

Prayer & The Will of God • Amos 7:1-9

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Who Believes In Prayer?*

1. Several years ago in a small town in the Mid West, there were no liquor stores.
2. Eventually, a *nightclub* was built right on Main Street.
3. Members of one of the churches in the area were so disturbed that they conducted several all night prayer meetings, and asked the Lord to burn down the den of iniquity.
4. Lightning struck the tavern a short time later, and it was completely destroyed by fire.
5. The owner, knowing how the church people had prayed, sued them for the damages.
6. His attorney claimed that their prayers had caused the loss.
7. The congregation hired a lawyer and fought the charges.
8. After much deliberation, the judge declared, "It's the opinion of the court that wherever the guilt may lie, the nightclub owner is the one who really believes in prayer while the church members do not!"

B. *Mystery!*

1. If we polled everyone here today, no doubt we'd find that the vast majority believe in the power of prayer
2. But there's another question we ought to add to that poll – how many believe in the sovereignty of God?
3. We'd likely find the same result
4. As bible believing followers of Jesus Christ, we believe in prayer *and* the sovereignty of God
5. But do we realize that this is a mystery – a great paradox?
6. Here we have two truths that stand side by side, and at first glance, they seem to stand in opposition to each other.
7. How can God be *sovereign*, where His will is unalterably done in all creation, and yet, we can come to Him with our requests, and He moves to answer them?
8. Our text this morning sets before us an example of this paradox that is nothing if not stunning!

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-3

1 Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop; indeed *it was the late crop after the king's mowings.*

2 And so it was, when they had finished eating the grass of the land, that I said:

“O Lord GOD, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he *is* small!”

3 So the LORD relented concerning this. **“It shall not be,” said the LORD.**

1. We'll get in to the background of the prophecy of Amos in our study Wednesday evening
2. For now, let me just say that Amos was a farmer from Judah who was sent to prophecy to the northern kingdom of Israel.
3. The nation was corrupt and in desperate need of reform.
4. In Ch. 7, Amos sees visions of judgment that are to come on the nation.
5. The first is here in verses 1-3.
 - a. it's a vision of locusts who descend on the fields just as the main harvest is ready to be gathered
 - b. as Amos watches, he sees the cloud of insects descend, eat everything in sight,
 - c. and then fly away, leaving utter desolation behind
6. Amos is overcome by what he sees and cries out to God
7. The nation cannot endure such a sweeping judgment
8. So Amos asks that God might forgive, that He might overlook the failure of the people.
9. And indeed, the response of God is in *favor* of Amos' request
10. God says – “It shall not be. The judgment by locusts will not come to pass.”
11. Then Amos has another vision . . .

B. Vs. 4-6

4 Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, the Lord GOD called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory.

5 Then I said:

**“O Lord GOD, cease, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand,
For he *is* small!”**

6 So the LORD relented concerning this. “This also shall not be,” said the Lord GOD.

1. The prophet has another vision of judgment – this time it’s a raging fire that sweeps across the land and consumes everything
2. Fires were always a threat in the ancient world
 - a. most buildings were made of wood and stone
 - b. and fields surrounded their villages
 - c. all it took was a stiff wind during the dry season and a tiny spark could kindle a blaze that would burn thousands, even hundreds of thousands of acres.
3. Here Amos sees a fire that sweeps the entire nation
4. And once again he is overwhelmed by the vision of devastation and cries out to God for mercy.
5. And again, God in effect says, “Okay Amos – the judgment by fire *also* will not come to pass.”

C. Cannot Explain

1. I would love to be able to stand here before you this morning and explain this passage - But I cannot!
2. My mind is too puny, my intellect too small to wrap itself around what’s going on here.
3. So I will not pretend to offer some neat explanation.
4. Rather, I want to ask you to join me in humble acceptance of what we find here and instead of tying it up in a neat theological package, let’s bow before the this mystery and acknowledge that our God is far bigger than our intellect.
5. Friends, a God who is small enough to *explain* is too small to *worship*
6. What we find here is *holy ground*.
7. In an act of divine revelation, God gives Amos two visions of

