

The LORD roars

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[0 : 00] Thanks very much, Evelyn, and can I encourage you to keep your Bibles open in front of you to the book of Amos.

As Kenny said earlier, we're starting a sermon series in the book of Amos today. Again, for those of you who are new, my name is Pastor Brian and I'm bringing God's Word to us this morning.

Also in your bulletin, there will be an outline, sermon outline, that will help you to follow along. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that indeed you would be present with us this morning.

Would you speak to us through your Word? Will you tear down any defenses and work in our hearts that we might see you as the magnificent and awesome God you really are, who will one day bring this whole world and restore it and recreate it to the way you want it to be.

All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Imagine with me for a moment a world in which God is not present. Now, I'm not asking you to imagine a world in which God does not exist.

[1 : 29] There's a difference. Rather, I'm asking you to imagine a world in which, yes, God does exist. Yes, he's a supreme being. And yes, he created this very universe.

But now that he's created it, he's decided to move on to other hobbies. He's finished making the universe. He's decided it no longer holds his interest.

So he says to us, Goodbye. All the best. He's a bit like a watchmaker who makes the watch and now leaves the watch to run on its own, ticking away minute by minute.

Or to change the picture a little bit, he's like an absentee father. Without him, the child would never have come into being. But now he has nothing to do with the child's life.

He's not there when it's his son's birthday. Or when his son falls down and wails. Or when his son is throwing a tantrum and needs discipline.

[2 : 38] What kind of world would that be? Just imagine. Your children go to school only to be caught up in a school shooting.

But God doesn't care. He's on holiday. Your workplace is rife with bullying and sexual harassment. But God doesn't care.

He's on holiday. You're terribly mistreated. And to your shame, you sometimes mistreat others as well. But God doesn't care either way.

Because he's on holiday. He exists. He created your world. But he doesn't care. Well, that would be horrible, wouldn't it?

And the question is, is this the kind of world we live in? A world in which God is like an indifferent watchmaker? Or an absentee father?

[3 : 39] Well, the book of Amos is going to give us a resounding no. This morning we're starting a series in Amos. And what we're going to find in these pages is a revelation of God not as an indifferent watchmaker, not as an absentee father, but as a roaring lion.

He cares more than we do, actually, about people being mistreated and injustice being perpetrated. Just come with me to chapter 1, verse 2 for a moment and notice that phrase.

The Lord rars. In other words, God is not silent. He speaks. He voices out. He intervenes.

He's present in this world. And that should unsettle us. Now, my son Lucas has a baby book with a picture of a lion in it.

Here it is. What a cute and cuddly lion that is, isn't it? But that's not the lion we're coming face to face with in the book of Amos.

[4 : 48] The lion we're coming face to face with is not tame, cannot be manipulated, and is fearsome and formidable.

And that's initially going to make us uncomfortable. But do you remember what C.S. Lewis famously wrote about the lion Aslan in the book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wadruk*?

It's on your hand now. He isn't safe. But he is good. He's the king. And so though this journey will be uncomfortable at times, it will be comforting in the end.

Because we'll come face to face with a God who isn't safe, who isn't tame, but who is good. A God who cares passionately about his world.

A God who burns for justice and righteousness. And a God who isn't cute and cuddly, but as we'll see, who is sovereignly ruling from his throne.

[5 : 55] And that will be made clear from the very beginning in the opening two chapters of Amos. So let's find out a little bit about the man Amos himself.

In verse 1, we're told that he's a shepherd. So he's not a professional prophet, so to speak. He's a layperson, not a pastor. But he certainly seems well-educated.

As we'll see throughout this book, he's well-versed in international affairs. He knows how to craft poetry. He's an insightful social commentator.

And he's from a place called Tekoa, which is located down south in Judah, about 10 kilometers from Bethlehem. Now, if you've been to God's Big Picture, you might remember that the nation, after the time of King Solomon, had split into two.

So we had the southern kingdom, the yellow bit, called Judah. And then the northern kingdom, the blue bit, called Israel. And by this time, the two didn't like each other very much.

[6 : 59] There was no love lost between them. I suppose in some ways, they would talk about each other the way some Sarawakians talk about West Malaysians, as those Malaysians who are out to get us.

But although Amos was a southerner from Judah, his ministry was up north in Israel.

