

## God's "Woe" – A Sign of His Love!

16<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 09/25/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Amos 6:1-7 Pastor Keith Besel

v.1, **“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria...”**.

### **Introduction**

- ✘ When you hear God, or someone else use the word “woe”, what do you understand it to mean? If I were to say, “Woe to you members of Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church who are at ease in your faith”, do you hear that “woe” as a threat? Or a promise? Or an expression of God’s love?
  - ➔ In our Old Testament reading today, the proclamation of “woe” comes directly from God, through the mouth of His prophet Amos, to His chosen people, both in the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judea.
  - ➔ They have been in The Promised Land now for more than 600 years – long enough that they have become quite complacent, even smug and over confident in their role as God’s “Chosen People”. And so the LORD sends a shepherd, whom He appoints as His prophet; one who was not afraid to announce to the leaders and the people alike: “Woe! How terrible it will be for you if you do not change your ways!”
- ✘ And folks, this word of warning is a word that you and I; that all of us – leaders and people alike in the Christian Church today, need to hear from God through those who are not afraid to preach it.
  - ➔ Because, you see, even though it has been almost 3,000 years since God gave this warning to Amos to proclaim, the similarities between the political, social, economic and even religious conditions in the days of Amos and those of the Christians in North America today are ominously striking!

### **I. God's Word of "Woe"**

- ✘ If we look quickly through the earlier chapters of Amos we see that God’s word of “woe” here in chapter six is far from the first time that God has tried to get the attention of His people. In fact He has tried over and over again to warn the people of their sinful ways and worship.
  - ➔ In chapter 1:2, we see that it’s not like Amos started out a little too softly or timidly so that the people didn’t quite get how serious God’s concerns were. No, his very first words are this: “The LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers”. And with that God begins His word of displeasure and judgement upon all who have not believed in Him; upon all who have not taken seriously what it means to be His people.
- ✘ In chapter four God calls the people of Israel and Judea out, especially the leaders, because they have oppressed the poor while they have been living only for themselves in luxury.
  - ➔ He reminds them of the many ways that He has tried to get their attention – sending famine, drought, blight, pestilence and military defeat upon them. And five times in seven verses God says, “...yet you did not return to Me” (4:6-12).
  - ➔ “Therefore”, Yahweh says through Amos, “prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” (4:12)
- ✘ Again, I ask the question, “Is that a threat from God? A promise? Or an expression of His extreme love?” All of it, including the disasters He sent earlier, comes from God’s deep love for His people! Throughout Scripture, and all of history, God brings both blessing and disaster –

always in His perfect time and proportion so that the souls He has created and redeemed might return to Him in repentance and faith.

→ And yet, as I said before, they did not; they would not take Him and His prophetic word of “woe” to heart.

## II. Is God’s “Woe” Fair?

✘ Some – both in Amos’ day as well as our time today – are quick to place the fault upon God and say that He is not being “fair or just or right” in the way that He’s treating His people. “I mean, come on Lord,” they say, “cut the people – cut us all a little slack. Is it really that big of a deal that Your people want to take it easy and relax a little? So what if we splurge on ourselves instead of helping those who are going hungry? Is it really that big of a deal that we take part in the ceremonies of the pagans around us? Those parties and parades for those false gods are just a bit of harmless fun – even if they make us too tired and too busy to worship You as often as You want us to, O Lord. Honestly, we still love You, God. Trust us, we really do!”

→ Amos’ words to those people and to us today shows that God doesn’t fall for that kind of phony baloney. Over and again in chapter five Yahweh says, “Seek Me and live” (5:4). Don’t seek Bethel. “Do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba. ... Seek the LORD and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph (i.e. His people) ... with none to quench it” (5:5-6).

→ God wasn’t kidding when He said in the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). He saved His people from slavery and death. He made them His own and promised them forgiveness, mercy and eternal life through His coming Son. They didn’t deserve it one bit and neither do we today! Yet now they/we have the gull to say that God’s not being fair when He calls them and us to task for slipping back into the old sinful and selfish ways.

✘ God calls them to account in verse three because they “put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence”. This “day of disaster” is God’s promise that their enemy, the king of Babylon, is going to come from the north to humble them by taking away all that they so arrogantly think they deserve and by removing them from The Promised Land into exile as servants and slaves. History shows that this actually happened about 20 years later in 722 BC.

