

Last week we discovered that God had called Amos to bring a message to the people of Israel. Initially they may have been happy as he spoke, because his message was one of judgement on the nations surrounding Israel, including Judah - two of the 12 tribes. The people were living in peace and prosperity, and they were enjoying increasing affluence. They felt secure and they were looking forward with optimism.

The charges God brings against the other nations remind us that God is interested in the happenings of countries and the charge against Israel shows us that he is also concerned when legal aid is denied to the poor, when people are sexually abused, or when the systems designed to protect the dignity of the powerless in society are quietly ignored.

These crimes, which take place in an outwardly orderly and civil society, are denounced in the same speech as the war crimes and atrocities of Israel's neighbours. The reminder to us is that while we often seek to categorise sin in terms of degree where we would have lesser or greater sins God simply views sin as sin.

And so the instruction to listen in verse one introduces the first of four collections beginning with such a call for the attention of those who heard the message. And they answer what I suppose would be the two main questions those who were listening to Amos would have: who does this person think he is, and could all this really happened to us?

The Lord states his clear intention to punish the whole family that he brought up from Egypt. Out of all of the families on earth God has chosen this family. By human standards God made a strange choice when he chose Israel: they were foreigners with no land of their own, they were weak and few in number and they ended up living in slavery. Yet God chose them to receive enormous privileges and to be a source of blessing for the entire world. God still calls in a similar way – 1 Cor 1:26-29  
*26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.*

However, with such a calling comes responsibility and the Israelites had failed to carry out their responsibility to obey God's covenant commands. To disobey those commands was to sin against God and it was for that sin that Israel was now to be judged. They would certainly think that being God's chosen people would not protect them from God's judgement and Amos reinforces this by giving examples of the principle of cause and effect. Effectively what he is saying is that there is a consequence for sin and that consequence is judgement.

In effect, that is the human story: when sin entered the world human beings were separated from God - cause and effect. The Bible is full of examples of God offering forgiveness while requiring obedience, including, ultimately, sending Jesus into the world. None of us are perfect yet, through faith in Christ, we receive the forgiveness of God - cause and effect.

So how can be possible to live in a way that pleases God? Verse 3 asks the question, "Can two walk together without agreeing to meet?" I want very quickly to think about walking with God.

There is one given in relation to walking with God - you must want to walk with him. If you have no faith, no desire to find out more about God, then you simply will not want to walk with him.

When we are walking with God there are certain things we must remember:

**We must walk on God's side of the road.**

*Genesis 5: 21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22 After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. 24 Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.*

Notice that Enoch walked with God - it doesn't say that God walked with him. It was Enoch's responsibility to walk with God. Today it is our responsibility to walk with him and, if you like, we need to be on the same side of the road or it's not walking with him. Amos 3:3 *Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?* The responsibility to walk in agreement is ours. We can't say, "If God does this, this and this, then I walk with him."

**We must walk with him every day.**

Over 80% of Enoch's life was spent walking with God. What difference would it make to our lives if we spent 80% of every day in the presence of God? The only thing we know about you, now is that he walked with God and for that, and that alone he is recorded amongst the heroes of faith. What a difference it would make if all of God's people would spend time every day praying, praising, reading the Bible and, with God's help, living a life of faith.

**We must walk in the same direction God is walking.**

It's quite obvious that you're not walking with somebody if you're going in different directions. In fact, unless you are walking in the same direction you're walking away from God. We don't get to choose where God walks - we simply get to agree with his direction, his plan, his purpose. It means that we need to conclude that he is always right despite how we feel, or what anyone else believes.

To start with that means that we need to view our sin anyway God views it. As I said earlier, we want to categorise sin, but God views sin as sin, and all sin needs to be dealt with. Isaiah 59:2 *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.* It is only through Jesus death on the cross that we have the opportunity to be forgiven, and to begin our walk with God. Unless we come to him in faith, accepting our need for forgiveness and surrendering our lives to him we cannot begin to walk with him.

### **We must walk at the same speed that God is walking**

1. speed is important - too fast, and we are expecting God to follow us; to slow and we may lose sight of where God is going.
2. We won't all walk at the same speed and that's okay as long as we are all walking with God. There will be times when God wants you to walk quickly, and there will be times when he expects you to stop and rest. Psalm 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

### **We must be consistent in our walk**

The great pianist, Rubinstein, said, "If I miss my piano practice one day, I know it, if I miss practice two days, my friends know it, if I miss three days, the whole world knows it."

The more we walk with God the clearer his voice becomes so if we miss one day it's not ideal, but it's not a disaster. The more time we miss with God the harder it becomes to recognise his voice, to discern where he's going and to follow him.

### **Walking with God brings his blessing.**

Genesis 6: 9 *This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.*

When God looked down on the Earth and saw it at its worst, he chose a man with whom he had been walking every day to fulfil his plan. He didn't randomly choose Noah. He chose him because he knew him, and God knew that he would be:

1. **Consistent and his calling.** He was willing to build a boat in the desert. He was willing to work hard in the heat of the day. He was willing to suffer the ridicule of others. He did it because he knew the one who had called him.
2. **Obedient, and his work.** He followed the plan God gave him and it's just as well or it might not have withstood the hard days of the storm.

Noah was not perfect but God used him to save the world. None of the people in the bible – even the great heroes of the faith were perfect but what they were commended for was their faith and their walk with God. If the Israelites had turned to God and sought forgiveness God would have forgiven them but they didn't. Like them we have a choice to make – to follow or to go our own way.

We have the great blessing of being children of God but as the Israelites found out that also carries huge responsibility. Amos says God is going to use the people around them to be witnesses to the failure of the Israelites – because they know what the Israelites are and what they should be. And there's the challenge for us – when people see us do they see people who are no different to anyone else, or an ordinary 'decent' person, or someone who is walking with God?