

Amos: Owning Our Brokenness
Sermon 4-22-18
By Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Amos 2:6-16

⁶Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— ⁷they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; ⁸they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed.

⁹Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of cedars, and who was as strong as oaks; I destroyed his fruit above, and his roots beneath. ¹⁰Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. ¹¹And I raised up some of your children to be prophets and some of your youths to be nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel? says the LORD. ¹²But you made the nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, “You shall not prophesy.” ¹³So, I will press you down in your place, just as a cart presses down when it is full of sheaves. ¹⁴Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain their strength, nor shall the mighty save their lives; ¹⁵those who handle the bow shall not stand, and those who are swift of foot shall not save themselves, nor shall those who ride horses save their lives; ¹⁶and those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, says the LORD.

Message:

When I was a chaplain, I remember meeting with a patient who was in the hospital for a number of ailments. He had all these different health problems. But the root issue was his obesity. After we got through introducing ourselves, He started talking about, in so many words, how guilty he felt. And what triggered this extreme sense of guilt was his daughter was getting married that day. And he couldn't be there to walk her down the aisle because his obesity had caused so many health problems. He felt guilty about his gluttony. So we explored that guilt, but I quickly tried to steer him towards forgiveness. How does his faith come into all this? I coached him on forgiveness of the self. I quoted Jesus' words when he told the disciples the second greatest commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” So if you don't love yourself, then you can't love your neighbor. Well...this

wasn't working for him out of my bag of tricks. I couldn't understand why he wasn't able to move from extreme guilt to self-forgiveness. After I met with him, I talked with my supervisor about the case. One of the things my supervisor pointed out to me was that I had misdiagnosed what he needed in that moment. I thought what he needed was to hear "forgive yourself." My supervisor challenged that diagnoses. What if what he needed was for me to sit in the difficulty of his guilt? He wasn't looking for a way out yet. He wasn't there yet. And to try to pull him out of this place of guilt prematurely might void the transformational stuff that could happen because of his guilt. His point was, guilt is a powerful motivator for change. And to rob someone of that, robs them of the opportunity to change. If I don't allow this patient to experience the brokenness of his guilt and let him own that, the likelihood of transformation diminishes. But don't we often do what I just did with this patient? We undervalue brokenness and guilt. Because we know the good news of Jesus Christ, we skip or gloss over the brokenness piece in favor of experiencing forgiveness. But what are we missing in the process? This patient of mine needed to own their brokenness and I may have been robbing them of this transformational moment.

In our passage, through Amos, the Lord is showing the people their brokenness. Their sinfulness. Their wrongdoing. They may have ignored these sins. They may have glossed over them in favor of grace and mercy. They lost their moral footing. The Lord has looked past these sins for too long and is no longer going to tolerate it. It's unfortunate that the Lord has to do this. But like any good parent does, if your children aren't getting it and changing their actions, you have to show them their sins. You have to bring them out of ignorance. As we see throughout our passage, God is showing the people their sins. These are the signs. In verse 6, it starts out with, "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment..." Although numbers held significant meaning to the Israelites, in this instance it is a literary ploy to say that the sins of Israel are many. And God will not withhold his punishment any longer. In the second half of verse 6, the Lord begins to rattle off their sins, "...they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—⁷they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; ⁸they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed." This is meant to conjure disgust in the reader. Both father and son have sex with the same girl. That's disgusting. They drink wine, that came from unjust fines, in the temple. That's disgusting. A gross misuse of God's blessings. And later in verse 12, "...you made the nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'" Nazirites were the holiest of the holiest people seeking after God. And they

corrupted them. That's disgusting to God. And because the people didn't like what God was saying, they told the prophets to stop prophesying. They are blatantly ignoring God.

And now, God is going to wake them up. He is going to show them. In verse 9, God is saying "I don't get it..." "I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of cedars, and who was as strong as oaks; I destroyed his fruit above, and his roots beneath."¹⁰ Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.¹¹ And I raised up some of your children to be prophets and some of your youths to be nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" In essence, the Lord is saying, "I did all these great and mighty things for you. I blessed you immensely and this is how you treat my goodness? You do these horrific things in my name?" And if that's how we respond to God's blessing, then we deserve the punishment that's coming. And the Lord doesn't shy away from naming the punishment, "I will press you down in your place, just as a cart presses down when it is full of sheaves."¹⁴ Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain their strength, nor shall the mighty save their lives;¹⁵ those who handle the bow shall not stand, and those who are swift of foot shall not save themselves, nor shall those who ride horses save their lives;¹⁶ and those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, says the LORD." Ouch!

One of the ways to look at the book of Amos, is to see it as a warning. A caution to those of us who are reading it today. Don't piss off the Lord. Don't mess around with Him. Don't say that something is of the Lord, when it's not. As Paul says in Romans 6, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin." What if, like the Israelites, we never acknowledged our sin? What if, we keep coming to church and we do all the right things, but never acknowledge our brokenness? What if we say that we believe in Jesus, but have never died with Him on the cross? What if we have never put our sin to death? "⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives

to God.” See, we can’t experience freedom from Sin, until we experience the weight of Sin. The weight of brokenness. Otherwise, we won’t understand new life. We won’t understand resurrection. We won’t get it. ¹¹ “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.” Paul and Amos are on the same wave length here. Both are calling the people out of their sin. To no longer live in it. To admit to it and put it to death so that they can experience the mercy and grace of God. ¹⁵ “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey— whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” Stop returning to sin. Stop returning to your vomit. Live in righteousness and obedience to God. Be faithful! Listen to his voice! Live in the light and life, not in death and fear! ¹⁹ “I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Folks, a righteous life, a faithful life, cannot exist without experiencing brokenness at one point in time. You cannot experience salvation without understanding the weight of sin in your life. Do not return to brokenness! Do not return to fear! Do not return to the things that make for death! Live in faith and life in Jesus Christ!