→ They didn’t believe God would really do it. They rationalized their way of life and their selfish behavior as being “not that big of a deal”. After all, they were the “chosen people” of God. They believed they could do whatever they wanted as long as they still “went through the motions” of worshiping and saying they believed in Yahweh. They were confident He would still keep them as His people.

✘ But God said just before our text today, “I hate, I despise your feasts, and take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer Me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them...I will not look upon them” (5:21-22). God wants so much more, folks, than just for us to go through the motions. He wants our hearts and minds and souls – all of us.

→ And yet there are countless people among us – maybe even some here today whose “Christian Pride” has taken the place of God Himself so that they are stretching out on their couches and trusting in a false security of their own making, that they are saved.

→ They might say or think something like this: “I know with certainty that the Lutheran Church teaches the truth. And since I’m a member of the Lutheran Church, I’m all set. I don’t need to actually connect to Christ on a daily basis through his Word and in prayer. I don’t need to seek to live, speak, and think as Christ desires. I don’t need to connect weekly to Christ in Worship

as the Third Commandment says all true believers must do. My membership is all I need. I've got it made!"

→ "And even if I'm one that does take part in worship, God doesn't care if I actually think about the words I'm saying in the Apostles' Creed or the Lord's Prayer, or that I take to heart what Pastor proclaims in the sermon. Just sitting here in the pew is all God really cares about."

- ✘ Sadly, those examples are more common than many of us are willing to admit. As God points out in verse six, "Woe"...to those who "are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph", that is those who ignore or do not see the true spiritual depravity in their own lives and/or among the so-called people of God.

### III. Where's the Gospel?

- ✘ I know we said that God's "Woe" is an expression of His love, but man, this sure sounds like an awful lot of Law and Judgment, doesn't it? So, where's the Gospel for us today in 2022?

→ It's right there - in the "Woe"!

- ✘ This announcement through Amos truly flows from God's good and gracious will and purpose for all the souls of all mankind, still today! He necessarily tears us down, in love, so that He can build us up and heal us for eternity. And this glorious fact remains true throughout the ages even though many people refuse to be healed. God lovingly gives us two vital lessons here:

→ The first is that just as the warnings of Scripture speak against our false, earthly securities – against being "at ease in Zion", so we must use this text, and all of Amos today, to spend some serious and intentional time in self-reflection of our own, individual way of life; of our own personal faith.

→ You see, God's Gospel comes first in His gift of a repentant heart, mind and soul, as Acts 5:31 says, "God exalted [Jesus] at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins". Yes, all true believers in Christ today are the "New Israel". Galatians 3:29 says, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

- ✘ So folks, you are Christ's children – the ones whom God loves deeply and desires to have in His Kingdom of grace and glory today, tomorrow and forever!

→ That's the second important lesson for us here today. God loves you and me so much that He directs His word of "woe" straight into our ears, through our minds, so that it takes root eternally in our hearts! He says in verse three, Do not take lightly "the day of disaster", that is "the Day of Yahweh" (Am. 5:18, 20).

→ That day of judgement upon sin and evil points us all far beyond God's wrath when He sent Babylon to destroy Israel and take them into exile. It points us to the outpouring of the Father's wrath upon the sin of all humanity as it was taken up by His sinless Son, Jesus, on Good Friday!

→ This shows us that a true and sincere faith in Jesus can never be one of ease or false security that stretches out on ivory beds or drinks wine by the bowl-full as Amos describes it in his day. No, the true Gospel means that a true faith includes true sacrifice! It means that our original and our actual sinful selves have been sacrificed with Jesus on the cross – drowned in the waters of our baptism so that now you and I emerge each day from those waters as a new, redeemed child of God!

→ It's not about our Church membership or our time in the pew or the works of charity and love that we joyfully perform. Those are the fruit that just come about because of Christ's transforming work within us.

- ✘ He's the one who becomes our confidence as we boldly and sincerely confess, "I believe in Jesus Christ, [God's] only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried" for me!
  - ➔ Because of Jesus, the final "day of disaster" when those who have lived "in ease" and apart from Christ will be cast into outer darkness forever, is the day that we who have taken the LORD's woe seriously will rise to new life and will be glorified in the fullness of eternal life!
- ✘ This is how God's "woe" serves us today, as a beautiful sign of His love; as His word of promise, not of ease and wickedness, but of a joyful life in His kingdom – today and forever! Amen.