

Proper 10; Pentecost 6
Amos 7:7-15
Psalm 85: 7-13
Ephesians 1:1-14
Mark 6:7-13

Our first lesson from the book of the prophet Amos is thought to have been written some 750 years before the birth of Christ. At that time in history, both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel were enjoying great prosperity and military strength.

However, like Rome and other previous prosperous societies, Israel and Judah declined to a time of idolatry, extravagant indulgence in luxurious living, immorality, corruption and oppression of the poor. The northern kingdom of Israel was politically secure, but spiritually self-righteous, arrogant and haughty, resulting in their religious and moral corruption; truly, a recipe for spiritual disaster.

Traveling from Judah in the south, it is into this spiritually hostile environment of the northern kingdom of Israel that Amos, a simple shepherd and caretaker of sycamore fig trees, was sent. To say that a formidable task lay ahead of Amos would be the understatement of the year.

The opening verse to today's reading from the Book of the Prophet Amos shares with us a vision given to Amos of Yahweh God standing next to a not so vertical wall. In Yahweh's hand was a simple tool, a tool that still is used today. I have one with me this morning.

(Take the plumb line out into the congregation.)

What a plumb line does is to set the standard, to set the bar, to which vertical construction is measured. Surveyors use a plumb to accurately place their equipment. Want to check how truly vertical a wall is... place a plumb adjacent to it. Yahweh God uses the illustration of a plumb line to measure

how out of “plumb” with His standards the kingdom of Israel had fallen.

Amos writes in verse eight:

8 The LORD said to me, "What do you see, Amos?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold I am about to put a plumb line In the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer."

Consequences of their disobedience is at hand.

Amos was sent to warn the leaders of the northern kingdom of Israel of the impending wrath of God to be placed upon them. He was sent to call for their repentance. Did they listen? No. Israel soon was conquered by the Assyrians and driven into exile. Such is the punishment of being out of plumb with God. Yahweh God sets the plumb line, sets the standards to which he expects His children to honor. Rejection of these standards, rejection of His commandments will result in being exiled from the kingdom.

To punish for being out of plumb with Yahweh God is not what the Father wants. As with any loving parent, God the Father would much rather give blessings as the fruit of a righteous life, a life lived by His plumb line, lived by His standards, and not those of our own making.

And what would these blessings be? We find them given in chapter one of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. The city of Ephesus is located on the western coast of what we now call Turkey. Paul spent some three years teaching and proclaiming the Gospel in Ephesus, longer than with any other church he planted. Many scholars believe that Paul’s intent was to have this letter read to all the churches in Asia.

On page 1169, at verse 3, we read:

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

Just three verses into his letter, Paul acknowledges and names God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. For just a moment, move with me down to verse 13:

13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Repeat: **“...having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise...”**

Paul named in verse three of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, and named the Holy Spirit here in verse 13. In so doing, Paul acknowledges and defines the God head as being composed of the Trinity of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is important to point out, for many say that scriptures do not affirm the three-person God head of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Well, we have them, not inferred, not implied, but named right here before us.

And each person of the Triune God head, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, have blessings to bestow upon those living a righteous life, whose life is plumb lined with God. There are three blessings, three gifts that Paul shares with us in this chapter.

I invite you to move with me up to verse 7:

7 In Him (Jesus Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace;

In Him (Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, his blood poured out on the cross for you and me. Christ redeemed us, freed us sinners by His death upon the cross. For us, all the goodness, all the joy, all the excitement of being redeemed sinners, freed from the burden of our sins, depends first and foremost our faith in Jesus. Without faith, we are out of plumb. We stand outside God's plan for us and are exiled from God's adoptive family.

So, the first blessing we receive by remaining true to God's commandments is that we are redeemed through the blood of Christ.

The second blessing, also is given in verse seven, is the forgiveness of our sins. We are freely given the forgiveness of our sins, so that no guilt, no past events, may stand between us and our full acceptance as adopted children of God. The heavy burdens we all bear are removed. Gone! Dumped into the deepest ocean! Forgotten by God! What a hope we have in Jesus Christ if we remain in plumb with Him.

The first two blessings are redemption and forgiveness. The third blessing is found in verses 8 and 9:

8 In all wisdom and insight

9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

God bestows upon us all wisdom and insight through which we can finally see, however dimly, the mystery of God's will. This wisdom and insight enables us to begin to understand the plan of salvation God has designed. Matthew records these words of Jesus in chapter 11, verse 25:

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

It is my opinion here that Jesus may be somewhat sarcastic. Jesus states: "that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent..."

So what things are being hidden? For one thing, who Jesus truly is. For another, his mission here on earth, and for another, that he, Jesus, is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. These things are hidden from the wise and intelligent. So who are the wise and intelligent? The government leaders! Are we surprised! In Jesus' time, the government leaders included the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes. And if you wish to direct a twenty-first century application of

Jesus' words to you know where, feel free to do so. In other words, these things, the mystery of salvation, are hidden from those who ought to know better and don't.

But to whom have "these things been revealed," to whom has the mystery of salvation been revealed? Jesus said they have been revealed to infants. Oh? And who are the infants? You and I. We are the ones to whom the mystery of salvation has been revealed. Why? Because we have remained plumb with God. We are not out of alignment with God's Commandments. And for those times we do fall out of plumb with God, what is one of his blessings to us? The forgiveness of our sins. What a God! What a hope we have in Jesus.

But why are we so blessed? Move back with me to verse 3. I invite you to read verses three and four with me:

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose you, chose you to be holy and blameless; chose you to live a life in the "plumb line" standards of God. This is what Paul said. What did Jesus say? In John 15:16, Jesus states, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit,..."

God chose this body of Christ to be His messengers. For more than generation, this body of Christ was taught the Word of God. Although, this congregation didn't know it at the time, we were being prepared for what had to be done in December, 2008. A time for wise discernment and decision-making had arrived. An extremely difficult and important decision was made – to move out from under the burden of apostasy and heresy into the light of Christ. This body of Christ moved out from under the weight of untruths into the freedom and light

of the one truth – Jesus is Lord. Why? Because the Lord chose and appointed us. How more awesome can that be?

Yes, that truly was a momentous time for us. But now that we have made that move does not mean that we are to sit complacent in our seats thinking that one hour a week in church complies with the Lord's expectations. Such an attitude borders on self-righteousness, self-satisfaction – even pride; definitely out of plumb with God's expectations.

From John 15:16, we are told that we have been chosen by the Father through Jesus Christ for what purpose: “that you would go and bear fruit, ...” God does not want any whining sideliners moaning and groaning about how bad things are. We, as a body of Christ, are not to sit back to silently watch more and more of our brothers and sisters drift away into spiritual exile, out of plumb with God. God chose you and I to jump into the fray, to jump into the culture to make our Christian presence known. We heard from the Gospel passage from Mark that Jesus did the very same thing to his disciples. He directed them to go into the culture, go into the fray to proclaim the Gospel of salvation. We, too, are chosen to proclaim God's promises of salvation to all believers. We are chosen to bear fruit. We are chosen ones! What an awesome thing to contemplate! Let us not disappoint him who has chosen us.

From this awesome chapter one of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul shared that through Christ we are redeemed sinners, that our sins are forgiven, and that we have been given wisdom to understand God's plan for all believers. Given these blessings, God has chosen us for His purpose: to make disciples for Christ.