

Rivers and Streams
Amos 5:24
10-18-2026

I had a professor who used to say the easiest way to get people to listen is to tell them what they want to hear.

Or, as Paul affirms in 2 Timothy 4:3 that a time would come when people would not put up with those who spoke the truth but instead, to suit their own desires, would turn to teachers who would tell them what their itching ears wanted to hear.

And how to get people to listen was a problem the prophet Amos faced when he began his ministry in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Prophets, priests, and politics were often closely aligned.

Priests and prophets were often court appointed and on the kings' payroll, sure to tell the people what he wanted them to hear.

But Amos wasn't an officially sanctioned prophet appointed by the king and the king didn't authorize his message.

He doesn't even refer to himself as a prophet, but in 7:14-15 *"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. And God took me from tending the flocks and told me to go prophesy to the people of Israel."*

Amos was a foreigner from Tekoa outside of Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah with a message no one wanted to hear

Which is why in chapter 7, Amaziah, the king's appointed priest of Bethel, told him to go back to Judah where he belonged because they didn't want him there stirring up trouble.

His problem was how to get people to listen and the way he did it was masterfully done

By tickling their itching ears, feeding their fears and hatreds towards other groups and nations by telling them what they already believed and wanted to hear, he

was able to grab and keep their attention and come back for more to hear what came next.

Once he had their full attention, it was too late, they were hooked.

Amos began by condemning all Israel's enemies, saying what bad and wicked people they were and how God was going to punish them for all their sin. Exactly what they were eager to hear

There is something about our sinful nature that likes to point fingers and find fault in others, to put them down for their failures and hear the latest dirt while ignoring and excusing our own sin

Maybe because it can make us feel better about ourselves so we can be all too ready to believe the worst in others when it fits in with our fears and hates and distrust and prejudices

Amos played on their prejudices by telling the people what they wanted to hear and it worked; he got their full attention.

so, he began his message in chapter 1,

“He said: “The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.” This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth, I will send fire upon the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad. I will break down the gate of Damascus; I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven and the one who holds the scepter in Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir,” says the LORD.” (Amos 1:2–5)

Damascus was the capital city of one of their longtime bitter enemies, the Arameans who were a constant threat.

Anyone at Bethel who heard these words of God's coming judgment on them would naturally stop and listen, even to this foreigner

In fact, they would want to hear more of what he had to say about those awful people in Damascus who deserved whatever is coming to them

Amos then continues,

“This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom, I will send fire upon the walls of Gaza that will consume her fortresses. I will destroy the king of Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, till the last of the Philistines is dead,” says the Sovereign LORD.” (Amos 1:6–8)

Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, these were all Philistine cities

Again, longtime enemies of Israel and now Amos is saying judgment is coming on them also, God is going to destroy them

And as the crowd grew, the people would think, hey we like what this guy has to say, let's hear more.

So next he turns to Tyre, their one-time friend who had betrayed them and broken their treaty.

“This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood, I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses.”” (Amos 1:9–10)

By now, Amos had the peoples' full attention and the crowd would continue to grow as word spread, come listen to this preacher let our enemies have it.

Then comes another longtime enemy, Edom

“This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked, I will send fire upon Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah.”” (Amos 1:11–12)

By now people would have been cheering him on

With a message like that, it certainly must be from God

So, then his attention turns to another one of their neighbors, Ammon.

“This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Ammon, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders, I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah that will consume her fortresses amid war cries on the day of battle, amid violent winds on a stormy day. Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together,” says the LORD.” (Amos 1:13–15)

People would be calling out for more, so Amos turns next to Moab

“This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he burned, as if to lime, the bones of Edom’s king, I will send fire upon Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet. I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him,” says the LORD.” (Amos 2:1–3)

All the nations Israel had faced time and time again in battle, Amos had now condemned except one, their brothers down in the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos’ own people.

“This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because 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, I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.”” (Amos 2:4–5)

Imagine how this would have fed their pride and belief in how much better they were than these others.

All their enemies have now been condemned and Gods judgement promised upon them all

If you were to look at a map, you would see that all these nations completely encircled Israel, North south, east, and west. None escaped.

