



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Amos 6: 1-14

Amos

“At Ease in Zion”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Let's begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for your goodness to us. We thank you for all that we have in Christ and the great privilege we have of being here together this morning and having fellowship with one another. Bless it, Lord. And the reality is the best fellowship, the genuine fellowship that we have is fellowship in your word and so we pray that you would bless that time together tonight as we spend in your word and then spend it in prayer together as we go to the throne of grace and pray for our friends and brothers and sisters in Christ.

So bless our time tonight, Lord. Teach us and build us up in the faith and take the words of Amos written so many centuries ago and apply them to us in these modern times. They certainly do apply. And that's one of the great evidences of this is your word. It's relevant, as relevant today as it was then. So help us to see that. Build us up in the faith again as I pray and pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Amos 6 is another prophecy of judgment or oracle of woe. It begins with the word woe which connects it to the previous chapter. In chapter 5:18, Amos said, “Alas,” I don't know if that's how it's translated in your version. It's also the word for woe. The New American Standard has it one way and the others have it another way.

But we see the same thing when we come to chapter 6. So chapter 6 can be seen as something of a continuation of the prophecy or the oracle of chapter 5. They're joined together by these words woe. Chapter 5, verse 18 then chapter 6, verse 1 and then finally in chapter 6, verse 4 each one introducing a sin that will be

judged. In chapter 5, in verse 18 it was the sin of presumption. “Alas or woe, you who are longing for the day of the Lord.” This is the earliest use of that word or that phrase, day of the Lord in the bible in Amos 5:18. It’s a day of deliverance for the faithful, for the believing community, but it’s also a day of judgment for unbelievers.

Israel’s sin was assuming that they were right with God and that that day of the Lord that they look forward to and they had put their confidence in would be a day of blessing for them. It’s the day of the Messiah. They had confidence that the day of the Lord would be their day of deliverance. But they were not right with God. That’s what they didn’t realize.

And Amos condemned the nation all through chapter 5 for its false worship and its injustice. It worshipped a false God or was engaged in false worship, worshipping the Lord but worshipping other Gods. And what was wrong with them spiritually was evident from the way they treated people with injustice. And so he condemned all of that.

There was religion with faith. There was a lot of ceremony but without any reality. So God said in chapter 5 verse 21, “I hate your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.” God doesn’t want activity only. He wants devotion. He wants love that comes out of faith. He hasn’t changed. That was the God of Amos’ day, it’s the God of our day. He hasn’t changed because He doesn’t change.

God doesn’t hate any less our assemblies and feasts of church services or the Lord’s Supper when they’re only routines. We’re just going through the motions and there’s no reality to it. And He disciplines churches for that. Peter warns us in 1 Peter 4:17, “For it is time to judgment to begin with the household of God.” Revelation chapters 2 and 3 give warnings to the seven churches. Well, six of the seven churches. Philadelphia seems to escape those warnings.

But those churches are representative churches, churches then and down through history. God gives warnings against callousness, presumption, all kinds of sin, so all of this. And I say all of that to show that all of this, as I’ve said before, has direct relevance and application to us today. Israel gives us a lot of instruction because human nature hasn’t changed and what they did and the sins they committed have application for us as well.

So the things we read about are for us as much as they were for Israel. And in its day, Amos’ oracle had relevance for people other than the Kingdom of Israel. This

book was written to and delivered to the people of the northern kingdom and probably these oracles were spoken there at the shrine of Bethel in the southern part of the nation. But they had relevance for other peoples as well. You see it at the beginning because he begins by speaking against giving oracles against various nations. And here in chapter 6 he includes the south. He includes Judah in his criticism.

That’s how that passage begins. “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.” Now this book is filled with memorable verses and phrases. And we saw one last week, chapter 5, verse 24, “But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” I think the King James has a mighty river or something like that. It’s a great statement, a great verse of scripture.

And this is another one I think. This phrase, “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.” It’s a warning to the complacent. It’s a warning to those who think that all is well. To use Robert Browning’s words, “God’s in His heaven and all is right with the world.” Everything’s good.

But it wasn’t. It isn’t and it wasn’t then. God in His heaven doesn’t like what He sees in the world. He didn’t like what He saw in Israel or in Judah: hypocrisy, presumption, injustice, the rich grinding the faces of the poor, and spiritual complacency. Later he addresses the sprawlers, those who lounge on couches and enjoy banquets, glut themselves on gourmet food. May I should have titled this Woe to the Couch Potatoes. I’m not sure, is that even a phrase we use anymore? It was pretty popular at one point, but couch potatoes.