And this is how Amos himself describes his calling in chapter 7, verse 15. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel.

So he becomes a missionary prophet. And this is very important to remember. That means Amos' words are God's words.

What he says throughout this book are not just his opinions. When Amos speaks, the Lord roars. Amos is merely the messenger.

[8 : 04] That's why you will notice this repeated phrase throughout. This is what the Lord says. It's right there in verse 3, and verse 6, and verse 9, and verse 11, and so on.

You will find it, or something like it, throughout the book. The Lord is speaking. He's roaring. He's announcing, and pronouncing, and declaring.

He's communicating to his world. His presence, not absent. And that's important, because Amos' words are not going to be popular.

You see, in verse 1, we are told when Amos was prophesying. It's during the time of King Uzziah of Judah and King Jeroboam of Israel.

And both of them enjoyed long and prosperous reigns. You can read about it yourself in 2 Kings 14, verse 23 to 29, and 2 Chronicles 26.

[9 : 10] During their time, their kingdoms expanded, their economy was doing well, and their enemies were weak. So things were very comfortable.

But now Amos comes to them, and he's going to say things like verse 2, The pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.

Everything from the grass plains to the mountain tops will come under the judgment of the Lord. Just imagine if Pakatan Harapan's time in power is long and prosperous.

But someone comes and says, You know what? Forget Harapan. Your hope is misplaced. The Felda settlements will go bankrupt.

The Petronas Twin Towers will topple. What do you think the public reception of his message will be like? I don't think it will be very favorable. That's the kind of situation Amos is getting himself into.

[10 : 18] But once again, don't forget who is speaking. Don't forget who is roaring. The Lord roars.

And when the Lord speaks, things happen. In Amos 1, verse 1, we're told that Amos had a vision concerning Israel two years before some earthquake.

One that he'll mention later on in the book. And sure enough, sometime between 765 BC and 760 BC, an earthquake strikes the region.

Indeed, 200 years later, in Zechariah 14, verse 5, the prophet Zechariah will recall this earthquake as well, suggesting that it was quite a significant event.

He could remember it 200 years later. And so when the Lord roars, he isn't just speaking empty words. He isn't just blowing hot air.

[11 : 21] His words literally shake the earth. When the earthquake happened just two years after Amos had delivered his message, it showed that God meant business.

He's saying to his world, I am no indifferent watchmaker. I am no absentee father. I am very much present in this world.

And when I see unrighteousness and injustice, I say, enough. I will act. So why does God react in this way?

Well, let's have a look at these opening chapters. And the first thing we'll see is that the Lord roars against the nations. The Lord roars against the nations.

That's chapter 1, verse 3, all the way to 2, verse 3, where you can see that God speaks against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab.

[12 : 32] Now, if you were to look at the nations on the map, you would see that these are Israel's neighbours. So we start in the northeast with Damascus, which is right there in Syria.

And then we cross right to the opposite side, southwest, to Gaza, which is in Philistia. and then we move northwest to Tyre. And then the last three nations, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, are in all southeast of Israel.

So it's as if God is saying, I've had my eyes on the whole world from northeast to southwest, from northwest to southeast.

Nothing escapes my attention. and what I see grieves me and displeases me. That's obvious when you see how he begins to address each nation.

For three sins of Damascus, even for four. For three sins of Gaza, even for four. For three sins of Tyre, even for four.

[13 : 45] And so on. It's a constant drumbeat. What is God going on about? Some commentators have suggested that since three plus four equals seven, and since the number seven in the Bible often symbolizes completeness, it could mean that the nations have reached the fullness of their sin.

They crossed the threshold, if you like. That's certainly plausible, but I take this to mean more simply that while three transgressions are more than enough for God to act, four transgressions put the matter beyond doubt.

Either way, you reach the same conclusion. The magnitude and extent of their sin is more than God will tolerate.

God gives time for repentance, but there will come a time for judgment. There will come a time when the lion will go on the attack.

What were these nations doing? Well, we'll briefly look at each of them in turn, but fundamentally, they were not treating people as those made in God's image.

[15 : 06] They were badly mistreating what God deemed as precious in His sight. So for instance, they were treating people as things.

Look at 1 verse 3. For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not relent, because she trashed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth.

