

Listening to What the LORD Actually Says

8th Sun. after Pent. – 07/14/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Amos 7:7-15 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 15, [Amos defends the authority of his preaching to the people and says,] **“Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel.’”**

Introduction

⌘ “Know your enemy.” Whatever the competition; whatever the challenge; whatever the difficulty it is that you face, it is crucial that you “know your enemy.”

→ A sports team studies hours of films to learn their opponents plays and identify their strengths and weaknesses. A chess master studies the games of the other chess master to know the opponent’s tendencies and strategies. In the business world, companies study their competitors to keep the advantage; to be prepared for possible changes they may need to make.

I. We live in a grand competition

⌘ In a much more serious matter, you and I as the redeemed people of Yahweh should know our ultimate enemy. In the hymn, *A Mighty Fortress* we sing, “The old evil foe Now means deadly woe; Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight” (LSB 656:1). So, what are the aims and goals of the old evil foe, the devil, the “ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)? What is his agenda? What are his strategies, his tactics? Pretending he’s not real or not a true threat is deadly. You must know your enemy.

→ Certainly the devil is happier the more violence and wickedness and chaos he can create. But the center of what he’s about is unbelief. He wants to keep unbelievers in unbelief; dead in their sins. And he wants to entice and draw believers away from their Lord and Savior; away from the faith and salvation we already have into his false pleasures and beliefs that lead only to eternal death and condemnation.

⌘ But what does the Holy Spirit want? The Holy Spirit wants to create and sustain faith in the hearts of all mankind. The Holy Spirit wants to tighten the bonds between you and your Savior, Jesus; to help you become a stronger, more mature Christian; to daily, weekly, yearly grow in Christ. And how does the He do that? By means of the perfect, life-giving, Word of God.

→ And by His wisdom, the Holy Spirit has chosen not to work directly or without instruments. Instead He works through the inspired Word of God as it is recorded in Scripture; as it is proclaimed by His chosen and called mouth pieces in truth and purity. We know there are two key components to this Word from God. First, through the Law of God, He leads sinners to see their sin in contrition and repentance and second, through God’s promises fulfilled in Christ (His Gospel), He creates and sustains faith; filling us with the joy of salvation!

⌘ The devil or the Holy Spirit: these are the two options before every soul on earth, in the days of Amos the prophet and in our day still today. We live in the midst of a great competition; a spiritual battle where our very hearts, minds and souls are on the line.

→ So, the devil’s goal is to prevent us sinners from hearing God’s Law and Gospel. He wants to keep you from hearing; from really listening; from taking seriously what the LORD Almighty has to say. His agenda is simple: prevent you and others from hearing the life-giving truth of God in His Word.

→ And how does the devil do that? We have examples of his tactics all throughout Holy Scripture. One approach is to fill the world with umpteen false voices; fake truths in order to drown out the true voice of God. Throughout the history of God’s people in Israel, there were so many false; so many counterfeit prophets that they actually outnumbered the true prophets.

These false prophets told sinners what they wanted to hear and guess what? That made them very popular. So when the people listened to these fake prophets, they were happy because they were basically listening only to themselves. This is still one of the devil's most favorite strategies today. Which voice are you listening to?

→ Another of the devil's common tactics is to simply silence the proclaimers of God's saving Word. Just forbid them from speaking. The prophet Isaiah was sawn in half and thrown away like garbage! The apostle Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified upside down. Many of the prophets and apostles were pursued and imprisoned. Elijah was constantly threatened. Both Jeremiah and Paul were often in prison. The life of one who faithfully proclaims God's Word is often filled with opposition from those under the devil's deceptive spell. But as we know from the preserved writings of the prophets and apostles, God has the last laugh. He will not be silenced.

II. Yahweh sent Amos; the devil sent Amaziah

✘ This grand competition; this battle for souls is front and center here in the Word we have from God in Amos, chapter seven today. The year is 760 BC. The place is Bethel, about ten miles north of Jerusalem. When Solomon died, the northern ten tribes "seceded from the union" you might say. But God, who made Israel His own covenant people, is never okay with the devil's attempts to bring division among God's chosen people. So God sent prophets like Elijah and Elisha to proclaim His Word. And now He calls Amos to proclaim His truth in a place where the devil is working hard.

→ In the north, instead of worshiping 10 miles away at the Temple in Jerusalem as they were supposed to, the people set up their own sanctuaries, one of those was here in Bethel. Amos' calling from God was clear: proclaim whatever the one true God had to say. This is why we hear him say repeatedly "Thus spoke Yahweh, the God of Israel" or as we see in verse eight, "Yahweh said...". It's through God's Word that He works salvation and life, so Amos' message is always some form of, "Listen to what the LORD Almighty has to say."

✘ But the current "spiritual" authority at the false sanctuary in Bethel didn't want to hear it. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, complained to the king, Jeroboam, about Amos. Amaziah did the devil's work of spin-doctoring God's Word to make the people and the king happy. And as long as you make the people "happy" then your job as a "priest or so-called prophet" is secure no matter the time or age that you're living in.

→ But Amos was sent to announce God's words of judgment against the rebellious people and king of Israel. So Amaziah twisted Amos' words to make it sound like a personal threat against the king. Verse 10, "Amos has conspired against you [O King Jeroboam II]." You see, he's making Amos out to be a political threat to the entire Northern Kingdom – a worldly threat. It's common even today for God's opponents to reduce God's Word against sin into some kind of a worldly attack in the realm of politics or economics or the like! We hear proponents for abortion, for example, twist it from being the murder of babies into an attack on "women's health care."

→ As it was with Amaziah, this turns God's Word into something that is only a human message; only a human opinion from the man Amos, instead of a life-altering or life-giving Word from God. This way the devil leads people to discount, trivialize, ignore and dismiss God's truth as nothing but human opinion.

