

“Repent or Rebel?”

Amos has been calling Israel to repentance for their greed, their neglect of the needy, their illicit worship, and their apostasy (falling away from the Lord). Such preaching is met with charges of wickedness and evil – charging that Amos has “conspired” against the king – that he’s devised a devious plan to overthrow Jeroboam!

So, the response is, get out! Silence – flee from here – go back where you came from! All because Amos dared to do what the Lord had sent him to do – to call God’s chosen people to repentance.

The words of our Epistle reading could have been written to Israel of old – and are worth repeating. Listen to them, as if you were Israel in the days of Amos.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

Such are the gifts and the Gospel to Israel – and to YOU – the chosen and beloved children of God living in these days.

The Old Testament, the Epistle, and now the Gospel reading. It's as if we have a repeat of the Old Testament – as if nothing has changed since the days of Amos the prophet. Now it's John the Baptist who calls King Herod (and Herodias) to repentance. Dealing with sins of adultery, and lust, and pride, and murder.

We have our own sins. Lust and adultery and all manner of sexual sins. Pride, a sharp tongue, and greed – a lust for money and the toys it can buy. Our illicit worship of sports, and play – and all the “gods” that take you away from the one and only true God.

And as it was in the beginning – so it is now – that the Lord sends His preacher to you, calling you to repent. The question is – will you repent, or rebel? Silence! Get out of here – go back to where you came from or worse, putting to death the call to repent.

The Lord is consistent – even adamant – about sin, and repentance. In every age – and week after week – His servants hold before us the mirror of God's Law – showing how we have fallen short of the glory of God – and calling us to repent.

But understand this – it is the Lord Himself coming to you. It's His work, His call. He comes – not to put you down – put you in your place – so that you live out your days under His thumb. NO! He calls you to repentance to relieve your burden – to forgive your debt – to loosen the chains of your sin – so that you might be free to live!

But wait! Not so quick. We are so eager to get to the good stuff – to run to the Gospel – to Jesus, our righteousness. But let's go back to the Law for a moment – to the fullness of the Law.

Have you ever wondered why the Lord says to you – “You shall ... [and] you shall not ...”? It's not for no good reason. He isn't just giving commands willy-nilly – giving you hoops to jump through just to show you who's boss. It's not a pass-fail test to see where you're at on a sliding scale.

His Law, His commands are His will for you – how He wants you to live – because as your loving and gracious Lord, these are the things that are GOOD for you. To break His Law is not just a disappointment – but rather – it means that you, and your neighbor, have been hurt or harmed!

Philip was harmed when Herod stole his wife! Herodias was hurt by Herod's use of her as his "wife"! Herod was in danger, because he lived as the god of his own life.

When you commit adultery – your spouse is harmed, devastated, torn apart. When you lie – someone is led astray – and trust is destroyed. When you are greedy for more and more money (or things) – you either work harder than ever (which isn't good for you, and often means your loved ones are abandoned) – or you resort to stealing from others.

When you despise preaching and God's Word – when you stay away from His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation – not only are you deprived, but you teach others to follow your example, and they are deprived of the greatest treasures of all.

This is why the Lord comes to you today, calling you to REPENT! The Holy Spirit sets your sin before your eyes – not just so that you acknowledge and confess you've done something wrong – but to see, and be sorry, for those whom you have hurt.

Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. As father or mother or son or daughter ... have you been disobedient, unfaithful, lazy ... hot-tempered rude or quarrelsome ... have you hurt someone by your words or deeds ...?

Take time before the mirror of God's Law to see who you are, and what you've done. Take time to consider how your words and deeds have harmed others. Go to those people this week – confess specifically what you've done – and how sorry you are that you have hurt them – and ask them to forgive you.

"Thus says the Lord" – "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Christ your Savior has covered you with His blood, blotting out all your transgressions. Though your sins be as scarlet, He makes you white as snow. In Christ, you are forgiven!

This is the life the Lord desires for you to live – repenting, confessing, and trusting that in Jesus you are forgiven and free! A life free from the burden of guilt and shame. And as you live a free men and free women – be ready to forgive others who come to you, confessing how they have harmed you, and seeking your merciful forgiveness.

Blessed are you, as you live the life that God has given and desires for you. Blessed are you, as you live by faith in Jesus – “holy and blameless” – in these days, and for all eternity. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.