It seems as if the Syrians, that's where Damascus is located, had engaged in extreme cruelty and torture of people. They did what we would call today war crimes.

They had been at war with Gilead, a southern neighbor of Israel, and having won the war, they treated their captives brutally. In ancient times, people took a wooden board, embedded with sharp nails, and dragged this over the grain to break it open and to trash it.

But now, that's exactly what they did to people. To them, their prisoners of war were simply cash crops, mere things that they could break open.

[16 : 27] Oh, look at what the Philistines did. That's where Gaza is located, verse 6. For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not relent, because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom.

It seems like they were involved in human trafficking, selling people on as slaves. these were whole communities. Men, women, the elderly, the children, married, widowed.

But they didn't care. The only question they asked was this, how much profit can we get out of them? Once again, these human beings are simply being treated as things.

Commodities to be bought, and so. Not only were the nations treating people as things, but secondly, they regarded relationships as meaningless.

Well, just look at the next nation, Tyre, which is in modern day Lebanon. Now, Tyre was a major port and trading place. And just like the Philistines, they were involved in the slave trade.

[17:44] Verse 9. For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not relent. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom.

And while engaging in this evil practice, they seem to have broken a promise. They had signed a treaty with another nation. It is not clear whether that's Israel or another country.

But in either case, end of verse 9, they chose to completely disregard the treaty of brotherhood. It's the equivalent of North and South Korea signing a peace deal, but North Korea going on to capture South Korea and capture South Korean citizens and sell them off.

Their words and signatures on the piece of paper were meaningless. Relationships were simply something to be used to their own advantage. And this too was the case with the next nation, Edom.

Notice in verse 11 that Edom pursued his brother with a sword. And this was even more tragic when you realize the shared history between God's people and Edom.

[19:05] You see, Edom, the nation, was descended from Esau, the twin brother of Jacob, the father of the nation of Israel.

But although in that sense they were brother nations, yet hostilities persisted between the two of them. All throughout their history, they kept doing violence to God's people again and again and again.

One commentator says that the way Edom behaves towards Israel, is basically like a maniac.

There's no good reason for their hatred. Their shared history was meaningless.

And the evil just keeps on coming as we move down southeast. For thirdly, we see the nations attacking the defenseless.

They attack the defenseless. Just look at Ammon verse 13. For three sins of Ammon, even for four, I will not relent, because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders.

[20:21] kill and kill of no military significance. But for the sake of ambition, of simply gaining just a little bit more land, of just moving their borders just a few more inches, they preyed against such women, and even worse, against the most vulnerable group of all, the unborn.

they ripped them open. Or look at Moab, chapter 2, verse 1. For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not relent, because he burned to ashes the bones of Edom's king.

It's not clear whether they simply burned the corpse of their royal enemy, which would already be a clear mockery, or whether they actually burned the king alive.

But either way, it's again showing no regard for human dignity or human personhood. It's a clear sign that they didn't care that these were human beings made in God's image.

Judgment falls. Look back for instance at chapter 1, verse 4 and 5. I will send fire on the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad.

[21:55] I will break down the gates of Damascus. I will destroy the king who is in the valley of Avon and the one who holds the scepter in Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to cure, says the Lord.

These nations might find security in their wealth, as represented by the palace of King Hazael here, or in their military might, symbolised by the fortresses of Ben-Hadad here.

But God says he will burn it all. He roars. His consuming fire will come. And if you look at the end of each of these addresses to the nations, for instance in verse 14, you will see that the imagery of fire comes up again and again.

Let me just read verse 14. God is not to be messed with.

So Amos is reminding us, God sees everything. He knows about every wrongdoing. He knows every detail about 1MDB, about MH17, about May 13.

[23:28] And he is patient. This is the same Lord, remember, who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and rich in love.

But never ever mistake his patience for incompetence. Just because he doesn't seem to act now on human trafficking at the borders of Thailand and Myanmar, or child prostitution rings in Russia, or war crimes in Syria, doesn't mean that he is incapable of acting.

Sometimes that's what people think, isn't it? They get into a position of power, and they begin to think that they are a law unto themselves. And that's not just true at the national level, but also at the level of our workplaces.

So people get into certain positions of power, and begin to think that it's okay to keep yelling at those under them beyond what is reasonable, to withhold certain privileges from them, to treat them almost like cheap replaceable machine parts.

