

Jesus.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen.

We have some interesting readings here. Amos preaching destruction, John the Baptist being beheaded, and Paul talking about our predestination and our adoption as children of God. How do they all fit together? Well, I'm going to try and help you see how these things fit together.

First off, let's talk with Amos. Amos is a prophet of God. And he was preaching about, say, 20 years or so before Israel, the northern 10 tribes are wiped off of the map, never ever to be seen again. God says, "I have my plumb line. And I lay my plumb line in the midst of Israel, and I will never again pass by them." In other words, He is completely abandoning the Israelites, the 10 northern tribes.

And now why is he doing that? Why is he doing that? We know that God is a patient and loving God. We know that He forgives our sins if we confess them. We know that He is anxious and desiring to be in a relationship with us, so why is God declaring to the Israelites, to these 10 northern tribes that He's going to wipe them out? It's because of the plumb line, because of what they have done.

Now, if you don't know what a plumb line is, it's a heavy weight on a string that you hang up somewhere, and it shows you whether or not you're level. This is before we had the bubble levels where we could just put up against the wall. You had a plumb line, and it helped you determine when it was square, when it was even, when your bricks and everything else was laid properly on the foundation.

And the problem is Israel was excited almost every time, the entire history, to get out of plumb. They seemed to always move towards other gods and false beliefs and false idols and corrupt morality, and so they constantly get out of plumb. And God would bring them back. God would send some nation to attack them so that eventually they would call upon the Lord and say, "Lord, forgive us." And then they'd get back in plumb for a bit because God would bring them into plumb. And then they'd get out again. They'd start wandering off into false belief. They'd be wandering off in sin and evil, and He'd put them back in plumb again.

Well, He's done this for their entire history. And finally, even though God is slow to anger, even though He desires to save, at some point, God's patience is finally had enough, and this is it. They will not listen. They refuse to believe. Here, Amos is speaking in Bethel. Bethel was one of the holy places. It's where some of the significant events of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's lives took place. It was a significant place. And what did the northern 10 tribes do? They put a false idol in that place and said, "This is your God." That false idol is, of course, logically golden calf because that always works out for the Israelites. But for whatever

reason, they put a golden calf in Bethel, southern part of their nation, and then way up north into Dan, they did the same thing. And these were, quote, unquote, "the holy places of God." Don't go to the temple of Israel or the temple in Jerusalem because that's the southern kingdom; worship your God. Here they were believing in false gods.

Now, admittedly, during this time, Israel was very prosperous. Financially, socioeconomically they were doing good; everything was going well. They had more money than they needed, and everybody was fully employed and had enough. But morally, they were corrupt. There was a cesspool of evil underneath. I don't know if that sounds familiar to you, but it definitely sounds familiar to me.

Now, we are not God's nation, we are not called to be God's people, but we have a moral framework. We have Christianity as part of our history. And for a long time, we at least pretended to be in line with that. But we seem to cease pretending and we see the underbelly of the evil that is taking place in our society. And is God about ready to lay the plumb line here and say, "I will never pass by them again"? I wouldn't blame Him if He did. We are judged by our sin, as is everybody. And the judgment is all of sin and falls short of the glory of God. And so we should be cognizant that God's patience wears thin in our lives. We have gone out of plumb, and it is only God that will bring us back into plumb. But we must repent.

Now, the reason Amos and John the Baptist are here in these texts is because both of them have the same message; repent and turn away from your evil and turn to the Lord. You know the word of God, you have heard the word of God, it has been proclaimed your entire lives, and yet you refuse to follow, you refuse to believe. You seek after your own desires and you're out of plumb. And it's a call both John and Amos to get back into line with God's measuring, with God's plumb line. And we cannot do that by ourselves. It is only by the grace of God, only by His word that does it for us.

Now, John was preaching repentance to the nation of Israel, preparing them for the salvation that was coming in Jesus Christ. And Herod, though he did not believe the message of John, he recognized that John was wise and righteous. And he was fascinated by the message. He didn't believe it, he wasn't going to do anything about it, but he was fascinated by it. It's like these people, "Oh, tell me more, tell me more," but they're not going to change. I don't know if you know of some people like that, but I do. They love to talk about it, they love to have intellectual discussions, but it's never going to touch their heart. It's never going to actually going to touch their lives.

And that was what was going on with Herod. He liked John and he respected John, but he didn't believe John. And he was a little uncomfortable with what John was saying about his wife, and so he was in a bad place. One night, Salome, Herodias'

daughter, comes and dances. And we're not talking the waltz here. You leave that up to your imagination what she was dancing. But she was dancing, and it pleased Herod and all the other folks, and so Herod probably a little bit... Actually more likely a lot drunk and not really in his full mind, he offered to give half of his kingdom away. And so the daughter came back, and she said, "I want John the Baptist's head on a platter."