Israel believed that they're problems were all out there, other people's fault.
It's the Ammonites and Philistines, the Edomites and Moabites, the Philistines and people of Tyre and Judah

Don't we still hear this?

It's those people, that group, they're the problem.

It's those liberals or conservatives.

It's all the people on welfare looking for a free handout

The homeless making our streets unsafe.

It's all those foreigners coming in and taking our jobs

If that group or those people would just shape up or go away or become like us, then things would be so much better.

If Amos had stopped there, he would have been quite a popular man in Israel, telling people everything they wanted to hear and already believed about others. Little did they realize that he had been softening them up and drawing them in, slowly tightening the noose around them.

Once he had their full attention, everything was ready for his primary message from the Lord.

Before they could turn away or tune him out, he continued,

"This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines." (Amos 2:6–8)

It was like the two women at the revival service a number of years ago. They were sitting together in the front pew as the fiery preacher got going.

When he condemned the sin of stealing, both ladies loudly cried, Amen brother!

**When the preacher condemned the sin of lust, they yelled even louder,
Preach it brother!**

**And when the preacher condemned the sin of lying, they jumped up to
their feet and screamed Right on brother! Tell it like it is!**

**But when he condemned the sin of gossip, the two ladies got very quiet
and one turned to the other and said, He's quit preaching and now he's
meddling.**

You could understand his harsh words toward the brutality of Damascus,
toward the inhumanity of the Philistines, treating people as objects to be bought
and sold.

Toward the betrayal of Tyre,
years of built up the hatred toward Edom.

Towards the terrorization of the defenseless by Amon as they ripped open
pregnant women, and toward Moab as the desecrated the bones of the dead,
which was a serious offence in that culture.

You could even understand the condemnation of Judah who had turned their
back on God and were worshipping others.

But now, as far as the people were concerned, Amos had crossed that line, he had
started meddling in places he didn't belong as he lumps Israel's sins in with
everyone else's

Making it vividly clear that as far as God was concerned, their injustice and
oppression made them no less guilty than any of these others

And now God had enough and things had reached the breaking point
So as he begins his message in verse 2, **The Lord roars from Zion and thunders
from Jerusalem** his judgement on the nations, Israel included

**The message of Amos is no different than the message of Micah we
looked at last week, *"He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what
does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk
humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8)**

And it's no different from the message of all the prophets who declared God cares about how people and society treat others

God is passionate about issues of justice and mercy, compassion and righteousness especially toward the defenseless, the outcast and foreigner, the poor and alienated, the weak and vulnerable and all those who have no one to speak up for them.

And he expects his people to act accordingly

the Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem and his message is captured in 5:24

Let justice roll down like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream.

Throughout the book, Amos comes back to these issues of justice and righteousness over and over again

Sins they ignored or excused while condemning the sins of others

In 2:6 he says they sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals
Treating the poor as if they were worthless

Do you realize that human trafficking is the third largest illegal export in the world, behind only drugs and guns.

Each year close to 1 million people, mostly women and children, are sold into slavery, over 20,000 in the US.

People considered worthless or of less value than others, often forgotten and their plight swept under the rug

:7 says they trampled the heads of the poor and walk all over them

Taking advantage of others who have no one to speak up for them

Sweat shops remain a major force in international trade

Companies like Walmart and Target keeping costs low and profits high at the expense of workers who are paid a pittance and often forced to work in harsh conditions in places like China and many third world countries

A few years ago, it was estimated that if Disney used only 1% of the amount they spent on advertising and marketing, they could pay each of their workers in their overseas toy factories enough to feed and clothe themselves and their families annually, something they didn't do.

And Amazon, one of the richest companies in the world valued at over 1.5 trillion dollars.

It's run by the second richest man in the world, whose wealth is valued at \$370 billion, yet over 12,500 of their employees in the US have to rely on food stamps to get by

Corruption cannot be excused as just business

Greed as that's just how things work

Unfair and unsafe business practices as everyone's doing it

Amos 8:4-6 says, "Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"— skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat."

