

- Actually read Amos 1:1-12, 2:4-3:2
- some of the background material lifted from the Amos series...

Introduction

- 10 years since Dunblane...
 - Thomas Hamilton took his own life, never faced up to the horror of his crime, ran away from facing justice...
- Overnight heard news of Slobodan Milosevic's death:
 - some of the headlines say he "escaped justice" by dying

Background

- To begin to understand what God might be saying through Amos, it really helps to understand something of the background to what he is saying, the world in which he was operating:
 - **When:** around 760 BC - ie 2760 years ago;
 - **Who:** Uzziah of Judah, and Jeroboam of Israel - both long reigning kings, suggesting a degree of stability for the region;
 - **Who to:** Israel, northern half of split kingdom of God's people;
 - **International:** a bit of a power vacuum between the larger neighbouring powers, leaving Israel free to expand (greater size implied greater control over trade routes which implied greater prosperity for the country as a whole);
- So we have a **well-off elite in the Israelite capital Samaria, with no immediate threats on the horizon.** What small hiccups do arise seem easily able to be dealt with using worldly political wisdom.
- **Complacency, indolence, carelessness with God's standards.**
- **Amos himself was a shepherd from Tekoa, south of the border.**
 - an **outsider**, an enemy, yet sharing much - **akin to Northern Ireland and Eire!**
 - and not a job commanding much respect - not a priest or a prince!
- **God used a nobody, an outsider, one with no official status as his mouthpiece,** to speak his words!

The Nations

- The whole of the first chunk of Amos is taken up with a series of prophecies or judgements against the nations of the area, including Judah and Israel.
- Bracketed between 1:2 "**The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem**" and 3:8 "**The lion has roared - who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken - who can but prophesy?**"
 - **pronouncement of God's judgement on the nations!**
- It would probably help to get a visual picture of who and where these nations were that come under God's judgement here:
 - **surrounding Israel on all sides;**
- Order is interesting:
 - in many ways, the judgements are **getting closer to home as they go on;**
 - the **Philistines** and **Syrians** were furthest away and had least in common with the Israelites nationally; those from **Tyre** and **Edom** were still quite distant, but a little closer; **Ammon** and **Moab** were closer still; and finally **Judah** is just next door, and essentially the same people.

The Judgements

- Remember that the first nations mentioned were heathen, godless, idol worshipping, lower than the low - **in the eyes of the Israelites.**
- And the crimes they committed in war were **atrocities:**
 - not just "**par for the course**" (though these were brutal times!);
 - **(1:3)** iron sledges, vicious way of slaughtering prisoners!
 - **(1:6)** whole communities - ethnic cleansing - rather than merely leaders, or

fighters, or whatever....

- (1:9) broke treaty, betrayal;
- (1:13) ripping open pregnant women - even in ancient world was "not on";
- (2:1) desecrating bones of the dead;
- Most akin to the kind of reaction you get these days to child sexual abuse.
- God will bring judgement on these people:
 - his justice **will** be done...

Judah (2:4-5):

- Distinctly less heinous crime in the eyes of the society of that day!
 - (2:4) "...they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed..."
- Turning back on God... (note how Amos is critical of his own people)
- Has two effects:
 - **first**, brings home **seriousness** of that as a crime when put beside these other judgements on the heathen nations.
(remember, this is the first & second commandments...)
 - **second**, also begins to open up realisation that **God judges his own people** as well as the heathen.

Israel

- Finally, last chunk of chapter 2, judgement on Israel.
 - **OUCH!**
 - bit too close to home; imagine the reaction: "we don't deserve... we haven't done anything like that.... splutter, splutter...!"
- They are being judged - not for ignoring religious observances, which they attended to.
 - but **for their lifestyle, their standards!**
- The way they used their **money**, the way they treated other **people**:
 - selfishness, greed, injustice, gluttony!
- **These are not on for God's people**
 - and God will bring devastating judgement against even his own people.
- Picture of judgement (v.13) is graphic - **crushing by a fully-laden cart**, like a car crash or an industrial accident today.
 - **inescapable, devastating**, not a little slap on the wrists - playing for real!

Conclusion

- Why did God get upset at all these sins committed in far off places?
 - age before world travel!
 - Damascus was a **long** way away for the average Israelite!
 - what did God care?

God cares about justice!

- God made all of humanity
 - he made us to know him, and to treat each other with the respect, care, even love that befits those created in the image of the Living God
 - his heart breaks at each injustice, at each abuse, at each betrayal, at each intimidation
- And in **every** case God will see justice done
 - there is no escaping his justice
 - Thomas Hamilton, Milosevic, the guy who raped an 11 year old girl in the supermarket toilets somewhere in England.....
 - all will stand before the throne of God and **justice** will be done
- God's **judgement** comes because he brings **justice**
 - he protects the weak, the fatherless, the widows, the oppressed
 - and every wrong will be righted
- I don't know how that makes you feel?

- relief that God will deal with the likes of Thomas Hamilton - perhaps...
 - but perhaps also a realisation that if God will right every wrong, we're in trouble!
 - for we've done our share of wrongs!
 - letting people down, treating those God has created as unimportant, as idiots, as folk to satisfy our wants
-
- And if God will right every wrong we won't get away with any of it!
 - only at the Cross is God's love and mercy held together!
 - God is a God of mercy - and of justice - and of judgement
 - the Cross is where they meet! Hallelujah!