Rather than as precious human beings. They promise but don't keep their word, and they fall prey to Ammonite ambition, depriving and exploiting others for the sake of expanding their personal little kingdoms.

[25 : 05] And God says, don't mistake my patience for incompetence, for even my patience has a limit.

There will come a point where I say enough. And that's right, isn't it? Imagine if your daughter constantly throws all her toys in a fit and never listens to her parents despite the gentle reasoning of mummy and daddy.

there comes a point when they will have to say enough. And there comes a point when God looks at all the evils in the world.

The rich exploiting the poor, the strong exploiting the weak, the wicked exploiting the upright. And he says enough.

for Amos is also reminding us not to mistake God's judgment for irrational vengeance.

[26 : 09] Don't mistake God's judgment for irrational vengeance. I don't know how you felt when you were hearing those list of evils in chapter one.

Did it turn your stomach? I hope it did. for only when we feel the force of how evil our world can be, then we can understand why God must judge.

It's still the same today. I don't know if you've read about the discovery of human trafficking death camps at Wang Gelian near the borders of Perlis.

The New Straight Times called it the most horrific case of human trafficking, torture, and mass killings to have occurred on our soil.

More than 150 remains of human beings, believed to be foreigners and including women and children, have been discovered, along with evidence of systematic torture.

[27 : 18] They were eyewitness reports of human beings being kept in cages. and perhaps just as shocking is the evidence that there has been some cover-up by the higher authorities.

Well, does your heart not cry out for justice to be done? And when we hear such things, it can seem too big for us to handle. I mean, it's beyond our control, isn't it?

How can we avoid falling into despair at such horrors? Well, there's only one way. When we know the Lord will roar.

When we are confident the Lord will judge. He's actually doing the most rational thing in these cases.

Enough. Enough. But Amos doesn't stop there. Because the Lord not only roars against the nations, the Lord roars against his people.

[28 : 24] The Lord roars against his people. God now turns his attention to the seventh nation, and that's Judah. And what's different compared to the other nations is that Judah forms part of God's people?

In fact, don't forget, Judah is where Amos comes from. It must have been hard for him to speak against his own people. But the responsibility of being God's prophet demanded it.

And what has Judah done? Chapter 2, verse 4. For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not relent, because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed.

This is a real tragedy. You see, Judah's crime is one that only God's people can commit. The surrounding nations don't have God's law.

They still live in God's world and are subject to his rules, that's why judgment comes. But they don't have the privileges of intimately knowing God's character via God's law.

[29 : 48] law. But Judah does. They have God's revelation. They should know better. But God's revelation does not stop their violation of his law.

If you have the older NIV, it says that they willingly followed lies. And if you are reading from the NIV 2011, it more specifically notes that they willingly followed false gods.

they've fallen into idolatry. Something that we'll hear more about again in the coming weeks. You see, you can't escape the God of this world, not even in church.

Do you know that sometimes people try to escape God, not by avoiding church, but by going to church? They mingle with God's people and perform their religious duties on a Sunday, so they look devout. But they still worship something else on a Monday, whether that's money, or the approval of others, or a certain perception of themselves that they wish to cultivate amongst their peers.

[31 : 02] But God says, don't think I don't see, don't think judgment isn't coming. Verse 5, I will send fire on Judah that will come consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.

Well, is that you today? Are you coming to church just for the sake of fulfilling some religious duty you think will satisfy God, and thinking that would be enough to keep him from bothering you after 10 a.m.

this morning? Do you think that you can secretly continue ignoring God's ways outside of a Sunday, simply by showing up to keep him happy today?

It's not going to work, I'm sorry to say. God knows. God knows. Now at this point, if you are Israel, you will be sitting back comfortably in your chair and enjoying this charama.

Don't forget at this point in history, God's people were divided into Judah, the southern kingdom, and Israel, the northern kingdom, and they didn't like each other. That's what we said earlier. So you love this eloquent prophet who has just promised judgment on all your enemies.

[32 : 25] And even better, he ends it by speaking against your arch-rival, Judah. After all, Judah is the seventh nation. And we said earlier that the number seven was the number of completeness in the Bible, right?