In 3:10 he says they no longer knew how to do right but were hoarding their wealth, storing all they had looted away in their palaces

3:15 says they were building summer and winter houses, mansions adorned and elaborately decorated with ivory while the poor went hungry

Archeologists have found that it was during this period that for the very first time, there began to develop a clear division between the rich and the poor in Israel.

Prior to this, houses were all pretty uniform and modest. But in Amos' day, there were enormous mansions build for the rich while the poor lived in hovels

Greed and avarice were running rampant and human life devalued

The rich were getting richer and the poor getting poorer

I wonder what Amos would say to a society where wealth is increasingly being hoarded into the hands of the few, where the number of billionaires grew from 66 in 1990 to almost 1000 today where the richest 1% control over 30% of the nation's wealth while the bottom 50% only 2%, and it's getting worse and where the estimated net worth of the richest man in the world exceeds the annual GDP of 174 of the 195 nations of the world

some might be tempted to think of such things as political.

But with a wealth of support from scripture, I would argue, that they are primarily moral, ethical and inherently biblical issues.

Speaking directly to our values, what we care about, the worth we put on people, especially the have nots.

For as far the message of Amos and Micah and the rest of the prophets were concerned, these types of things weren't so much political but very clearly faith issues.

Justice and righteousness, compassion and caring for those in need, the vulnerable and those at the bottom, those abused by the system, treating them fairly with respect and dignity, are at the very center of the heart of God.

For as James said, religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

And our Lord himself told us, whenever we feed the hungry and give the thirsty something to drink, whenever we care for the stranger and clothe the naked, whenever we care for the sick and visit those in prison, in other words whenever we show compassion towards those in need, whatever we do for the least of these, he said, we are doing it for Him.

So in the words of the prophet, let justice roll down like a river and righteousness like a never-ending stream

people were only thinking of themselves and had lost all compassion towards the needs of others

6:1 *"Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, who have stopped caring, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!"*

Then they went to church and worshipped God as if everything was fine

Yet God declared, *"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me."* (Amos 5:21)

He wants nothing to do with a religion or faith that treats people like that that ignores the needs of others, then think they can just come to church like everything is fine

God says this has got to end.

It is said that when the first mayor Daley of Chicago, who was not known for his humility, when he was in office one of his speechwriters approached him and said could barely get by on what he was making and needed a raise. Daley's response was, I'm not going to give you any more money. It ought to be enough that you work for a great American hero like me. That was the end of the discussion, or so he thought.

Daley was known for his speaking ability and that even though others wrote his speeches for him, he was able to deliver them on the spot without ever having reviewed the notes before he got up to speak. On one particular instance, he was speaking before a group of veterans for a Veterans Day celebration and it was getting national press coverage.

Daley began the speech and as he delivered it, he was impressed with how eloquent and passionate it was. He talked about how everybody had forgotten the veterans and assured them that he remembers and cared.

So, he said, Today I am proposing a seventeen-point program—national, state, and local—to take care of the veterans of our country.

As with Amos, by this time everyone was on the edge of their seats to hear what he would say next. They were excited to hear about this elaborate and expansive plan to care for the veterans. And the truth was that at this point, since he hadn't reviewed his notes ahead of time, even Daley was very interested himself. He couldn't wait to find out what he was going to say next. So he turned the page over and all it said was, You're on your own now, you great American hero.

The point of the story was that things have a way of catching up with us
Amos' message warned that things were catching up with Israel as well.

As Isaiah 1:17 says, 'Stop doing wrong and learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow'

There are so many ways to do it but we all need to find ways to express and keep issues of justice and righteousness, mercy and compassion before us
There are local ways like supporting things like the Hawaii Foodbank, we will be collecting food for it at the Harvest Fest.

At Christmas, we again will be collecting gifts for children at the shelter in Waimanalo.

Gifts can be designated in your offerings to go to SBC hunger and disaster relief
There are groups like Compassion International that let you support a child.

My oldest sister introduced me to something called Tisbest.org which connects people with dozens of legitimate charities dealing with everything from trafficking to hunger to homelessness to education to seniors and children.
It lets you give to whatever is closest to your heart.

So let justice roll down like a river and righteousness like a never-ending stream.