

Christian Perspectives ? Amos

Amos was an ordinary individual. He was a busy man who was a full time shepherd with a business on the side picking the fruit of sycamore trees. He lived in Tekoa a small out of the way place two hours south of Bethlehem on the border of the desert lands of Judah. It was out in the middle of nowhere, on the very edge of civilized society. Amos probably did not lead an easy life; his name means 'Bearer of Burdens'.

And yet at the time Amos lived in a 'Golden Age' for both Judah and Israel. Life was good.

But in the middle of this 'Golden Age' God has stirs up a holy discontent in the heart of Amos. Amos is agitated and yes maybe even angry: 'righteous anger' He sees what is going on the nations around him: the cruelty, blind hatred, slavery and exploitation. Even the nation of Israel comes under scrutiny: Amos accuses the nation of 3 things:

Oppressing the poor: They were using their wealth to further oppress the poor and taking advantages of those less fortunate. They could not care less for justice and allowed injustice to flourish as long as it brought them the economic advantage.

Living in immorality: In their arrogance the people decided that anything would go. They were promiscuous and followed their lustful desires caring little for God's commandments.

Practising Idolatry: Bethel, the religious center of Israel became a place of pagan worship. Places were drunkenness, temple prostitution and outright idolatry were common.

Certainly we can agree that Amos describes some of the same conditions we find in our world: The same kind of cruelty described by Amos we have seen in the recent news: violence, cruelty and inhumanity in the Civil war in Syria and Iraq, in the ongoing war in between Israel and the Palestinians, in the latest conflict in the Ukraine. Even today many girls and young women are abducted and sold as slaves to work in the sex trade. Many families in developing countries literally slave away for pennies a day producing the goods North Americans demand to satisfy their out of control consumerism. Corporate and individual greed is easy to find.

Immorality is on full display both in the individual lives as in the mass media. Idolatry is alive and well: people worship: Self (individualism), material goods (consumerism) or technology just to name a few. It doesn't seem that anything has changed much in the last few centuries.

One of the messages that Amos gives is about the mistreatment of the poor. The bible is filled with God's concern for the poor. He has a passionate concern for those who are the 'last, the lost and the least'.

What comes to mind when you think of poverty? We immediately think about the disadvantaged: those who lack material possessions: they don't have food, no money, little or no clothing, no home or shelter. You do not have to go far to find the disadvantaged. Even in our own community, right here in Dufferin you can find those who are disadvantaged.

But are those the only 'poor' among us? I would like to stretch your perception of 'poverty' a little more.

There are the poor because of accidents and or circumstances. People that lost everything because of an economic crisis. People whose homes and livelihoods were destroyed by war, natural disasters

Poor in relationships: Those who are isolated, lonely, without friends or relatives. The single, the divorced or perhaps the seniors.

The poor in health: The sick, the chronically ill, the disabled, those who are mentally ill.

The poor in hope: those that have no future. Think of prisoners or those who chronically unemployed

The poor in love: There are many people especially young people, who go through life unloved. They go through life from one relationship to the next looking for love.

And lastly those who are poor in willpower. Think of those who are addicted and or those that utterly defeated by life and circumstances.

In Matthew 9:36 Jesus looked out of the crowds and had compassion on them because they were harassed and poor in hope and love (helpless).

Do you get agitated when you see social injustice around you? Do you have the same Christ-like passion and concern for those who are poor? Do you have a heart for the last, the lost and the least?

Act on it, become the hands and feet of Christ. Be a Hope-bringer, Be Good News to those who are poor.

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