

Stop Being Complacent

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 November 2015

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0:00] Well, pleased to have a seat and a very good evening, everyone. I hope you've had a great afternoon in 1st of November, which I heard from Lawrence in Wales. It was 22.7 degrees, Lawrence.

Unheard of, November. There we go. Amos chapter 6. Please turn there in your Bibles. Also, I've made us a sermon outline this evening, which is going to massively help us, I think, see the big idea of what Amos 6 is all about.

So if you don't have one of them, then please put up your hand. And Johnny, I'm sure, will be able to get one to you. Hopefully that's going to be very helpful for us this evening. What a joy it is to be together at the end of what is a busy week, and I'm sure on the cusp of what is going to be another busy week, just to spend time in God's presence.

So why don't we pause and let's pray together before we dive into Amos chapter 6. Let's pray together. Our gracious and loving God, we are so thankful for our time together this evening. Father, we ask that as we continue to look at this book of Amos, this sometimes difficult book to understand, Lord, that you would help us, by your Holy Spirit, to understand what you are saying to us.

[1:12] Would you help us to know more of you? Would you help us to see more of your goodness and your glory in this passage we ask in Jesus' name? Amen. Amen. So I want to begin by taking you back to your school days.

I wonder if you were like me, my dad would come home after every day from work, and he would say to me, son, how was school today? And I replied, one word answer.

I wonder if anyone else did this. One word. What was that word? Fine. Every time. Fine. And so my dad, bless his heart, he would try and get a bit more out of his stropky teenager, and he would say, son, what about maths?

Did you enjoy maths today? And I said, well, yeah, it's going well. What about English? You've been doing that project in Macbeth. Are you enjoying it? How's it going? Yeah, it's going all right. Not too bad.

Quite like Macbeth. I said, well, what about history? You love history. Tell us about World War II. Tell us what you're learning about German history in the Weimar Republic. Yeah, it's all right. Teacher's a good guy. Everything was always fine.

[2:16] But I wonder if you were like me. There was one day in the school calendar that I dreaded above all others. And it was the day when I came home with my school report cards. Because that was the day that revealed that all things weren't in actual fact fine.

And I remember those days well, with trembling hands and with knobbly knees. I would hand this report card to my dad, and out the door I sprinted to play football with my friends, because I was bracing myself for the worst.

We all know that experience, don't we? What our mouths kept hidden, the report card so massively exposed. And I think that is a good way to understand what is going on in Amos chapter 6 this evening.

I found this a really helpful way for understanding what's going on here. This is the last part of the first section of this book, and it's the second of these warning or woe oracles that Amos has been bringing to God's people, the first one of which we saw last week.

And I think what we need to understand is that if you had asked God's people at the time how things were going, they would probably tell you they were going fine. In fact, they were going better than fine.

[3 : 29] They are flying right now as a people. We are experiencing the favor and the blessing of the Lord. It's no doubt what they would have piously and presumptuously told you.

Things are going good in the land. Remember, John introduced this letter a few weeks back. Things are going very well for Israel at this point. They are prosperous and they are victorious.

These are good times on the surface for God's people. Things are going fine. Amos chapter 6. He's about to deliver to them God's report card on how he thinks things are really going.

And let me tell you, it is stinging. Right at the heart of this stinging take on things, the divine looking at things, the biggest displeasure that God has with his people, the precise details that we'll look at in a minute, the very heart of this is their pride.

God is disgusted with the pride of his people. Open report card, page 1. It says that, I detest, I abhor your pride.

[4 : 40] I abhor it. I hate it. And notice who Amos is addressing here. Firstly, he's addressing the people of God. Right?

The people who are supposed to be God's people, representing him, as we heard this morning, shining for him and displaying God's glory to the watching world. That people, God's anger, is against them.

It's not just against any old nation. It's against God's people, which incidentally is why the lessons from this are so applicable to us this evening. This is God's people. Secondly, within that people, look halfway through verse 1.

We saw Amos last week addressing, or two weeks ago, addressing the females in Israel. So the cows of Bashan, which I thought Ian so helpfully and delicately took us through.

