knew you!” (Matt 7:21-23) Are you seeing your spiritual standing before God with clarity? Are you ready for the day of the Lord's judgment or will you be caught off guard? We

all need to have a sense of fear, importance, and urgency to be ready for the day when our works will be judged.

- **Feasting Into Fasting**

- All the while Israel was enjoying themselves, God had a plan to bring them to ruin for their unfaithfulness. "I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." (Amos 8:10-11, ESV)
- If we allow the pleasures of this life to distract us from dedicated service, we too will have our pleasure changed to bitterness. Don't get too comfortable here! This earthly life is just a tent while we travel to our ultimate home, made without hands. Consider how comfortable of a life Jesus had on this earth, and remember that He promised His disciples to experience the same kinds of rejection and persecutions in our own lives. Trial is never a bad thing when it strengthens our patience and trust in the Lord! (James 1:2-4)

Conclusion

- There is a glimmer of hope in the story of Israel, and that was the coming of Jesus to save the world. "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the Lord who does this." (Amos 9:11-12, ESV)
- Jesus paid the ultimate price by hanging on the cross for your sins. He endured cruel treatment, rejection, and material want for your sake. Will you allow the pleasures of life to distract you from following Him and from serving your neighbor as He instructed? Or will you use your material blessings in the service of others, acknowledging Him as the source?