

Who Among Us Will Go?

Week 3 – Amos

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If you make it to the Major leagues, you know you've made it. But Amos, the book and Prophet that we are studying, is just a minor prophet, not in the major prophet category, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Being a minor prophet sounds less significant, but minor doesn't mean that Amos or the other minor prophets didn't make a major impact on the world.

It didn't mean that they were less important than the others. Fun fact: the prophets were simply grouped by the length of their books. So, extra credit goes to Isaiah for being the longest book. Now, the prophets who wrote the books or had books named after them didn't get clear guidelines from their teacher on how long the books were supposed to be. They didn't get any guidelines.

But what about credentials? Do the prophets have any credentials? What about Amos? Well, credentials and titles can be important in some situations. When we go to the doctor, we hope they have the right credentials to treat us. I had a professor in seminary. His name was Dr. Komezando, and he would always see me in the halls, and from way down the hall, he would shout, Reverend, how are you?

It would make me feel uncomfortable because I had not earned the title of Reverend I. In fact, at that point in my schooling and in my journey of being a pastor, I was not even planning on going through the ordination process. I was happy taking my course of study classes at the seminary and being a local licensed pastor.

After a few times, I told Dr. K that I was not a reverend yet. Why do you why do you keep calling me that? And he said, Where I come from in Africa, we call people by the title that we know that they are, or we know they can be. Now, growing up, my brother called me Bean, so I'm still living that one. Did someone call Amos a prophet to make him so brave and so bold to travel and talk about God's destruction that was about to come on them?

And probably not I. We don't know. But we don't have a scripture that supports it either way. But I'm guessing it's not because Amos had a different profession. There were some common occupations found during this time, and they were usually centered around

places. So, there were professions and occupations that surrounded the home. So that would be the bakers and the hunters and the fishers and the shepherds.

And then the occupations that surrounded the palace. So you had the king and the governor and the scribe and the cupbearer and the soldiers and then the marketplace, you had the tent makers and the potters and the metal workers, and then the religious occupation related to the temple was the priest. Now, most prophets, many prophets were actually trained professionals who earned a living as a prophet.

So they might resolve a problem and be paid a fee, as we read about when Saul visited the Seer Samuel in the book of First Samuel. So we know from chapter one, verse one of Amos, that Amos was a shepherd; the very beginning of the book says, These are the words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa.

We also know from this verse that the King of Judah was King Uzziah but then also the King of Israel was King Jeroboam. He'll come into our conversation later. So, a shepherd doesn't have any credentials in the temple. Sometimes, it doesn't matter if you have the right credentials or not. Now, here's an example.

It's going to take me a minute to get there, but here is the example. So, we have some really great opportunities coming up here in the next few months to serve kids in our neighborhood. The end-of-school party, which we call the summer palooza, is happening on the last day of school, which is Thursday, May 23rd. It's like this mini carnival that happens here.

It takes a team of people. Last year, it rained at the last minute, so all of the volunteers quickly moved everything from outside to inside. And it was chaotic, but it was wonderful and beautiful. When we did interviews in our community with leaders and people who lived around here, we did several interviews with our neighbors. Many of them said they really appreciated that we do things like this for the neighbor and the kids in the neighborhood.

We need many volunteers to make that happen, so you can go to the events page, check it out, and sign up to help out or participate. On that events page, you will also see Vacation Bible School, which is the best week of the summer.

There's a place for everyone to serve. Now, if working with kids is not your jam, you can help with our dinner crew. We feed all of our volunteers before dinner. There's a set up and tear down crew. There's check in, There's so many different roles that you can play. However, one of those important roles is that of the safety team.

Now, the safety team helps ensure that the kids are safe. They are stationed outside and inside, and they're on the lookout for any dangers that might be present. Now, of course, one of those things is that we don't want people in our building who are not supposed to be here for the safety of our kids and that the team takes this very seriously, which is wonderful. We're so grateful for that team. We want to ensure that our kids are safe while learning about Jesus.