We're looking this week at the male of the species. Amos is speaking directly, did you notice it, to the notable men. So he's speaking to the men in the corridors of power, both in the north and in the south.

[5 : 48] The men at the top of society, the movers and shakers, the men of influence, the decision makers, the leaders of God's people. These are the people that Amos is speaking to.

And these are the people in his sights as he delivers this stinging report card. God detests their pride. Hates it. And for that pride, says God, you are heading for destruction and exile.

I think we see that emphasis come out so strongly in the way that Amos has shaped and structured this message in this chapter.

Now, here's a question for you this evening. Put your hand up if you like a sandwich. Excellent. Peter, favourite sandwich? Take your time.

Stuffing. Excellent. Cool. Anyone else? Favourite sandwich? Lawrence. Cheese and ham. Okay. Anyone else? One more. A BLT. Standard. Excellent.

[6 : 52] Here's the sandwich we're going to look at this evening. This is the Amos 6 sandwich. Very simple. Two bits of bread, two bits of cheese, and a bit of meat in the middle, which is the focus of and the substance of the sandwich.

Amos 6 sandwich. You'll see it on your sheet. The mark of pride, number one. The mark of pride, number two. And the meat in the middle, which is the very focus of and the sharp end of what Amos is saying to God's people.

God is disgusted with the pride of his people. Mark of pride, number one. His people's complacency.

God hates his people's complacency. You'll see the first bit of this sandwich, verses 1 to 3, and verses 13 to 14. This is the bread of the Amos 6 sandwich.

And what does he start? Verse 1, chapter 5, the word, woe. Now, I've had many a bad report card in my time, but none of them have started with woe. Started with a lot of other words, but not woe.

[8 : 01] This is shockingly surprising, isn't it? Woe. It is strong language. Who is this woe addressed to? It's to the capital cities. Capital city in the north, capital city in the south.

To those who are at ease in Zion, so that's Jerusalem, and those who are secure in Samaria. These men at the top, whom the people of the land, they come to seek counsel and advice from, they are quite happy, quite happy with how things are going in the land.

And that ease may suggest comfort to those leaders, but it reeks of complacency to God. Here's what they're doing. They're doing two things, okay? Firstly, they are looking at favorable comparisons.

Now, you'll notice it. Johnny did excellently in reading the place names that are in here in these verses. Look at them with me, okay? The place names. Kalna, Hamath, and Gath. These are the nations that surround Israel. And we can understand that at this point in time, Israel are far better off than the nations surrounding them. And as the leaders of God's people, when they go compare.com, they come off very favorably.

[9 : 21] And it produces within them a sense of smugness as they compare themselves to the nations round about them. Now, look at verse 2. Commentators think that this, verse 2, is the propaganda of the day.

So, when the people of the land, they come to the leaders with their problems and their cases of injustice, instead of dealing with them, the leaders simply fob them off by telling them that instead of complaining, what they really should do is be extremely thankful that they live in Israel and they don't live in one of the surrounding nations.

Be so thankful that you live here and you don't live over there. This is what they're saying. And so, they're just fobbing them off. Now, to get your head around what this would look like, here's what I want you to picture.

Imagine you write to David Cameron and you're appealing to him because your employer has tripled your contracted hours of work, is making you work without a break, and to sum it all up, he has halved your pay.

So, you make your way to number 10 and you meet David Cameron. He hears your complaint and he says to you, well, I could deal with your complaint. I could deal with it. But I put it to you that you should be thankful that you live in the United Kingdom where you have a job instead of living in a third world country where you don't have a job.

[10 : 45] So, here's what I suggest to you, that instead of coming to me with a complaint, just stop yourself next time and count your lucky stars that you live here and you don't live over there.

Now, would you be satisfied that justice has been done in that situation? Of course you wouldn't. Of course you wouldn't. But that is exactly what is going on in the land of God's people at this precise moment.

These leaders, these people at the top should not be at ease over how things are going. There's a distinct moral unjustness that is rife in the lands and they are being complacent in the way that they are leading this nation.

