Amos 6:1a Woe to you….

Boy, I thought the last text, which was also from Amos was a tough one. This one is even worse! This one is even more law, more threats from the Lord God than the last one. At least with the last one we had one little phrase we could latch onto that gave us a glimmer of hope in the gospel but this text…nothing! What to do, what to do?

So once again I will start with giving you background information. Again, Amos is a prophet of God who wrote his book around 755 B.C. He is a contemporary of Isaiah, Jonah, Micah and Hosea. Like all of these other prophets, Amos’ message was a call for repentance because of the multitude of sins the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel have been involved in…involved in for the last 150 years!

That’s right, for the last 150 years the people of Israel have worshipped golden calves at Dan and Bethel. For the last 150 years they have indulged themselves with the rituals and godlessness of the Canaanite gods, in truth, abandoning the true God and his message of grace and love. For the last 150 years these people and their leaders have pushed the Lord God to the limit and are on the verge of having the just judgment of God descend upon them. About 30 years after Amos, God will allow the Assyrian’s to rise up, capture this people and land, deport them and they will simply disappear into the sea of humanity without a trace. The lost Ten Tribes of Israel is how they are known today. Gone because they reached a level of godlessness that ultimately brought God’s judgment.

Our text today is really a text that reveals the depths of their godlessness. It is given to point out the horror of how they have decided to be and live. It is law, the stern and in your face revelation of the Lord concerning their sins. Hopefully these words will then serve to give us thought and to contemplate our lives in regard to the Lord our God. Our theme will be: **GOD OR THE WORLD? 1st. The World. 2nd. The Lord. 3rd. Grace.**

Let’s begin by helping you to understand clearly the words of the text before us. They are words clearly showing the depth of sin the people of Israel have fallen into. Our text opens this way, **“Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mt. Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!** With these opening words the Lord through his prophet wishes to address the problem he knows the people have. I do want you to note that these opening words address both kingdoms, the Southern Kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem its capital (Jerusalem is built on Mt. Zion) and the Northern Kingdom of Israel with Samaria its capital built on Mt. Samaria. Both kingdoms are addressed because the problems and godlessness that have been in Israel are now beginning to creep into Judah. Judah is slowly but surely beginning to abandon the Lord under the influence of Israel.

God says their problem is “complacency” and “feeling secure.” It’s true. Times were great. Both kingdoms are at the largest they have been since the time of Solomon. Both kingdoms, right now, have no enemies threatening their livelihood or the peace they have. Prosperity and good times are happening like never before. In a way. I have to say that because the rich and powerful are thriving and getting wealthier but the common people, they are being cheated, misused and abused in every way possible. Justice is a foreign word to the people. Law-abiding is a strange concept to all. So while it is true that many good things were going on, God has made it clear that these good times were not a part of his blessing upon them but rather was a part of the evil that has infected the land.

God goes on. He says, **“Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours?”** With these words, the Lord is giving a challenge to His people. Look around. Are the good times everywhere? Don’t you see what is going on? Every one of the cities that God has mentioned has recently been destroyed. Every one of the places pointed to here should have served as a warning and alarm to the Jews that things were afoot. There were clearly signs that things were not right, but these people, because they were comfortable and seemingly doing fine, they refused to see what was going on. (Boy, doesn’t that sound like much of our world today?)

The Lord goes on, **“You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you to do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.”** I think you get the sense of these words. The leaders and the rich were living high. They had the best of the best, indulged in the arts, living in luxury, partied away. The most important line here says, **“but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.”**

I think there are two ways of looking at this verse. Think initially of how Joseph’s brother felt when they sold him into slavery! At that time, they did not care about Joseph, did not care they were destroying his life or hurting their father in this action. Their hatred of what was good and right was so deep that they easily and without guilt destroyed the life of their brother! That is the first way. The second is to realize that Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh had become two of the great tribes of Israel. Yet the very souls of these people, these descendants of Joseph were being destroyed by the godlessness and evil of the land. And no one cared. No one cared that the truth of God was lost to all. No one cared that God’s majesty was offended by idolatry and evil. No one cared that evil was declared good and good was declared evil. Either way, you can grasp in these words that the greatest danger here was unbelief. A rejection of the truth of God and a rejection of the promises and religion that God himself had given to these people.

As you read through Amos you can see this real problem raise its voice. God calls upon the people to seek Him and live. He pleads with them to seek good and not evil, to hate evil and love good. But all to no avail. The people will continue in this godless way and yes, their destruction is soon to be.

That’s the point of the woe. I believe what is said here is basically what is at the root of the words found in 1 John 2:15-17, **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”** Or should we fail to grasp the words of Jesus in Matt 6:19-21, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Or maybe we just need to go back and look again at the words of our Epistle reading! **“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this…”**

Here is our consideration. Do we desire to follow the Lord our God or do we desire to follow the world? Let’s just weigh that for a moment.

Look at our world today. Most of us here would agree that things are going downhill. That’s the nature of the world. We keep trying to cure ills with greater evil and fix the good as if it is broken. We are a world drifting into lawlessness, immorality and complete rejection of the truth of God. We have been fighting poverty for the past 50 years and yet the problem is getting worse! We decry that our police are lawless and we are trying to fix this by even greater lawlessness? It is a world gone mad and blind, that cannot see the truth though it reaches out and slaps it. Is that what you want? The kind of world that Amos preached against because it was a world without God.

Or would you rather have the Lord and His Ways. God has revealed the nature and horror of sin. God has shown how sin will destroy, how the world will embrace sin and how we will need to stand in the wonder of God. Seriously, if you just pay attention to God’s Word, the whats, whys and wherefores become very clear.

And then God provides that solution for sin. It is His Son Jesus. God in love sent his Son to be our Savior from sin. Jesus lived the perfect life we could not and do not and then Jesus went to the cross to pay the debt of sin each of us owes. Completely paid the price! An act of love so awesome that without the gift of the Holy Spirit that God will give you, Jesus and his message of eternal life and salvation will be considered the greatest of foolishness. And yet in Jesus we learn of God’s care and love for us. We learn how God forgives and overlooks our faults. We learn how God encourages, comforts and guides our lives to His glory and honor. We see how God’s love fills our lives with His love and everything, whether we live or die, is to the glory of the Lord. This is the wonder of God. His love given in promises made and fully kept. His love shown in His Son dying for our sins. His love realized and true, as Jesus rises from the dead and grants us eternal life and salvation. Everything in our life with God walks in this path of love, is influenced in this path of love, and finds its comfort and peace in this path of love. Jesus is the path, the Way to eternal life.

And that is important because finally, and truthfully, go to your local cemetery and see what this world will bring you. Yes, it is death. That death can be your introduction to the judgment of God because you have rejected and spurned him or that death can be your entrance to God’s eternal life and salvation which God has promised and given! Given in Jesus. Given in love. Given by grace.

The people of Amos’ day went with the world. Many people today still do that. I plead with you, Seek the Lord and live. Know the wonder of Jesus. Marvel in God’s plan of love. That is the path we want. Where the Lord our God does not threaten but rather proclaims “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The world or the Lord. May it be His grace. Amen.