Last year, our district superintendent, you know, my boss, Nancy Tomlinson, showed up to VBS, and her grandkids happened to be in town the week of our VBS. So, she signed her grandkids up for our VBS, which was really cool. She came in, checked in her kids, and came into the worship center. Then, she stayed in the worship center. The safety team noticed that. We have pretty strict guidelines on what a volunteer should wear, right? We need to know what they look like.

The safety team notices, and they go to the doors. Nancy, my boss, and they say to her that she is not allowed to be here and that she needs to leave the worship center. But very nicely, they said this, thankfully so.

I'm sure she didn't say it in this way. Okay. I know she didn't say it in this way, but I'm sure she could have said something like this. I have the credentials to be here. Right? I am a woman of God in the United Methodist Church. I am a disaster superintendent. I'm part of the bishop's cabinet. You know, I am ordained. I am set apart by the church and God for the purpose of God's work. So she says whatever she says, probably not exactly that, but the team escorts her out.

You know, my boss. So eventually she was vouched for and we got her a guest's name badge and allowed her to check out what was going on up here. And she laughed about it. And she said she was so impressed about how seriously we took the safety of our kids. Credentials are important at times, but other times they're kind of irrelevant because being called by God means you're called by God.

There are no other requirements besides faithfully and humbly living into your calling. So, like our security team, who asked our DS to leave the worship center, Amos was asked to leave the temple and leave the town. Here's how it happened. In Amos Chapter Seven, starting at verse ten, it says, Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the House of Israel, and the land is not able to bear his all of his words.

For thus, Amos has said Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile, away from his land. Amaziah said to Amos O Seer, Go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the King's Sanctuary, and it is the temple of the Kingdom.

Now, unlike our DS, Amos didn't try to prove his credentials. When the king and the priest at the temple asked him to leave, Amos responded with this. Amos answered, Amaziah, I am not a prophet, nor am I a prophet's son, but I am a shepherd and a trimmer of six sycamore trees. Now we know that Amos didn't consider himself a prophet or a prophet's son, which means from the School of Prophets.

We also learned from this that he was a trimmer of sycamore trees, which likely meant he was wealthy, at least not in the poor category. When Amos goes to this other town in the southern country and says, hey, you're not treating your poor well, he's not saying it for his own benefit. He is standing in solidarity with the people who are being treated poorly.

Amos was in a profession, but no prophet, but he received this message from God and traveled from the southern kingdom to the northern kingdom. And he goes straight to Bethel. Now Bethel means House of God. It's the place where Joseph made this covenant with God, but he is denounced by the head priest, Amaziah. Who went to Jeroboam, and together they're like, we need him to leave the kingdom like he is making, causing too many waves. He needs to leave now. There's probably little doubt that Amos was actually forced to leave the Northern Kingdom and return to his native country.

God called Amos. He called Amos because he sees false worship going on. He sees that he sees injustices in in the in the kingdom. So God's message was, people, you need to open up your eyes to what is around you.

I am bringing judgment to you, and I will destroy you if you do not repent. This is this is God's message. This is the message that God told Amos to say to go. Go and say this message. Now, I don't know about you, but if I was told to go and say that kind of a message, I might be a little scared.

I might say I'm I don't I don't know what to do. I don't have the right credentials for that because preaching on God's judgment is not the most fun thing to do. Right?

It's why many times pastors will avoid preaching on the story where Jesus curses the fig tree because the fig tree represents the people who are not producing fruit. He curses those who are not sharing the good news, who are not helping the poor. It's not fun to say that God's judgment is coming on us. It's a lot easier to say God is full of grace, life, and

truth. I will be preaching on Jesus, cursing the fig tree. We're also announcing our vision statement at that service. I hope that you will join us for that.

Now, when it comes to injustice in our city, seeing the injustices in our city, I have always hated it since high school. I used to be like, how why is this happening in our city? I used to say things like that all the time.

I still say things like that all the time. And over the years, my go-to responses are, ah, I'm not qualified to actually make a change, and it's scary to say things that people disagree with or say things that might upset people. But sometimes we are asked to do things we don't feel qualified for example, you're going to love this one.

