

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Amos 7:7-17

^{7:7} This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸ And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; ⁹ the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." ¹⁰ Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹ For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" ¹² And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; ¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." ¹⁴ Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵ and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' ¹⁶ "Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.'" ¹⁷ Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"

Commentary

Amos was the earliest of the great 8th century prophets to pronounce judgment on the nation of Israel. He prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.), who restored earlier boundaries and supporting national shrines, bringing peace to the land. The walls seemed firm in this kingdom, but Amos reported a vision he had seen of God standing before him holding a "plumb line," a cord and weight used in construction to make sure walls were true. God was measuring these people, and they were not proving to be the plumb and true to God's standards. It is clear that Amos understood the symbol to convey God's judgment for Israel's future. In two previous visions, Amos had seen God preparing a plague of locusts and a destructive inferno. On those occasions, when the prophet interceded for the people, God relented and delayed judgment. This time, however, Amos was given no opportunity to plead

for the people; for God declared in no uncertain terms: “I will never again pass them by.” Amos retorted that he was not a professional prophet, so it was not Amos whom Amaziah was opposing, but God. Therefore, Amaziah had to suffer Israel’s fate.

Reflection

Jeroboam had brought peace and prosperity, but the nation had failed to keep its covenant with God. What are some modern parallels in personal and national lives where the outer signs all look good, but inner, spiritual decay has set in?

Colossians 1:1-14

^{1:1} Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. ³ In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷ This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸ and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit. ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Commentary

Colossae was a small town near Laodicea in the Lycus Valley on the ancient road running east from Ephesus. Colossians was written to combat Gnostic (belief in salvation through special knowledge) teachers who advocated asceticism, special days and rituals, and worship of angels (2:16-23). They were advocating a syncretism (mixture of Christian and pagan ideals) that detracted from focus on Christ. These teachers claimed to have superior wisdom that gave them access to God. The author of Colossians counters that Christ alone makes possible a saving relationship with God. True spiritual wisdom consists of listening for God’s will and leading a life worthy of belief in Christ. The writer is grateful to God for how the gospel is “bearing fruit” in their lives, and prays that the recipients of the letter will live effective lives of faith, endure trials and controversies with consistency and dedication, giving thanks to God through it all.

Reflection

Mistaken teachers advocated a syncretism that detracted from the focus on Christ. What spiritual beliefs and practices undergird faith in Christ? Which detract? How can we tell the difference?

Luke 10:25-37

^{10:25} Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Commentary

This beloved and familiar story has an edge, a sharp or touchy dimension. Part of the edge comes from the setting given by Luke. The other aspect of its edge is seen in how Jesus twice undercut the expectations of his hearers. The confrontation is with a lawyer—a teacher of the law of Moses. In his time, rabbis commonly debated in public, exchanging questions and retorts. Though this lawyer asked Jesus a legitimate question about how to inherit eternal life, Luke disparaged the lawyer's motives, saying he wanted to "test" Jesus and to "justify" himself. (The only others to "tempt" Jesus in Luke are the devil and the "evil" crowd.) For Luke, the lawyer was more concerned with appearing religious and advancing himself than loving God. After the lawyer asked the question of Jesus, Jesus turned the question back twice, and the lawyer answered with two of the basic teachings of the Jewish faith, the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5), which pious Jews recited daily, and a portion of the Holiness Code from Leviticus, which detailed the ritual and ethical requirements of holy living. Jesus told the parable, and then he brought the conversation back to the starting point: "What must I do?" His imperative has the force of "you, go, now."

Reflection

The lawyer, employing a time-tested method of avoiding action, challenged Jesus to define “neighbor.” When have you preferred to discuss a problem rather than act on it? What needed ministries in your church still await action? What is behind the delay?

Responsive Psalter

from Psalm 82

- ^{82:1} God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:
- ² **"How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?"**
- ³ Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
- ⁴ **Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked."**
- ⁵ They have neither knowledge nor understanding,
they walk around in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- ⁶ **I say, "You are gods,
children of the Most High, all of you;**
- ⁷ nevertheless, you shall die like mortals,
and fall like any prince."
- ⁸ **Rise up, O God, judge the earth;
for all the nations belong to you!**

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**