And adding to that sense of complacency, secondly, they are exaggerating their achievements. Look at the bottom of the sandwich here. So, this is verses 13 and 14. The bottom bit of bread. So, this is, look at it with me, Lodabar and Karname. They are two place names. They are two places of recent military victories for Israel.

[11 : 57] And the fact that they are two recent military victories has led to God's people feeling super confident in their own abilities and strength. And what does Amos say?

You foolish people. You foolish people. There's some irony going on here as well. These two towns, we can understand, they were not hard to conquer.

They were not hard to conquer. Lodabar, the name literally means nothing. It means nothing. I mean, this is the equivalent of Scotland beating San Marino at football and thinking that we are world beaters off the back of it.

Now, I say that knowing that sometimes we don't beat San Marino, but you get the point. Don't get ahead of yourself. That's Amos' point. Don't get ahead of yourself. That wasn't a difficult victory. And Karname, again, it's not a big place, but its name, it means horns. So, it's the symbol of power and authority. So, to conquer a land with horns on the emblem, it most likely fed Israel's pride.

[13 : 02] Both of these are hollow victories. They're not something to be boasting about. They're not something to be bragging about. And I think these favorable comparisons and this exaggerated sense of achievement has led to this sense of invincibility.

And as they look to their army and as they look to their borders, they think they are invincible when the truth is they are anything but. They are a complacent people.

They are a complacent people because they have taken their eye off the ball. They have taken their gaze away from God. They have fallen out of a right relationship with Him.

and they have stopped judging things by how He views things and they have started judging things by their own standards and their own interpretation. They say things are fine.

They are not. You are a complacent people, says God. And I guess we've got to ask ourselves, haven't we, as God's people, are we complacent?

[14:12] Would that be as we open our report card, would it say complacent? Are we settling for hearts that are at ease? Are we settling for a haphazard prayer life?

Are we becoming casual in our treatment of God's words? Both indications, I think, that we are doing things in our own strength.

Friends, have we become numb because of our comfortable lifestyles to the broken world in which we live? Are we being lulled into thinking that we are doing well at shining for Jesus because we are comparing ourselves to the world in which we live and we think we're just that little bit more moral than everyone else?

Brothers and sisters, have we taken our eyes off of God and are we stopping judging things by his standards and are we judging things by our own?

You know, it was Jim Elliott who said, forgive me for being so ordinary while claiming to know so extraordinary a God. And so what does Amos say to this complacent generation of God's people?

[15:26] Look at verse 3. You put off the day of disaster and bring near a rain of terror. I mean, I know it was Halloween the other night, but these are scary, scary words, aren't they?

Mark of pride number one, their complacency. Mark of pride number two, their carelessness. God detests his people's carelessness. And you'll see this next layer of the Amos 6 sandwich.

Okay, we're into the cheese section now. Verses 4 to 7 and verse 12. Now, why might you be asking? Why are they careless? Well, to be blunt, friends, they really couldn't care less about what's going on in their land.

These notable men could not care less about the people underneath them in the pecking order of society, and they couldn't care more about prospering themselves.

Look at verses 4 to 7. Amos gives us such a flavour of the reality of what's going on in the land here. It's a picture of affluence, it's a picture of indulgence and luxury.

[16:35] All round about them there is poverty and ruin amongst God's people. Look at the words that Amos uses here. Look at this description. What's he saying here? This is what's going on in the land.

Beds of ivory, lounging on couches, dining on choice lambs and fattened calves, drinking wine by the bowl full, strumming on instruments, I don't think that's anything against the harp there, using the finest lotions, bathing themselves.

Do you get the picture here? Do you see what he's trying to tell us? That this stuff that's going on, God's not blind to it, God sees it, God sees how they're behaving, and he hates it.

He hates their carelessness. And you'll notice two biblical characters that Amos uses there in those verses. I think they add to that sense of rebuke. Firstly, you get David in there, and I think Amos is saying, and it's a massive lesson for God's people, that just because you act like David, David, doesn't mean you've got a heart like David, and also we get Joseph in there as well.

What's he doing in there? Well, we studied him, I wonder if you remember, a few months ago. We did a series in Genesis looking at his life, and you may remember that episode in Genesis 37, where his brothers, filled with jealousy, they throw him into the depths of the pit and leave him there for events to take their course.