Well, there are spiritual couch potatoes. We have them today, easygoing evangelicals. Worldly church goers who are casual about the faith. In fact, in have to include myself in that sometimes. Yes, I’m a spiritual couch potato more than I’d like to be. Well, they were in Zion. Zion is Jerusalem and it represents all of Judah. It was the age of King Zia in the south which was a time of political strength and economic prosperity. Zia was a good king. Zia was a great king.

2 Chronicles 26 describes his reign and how God helped him against all of his enemies. He built towers in Jerusalem and in the wilderness. He fortified the land. He had a large battle-ready elite army fitted out with the best armaments. In fact, he was an inventor. This is a brilliant man is Zia. He invented engines of war we’re told, state of the art weapons. So this army that he had formed there in Judah was a crack army. It was an elite army of its day, well-fortified.

The nation, as a result, was strong. But Zia was not only a military man, we're told that he loved the soil. He was a man of the earth. He was a farmer and the text says he developed agriculture. He **hued** out many cisterns, he had much livestock all over the land. He also had plowmen and vinedressers in the hill country and fertile fields. Now Judah, if you've ever been to Israel you know that southern part is not particularly fertile. But he had fertile fields there. He was a brilliant man in terms of the military and in terms of agriculture. They were days of what we called guns and butter. They had it all.

But there's always a danger in wealth and prosperity and peace. And in fact, peace and prosperity may be more difficult to manage spiritually than war and famine because people become complacent. They had in Judah. They got smug and confident. They were at ease in Zion. They were rich and prosperous and they had the temple. God lived with them they thought.

So Amos addresses Judah to begin with, but then – he doesn't lose sight of his main audience, Israel. And in the next slide he comes back to them. “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion and to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria, the distinguished men of the foremost of nations, to whom the house of Israel comes.” Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom. It's built on a hill.

It was a strong fortress; the people felt very secure there, especially at this time because this was during the reign of Jeroboam II. And while he was an evil king, he was a very successful one, much like Uzziah in the south. The south was prospering. Well, the north was prospering probably as much as it ever had. More than it ever had.

His reign was also, as I say, prosperous because he expanded the borders, he'd won back a lot of territory that had been lost to the Syrians. So there were good times in the north as well. The leaders designated themselves as the foremost of the nations to whom everyone came which indicated the plight of the people who depended upon the leaders rather than depending upon the Lord. The leaders rested in their wealth and were self-confident about themselves spiritually because they were religious.

So they rested in their wealth and their religious activity. The people rested in their leaders. They came to the leaders. And evidently the suggestion I think here is that the leaders rested in their wealth and their religious activity, the people looked to the leaders for their strength and their help and the Lord wasn't in the minds and the

hearts of any of these people. And they too were complacent. They were at ease in Samaria or secure in Samaria. They thought they were invincible.

So in verses 2 and 3, Amos tells them to consider other kingdoms and what happened to them. “Go over to Calneh and look, and go from there to Hamath the great, then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms, or is their territory greater than yours?” And the answer to that is yes, those were strong places is what he’s saying. The city of Calneh was to the east in Mesopotamia. Hamath was in the north in Syria and Gath was Goliath’s town. It’s where the giant came from in the south in Philistia and to the west of Judah.

I think you can see from just the geography of these three cities that they represent the ancient near east. Mesopotamia, Syria to the north and the east and then in the south you have kind of a representation of the nations of the world. They were strong cities and what he’s saying is they’re stronger than Samaria and the cities that he’s describing here and they’d all fallen. So Amos was saying consider that. You’re confident and you feel secure, you’re at ease, consider these cities. There’s not a fortress that cannot fall. There’s not a nation that cannot be conquered.

And Amos said, “They put off the day of calamity,” or the day of evil meaning they rejected it. And he’s talking about the people of Israel, the leaders and perhaps the people that depended upon the leaders. But they put it off, this day of calamity, this day of judgment. They didn’t think it would happen. They didn’t believe that they could be judged and fall like these other cities. But their confidence, and this is what he’s telling them, their confidence was false.

They failed to see that they were not right with God, in fact, they were God’s enemies and He speaks very strongly about that later in the chapter, the Lord God does. The only hope the people had is in the Lord in whom we live and we move and we exist. Interesting thought when you think about it. We live and move and exist in the Lord and we become indifferent toward Him.

The one who gives us every breath of life that we take is the one we depend upon for everything and we think we can be indifferent toward Him, presume upon all of that? That’s a dangerous thing. That’s what they were doing. In verse 4 Amos condemns self-indulgence with a third woe. He calls out what might be called the fat cats of Samaria. I don’t know if that’s any more contemporary a term as couch potatoes, but these guys certainly fit the description.