As many of you know by now, we are on the cusp of having Abundant Life Bible Church join us here at Providence Church. Two separate churches under one roof. And I want to give you my personal story and journey to this juncture. Back in November of 2017, I hit a broken point. It wasn’t anything sinful per se. After being here for a few years and trying a number of things. Things that I brought with me from seminary or things that you all mentioned that you wanted to try. It just seemed that more and more we were seeking new life as a congregation by our

own effort and our own might, and yet, it wasn't happening. It wasn't working. And so I had to ask God, "What's going on here? What am I doing wrong?" Although we wanted to see Providence Church thrive and make new disciples, it seemed that whatever we tried, it didn't work. And around that same time, we received the "Netzer Discernment Report." They were as kind as possible in the report, but much of it wasn't favorable. I think that report was a call to brokenness for Providence Church. And again, no one wants to be called to brokenness. No one likes the experience. But it's often the experience that's needed to open us up to opportunities of new life. The issue with me at the time was the same issue I believe God is trying to address with us as a church. To believe that we can build the Kingdom of God by our own might. By our own works. That we try to bypass what God is doing in favor of what we want to do. In a recent book I've been reading by Keith Yoder, he calls it, "willful striving." "When we are not quite sure who we are or do not feel secure in the vision and direction we are going, we [feel we] may have to push and make something happen to somehow 'save face' for our identity and reputation." Instead of resting and trusting that God has a vision for us, we push past what God wants. We become unfaithful because of our anxiety and fear. And when we try to get ahead of God or try to force things that don't fit God's plans for us, we sin in disobedience. So, personally, I got to this place of asking, "What do you want, Lord, for Providence Church?" I started to relent of my personal vision in favor of God's vision. What does God have in store for Providence Church? When I looked around, the problems abounded. With the exception of Christine and I, the youngest adult regularly among us I believe is around 40 years old. And physically speaking, many of you are limited. So we can't do anything hugely programmatic. And most of you are already taking on multiple roles in the church. So where do we go from here? And as much as we hate it, God loves it when we are spiritually, emotionally and mentally in this space. Because that's when God can work with us. That's when God can work with our humility. That's when God can mold and shape us into something new, wonderful and beautiful. As I prayed and listened, the only path forward I could see is if we invited a church plant to join us here at Providence. It may not mean the success of Providence, but the success of the Kingdom of God. And so I had a one-on-one conversation with Tim Doering about all of this. And I threw out this co-church idea that I thought may be coming from the Lord. And I mentioned that it would be a great fit if this church plant had a booming children's ministry. And Tim essentially said, "Dude...it's so cool that you say that. Because the church that immediately came to mind is Abundant Life Bible Church. I've been working with them in this pastoral transition for a while. They have a booming children's ministry. They're having space issues in their current location. I could see how they would be a great fit for this idea." And then of course, we named the hurdles

to cross. Providence has a rough history, will they even be open to such an option? I was even nervous that the elders would react negatively to the suggestion. And since December, I've been in a holding pattern and praying diligently through each step. Presenting the idea to the elders and seeing God work in their hearts. Presenting the idea to Abundant Life and seeing their excitement and enthusiasm about the opportunity. And I got to tell you, it's been a painful internal journey for me. Because as many of you know, when I have a vision, especially a God-given one, I'm ready to roll and I want to make it happen right away. But the Lord continued to whisper in my ear, "patience." And it's been stretching to stay in sync with the Lord and His movement and not move any further ahead. But to even have this possibility on the table, it wouldn't have happened without the Lord first calling me to brokenness. To say, "Not my will be done, but your will be done." At the end of the service today, you'll have a chance to talk about worship service times and how that works with Abundant Life. I invite you to ask, what is God calling us to sacrifice or relent in order that He can be more? In order that He can lead us? What act of faith is God inviting us into? Ask, is this of God, or not?

Providence Church, I believe God is calling us to a state of brokenness and sacrifice. I know it's hard. I know that in some ways, it doesn't feel good. But if we are willing to get on our knees before the Lord and have humility, I believe God can do some mighty things through us. That we can experience life anew. That we will be able to stop wallowing in "woe is us" and start proclaiming how great our God is. That He can orchestrate things that we could never imagine. That He has the Kingdom vision that we cannot see. That we can testify to His great deeds of power. That even when we are unfaithful, He is faithful. Providence Church, can you allow yourselves to experience brokenness in order to experience salvation in Jesus? Looking at the words of Amos, can we see it as caution? Let's not become so far gone that we are beyond redemption. God loves to work with broken people. God loves to work with small groups of people. Hello...the Israelites were an incredibly small nation and God brought Jesus Christ out of such a small area in the world. God does big and mighty things through small groups of people. Can't you see? God wants to be our strength in our weakness. God wants to be the life in the midst of our death. God wants to be our resurrection beyond the grave. God wants to be our salvation on the other side of sin. God is calling each and everyone of you to have a spirit of humility. If we can't own our brokenness. Our wrongdoing. Our misdirection. Our sin. Then there is very little God will do through us. Again, God has a Kingdom vision for Providence Church. He wants to do awesome things through us. But do we have the humble and willing spirit? Can we own our brokenness? Israel didn't want to own their brokenness and terrible things ensued. Let us listen to the Lord and say "Your will be done. Not mine." Amen.