✘ So in verse 12, Amaziah tries to pressure Amos to leave, to go back to his home in the south: "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah." The Hebrew literally says, "flee to your advantage". Amaziah tells Amos there that his life is in danger if he stays and continues to speak for God as he is. He's pretending to be Amos' friend, even though he is the one conniving to turn the king against Amos. Then to add insult to injury, Amaziah tells Amos to make his living back in Judah:

“Eat bread there, and prophesy there.” As if Amos were just another self-serving religious guru, feathering his own nest as “a prophet for hire” like Amaziah was in Bethel.

III. Devil’s plan - keep you from listening to Yahweh

⌘ How much of this competition between the devil’s prophets and God’s prophets do you and I face here today? Folks, nothing has changed – only the methods by which the devil seeks to trick and deceive us.

→ We hear things like this: “Don’t impose your religion on me.” “Keep your religion to yourself.” “Don’t give me all that religious mumbo jumbo.” These statements accurately assess all false religions, but they have no effect upon the authentic Word of God.

⌘ So where are you at right now today? Each one of us must ask the question. Do you want to hear the Word of God? Or do you find ways to discount and ignore it? Do you dismiss it as irrelevant and boring? Do you have more important things to do with your time? Everyone’s life is “busy”, so that excuse doesn’t fly. But what is your life busy with? You’re swamped with daily duties and activities; so many voices always vying for your attention – on TV, the computer, digital devices, over the radio. So many voices; so many dangers facing us and trying to convince us to listen only to ourselves – this is the devil’s plan!

→ So, know your enemy folks; your ultimate enemy, the old evil foe who wants to keep you from hearing the life-giving Word of God Himself! He is the one who tells us sinners to listen only to ourselves; to what keeps life “easy”; to what makes us “happy”. But God’s call to Amos was not about “easy” or “happy” from a worldly perspective. That was Amaziah’s life and lie. And it’s the devil’s lie to you and me today. The fact is, as God’s proclaimer, my life – as God’s ambassadors every day, your lives are in danger.

IV. Yahweh insists that His Word be heard

⌘ Though Amaziah tried with the devil’s tricks to silence and trivialize God’s Word of judgement and grace he could not do it, could he. To this day, some 2,700 years later, we still have it recorded in Scripture where we can read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word of Yahweh to and through His prophet Amos.

→ Because God will not be silenced. He is the God who speaks; who does not hide Himself in secrecy or limit access to His will through deceptive things like divination, sorcery, astrology or witchcraft as the devil does. No, the true God; the almighty Creator, He speaks throughout the Scriptures, beginning in Genesis 1 all the way through the Book of Revelation using common human language. Why? So that He can be heard and understood by every human soul in every time through all of history. Our God is not deceitful. He is open and transparent. He is a straight shooter that reveals His will and ways in clear human language.

⌘ And to convey His Word into the souls of mankind He raised up prophets; most often common ordinary people like Amos who was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. As Amos told Amaziah in verses 14-15 when he tried to send him away and silence him, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son...”. In other words, “This wasn’t my idea; my life-ambition as a ploy to make money or gain power and influence people.” But God is the one who said, “Go, prophesy to My people Israel” (v. 15).

→ You see, God is the one in charge of Amos, not Amos; not any king or false prophet or group of people! And why was Yahweh so insistent that His Word be proclaimed, even when it meant that His spokesmen would be hunted, arrested, imprisoned, and even face death for it? Why the bother for a bunch of ungrateful, unbelieving, self-centered souls?

→ Not for Amos’ benefit or profit or fame; but for the sake of God’s “people Israel”; because through His Word, God, the Holy Spirit leads those sinners to contrition and repentance. That’s

why God called Amos. So that ancient Israel would turn away from their evil and turn back to the true, saving God.

- ✘ Then and now God's Word of judgment and repentance leads sinners away from their idols and their crooked ways. It uncovers the death that comes from those false beliefs. When false voices speak against God's Word it only confirms sinners in their sins. The same thing happens when you and I listen only to ourselves; to what makes us "happy" or makes us feel "important".

→ Only the true Word of God leads sinners out of this endless cycle of sin and death. Only the promises given by God in His Word and through His faithful proclaimers are true and trustworthy; leading us beyond this world's "happiness" into deep, everlasting peace, forgiveness and salvation in the arms of our Lord.

V. Yahweh's Word is fulfilled in Jesus!

- ✘ So, what happened to Amos and Amaziah? In short, ancient Israel rejected Amos and the other true prophets, bringing God's judgment upon themselves. The death sentence came down on Israel just as Amos had announced. What God says is truth.

- ✘ But that was not the end of the story. Through Amos, God also spoke a promise; the promise that one day, God would reverse His judgment. In Amos 9:11–15, God promised He would raise up a new and greater Davidic King and restore His people Israel.

→ As we know He did just that in Jesus, God's Son and also God's new and greater Prophet. But even He was rejected by sinners who wanted to listen to themselves though He was the very truth of God in human flesh.

→ For that, and for the sins of all mankind He was crucified. He would not desert; He would not leave His people without a way to forgiveness and salvation and eternity in the arms of their Creator. So, He suffered in your place. He suffered for you!

- ✘ And now He lives... and He reigns as the eternal Victor over sin, death and the devil! He is the Word – the only Word of truth today and every day. If you want to listen to what the Lord God Almighty has to say, dear people listen to Jesus! And listen to those whom Jesus sends to proclaim His Word and to administer His gifts according to His command.

→ Through Baptism, Jesus puts His name upon us and we belong to Him. Through His Supper, He unites us with His life-giving body and blood and with all true believers in Him.

- ✘ These are the ways that we "listen" to what the LORD our God has to say. Are you listening today? Amen.