THE CANCER OF COMPLACENCY

**(Amos 6:1-14)**

I once heard about a man who struck it rich; he became incredibly wealthy. In keeping with his newfound wealth, he decided that yellow was his favorite color because it resembled the color of gold, and gold was what he truly valued. As a sign of his affluence, he redecorated his entire bedroom. He hired an interior decorator and instructed her to bring in a yellow rug, to hang up yellow curtains and yellow wallpaper. She outfitted his bed with yellow sheets and a yellow bedspread. He even wore yellow pajamas to bed.

Soon, the man fell ill. He came down with, of all things, yellow jaundice. The man’s wife called the doctor, and the doctor agreed to make a house call. When he arrived, the wife escorted the doctor to her husband’s bedroom. She went back downstairs while the doctor went in to conduct his examination. The doctor entered the man’s room where he was asleep in bed. The good doctor was there for quite some time. When he came down, the wife asked, “How is he?”

The doctor scratched his head and answered, “I don’t know. I couldn’t find him.”

It is easy for us to get lost in our wealth and completely absorbed into a world of greed and materialism.

Such was the case with many in the land of Israel during the Eighth Century BC. We learn about their situation and God’s word to them from the prophet Amos in the book that bears his name.

In his book *Preaching from the Prophets,* which was published in 1942, seminary professor Kyle Yates (I once met his son Kyle Yates, Jr. who lived in Stillwater) wrote:

We find in the book of Amos a vivid picture of the social conditions of Israel at the time. It was a period of unprecedented prosperity. Wealth abounded and the people gave themselves over to a life of luxury and self-indulgence . . . Business was good, wine was plentiful, ivory couches and rich furnishings were provided along with delicacies and stirring music for the feasts and banquets. Ease and extravagance contrasted with the misery and suffering of the slave population who could not afford the bare necessities of life.

Yates went on to write:

The rich gained their wealth by injustice and oppression. The poor workers in the fields suffered at the hands of the cruel landowners and the heartless creditors. The dishonest merchants and venal judges conspired to make the lives of the poor miserable beyond endurance.

What was the state of religion in Amos’ day? The people were outwardly religious. They brought their sacrifices and they went to church, but their religion didn’t make them moral or any more compassionate. Yates wrote, “Instead of plain living they knew drunkenness, extravagant meals, carousals, lolling on soft couches, idling away precious time while swift retribution made its way toward them.”

It was Amos who arrived on the scene to announce the coming of God’s judgment. What do we know about Amos? We know that Amos was not a person born into position and power. He grew up in the small town of Tekoa, 12 miles south of Jerusalem. He was from the working class. He refers to himself as both a shepherd and a tender of sycamore trees (7:14). He was a poor man who worked hard for a living. God called Amos to preach to his wayward people in the north and preach he did. He preached against the immorality and social injustice of his day. He preached against false religion and the rich people’s oppressive use of wealth. He also warned that judgment was coming.

Sadly, the people did not heed Amos’ message and judgment did come. In 722 the Assyrians destroyed the nation of Israel. The people were taken into captivity and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire.

In today’s message I want to suggest to you that much of what took place in Amos’ day is taking place in ours. The rich are getting richer, and often they are getting rich at the expense of the poor. Also, religious observance is just a social thing that makes no difference in how people live or in the decisions they make. I believe there is a cancer at work in the Church of Jesus Christ. This cancer is eating away at the health and vitality of the church. If it goes unchecked many churches will be destroyed by it, and it will do unimaginable harm in our society. It is what I call, “The Cancer of Complacency.”

Amos spoke of it in Amos 6. Let’s read 6:1-7. I want you to notice several things about this cancer of complacency.

**I. THE CANCER OF COMPLACENCY LEADS TO WORSE CONDITIONS.**

Just as physical cancer can manifest itself in different ways in many different parts of the body, the cancer of complacency shows up in various forms. I want to point out some of the conditions to which complacency leads.

1. *The Cancer of Complacency Leads to Presumption.*

Look again at v. 1. *Zion* is a nickname for the city of Jerusalem. Amos is pointing out that those who lived in Jerusalem mistakenly thought that nothing bad could ever happen to them. They reasoned that since the throne of David was in Jerusalem and since God’s temple was in Jerusalem that God would protect them from foreign armies no matter what they did.

Do we ever have similar thoughts? Could it be that we think, “We are Baptists. We are evangelicals. We believe in the Bible. We will never have to worry about God being displeased with us.”