Verse 4 through 6, “Those who recline on beds of ivory -” those are wealthy beds. These are the beds or the couches of the really rich, the super-rich there in the north. “Those who recline on beds of ivory and sprawl on their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who improvise to the sound of the harp and like David have composed songs for themselves,” not for the Lord. Like David, but composed songs like David, but they just compose it for themselves. “Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls while they anoint themselves with the finest oils, yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.”

They have no spiritual understanding of what’s going on, have no grief or repentance. Israel’s leading citizens here described in this way. They’re eating the best food, lounging on luxurious beds laid with ivory. The picture is that a voluptuary’s lying on soft sofas eating sweets and entertaining themselves with their own music.

It was a life of leisure, it was a life of luxury and a life of excess, drinking wine out of bowls not cups. In fact, the way this is described, the bowls are sacrificial bowls. I didn’t study that expression a lot, but if that’s a good translation, reminds me of Belshazzar and Babylon in Daniel 5. Remember, he calls for the vessels from the temple that Nebuchadnezzar brought and they drink their wine out of that.

I think that’s the sense here. Their religion really is their appetite. That’s their God. They treat in a very trivializing way the things of God. Certainly drinking wine out of bowls, it shows the excess of it all. It’s a disgusting picture. It certainly was to God, so the party would end. And we read that in verse 7, “Therefore, they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles, and the sprawlers’ banqueting will pass away.”

It’s all going to end, this banquet, this life of living like it’s all a party. So they’d suddenly go from riches to rags into exile with no return. In fact, into a kind of oblivion. Judah will return from its exile. Israel, the north, didn’t. What a shock. That can happen. It could happen really to us someday, something similar. It has happened.

I was reading about the Great Depression. This is some years back. Actually, I was reading a book by Robert Caro who’s written I think a four volume biography on Lyndon Johnson and this is the first volume and he gives the background, the economic situation from which Johnson arose when he became a congressman. But he’s just giving the historical background and part of it was the Great Depression and

how it affected people all over the country and affected people from all different levels and was a really kind of a shocking thing.

And it's been some years since I read it, but the one thing that stuck out in my mind was a story that he told about a middle class family from the Midwest that had lost everything. This was a middle class family and the father and son had migrated to South Texas to work in the fields picking either fruit or cotton, I don't remember, but it was backbreaking work. They had to get on their hands and knees and pick whatever they were picking and had thorns and stickers in their fingers. And it was just a very difficult experience for these people.

And to think go from a middle class life to that where you're working on your hands and knees just to make enough to live for the day is something we're not used to. And as I read that, I thought, what would happen to us today? And we live in far more luxurious times than people did in the 1920s. What would happen to us if that happened? Could we endure it? Could we make it through that?

That's a great test of a person's character to go through something like that. And I think the lesson I took from it as I thought about that is these are the times to prepare for something like that. It may never come, that may never happen to us. It may happen a generation or two generations later, it may not, but what you do in the times of prosperity is prepare for that. And I don't mean you prepare financially for it, that's perhaps a lesson also, but you prepare spiritually in the good times for the times of testing to come.

We don't know when those times are coming. So we always need to be men and women who are living by obedience day by day, moment by moment and living by obedience involve being men and women of prayer, being men and women of study, doing what the word of God tells us to do. That's preparation. Well, this happened to Israel. In fact, it happened in a much more devastating way than anything I've read about in American history, far more devastating than the Great Depression. That was temporary. This was permanent.

The Assyrians came down and in 722 they took the people away and the party ended. That's what described in the rest of the chapter, it's about military conquest. God doesn't tolerate self-indulgence in any generation for any country or among any people. He eventually deals with it.

Verse 8, “The Lord God has sworn by Himself, the Lord God of hosts has declared: ‘I loath the arrogance of Jacob, and detest his citadels; therefore I will deliver up the city and all it contains.’” Now again, go back to what I said earlier. Paul told the Athenians that God is the one in whom we live and move and exist. That’s not the one I want to have saying, “I detest what you’re doing.”

Well, they presumed upon all of that and this was the result, God dealt with them. And He had sworn by Himself, as He says here, because He could swear by no one greater. There’s no one higher to swear upon than Himself. So the Lord God has sworn by Himself. The Lord God of hosts, that is the Lord of the armies, the heavenly armies, the earthly armies, He controls it all. He’s sworn that He’s going to do this. And that means He had committed them absolutely to judgment.