[18:02] They literally just leave him for death. And then a few chapters later on in Genesis 42, the brothers are looking back on this incident, they're looking back on this incident, but Joseph now is in the place of power in Pharaoh's courts.

And they say this in Genesis 42, looking back on that, they confess to one another. This is what they say. We saw how distressed he was. So that's Joseph.

We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded for his life, but we would not listen. We saw his cries and we did nothing.

We heard the cries, we saw it, we turned a blind eye to it and we did nothing. And it's almost as if Amos is saying to this generation of God's people, you are at it again.

You're doing it again. You turn a blind eye to injustice. You ignore it as if it wasn't there. This is happening right under your noses.

[19:02] You know about this stuff and you're doing nothing to stop it. As leaders of God's people, you're supposed to be those who love God. You love God and you love and you serve his people and you are doing anything but.

And that mismatch behavior isn't right, it isn't right morally and it isn't glorifying to the God who you claim to represent. You're not shining for him.

And as if to drive home the point, we get the second part of that sandwich at verse 12. And the big idea that Amos is painting for them here is this idea of mismatches.

So this is things that everybody knows don't go together. So look what he does. What does he say? Would you take your horse out of the paddock and instead of taking it to a lush green field for a run around, would you take it to the rocks to run around?

Of course you wouldn't. Of course you wouldn't. Would you take your oxen out to plow and instead of going to the lush soil of the farm to plow, would you go to the sea to plow?

[20 : 08] Of course you wouldn't. Everybody knows those things do not go together. It does not take a genius to work that out. And so follow the logic. What does he say next?

Would you expect life-giving justice to produce poison? Would you expect a healthy tree to produce bitter fruit? Of course you wouldn't. Of course you wouldn't. And yet, and yet, that is precisely what is going on in your land.

Precisely what's going on. Now if you've got an ESV there, you'll notice it verse 12. Instead of bitterness, it uses the word, Amos uses the word wormwood. I find that quite a helpful image in understanding what's going on.

I wonder if you've had that experience in your life where you've gone to pick up an old table or an old chair that was sitting in the attic for years and years and years, and as you lift it up, it just falls to pieces beneath you.

Have you had that experience before? I've had that experience before. It is rotten to the core. It is eaten by woodworm. And it gives you the impression that it is healthy and stable, while all the time it is rotten to the core.

[21 : 18] And that's what's going on here. Here is a people at face value are giving the impression that they are healthy and stable. Reality is there's nothing going on. They are rotten.

You are a careless people. What does Amos say to this careless generation of God's people? By the way, you'll notice that where it says, those who strive to put themselves first.

You'll notice that idea of first as you read this through. They put themselves, they are the first nation in their eyes. The leaders place themselves first in this nation.

They eat and anoint themselves with the finest or the first of meats and oils. What does Amos say? Verse 8. Therefore, you will be among the first to go into exile.

Your feasting and lounging will be at an end. God detests his people's carelessness. He hates it.

[22 : 21] And it's a real, real challenge to us. Friends, would God on our report cards, would he write careless? Are we those who are living mismatched lives?

Are we people who say one thing, claim to be living for one thing, and are doing something completely else? Are we giving the impression of health and life, but the truth of it is, on the inside, there's absolutely nothing going on?

Now just think about your own personal walk with the Lord for just a second. are you good at putting on the front in here? Are you, have you mastered the church lingo?

Do you know the right times to say amen? But actually the reality is that the fire, the inward affection and love for Jesus has long gone out.

Friends, do we care about justice? Do we care about injustice? Or have we got so good? Have we mastered the art of turning a blind eye to it, and are simply fattening ourselves and growing callous?

[23 : 29] You know, Neil mentioned it earlier, are we unconcerned? Are we concerned about the plight of our brothers and sisters around the world who are facing persecution for standing for Jesus Christ?

Does that even concern us? Can I encourage you to come to the prayer meeting on Wednesday, where we'll be praying for the persecuted church? It's just a great way of remembering them in our prayers.