judgment

- a. they speak of His holy wrath toward the corruption and blasphemy of the nation.
 - b. quite frankly, Israel DESERVES judgment
 - c. but what Amos sees is so overwhelming, he cannot help but cry out to God for mercy
 - d. and God, and here is what we find hard to understand, God says, “Okay Amos – mercy! Not judgment.”
8. Is God altering His will? Is God *changing* His mind? *Can* the mind of God be changed?
 9. Isn't a vision that God gives a SURE picture of the future?
 10. Can a man receive a vision from the Lord and the thing NOT COME TO PASS?
 11. I don't know!
 12. But what *I do* know is that Amos prayed, and judgment was averted – and that friends, is what the Holy Spirit wants you and I to learn from this.
 13. For our God is perfect in *both* love *and* justice.
 - a. sin, He *will* judge; corruption He *will* punish, blasphemy He *will* answer, evil He *will* pour His wrath on.
 - b. but in love He will *also* be longsuffering, patiently waiting for the repentance of sinners
 - c. He waits with open arms for His erring children to turn back to Him
 14. And what these verses teach us is that it's the prayers of the faithful that lengthen the day of mercy and delay the day of judgment!
 15. What stimulates them to such intercession, to such restraining prayer that delays judgment is a vision of the reality and seriousness of judgment.
 16. Look at verse 7 . . .

D. Vs. 7-9

- 7 Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand.**
- 8 And the LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?”
And I said, “A plumb line.”**

Then the Lord said: “Behold, I am setting a plumb line In the midst of My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore.”

9 The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, And the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam.”

1. Twice Amos has seen visions of judgment, and both times, in answer of Amos’ intercession and request for mercy, God has *delayed* judgment.
2. But only delayed it!
3. Now, with the third vision, God is telling him the day of mercy is over; the time for repentance is past.
4. The people have not taken advantage of the opportunity to repent – and so judgment will be delayed no more.
5. God’s plumb line has measured the people and they have been found to be crooked, out of line with His will.
6. Like a builder who has to tear down a wall that is not true to plumb, God will tear down the idolatry and corruption of the nation.

III. CONCLUSION

A. The Lesson

1. While these verses hold forth a mystery to us – the mystery of the power of prayer and the Sovereignty of God,
2. They also teach a simple lesson -
3. That lesson is this – the prayers of the faithful lengthen the day of mercy and give sinners an opportunity to repent and be saved from judgment.
4. But it’s the *reality* of judgment that *compels* God’s people to pray!
5. Twice God delayed judgment in answer of Amos’ prayer but that prayer was sparked by a vision of judgment!
6. The third time, God warned there would be no more delay – and so Amos didn’t request one.
7. Christian – we live in the Day of mercy when in His longsuffering, God is bearing with the wickedness of this world, - longing for the repentance of sinners and the return of the lost.

8. The Bible gives us a clear vision of the Final Judgment, and knowing the surety of that Day, we plead with God, as Amos did, for forgiveness for the lost.
9. In light of the judgment of God, in 2 Corinthians 5:11 Paul says . . .

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

- a. indeed, we plead with both God and man!
- b. we plead with people to repent and with God to show mercy.

“Give them more time God - And then use time to woo them and win them!
Convict them of their sin and desperate need of You O Lord!”

10. Time in itself does nothing – but it does provide the space in which the grace of God can do it’s work of winning the lost.
11. Our role, is to pray!
12. Knowing judgment is surely coming – we pray!
13. And we pray with a sense of urgency!

B. To Unbelievers

1. Let me conclude with a word to those here who are not Christians
2. I plead with you to come to faith – today, right now!
3. You see, while time is God’s great gift to you, while His delay of judgment provides you the opportunity in which to repent and come to faith in Christ, the delay may also *blind* you to your need.
4. You’ve lived for 20 or 30, maybe 50 or even 60 years – and the end hasn’t come!
5. Even more, you look at history and say that this world’s been spinning for thousands of years, and there’s no Final Judgment.
6. You are making a tragic mistake –
 - a. you are thinking that the delay is unending –
 - b. that God is not *willing* to judge sin, or that He doesn’t care about it as much as we Christians say He does.
 - c. you are in fact, fulfilling Bible prophecy because Peter said that in the last days, there would be people who would think exactly like that
 - d. 2 Peter 3:3-4

3 Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation.”

- e. Peter then gives the example of the people who lived in Noah’s day who refused to believe him when he said judgment was coming and they needed to repent of their evil
 - f. for a hundred years Noah built the ark – and each day he preached of the coming day of judgment
 - g. they laughed and mocked him, till the first drops of rain fell
7. Do not make the same mistake they did. Do not think that *this* is the way it always will be.
8. We live in the midst of the *delay* – and it is nothing but the longsuffering of God and the prayers of the people of God that hold back His wrath.
9. Every day you put off repentance, every day you refuse to take advantage of the delay of God’s judgment, you are in fact, heaping up more reason and cause for God to come in judgment.
10. Listen to the words of Romans 2 . . .

3 And do you think this, O man, . . . that you will escape the judgment of God?

4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

- 11. Forsake your sin – turn to God
- 12. Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for your sins and rose again from the dead to give you new life!
- 13. Receive God’s offer of forgiveness – and receive it now!