Fortresses would not protect these people. They put their confidence in that and all of those fortresses and those citadels could be pulled down and they were. In verses 9 and 10 Amos describes the extent of the loss of life. “Ten men will be in a house and all will die.” Maybe they’re in the house because of plague due to a siege of the city, but whatever the reason was, the death toll is great and the survivors of it will be so traumatized that they will be afraid to mention God’s name.

That’s what we read in verse 10. “‘If someone is found in the inner most part of the house,’ Amos says, and is asked, ‘is anyone else with you?’ And he answers, ‘No one,’ then they will say, ‘Keep quiet for the name of the Lord is not to be mentioned.’” Hard to know exactly what that means, but this is probably the idea that they’re afraid to mention the name of God because that might get a response from God and that would risk more disaster since this is God’s judgment on them. So don’t bring God’s attention to us. Just be quiet about the Lord.

They’re not repenting. They just don’t want to have any more discipline or judgment from Him. Well, whatever the reason for keeping quiet, the judgment was from God and it would be devastating for all, for the complacent rich and the complacent poor alike. “‘For,’” Amos explains in verse 11, “‘behold, the Lord is going to command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments.’”

Nations fall at God’s command and not in some general way, but in very specific ways. He orders that the houses be smashed to pieces, the great houses of the rich and the small houses of the poor. He’s the almighty. He’s God and is to be

feared. He’s not to be ignored. There are consequences for not obeying Him. There are consequences for ignoring God’s laws, just as there are consequences for ignoring the laws of nature.

And that’s how Amos makes his point in verse 12 with two rhetorical questions about farming and they’re questions that the simplest farmer would have been able to answer and the answer would have been very obvious to him. “Do horses run on rocks? Or does one plow them with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.” The answer to the questions of do horses run on rocks or does one plow rocks with an oxen is obviously no. A running horse on rocks will injure itself. Plowing rocks is like plowing the sea. It’s absurd. You wouldn’t take a plow out to a concrete parking lot and try to plow it.

And that’s the idea. It doesn’t work and likewise, it’s foolish to pervert justice, that’s what he’s saying. Plowing the rocks would break the plow. Destroying justice destroys or breaks a nation. But that’s what the leaders and judges of Israel had done. So judgment came or from Amos’ perspective it would come and it would come certainly ‘cause God has sworn by Himself, on His own person that it would come.

That was the prophecy and the warning in these verses, but it all seems so unlikely to Israel. It even seemed impossible to them. Israel was strong, Jeroboam II had recovered cities they had lost, he’d expanded the borders of Israel. It reached its zenith under his rule. Amos refers to that in verse 13, Lodebar and Karnaim, they were located on the east side of the Jordan and they took them.

Under Jeroboam they recaptured them from Syria. They had been part of Israel, they lost them to the Syrians and they took them back. And they boasted about that. They thought they’d made a great military conquest. “Have we not by our own strength taken these cities,” they were saying. They were small cities, they were unimportant cities so the victories were really not that great.

And it happened historically in a time when Assyria was at a kind of weak point in its history. So there was a kind of power vacuum in the Middle East and they, Israel, were able to expand without any real opposition from the superpower of the day because it wasn’t so super at that particular time.

So the nation’s strength, that is the nation of Israel, its strength seemed a lot greater than it really was. Their victory’s bigger than they really were and so their

confidence in themselves, in their strength and their ability to protect themselves was way out of any reasonable proportion. Their strength, true strength would be tested and their boasting challenged.

Assyria would become strong again and would become strong for God’s purpose. He gives nations their history. He raises up kings and He brings them down and He raises up nations and brings them down. And He would use them for His purpose and that’s what we read in verse 14, “‘For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel,’ declares the Lord God of hosts,” that is the God of the armies. I’m going to raise up an army against you.

“And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of the Arabah.” Hamath was Israel’s northern most border. The brook of the Arabah was the southernmost border so God’s judgment would extend north to south. It would be a total defeat for the nation. King David was a military man, but he knew where his strength lay and he wrote about that in Psalm 20:7. “Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.”

King Uzziah learned that. At one point he believed that but he had to learn that lesson later in life. You’ll remember, now he’s the king during Amos’ ministry and he was a great king. Uzziah was one of the godly kings of Israel, a man of faith. And we read about him, about his victories and how he established peace and prosperity, but it was all of the Lord’s doing. And that’s what the writer in 2 Chronicles 26 records, that all of this was God’s work in his life.

In verse 15 after listing all of the advances during his reign, this glorious reign during Zion, the writer says, “For he was marvelously helped until he was strong.” And then things changed. Verse 16 says, “But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly.” And that was his downfall. You know the story of Uzziah, how he transgressed the temple, he’s the king but he wants to act like the priest and he enters the temple. The priests try to hold him back, he won’t be held back until suddenly leprosy breaks out on his forehead and he spends the rest of his life a leper.