God detests his people's carelessness. And now we come to our favorite bit, the meat of the sandwich. This is the meat of the sandwich here.

This is the sharp end of what God is saying to his people through Amos. You'll see it in verses 8 to 11. And the big idea here is that God detests his people's pride.

He hates his people's pride. What's going to happen to this people? That's the question. What's going to happen to them? Well, says Amos, you are headed for exile and destruction.

[24 : 28] And he describes for them what that destruction is going to look like as we get this quite shocking picture at verse 9. Look at it there. Verse 9, it is a shocking picture.

And I think it's a picture of the aftermath of a slaughtering battle. And there's a relative hunting for survivors amongst the rubble, looking for bodies to take away and burn.

And what he does, he calls into the rubble. He calls, is anyone there? Is anyone there? And a voice shouts back, I am here. I'm here. But whatever you do, whatever you do, just don't mention God's name.

Just don't mention God's name. Now, why is he saying that? Well, I think the idea is that this people have experienced God's judgment. And this is the confession of a people who have taken God lightly.

They have not listened to his words, and they've experienced the consequences of that. Now, why? What does God have against his people? Well, God is disgusted with the pride of his people.

[25 : 33] Their self-sufficiency, they don't think they need him. Their self-assurance, it's that they can go alone. That they think they have all the resources at their disposal. Their self-enhancement, their false sense of security, the fact that they only care about themselves.

That's what's going on here on the surface. But I think we need to work a little bit harder than that. Because lying behind this pride, lying, I mean, pride is just a manifestation of it, right?

Lying behind this pride is a people who have lost sight of who God really is. Because right at this root, right at the root of this pride, standing right behind it, this is a worship problem.

This is a worship problem. They've ceased to worship God as he truly is, how God has revealed himself to be, and instead they are bowing at the altars of the God of their own imagination and preferences.

So you can think about it this way, in the life of this nation, God's people at the time, God has gone from being in the driver's seat to being but a speck in the rear view mirror.

[26 : 44] They've just forgotten about him. And God reminds them here of who he really is. Notice the names that God uses for himself at verses 8 to 11.

The sovereign Lord, verse 8, the Lord God Almighty, verses 8 and 14. He is the holy God.

He is the awesome God. He is the all-powerful God. He is the redeeming and loving God. He is the God who controls the entirety of the world which he made.

All people, all people, including God's people, answer to him. So do you see what God is doing here? He's committing the totality of who he is to doing what he says he is going to do.

Let me ask you this evening, let's pause just for a second and ask ourselves this because it is so important. Friends, do you have a worship problem? Have you lost sight of who God really is?

[27 : 49] Have you just lost sight of it? And instead, are you making God into a figment of your own imagination and being? Is God who he says he is or is God who you say he is?

You see, lying behind this people, the core of the people's problem here is that they have failed and they are ceasing to see God as he really is. It's a worship problem.

I'm always reminded of the words of Lucy from *The Lion and the Witch and the Wardrobe*, if you remember that. She's speaking about Aslan. And what does she say? He is not a tame lion, but he is good.

He is not a tame lion, but he is good. God's people are headed for exile and destruction. And of course, we've got the privilege of having history on our side.

We know that 40 years or so later, the Assyrians are going to come marching into town and destroy Israel. And if what we know about the Assyrians is true, they're not the most humane of people when it comes to conquering a nation.

[28 : 51] And Judah, of course, the little brother of the north and the south. Judah, they're not far behind. God is disgusted with the pride of his people.

Now, this Amos 6 sandwich, it's been a hard chew, hasn't it? It's been a hard chew. But here is the aftertaste that I wanted for us to be on our tongues as we leave this evening.

Because believe it or not, there are two great encouragements. I know, honestly, there are encouragements in this passage. Two great encouragements for us in Amos chapter 6.

Firstly, what comes so clearly across in this chapter, and indeed throughout the whole Bible, Old and New Testament, is that God detests pride. He hates it.

God opposes the proud. But praise God that he gives grace to the humble. James chapter 4 would tell us that wonderful truth, that he gives grace.