So just imagine the shock when Israel is just getting ready to leave the charama, thinking that it's all over, there's been seven nations listed already. when suddenly Amos starts up again with verse six. For three sins of Israel, even for four. And there's a danger, isn't there, that we too can enjoy hearing the preacher preach against others, thinking that we're fine, there is the people out there who need to hear this, not us.

But Amos doesn't let his hearers then, or today, off the hook. He goes on to describe Israel's list of sins, which is three times as long as those of the other nations, verses six to eight.

They sell the innocent for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.

[33 : 58] Father and son use the same goal and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their God, they drink wine taken as fines.

Wow. The mood in his audience must have changed in an instant. But Amos is unrelenting. You behave just like the nations in the way you mistreat others, Amos says.

You exploit the needy. You use women. You desecrate the house of God. Indeed, you show utter contempt for God's grace and salvation.

Look at verses 9 and 10. Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them, though they were tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks.

I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below. I brought you up out of Egypt and led you for forty years in the wilderness to give you the land of the Amorites.

[35 : 08] and yet they showed contempt for their history. And the root of their problem is right there in verses 11 and 12. I also raised up prophets from among your children and Nazarites from among your youths.

Is this not true? People of Israel declares the Lord. But you have made the Nazarites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy. The prophets were people who brought God's word to his people.

And the Nazarites were those who were meant to model holy living. We find that in number six. But God says, you don't want to hear from God's word anymore.

And that's why you disallow the prophet from prophesying. You don't want to see God's word in action. So you force the Nazarites to drink wine, which goes against their vows.

The modern equivalent today would be people who refuse to open their Bibles and listen to what it says. People who deliberately choose to open social media rather than to listen to faithful expositions of God's word.

[36 : 26] People who say to preachers of God's word, don't you dare make us uncomfortable. Don't you dare challenge us and don't be too fanatical.

We don't want those people in church who always say that we must put Jesus above everything, even above studies, even above parents, even above financial security. We don't want such people to influence our kids.

We don't want such role models. Well, this is what the Lord says, verse 13. Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain.

The Lord roars. As the cart topples and strikes the ground because it is overloaded, so the earth will be split.

Amos seems to be hinting at the coming earthquake. the Lord roars. How Israel would have hated hearing this.

[37 : 31] They thought they were God's people. They had a covenant. They were safe. But they were not because they were lacking one thing, true saving faith.

Verses 6 to 8 was overwhelming evidence that they had none. Their fruit betrayed their roots.

Today, is there evidence that you have saving faith?

Or is there overwhelming evidence to the contrary? Zero willingness to try to understand and follow the Bible. No desire to even attempt to pray.

No conviction of trying to follow Jesus wherever you are, especially in the way you treat others. if so, beware the lion.

I did say Amos will make us uncomfortable, didn't I? So how should we hear these chapters? Well, I've already addressed how those of us who call ourselves Christians but have no real understanding what that means should hear it.

[38 : 49] we need to take seriously God's warnings. But what if you are a Christian today who is genuinely exercising saving faith in the Lord?

How should we hear this? Well, we should hear it this way. We should hear the lion who roars as our lion of Judah.

perhaps as you've been hearing Amos 1 and 2 today.

The Holy Spirit is weighing upon your hearts and brought to your mind all the times that you have treated others badly. You know where you've broken God's law. You know where you've taken the things of God too lightly.

And you're trembling with fear. But when we remember the entire story of the Bible, we find relief there. For we remember that this lion who roars is the lion of Judah who at the same time is the lamb who was slain.

[40 : 00] In Revelation chapter 5 verse 9 to 10, we're told of what he did. You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth. Do you hear that?

The lion who roars is the very same lion who took the judgment we deserve upon himself. And with it he bought every nation, Syrians, Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Israelites, and you and I.

Remember what Israel did? They didn't just commit acts of social injustice, they had offended a holy God and yet he gave them a place of refuge in his son, the lion of Judah.

Judah. But as we finish, don't forget, the lion of Judah is not just the lamb who was slain, he is still the same lion who roars.

[41 : 30] We find refuge in Jesus, but we must not presume on him. He is not cute or cuddly, he isn't a cat that we can pat on the head and ignore when we like.

As Acts chapter 17 verse 31 says, For God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

That's Jesus. That's the lion of Judah. So let us not test his patience. Let's seek refuge in the Lord who roars.

for us for Thank you.

Thank you.