



Amos 6:1-7
 Minor Leagues:
 Insights from the Minor Prophets
 Do Unto Others...

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Have you ever wondered what it takes to really have an impact on somebody's life? The presumption, usually, is that it takes a long time to really have an impact on someone – a few years perhaps, maybe even longer – and that in order to do so you need to be an expert in some field of knowledge, or have a ton of experience in something. Amos shows us that we can have an impact on people without these things, and his message tells us what one of those impacts ought to be.

Unlike Joel, who we looked at last week, we know a fair amount about Amos, and can piece together some other things based on what we do know. All we know of Joel, besides his own name, is his dad's name. Which, with today being Father's Day, we can certainly acknowledge that that's an important piece of information. But with Amos, we know a lot more. First of all, Amos is one of the best-known prophets today. In fact, people who know nothing about the Christian faith have heard of Amos because of his Famous Amos cookies. Ok, the cookies have nothing to do with him, and undoubtedly when most people hear the name Amos, they just think of the cookies, and not the prophet.

But we do know quite a bit about him. The very opening of the writings of Amos starts with this: **“The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel” (Amos 1:1).** Right here we know where he was from – Tekoa, which was both a village about 10-12 miles south of Jerusalem that is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, and also a larger region around it that went by the same name. So he's from the southern kingdom of Judah, but his prophetic work was in the northern kingdom of Israel (we see more about that a bit later). We also learn in this verse who were the kings in the two kingdoms during his time as a prophet, which helps us date when he served as a prophet (the two overlapped for a 15 year period). We also learn that he was a shepherd, though the word used here is not the normal Hebrew

word for shepherd and really means someone who was in the sheep business...someone who owned or oversaw several flocks of sheep, and probably oversaw shepherds who would do a lot of the actual handling of the sheep. So right there we know quite a bit about him.

Then in Amos 7 we get a little more about him in a very interesting section of the text. Amaziah was the priest at Bethel at this time. Bethel was historically significant and had been a holy place of worship. But starting in the 800's B.C. and all the way through to about 630 B.C., it became a place where all kinds of pagan worship rituals and deities had been allowed to intermingle with the worship of Yahweh – the God of the Bible. King Josiah put an end to that corruption of worship over the course of a few years starting in 632 B.C. You can read all about the corruption and the reforms that King Josiah brought in the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

So Amaziah, the corrupt priest leading corrupt worship, confronts Amos and says to him “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom” (Amos 7:12-13). And then Amos answers, **“I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people in Israel””** (Amos 7:14-15).

So we learn more about Amos here: First, he's not a “professional prophet.” Amaziah actually uses a degrading term, calling him a “seer” and accuses him of prophesying for the sake of money. And Amos says, “Hey, that's not me. I was in the sheep business and helped manage an orchard. God called me out of that to preach up here in Israel – I'm no ‘professional prophet.’” Reading between the lines, we can take a decent guess that Amos was familiar with the northern kingdom, probably from business trips. He saw all that was wrong with the northern Kingdom – not that the southern kingdom was perfect, but it wasn't as corrupt as the north at that time – and God put it on his heart to try and steer them away from the calamity that would otherwise be coming.

So, two things we learn from Amos' life, and then we'll look at one of the significant themes of his message. **The first thing we learn from his life is that you do not have to be in relationship with someone a long time in order to impact them.** Amos was not in the northern kingdom permanently. That wasn't his home. And yet God had put it on his heart to go and preach and write a message of warning against them, and seek to influence them to come back to God and God's values and to right worship – and scholars are in agreement that he wasn't there long: 2 years at the most, maybe as short as a week.

The second thing we learn from the life of Amos is that you do not have to be a “professional” or have special training in order to be used by God and have an impact on others. Amos was not a priest, it doesn't appear that he had any particular theological training...he doesn't seem to have had a role in the local worshipping community, or anything like that. He owned or managed sheep and owned or managed an orchard as well. He's a farmer. And yet he's called by God to go and prophesy against the northern nation of Israel and some of the surrounding nations as well.

This is significant. God works through those people who are in relationship with him regardless of their expertise in the faith or how long they've known someone. Jesus does this too. For instance, in Luke 10, Jesus sends out 72 disciples in pairs, ahead of him, to communities where he would be visiting soon. It wasn't like he selected just the 12 Disciples, or a narrower set of the 12 who he thought really “got it.” He sent 72 – and as near as we can tell they weren't sent to their “hometowns”! 1 Peter 2 speaks of the church – not just its appointed leaders – as the priesthood, chosen to “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). **You don't have to be a “faith expert” to impact others, you just have to have a heart for God and a willingness to trust Him.**

When I was in High School I went on a winter youth retreat with a friend's church youth group. I think it was my junior year, because I remember sitting near the back of the bus, on the driver's side (I can still picture this), singing along with seemingly all the rest of the kids on the bus...singing to a recording of the song “We Didn't Start The Fire” by Billy Joel, which was

released in the fall of 1989, which was the start of my junior year. And at the retreat, in the midst of a small group discussion about the Christian faith, the guy who was the “adult” leader (college-age kid) in my group made a comment about why he was a Christian that really impacted me at the time and has stuck with me.

He said that one significant reason he was a Christian (and particularly why he trusted the Bible) was because, in his view, no other religion adequately explained how creation came into being. No other religion explained Creation – from the galaxies to humanity – as clearly or as well; and for him that pointed to the divine inspiration of Scripture and its trustworthiness.