Those who lived in the northern capital of Samaria, on the other hand, trusted in their military defenses. They lived on a high hill that was not easily accessible. Furthermore, a thick wall protected their city. They were certain they could fend off any attack even though their lives were an insult to God.

As a nation, do we think we can ignore God, dishonor Him, and yet remain secure because we are the only true Superpower left in the world?

As individuals, do we think we can live our own lives and do our own thing, and be our own boss, and still be blessed by God because we go to church with some regularity and are nice to our neighbors? We have presumed upon the grace of God.

1. *The Cancer of Complacency Leads to Procrastination.*

Look at v. 3. Some people say, “I’ll put things right with God someday. I’ll go to church and read the Bible when I get around to it.” You have heard the excuses:

* Right now, I’m getting my education, and I don’t have time.
* Right now, I’m getting started in business, and I don’t have time.
* Right now, I’m raising a family, and I don’t have time.
* Right now, things are so hectic, and Sunday is my only day to sleep in.

Many are looking for a more convenient time.

What have you been putting off? Have you been putting off getting baptized? Have you been putting off joining the church? Have you been putting off getting serious about your relationship to God? If you know what you should do, why aren’t you doing it?

James wrote, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (4:17).

Is there any area of your life where that verse applies? Procrastination is just one from of complacency.

1. *The Cancer of Complacency Leads to Self-Indulgence.*

Look at v. 4. The problem here is that the people were giving more attention to pampering their bodies than growing their souls.

Are we not guilty of that, as well?

The late financial counselor, Larry Burkett, wrote: “Focusing on material things is the greatest danger we face. What makes it seem so normal is that virtually everyone in America is doing it.”

Mother Teresa once said, “If it takes you more than fifteen minutes to pack, you have too much stuff.”

Based on her statement, do you have too much stuff? We care far too much about the external and far too little about the internal.

1. *The Cancer of Complacency Leads to Indifference.*

Notice vv. 5-6. In these verses, we see that we cater to our ears (music). We cater to our appetite (wine). We cater to our vanity (lotions/oils). But we don’t care about those who are dying in their sin.

There is a story about a rich man who was terribly unhappy. He went to visit a Rabbi. The Rabbi thought of a creative and powerful way of pointing out the source of the rich man’s unhappiness. He took the man to a window and said, “Tell me what you see.”

The man said, “I see some men, some women, and I see a few children.”

“Fine,” the Rabbi replied. He then took the man to a mirror and asked, “Now, what do you see?”

The man answered, “Obviously, I see myself.”

The Rabbi noted, “Interesting. In the window there is glass, in the mirror there is glass, but the glass of the mirror is covered with a bit of silver. And no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, only yourself.”

Brothers and sisters, we are unable to see other people and feel for them because we are too concerned about the stock market, and too concerned about our 401-K, and too concerned about our mortgage, and too concerned about buying that next thing we have our eyes on.

The cancer of complacency is bad enough, but what makes it worse is that it leads to other conditions that are worse. It leads to things like **presumption, procrastination, self-indulgence,** and **indifference.** Do you find yourself afflicted with any of those conditions?

**II. THE CANCER OF COMPLACENCY HAS ONE PRIMARY CAUSE.**

Look at v. 8. What causes people to become complacent? What causes them to end up presumptuous, given to procrastination, self-indulgent, and indifferent? In one word—pride. Pride is the root of all of these things. The proud person thinks he is deserving of everything he has and should have everything he wants, and he becomes insensitive to the needs of others.

The proud person is unable to see that everything he has was given to him by the gracious hand of God.

In the old movie *Shenandoah,* starring Jimmy Stewart, there is a scene in which Stewart is at the dinner table with his family. Before they eat, he stops to say grace. In his prayer he says something to the effect, “Lord, we cleared this land; we plowed the fields; we planted the crops, we tended the fields; by the sweat of our brow we harvested the crops, and we cooked the food, but we thank you any way.” He wasn’t really thanking God; he was congratulating himself on his hard work.

There are many who feel that way. They believe they have what they have because of their own hard work and persistence. As a result, they think they can do whatever they wish with what they have because they earned it all on their own. They also think they can just sit back and enjoy what they have.

Furthermore, they think that if a person is poor it is that person’s own fault. If they just had more gumption they could go out and make a living like the rest of us.

Amos goes on to point out in v. 12 that the people weren’t being sensible. He is saying, “You know enough not to try to plow a rocky hillside, why don’t you have the sense to not pervert justice?” The problem is their pride. Look at v. 13. They think they have achieved everything on their own.

Malcolm Muggeridge, who had been an agnostic journalist and then become a Christian later in life once wrote, “What will finally destroy us is not communism nor fascism, but man acting like God.”