So just a few years into being a pastor, actually was probably maybe in my first year of being a pastor, I was asked to do a memorial service for a beloved member of our community who happened to be a camel, as in a camel with one hump. Now, I have done several funerals and services up to this point, but never one for an animal.

I was like, I am not qualified for this. I do not have the right training for this. I don't even know what to do. But I did the service, and it was a beautiful moment. Now, here is a little context to this story. I was currently at the time I was a board member of an animal rescue ranch, and this was a camel who made many, many people happy in our community.

The camel played the role of camel in many native cities. The camel visited schools and went around town for hump day. So, like, this was a beloved camel. But sometimes, we're asked to do things that we don't feel qualified for. Sometimes those asks come from another human. And it's easy to say no to that other human, especially if we don't feel that person is connected to God or speaking God's truth.

But what happens when we feel that we are asked by God to do something? Now maybe you're like, well, I don't feel I don't have that feeling of God. And there are times in my life where I'm like, God, where are you? At those times in my life, I know that I need to take some time to connect with God or reconnect with God because we may not know what to do, but when we connect with the Spirit, we are called to do something.

Now, if you're interested in finding something, come talk to me or another one of the staff people. You can join a life group, which sometimes reveals some things about who and what you're supposed to be doing. You can join us for Growth Track today at lunch. But the thing is, we have to do the work.

Sometimes, we have to know God; we have to worship God. We have to connect with God. We have to know God's Word in order to hear what God is calling us to do. And then we humbly follow. Now, it's hard when we read Scripture not to compare what was happening in those times of the prophets and other times.

It's hard not to compare those times to what is happening in our world today. And that's important. Some right We want we want God to speak through us. And we believe that God speaks through the Bible, through the words but we do have to recognize also that we live in a different time. We can't we're not comparing apples to apples.

So the truth is, though, that people like it when we compare what is what is in the Bible to what is applicable to our world. Right. That's helpful for us unless it's something that we disagree with. And then we're like, no, no, thank you. So this is one of the reasons. These are just some of the reasons why I love that we, as a church, are part of Justice in Action.

I love that Justice in Action first listens to the cries of the people, like opening our eyes to what's happening in our city, just like Amos's message from God that God calling us to open our eyes. I love that we have people in Justice in Action from different faiths, communities all with different backgrounds, slightly different beliefs, and maybe even different political affiliations.

We're all coming together. We're all working together for one purpose, and Justice in Action does research before declaring a solution. And there are different people from different faith communities on these research teams. Some of them are experts themselves.

Then, the team takes time to get to know other experts and meet with other experts, people who are working in the field and can actually make a difference. And I love that. The Spirit of Justice in Action team is humbly working for others in the community, knowing that this is God's work. Second Corinthians Chapter Three, verses five through seven, says this: It isn't that we ourselves are qualified to claim that anything came from us.

No, our qualification is from God. He has qualified us as ministers of a new covenant, not based on what is written but on the Spirit, because what is written kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now, we can't decide to become prophets like God has to call us. But God calls us in different ways and uses every single person.

We might not hold power like Jeroboam or Amaziah, but maybe we're like Amos, just ordinary individuals stirred by the difficulties in our community. And we can't choose to be prophets like God does the choosing. But we can't ignore our calling whatever, whatever it may be. And if it's truly the word of God, it will resonate, whether it's welcomed or not.

We will call on the Spirit and trust in the Spirit to move us forward in God's work, speaking hard truths when necessary.

Let us pray. God, you are the great giver. You have given light and life to the world. You have given your only son for the sake of the world. You have given yourself to us. You have given and forgiven. And you remember our sins no more. And we, too often in response, are takers. We too often take without thankfulness what you give us. We too often take from our neighbors in ways that seem acceptable or legal. We too often take from our unseen neighbors and self selfishly. We too often comply thoughtlessly as others take from the weak among us. And it dawns on us that our taking does not match your giving. Help us seek a more just and healthy city here in Lincoln. Amen