And that comment, from a college-aged retreat leader who I didn’t know for more than 48 hours, and who probably didn’t have a ton of theological training, has stuck with me for 30 years. Talk about having an impact! The prophet Amos was a little like that as well.

So even if you don’t feel like you have all the answers or that you haven’t known someone long enough to really influence them, God still calls you to minister to people in whatever ways are needed. You can have that kind of impact. And usually, people who think they aren’t equipped enough to impact others actually have a little better understanding of the faith than they think they do, especially if they’ve been in church regularly for a few years and even more so if they’ve participated in Discipleship classes or a small group or some other kind of Bible study regularly in addition to worship. If that remotely describes you, then there’s no reason why God can’t work through you just as he did Amos. Do you think we pastors really have all the answers? Of course not. If pastors had to have perfect knowledge and understanding of the faith, no one would ever stand up in front of a congregation and even dare to utter the words of a sermon or teach a class. So Amos shows us these two things: You can have influence even after a short period of time, and even if you feel inadequate for the task.

And then the *message* Amos carries into Israel and to the nations around them is one that is still relevant for us today as well. As with any writing that’s the length that this is, there are multiple themes, and they are linked

together. **But if you were to summarize the key point of Amos, the main thing he was trying to address in the culture of the northern kingdom at that time, it would be the injustice of the distribution of wealth and how those who were the “haves” treated the “have-nots.”**

Amos 6:1-7, the passage we read this morning, is a prime example:

“Woe to you who are complacent in Zion,
and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria,
you notable men of the foremost nation,
to whom the people of Israel come!”

This is being addressed to the “haves” right here – those who have grown complacent, those who feel secure, those who are notable, and so forth.

He goes on to say in verses 4-7:

“You lie on beds adorned with ivory
and lounge on your couches.
You dine on choice lambs
and fattened calves.
You strum away on your harps like David
and improvise on musical instruments.
You drink wine by the bowlful
and use the finest lotions,
but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.
Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile;
your feasting and lounging will end” (Amos 6:4-7).

A couple chapters later we get this:

**“Hear this, you who trample the needy
and do away with the poor of the land,
saying,
‘When will the New Moon be over
that we may sell grain,
and the Sabbath be ended
that we may market wheat?’—
skimping on the measure,**

**boosting the price
and cheating with dishonest scales,
buying the poor with silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
selling even the sweepings with the wheat” (Amos 8:4-6).**

And then he goes on to tell of the consequences that will come, and they're not good. This is a word about justice and treating people fairly and rightly and with honor and dignity. It's a word against the powerful and the wealthy propping themselves up by putting the other down – even to the point of using dishonest measures to their own benefit.

Is this not one of the most pressing issues of our time in 21st Century America – and around the world? It's been nearly 2800 years since Amos preached, and we still don't get this right. As a nation, we struggle with affordable housing and homelessness and some of the issues that prevent people from getting out of poverty situations like education and mental health issues. And that's just looking within our own borders. The distribution of wealth on a global scale puts most of America at the top. If you have a roof over your head, you are among the world's wealthiest. According to a major study of this in 2012, **“...the top 0.6% of world population (consisting of adults with more than US\$1 million in assets) or the 42 million richest people in the world held 39.3% of world wealth. The next 4.4% (311 million people) held 32.3% of world wealth. The bottom 95% held 28.4% of world wealth.”**ⁱ In other words, in 2012, more than 70% of the world's wealth was in the hands of 5% of the world's population.

Jesus frequently teaches on these kinds of themes. Perhaps the solution is best summarized by him in Luke 6:31: **Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:31)**. Jesus lived this out as well as anyone, going to the cross to lift us up out of our own poverty – the poverty of the soul – and to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. Thank God He doesn't leave us in the muck and mire of our sin and our destitution. He doesn't turn a blind eye to us when we are in need: He extends a hand to help us out. In fact, he extended both of his hands on the cross to get us out of our spiritual poverty. And then God invites and calls and chooses us to help others in

much the same way – including when it comes to social justice. God cares about how we treat one another, and it's deeply connected to our faith.

And the warning throughout Amos to the people of Israel is that if they don't get that figured out and address it, it will be the downfall of their nation. They didn't, and the northern kingdom fell to Assyria less than 30 years later.

We need a dose of Amos' message to help us out as well, because this is much less a political issue than it is a Biblical one. This stuff has deep spiritual roots. And **Biblically-speaking, we who follow Jesus are called – in fact, not just called, but chosen – to bear the light of Christ in the world, including to make sure that people are treated justly and rightly and that all people are treated like the image-bearers of their Creator that they are.** It's one way we come alongside people to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their time of need.

You don't need to be an expert in the faith or be in a place a long time in order to have a positive spiritual impact on someone. Amos shows us so. God can work through you just as you are. If you're a dad (you're not an expert, I know that!) you can raise your child up to do to others as they'd like others to do to them. It's a great motto to live by. And in teaching it to the kids in our lives or to whoever it may be, we have an opportunity to teach them about Jesus, the one who models this for us perfectly, who reaches forth His hand from heaven to lift us up and impact us in this life and into eternity. May we be His hands and feet and do the same thing for others. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distribution_of_wealth