In a sense, that is what destroyed Israel, and that will be what destroys America unless we repent. We are trying to play God, and God abhors such willful pride.

**III. THE CANCER OF COMPLACENCY IS SUBJECT TO A CURE.**

Despite his warning of impending disaster, Amos did preach a message of hope. He indicated that God would spare the people if they would do something. What were they to do? What did Amos call upon the people of Israel to do? Really, there were two things they were to do. Those two things will cure complacency.

1. *Our Complacency Will Be Cured if We Will Seek God.*

Look at Amos 5:4. He repeated the same promise in 5:6. God had sought to bring the people to Himself. He had done all kinds of things to get them to come back to Him. Look at 4:6. He used hunger. He used drought (4:7-8). He used the destruction of their crops (4:9). He used plagues and war (4:10). He even used the destruction of their cities (4:11). Yet, the people would not return to Him.

Is it possible to be religious and yet far from God? Absolutely! The fact is that we can even use our religion to keep God at arm’s length. Some use their religion as a substitute for an authentic relationship with the Lord.

Are you seeking God, or are you just being religious?

In July of l955 Sam Shoemaker gave a speech commemorating the 20th anniversary of the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous. In his speech, he said this:

You know what a lot of religious people are like? They are like a lot of people sitting around a railroad station thinking they are on a train. Everybody is talking about travel, and you hear the names of the stations and you have got the tickets, and there is the smell of baggage around you and a great deal of stir, and if you sit there long enough you almost think you are on a train. But you are not. You only start to get converted at that point where you get on the train and get pulled out of the station. And you do get pulled out; you do not walk out.

It is not enough to be in a religious setting with a host of other religious people.

1. *Our Complacency Will Be Cured if We Will Seek Good.*

Look at Amos 5:14-15. Seeking God and seeking good remind me of the two greatest commandments—love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. We can’t use the search for God as a substitute for seeking justice (5:23-24). If our faith doesn’t cause us to desire the betterment of those who are poor and oppressed then our faith is a sham and brings no honor to God.

We can’t divorce the horizontal from the vertical. If our vertical relationship with God is what it should be, then we will give attention to our horizontal relationships.

It just so happens that in his letter to Titus, Paul made much of the idea of doing good works. Let’s take quick look at several verses in this small letter:

[**Titus 2:7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Titus+2:7&version=ESV)

Show yourself in all respects to be a model of **good** **works,** and in your teaching show integrity, dignity,

[**Titus 2:14**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Titus+2:14&version=ESV)

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for **good** **works.**

[**Titus 3:1**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Titus+3:1&version=ESV)

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every **good** **work,**

[**Titus 3:8**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Titus+3:8&version=ESV)

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to **good** **works.** These things are excellent and profitable for people.

[**Titus 3:14**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Titus+3:14&version=ESV)

And let our people learn to devote themselves to **good** **works,** so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

Of the ten times that the word *good* shows up in Titus, five of those times Paul joins the word *work* or *works* to it.

Let’s look at one final passage—Ephesians 2:8-10. The Bible teaches that we are not saved by God works, but we are saved to do good works. Those who are ridden with the cancer of complacency, however, will lack the will-power and stamina to do good works.

Some time ago, I shared a story told by Megan McKenna. I share it again because it is so appropriate to this message.

There was a woman who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart. She would read papers and get depressed. One day she decided to go shopping, and she went into a mall and picked a store at random. She walked in and was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus, because he looked just like the pictures she’d seen on holy cards and devotional pictures. She looked again and again at him, and finally she got up her nerve and asked, “Excuse me, are you Jesus?”

“I am.”

“Do you work here?”

“No,” Jesus said, “I own the store.”

“Oh, what do you sell here?”

“Oh, just about anything!”

“Anything?”

“Yeah, anything you want. What do you want?”

She said, “I don’t know.”

“Well,” Jesus said, “feel free, walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is you want, and then come back and we’ll see what we can do for you.”

She did just that, walked up and down the aisles. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air, careful use of resources. She wrote furiously. By the time she got back to the counter, she had a long list.

Jesus took the list, skimmed through it, looked up at her and smiled. “No problem.” And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, stood up, and laid out the packets.

She asked, “What are these?”

Jesus replied, “Seed packets. This is a catalog store.”

She said, “You mean I don’t get the finished product?”

“No, this is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them grow and someone else reaps the benefits.”

“Oh,” she said. And she left the store without buying anything.

Don’t be that woman. Take the good seeds God gives you, then plant them, water them, and nurture them, and see what God does in you and through you.