

AMOS – THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE

What is the common idea behind something that is called “major” as compared with something that is “minor?” For example, how is the minor league in baseball different than the major league? How is a minor storm different than a major storm? And how is a minor change different than a major change? Is minor surgery different than major surgery? Usually, when we hear the word, “minor,” we think of something that is not as good or as important as something that has the word “major” in front of it

That’s where we can become confused about some of the divisions of the Bible. The messages of the prophets have been divided into what is called “major prophets” and “minor” prophets. Using the thinking I just described to you, that would lead us to believe that those books which are called minor are less important than those that are called major. That’s not true. The minor prophets are called minor because they are shorter, not because they are less important.

Among those books in the Bible that are called minor prophets, there is a book called “Amos.” Whenever I hear the name “Amos,” I think of a t.v. program that I used to watch many years ago called “Amos and Andy.” This is a different Amos. The Amos in the Bible was a prophet who lived during the time of Hosea, about 750 years before Christ. He was also on the tail end of the ministry of Jonah and Elisha. Although Amos lived a long time ago, his message is as relevant today as it was when he lived. Today, we are going to focus our attention especially on the man himself. What was this man like?

1. AMOS WAS NOT A LIKELY CHOICE TO BE A PROPHET OF GOD

Amos 1.1, "The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake."

This word translated "herdsmen" is a word that was used to describe somebody who bred and supplied sheep. But not only was he a rancher, he was a farmer. (7.14) "and a tender of sycamore fruit." Amos was a caretaker of sycamore trees that grew figs.

Amos lived and worked in a little village called Tekoa that was located in a very dreary, barren place that is known as the wilderness of Judea. In that country, barren atmosphere Amos listened to the voice of God and obeyed.

2. AMOS WAS NOT WANTED BY HIS AUDIENCE

a) HE DIDN'T HAVE THE RIGHT BACKGROUND

You may remember that after the death of Solomon, the nation of Israel divided into 2 kingdoms, the nation of Judah in the South and the nation of Israel in the north which was led by a man named Jeroboam.

When Jeroboam led the break away of the ten northern tribes from the two southern ones, he established his own place of worship. Instead of Jerusalem being the place for worship as God had chosen, Jeroboam made Bethel the worship center. He knew that if his people continued to worship in Jerusalem, which was located in the kingdom of Judah, they would likely become loyal to Judah, and he would lose his kingdom. So, Jeroboam ignored God's command and set up his own place of worship in Bethel. He had his own priests who offered sacrifices and his own feast days. So Bethel became the center of idolatry in Israel. God called Amos to go cry against the corruption of Israel and against Bethel and the kind of worship that was going on there, but he was anything but accepted.

It would have been bad enough if a prophet from their own nation would have spoken out against the nation's idolatry, but Amos grew up in the southern kingdom called Judah. To have this farmer from the rival nation to come in and preach against them was not a welcomed thing.

b) HE DIDN'T HAVE THE RIGHT MESSAGE

When Amos began his ministry, it was the best of times. It was a time of prosperity and confidence, a time of relative peace, a time when most everything looked pretty good. In such a time no one wants to hear someone say things are going to change for the worst. Who wants to hear bad news about the future when what's going on in the present looks so good? And who needs to hear about God when we seem to be doing pretty good without Him? We've got money, and we're having a good time. Don't give us any bad news because we don't want to hear it.

A cartoon shows a couple leaving the church after worship, with the man saying to the pastor at the door, "I liked your sermon, except for the parts that made me feel guilty."

Amos was like a dark rain cloud on a sunny day. Nobody wants a rain cloud when a parade is going on. Amos tells the people the parade is going to end because the people have forsaken the true God. There will be no more prosperity and no more peace. God gives Amos a vision of a fruit basket (8:1-2).

Amos 8:1-2, "This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. 2 "What do you see, Amos?" he asked. "A basket of ripe fruit," I answered. Then the LORD said to me, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer."

Amos sees a basket full of delicious fruit. But the fruit that looks so good right now will not be so for long. Fruit does not last. In just a while the fruit rots and spoils, and nothing is left.

That's what it's like to live in a land and in a time when God is not honored. It's like a basket of summer fruit. Everything looks great right now, but rottenness is just around the corner. The good times won't last because God will spoil them. If we were really conscious of the fact that God is observing everything we do and think and that it all mattered to Him, we would probably live our lives very differently. We'd use our time differently. We would relate to people differently, and we'd spend our money differently. The people didn't like Amos' message.