[29 : 52] We need to see that God warning his people of their pride, him pointing it out, is a mark of his loving and great grace. It's grace.

And that gracious hand of God is still outstretched today through his son, Jesus Christ, the man who John describes in his prologue, John chapter 1, as being full of grace and truth.

Encouragement number one, friends, that God gives grace to the humble. And the second great encouragement that I think we can take from this, Amos here is addressing a generation of God's people, and specifically addressing a generation of corrupt leaders of God's people.

Complacent leaders, careless leaders, leaders who couldn't care less about the affairs of their people, leaders who are self-serving, who are quite literally leading their people into death and destruction.

And I think most importantly, they are leading this people, their people, away from the presence of God. Well, praise God. Praise God, friends, that the true and perfect leader of God's people, Jesus Christ, came as one who was fully obedient to God, who was fully dedicated to his people, and who fully gave it all to save them.

[31 : 17] For Jesus came not into riches and palaces, but into poverty, with nowhere to lay his head. He left his throne room.

He humbled himself. And he took our poverty. He took it. So that we, through him, might become rich.

Jesus came not eating and dining with the high and mighty, but associating himself with the meek and lowly. He came not wearing the sweetest smelling aromas of finest perfumes, but he was born into the stench of a stable.

And Jesus is the true leader of God's, true leader of God's people, through whose costly sacrifice on the cross took God's disgust and judgment that we deserved.

He took it on himself. And his self-giving for his people has opened the way back up for us to come to the Father. Do you see what's going on here?

[32 : 19] This is beautiful stuff. These leaders of God's people are leading their people away from the presence of God. Jesus leads his people straight into the very presence of God.

The contrast couldn't be any greater between these two leaders of God's people. Friends, let me ask you this evening. What leader are you trusting in this evening?

Are you like Israel in Amos 6? Are you trusting in yourself? Do you rate your own achievements and capabilities? Or are you trusting in Jesus, the true and perfect leader of God's people?

If that's you this evening, if that's where you are, then this is a great cause for rejoicing. That we have been saved from death and destruction. And we are now found in the true and perfect leader of God's people.

And what does he tell us to do as his followers? To live now for his kingdom. The kingdom that he will bring when he returns in glory, where all social injustice will be abolished, all oppression ceased, and where he will rule his people in grace and truth in the very presence of God.

[33 : 28] And what does he tell us to pray and to do? That it would be done on earth as it is in heaven. You see, there's that wonderful cause for rejoicing this evening that we are found in the perfect leader of God's people, Jesus.

What a great thing. But as we close, let me just take you back to school for a minute. When it comes to the report card of our lives, friends, let's be honest with one another, none of us are getting straight A's, are we?

I mean, not even close to that. None of us are perfect. But the gospel tells us that Jesus has taken our blotted report card.

The report card of our lives that justifiably read guilty and excluded and dead. And he's given us his unblemished perfect one. And so we don't come in fear and unbelief before God.

We come before him with confidence and assurance in Jesus Christ that we are acceptable to him and praise God that we can call him father. That is what God has done for us in the gospel.

[34 : 34] He's taken spiritually dead people and he's made them alive. He has turned enemies, his enemies, into his friends. And he's turned orphans into sons and daughters of the living God.

What a great and wonderful God that we serve. Why don't we pray? And I'm just going to allow just a few minutes, maybe just 30 seconds actually, let's just respond to what God has been saying to us through his word this evening.

God with you.

Let me just read you one of the verses of one of my favorite hymns called Here is Love.
Let me all thy love accepting, love thee ever all my days. Let me seek thy kingdom only and my life
be to thy praise. Thou alone shalt be my glory, nothing in the world I see.
[35 : 55] Thou hast cleansed and sanctified me. Thou thyself hast set me free. So Father God, we
thank you so much for Jesus. We praise you, Lord, for the gospel.
We praise you for our great leader, Captain, King, and Savior, who has saved us, rescued us from
death, and transported us into your wonderful family. Help us, Lord, this week as we live our lives in
this world to seek your kingdom above all.
Lord, help us to be people who don't live for ourselves, but live for your glory. And this is our prayer
in and through Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.