It is as foolish to ignore God’s commands and disobey as it is to plow rocks. But that’s what happens when we become complacent and presumptuous and worldly. We act foolishly. Happened in Zion and Samaria, it happens in the church.

It happens in bible-believing churches. It happens in evangelical churches. It's a danger for all of us.

Seven churches of Asia Minor give an example of that and warnings of the dangers we face. And one of the dangers is complacency. It's being at ease in Zion. In Revelation 3:1-6, God gave a message to the church at Sardis and he says to that church, “Wake up and strengthen the things that remain which are about to die.” Sardis was like Zion and Samaria. It was a rich city, it had good location at the junction of five main roads. One of the roads was the great king's highway from Persia so it had lots of advantages from commerce. It was in a very advantageous place for business and the city prospered.

It's a wealthy city and so the city prospered and therefore the church also was affected, it prospered financially. But it didn't prosper spiritually. It was full of soft saints, it was full of complacent Christians. They were comfortable in life and they were casual in their faith. They thought they were doing well, they were really close to death. They are an example of what have been called or what I've been referring to as easygoing Evangelicals, people who profess faith but are comfortable with the world, people who are at ease in Zion.

So the Lord said to that church, Jesus said to that church, “Wake up.” And those words were especially appropriate for the church of that city. The city had fallen twice in its history to a surprise attack when it became complacent. Sardis was never conquered in a frontal attack. It was built on a high hill that made it seem to the citizens of the citadel that it was invulnerable, it was impregnable and so the citizens were very confident in their position and they left their strongest point unguarded. They don't need to worry about that, it's so strong they can't defeat us there. It was on a sheer cliff, that strongest point.

So the Persians found a crevice in the face of that hill at the strongest point of the city and the soldiers were able to work their way up very easily, enter the city at night and the city fell. The king, King Croesus, this rich king, all of his wealth in that city woke up and he lost his city and he lost his treasure 'cause they weren't alert, they weren't guarding every point of their city.

It happened during the time of the Persians, it happened 300 years later again when the Greeks conquered it and they did it in the same way. The city showed a pattern of neglect. It showed a pattern of overconfidence, of complacency. And the

church in that city reflected the city. It was active, the church had services weekly, people met, they were all churchgoers but complacent and spiritually unguarded. So Jesus told them to wake up, be watchful. If they didn't He said, "I will come like a thief and come with discipline," just like those Persians did and those Greeks came. Stole in like thieves and took the city.

He says the same to us. Don't sleep. Don't become complacent and drift, it's a danger for all of us. It's a danger for me. I read these things, I read about it, where are you in this? You meaning talking to myself. And I say, "I'm at ease in Zion so much of the time." It's a dangerous thing.

Now what we need to do, and I think it's true of all of us, I include myself, but I think we're all made of the same stuff and the exhortations and the warnings are directed to all of us, we all need to guard ourselves. We need to be aware, we need to be vigilant, we need to be in prayer, we need to be in study and be with God's people. That's a vital part of our spiritual life and development is being with God's people, knowing them and supporting Him and being supported by them. Being where God's word is where it's taught, that's where we need to be.

Another command Jesus gives to them is to the church at Sardis is, "Remember what you have received. Remember what the Lord has done for you." We need to remember what the Lord has done for us. He's gained life for us at the expense of His own life. We are forgiven if we're believers in Jesus Christ. We are in Him forever. We have been cleansed once and for all and we have power. We have power to live rightly and live well and to be alert. We have power to be obedient and we have a future that is glorious and forever.

We're to remember that and do so continually. And that encourages us in doing the right thing. Well, may God give us that, give us what we are to have and the strength to live it. The Lord introduces Himself to the church in Sardis as He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. And He has us too. And having us, he'll never let us go. We can rejoice in that. We need to remember that, be watchful and be awake. Well, with that, let's close in a word of prayer and then I'll turn it over to Mike.

[Prayer] Father, thank you for your goodness to us and for the oracle that you gave to Judah and to Israel, to those who were at ease in Zion and secure in Samaria. They shouldn't have been at ease and they shouldn't have felt secure. Guard us from

such presumption and complacency. Stir us up to be watchful, to be diligent, to apply ourselves to the word of God, to prayer, to fellowship, to all the things that you'd have us to do. We thank you for all that you've give us in Christ. We are rich beyond imagination. Thank you for all that He's given you and it's in His name we pray.  
Amen.