And so he was more afraid of his standing before men. He wanted to be respected and seen of a man of his word to the people that he was with, the Gentiles and the leaders, the military leaders, rather than being right before God. And so he allowed the weakness and his desire to be praised among men to cloud his judgment, and so he had John the Baptist beheaded. He was out of plumb, and he would not allow the word of God to put him back into plumb. And so we have Amos and John framing this message in Ephesians.

Now, we know that even though we are in Christ, even though we are new creations, we still have the tendency to get out of plumb, to fall short of the glory of God. But we also know that God has predestined us. He has adopted us as His children, so we know that He will be faithful to us and He will bring us back into plumb. We know that because we read His word, which says we are his children because our names were written in God's Book of Life. Our names were written before God created a single thing. Before He ever spoke a word of creation, our names were written in the Book of Life. It's not about us and it's not about what we do, it's all about what God has done for us and how much He loves us and how much He has gathered us into his family and what He has forgiven us and the righteousness that we receive.

You see, our names were written before Creation. Salvation was declared ours, and then that salvation was purchased for us on the cross of Jesus Christ. When He died to forgive our sins, He purchased that salvation for us because He paid the price of our sin. And then that salvation, which He purchased, was then given to us in our baptisms, and now it is ours. That which was declared before the beginning of time is now ours in our baptism. And we can rest assured that in our baptism we are His children. And as His children, He will always guard and protect us and keep us in His loving care.

We need to believe that to be true. Otherwise, if we don't, if we begin to think that I need to do the work or that maybe I don't like God's word and I want to do something different, if we walk away from Him, we will get ourselves out of plumb. And it is always God's word that corrects us and disciplines us and chastises us but also offers us the grace, that even though we have sinned, we are forgiven in Christ. And we know that to be true not because we're such great people, because the fact of the matter is there's not a whole lot of difference

between us and everybody else in the world except that we have been given a great gift, a gift of salvation, a gift of adoption. And that gift is for all people. If you believe it to be yours, it is yours.

And so we, as Christians, knowing the certainty of our adoption as children, children of God, knowing that we are in plumb with Him because of His righteousness given to us, we then are called to be like Amos and John and preach the word of God, the repentance of mankind and the hope of the salvation in Jesus Christ. Because there are others out there whose names are written in the Book of Life, they just don't know it yet. They need to hear the word to bring them into the family. How are they going to hear it unless we share it with them?

And so our task is to take what we know, that God's patience does wear thin, and our call is to call people into the church, to call people into the love of God, to call people that they might hear God's word so that the Spirit might bring them to salvation, so that the Spirit might wrap them in the assurance of their adoption as children, so that they might know the peace which we have, the peace that is still ours, even though we look around the world and it seems a lot more like Amos' world than it ought to be. Even though when we look at the world and we see it's very much out of plumb, we still have peace because of God's word within us that is working in and through us.

And so our call is to rest in the assurance and the confidence of our salvation so that we do not need to worry. Even if our salvation leads us into suffering, leads us into persecution, we still do not need to be afraid. If it leads us into mockery, we still do not need to be afraid because we know the truth. God's kingdom is more important than all of the kingdoms of this world. And that is where our home resides. And so we don't need to be hanging on to the approval of the people of this world, we need to be proclaiming in our words, in our deeds, in our actions the love of God for all of humanity and the forgiveness of sins that is there.

And so let us pray. Pray that God would nourish us and strengthen us by His word, that we receive when we walk by that baptismal font and we remember that we have been adopted as His children, when we come to the altar and we receive the body and blood of Christ, the real body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of our faith and the assurance of salvation. When we hear the words proclaimed that our sins are by God Himself, when we hear all of that, let us pray that we might be strengthened by that and nourished by that so that we might go forth into the world and be salt and light so that others might know that they too can be the children of God if they believe that God desires them to be part of their lives because we are called to be witnesses.

We are not all prophets. Amos wasn't a prophet, he was a shepherd and a manager of figs. He wasn't a professional prophet, he wasn't a professional pastor or

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preacher, but God still called him and God still used him. And calls and uses each and every one of us for His glory, for His kingdom, for His honor. It's not about us, it's all about Him. And what a glorious message that is, because He has done it and He has given it to us freely. And we, as His adopted children, can stand firm knowing that He has put us in plumb, and therefore we are saved because of His grace for us. May that grace and that mercy and that peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.