

Sermon on **Amos 7:10-15** for 7.18.21

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How do you teach a child to report or tell needed information about someone and yet warn them against being a tattletale? There are times when you know it's tattling – they just want to get someone into trouble, and cover over something they did. "She hit me!" is followed by, "Well, he hit me first." But there are times when you need to say something or tell someone in authority. An internet search gave me this answer – "Tattling or snitching is the intentional act of trying to get someone in trouble or make yourself look good. Telling is reporting to another person in order to help someone who is struggling or being hurt." The prophet Amos and the priest Amaziah show the difference. And you'll quickly see which side you want and need to be on. Amos shows us the value in our theme for today,

"Preach the Word, Not Yourself!"

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying: "Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land." Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom. Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' (NIV 2011).

Amaziah was a tattletale. He ignores the heart of Amos' message of repentance and makes him out to be a conspirator. Amaziah preaches himself. He seems to be the chief priest at Bethel, the unsanctioned and idolatrous temple that king Jeroboam built in the Northern Kingdom to keep people from going back to Jerusalem to the real temple of the LORD. You see, after the golden age under King Solomon, the kingdom went through a buzz saw. The Northern ten tribes rebelled, seceded, and made Jeroboam King of Israel. Judah and Benjamin stayed with the Davidic king Rehoboam, as bad as he was. Imagine if the civil war in our country had gone the other way and you had two countries instead of one. Jeroboam built a temple near the border of Israel at Bethel like a plug in the funnel to keep the people from worshipping the LORD at Jerusalem. And though he may have intended people to worship the LORD, it gave way to much idolatry and syncretism. He built a golden calf there. A few generations later Jeroboam II came along and ushered in a silver age for the Northern kingdom. Though the poor suffered, and the worship of the people resembled Canaanite practices with the sacred prostitutes and other tragedies, and God was angry, the borders were expanded, money was in the pockets of the rich, and they had peace on the borders. So why upset the apple cart?

Amos came from Judah and upset the apple cart. He condemned Israel for their idolatries, their mistreatment of the poor, the injustices, and their greed. Amos went to Bethel, the center of Israelite worship and idolatry. Amos preached repentance before it was too late, *"Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph"* (Amos 5:14-15). Israel was headed for destruction for the house of Jeroboam and exile for the nation. Amos **told** them what they needed to hear.

Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent word to Jeroboam II that Amos was leading a conspiracy against the king and the country. Amaziah tried to discredit Amos, intimidate him, and hide the real message. Amaziah taunted the prophet of the LORD. *"Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."* Amaziah called the prophet of the LORD a sandwich board howler on the corner who couldn't cut it in Judah and stirred up dissension for profit in the North. Amaziah was a **tattletale and bully**.

Amaziah's attitude lurks inside our sinful nature. We see it when we excuse away our sin or the sins of those we love to try to keep some peace and make it better for ourselves. We blunt the message of God's law when it is preached, and we tell ourselves it's ok for us or for our loved ones. We tell ourselves its ok to ignore time with God, to be lax in our worship, or bible class attendance or bible reading because we're busy, or family comes first, or we have practice, work, or fill in the blank. We don't talk to our children or fellow believers about coming to church because it's going to be a battle, or they might say no and that would be uncomfortable. We don't address our Christian friends or loved ones living in a sinful lifestyle, or living together as significant others

before marriage – which we and they know is wrong, because we don't want them to stop liking us. We don't encourage our friend to get help, or stay in their marriage and be faithful, or tell them they're wrong when we know they are, but instead we tell them what they want to hear. We don't call our buddy to account for abusive words and actions to others, for their anger, or their overindulging because "it's not my business." And maybe if I don't say anything to them, no one will say anything about my sins. The Amaziah in us preaches himself.

And if a sermon or somebody says something about my sins, our sinful nature wants to break the mirror they're holding up and slap the one who holds it, we can be like Amaziah who said, "Who are you to talk to me? Go back where you came from! You are only causing trouble for me!" We blame the doctor for making a house call and showing us what is wrong with us and scoffing at the cure. And we sound like Amaziah. We need Amoses in our life. In mercy God sends them. Listen to them.

"Amos answered Amaziah, 'I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" Don't you see? Don't you see how much God loves you? Don't you see how much God cares for you and is pleading with you to turn away from sin, confess it and come back to him? Don't you see he is your Savior and the lengths he goes to for you, to help you, to lead you, to guide you, to work repentance in you, to show you his love and forgiveness? Me, I'm a nobody from Judah – a herdsman and I prune fig trees so they ripen for harvest. This wasn't my idea, it was His. He chose me, took me away from my business and gainful employment to come to you. He sent me to you to help you. That's how much he loves you. Turn away from sin and turn back to him! They needed Amos's message. We do too.

God never stopped doing that even when his people rejected him. God even sent his only begotten Son to take on flesh, the Son of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. How much God must love us! And Jesus lived according to his Father's will in complete perfection where we fail so often. Jesus spoke words of freedom and hard words of truth to people who needed to hear it. Some thanked him and followed him. Some put him on a cross to try to keep the peace. John records in the gospel, *"Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. 'What are we accomplishing?' they asked. 'Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.' Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, 'You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish'"* (John 11:47-50). Why did Jesus come? Why did Jesus sometimes stir the pot or upset the apple cart? It's because he loved them and us. It's because it needed to be done to help sinners see the error of their way whether they were in a tax collector's booth, in the high priest's chair, or at 201 N. State Street. They needed to see their need for Him!

And then for the Amaziah in each one of us, the sins we've committed but tried to justify, the conversations we've needed to have but chickened out on, and the sinners we are - incapable of attaining God's favor, Jesus allowed himself to be rejected, beaten, bloodied, and nailed to a cross. Jesus took God's just wrath on our sin and sinfulness and suffered in our place. He is both our substitute in life and in death. He was rejected so we are accepted by God. And the punishment is done. The barrel of God's wrath is empty. Jesus suffered it for us, died for us. And he rose physically from the grave to prove that in him we have redemption, forgiveness, freedom, and life eternal.

God calls us, *"My people"* – not because of the land we live in or that we've earned or deserved it, but because of his mercy, because of his will that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, because of the sanctifying work of the Spirit – baptized into His name, and made his children, blessed with faith in our Savior, and family in Christ.

God has turned you from Amaziah into Amoses. You **Preach the Word, not Yourself!** You **don't tattle.** You **tell** what the world needs to know about sin and the Savior. You listen to God's Word and his love for you. You address the sin in your life and bring it to the cross of Christ. Forgiven and freed, you live for him; you listen to his will for your life. And because you are loved, you love others. God gives you the words as you consider the brothers and sisters in Christ in the mirror, in your church, in your home, in your life and the conversations that you will have. You have his Word on it. *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). You are an Amos. **Preach the Word, Not Yourself.** Amen.