Amos 7:6-13 says, "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. 11 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.'" 12 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. 13 Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."

Amos was told to get out. They didn't want anything to do with him. Things haven't changed. Sometimes the things people need to hear the most are the things they want to hear the least. Most people are not waiting with great anticipation for you to tell them about their need. If you wait for an invitation, you will probably never get one.

3. AMOS' BACKGROUND WAS NOT A PROBLEM FOR GOD

The description of Amos' call is found in

7:15, "Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

Amos' background and his lack of training didn't bother the Lord at all. In fact, God generally uses ordinary people for extraordinary things. Paul says in

1 Corinthians 1:26-29, "6 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God

chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29so that no one may boast before him.”

It is not uncommon for God to use ordinary people to do extraordinary things for Him. D.L. Moody was a famous evangelist who was born in 1837. His father died when he was 4 years old, and he was raised in poverty by his mother who couldn't make enough for herself and 7 children. He was a poor student in school and spoke very poor English even after he started preaching. In fact, when he started preaching, he would have to skip over some of the words in the Scripture he was reading because he couldn't pronounce the words.

When he was 17, he left home for Boston where his uncle hesitantly gave him a job as a shoe salesman. No doubt when D.L. Moody began to preach, some people said, “What can this uneducated shoe salesman say to us?” But God used D.L. Moody to shake the world for Christ.

Billy Sunday was born in 1862. As a young man, he was a baseball player, but he became a famous evangelist. It's likely that the sophisticated religious crowd asked, “What can this ex baseball player teach us?” But God used Moody and Sunday, in spite of their lack of training.

Such was the case with Amos. He was a layman, not a graduate of a prophetic school. He learned spiritual truth as he communed with God while caring for the flocks and orchards.

When God decides to use someone for His glory, He doesn't choose that person on the same basis that we would choose someone. Someone has said, "Man is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men and women." That's true. Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote, “It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus.”

There seem to be three characteristics of the kind of people God uses.

a) GOD USES PEOPLE WHO SURRENDER THEIR LIVES TO HIM

Romans 12:1, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”

A surrendered life is the most important, basic thing that is needed to be used by God. You lay down your dreams, your deepest desires in order to do whatever God leads you to do.

The French Foreign Legion had this motto: "If I falter, push me; If I stumble, pick me up; If I retreat, shoot me." Suppose that kind of commitment were required in order to be used of God. Would you qualify?

b) GOD USES PEOPLE WHO ARE SINGLE-MINDED

God uses people who are willing to give all they have to one cause-His cause. An old commercial went like this. The television screen is blank. Suddenly, the buzz of an alarm clock is heard. A bed lamp goes on and a hand reaches over to shut off the alarm. As the man sits up in bed, we hear a solemn voice: "The day cannot begin soon enough for a man possessed by a single aim in life. He is compelled by his drive to win." That drive in the commercial is to be on a winning team of stockbrokers. It pictures the kind of single-minded determination we should have to bring glory to God.

Amos had that single-minded devotion. Regardless of how the people of Israel resisted his prophecies, He was not deterred. "The Lion has roared," Amos declared, "Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?" (3:8)

God calls people who are single-minded in their devotion.

4. GOD USES PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TEMPORARY AND THE ETERNAL

If we live for today and its pleasures alone, then we will have very little concern about bringing glory to God through our lives. God uses people who understand that all we see around us is only temporary and that it will soon be over. God uses people who live their lives and make their decisions in the light of eternity.

A very old woman came to Jacob the baker to ask his advice. Jacob was renowned for his great wisdom. "Listen, young man!" I heard you talk about dying, and I'm going to die soon. I have a great deal of money. If you're so smart, why not tell me how I can take it with me?" Jacob just looked at her. "Well? What can be carried to the other side?" she asked.

"Everything of value," answered Jacob. Her greed excited, the old woman shouted, "How? How?" Jacob drew calmer. "In your memory," he answered. "Memory!" said the woman. "Memory can't carry wealth!" Jacob replied, "That is only because you have already forgotten what is of value." Jacob the baker was right. The only thing we can take with us to the next world are those things we have done for God.

Fellowship Bible Church

Pastor: Don Griffin

Amos lived a long time ago, but his life still speaks today. It leaves with us an example of how to be used by God. Do you fit God's job profile?