

A Question of Ethics

Sanctuary Bible Study – February 14th

National Ethics

Basic Questions: What is the deal with 'national' sins? How do we respond to them?

SETTING THE STAGE

1. OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF SIN AND PUNISHMENT:

- **Egypt:** God promises Abraham that He will punish their sin of mistreating the Israelites. (Genesis 15:14)
- **The Israelites:** Worship of the Golden Calf is punished by God with a plague. (Exodus 32:34-35)
- **The World:** God will punish the world for its evil. (Isaiah 13:11)
- **Specific nations:** Over and over again God speaks through the prophets announcing His retribution for sins such as unfair measures, idol worship, divination, lack of respect for life, pride, calling evil 'good' and good 'evil', unjust laws, oppressive decrees, depriving the poor, etc. We can find more than a few that apply to our nation today!
- **Punishment:** More often than not, God uses regular means to carry out His punishment. In Israel's case He almost always uses another nation to come in and take over i.e. Assyria, Babylon etc. The use of natural wonders such as plagues are also used and on occasion supernatural means are used i.e. Sodom and Gomorrah.

2. NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF SIN AND PUNISHMENT:

- **Punishment moves from nations to individuals:**
 - 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10
 - Mark 12:40
 - Matthew 25:46
 - 2 Peter 2
- **The common thread in both Testaments is that God is a just God who hates sin and demands payment for it.**



3. THE DAY OF THE LORD (THE FINAL JUDGEMENT)

- **This phrase refers to the final judgment that will take place at the Second Coming of Christ, when He redeems His faithful and sends unbelievers to eternal punishment.**
 - **The phrase is used 19 times in the Old Testament:**
 - Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi. 4:5

- These passages refer to both a near and far fulfillment, as does much of Old Testament prophecy. Some of the passages describe historical judgments that have already been fulfilled, while others refer to divine judgments that will take place at the end of the age.
 - The phrase is used 3 times in the New Testament:
 - Acts 2:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10
- The Day of the Lord will be a time of judgment and a time of salvation. The final outcome of the day of the Lord will be that “the arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day” Isaiah 2:17.

4. WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH US TODAY?

- 9/11, Katrina, Haiti Earthquake – Is God punishing specific national sins?
 - God’s judgment on our country or the people of Haiti (Robertson, Farwell).
- A healthy response is not to label sins and punishments, but focus on our need individually and corporately to focus on Jesus (John 9).

5. A PROPHET NAMED AMOS

- Lived during the time when the Kingdom was divided into the North (Israel) and South (Judah). Main part of ministry was carried out from 760-750BC
- Preached during the reign of Uzziah in the south & Jeroboam II in the north.
- Only prophet from the south to preach in the north.
- His main task was to call the Israelites back to God, letting them know they were also guilty.

THE BIG PROBLEM: A LIFE WITHOUT GOD

- **Damascus: Amos 1:3-5**
 - The capital of Syria will be punished for its hunger to expand her borders and lack of regard for life in Gilead.
- **Gaza: Amos 1:6-8**
 - Gaza will be punished for selling people into slavery in Edom.
- **Tyre: Amos 1:9-10**
 - Tyre will be punished for selling people into slavery in Edom.
- **Edom: Amos 1:11-12**
 - Edom will be punished for killing the people of Jacob.
- **Ammon: Amos 1:13-15**
 - Ammon will be punished for ripping children from pregnant mothers in order to expand their borders.
- **Moab: Amos 2:1-3**
 - Moab would be punished for a total disregard for the sanctity of life by burning the bones of the King of Edom.
- **Judah: Amos 2:4-5**
 - Judah will be punished for turning their back on God.
- **Israel: Amos 2FF**

- Israel will be punished for enslaving people, degrading the poor, beating people, behaving sexually immorally, misusing garments taken in pledge, charging petty fees then with those fees buying wine & drinking it in church.
- **A picture of a life without God:**
 - Deepening cycles of evil
 - Lust for power
 - Us and them talk
 - A focus on self rather than others, no matter the cost
 - An absolute loss of respect for life

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.”

Psalm 1:1

- **A progression AWAY from God!**
 - Life without God = listening to the voices of evil
 - Life without God = living the way sinners live
 - Life without God = sitting in the seat of those who defy God
- **Paul describes this downward spiral in the NT counterpart to Amos in Roman 1:28-32:**

“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

Like Amos Paul sets the bull’s eye back on us – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
Romans 3:23

Paul’s point is the same as Amos; life without God is destructive, for all of us.

6. PERSONALLY...

- **We are made to be in relationship with God, from God we receive:**
 - Our identity
 - Our worth
 - Our purpose
- **Lifeboat Exercise**
- **Life without God is all about finding the advantage**

7. AS A NATION...

- **Compete against others for resources**
- **Everything is evaluated based on security and threats**

- **We live in a nation that looks eerily similar to the nations Amos described:**
 - Babies being cut out of their mothers for the sake of convenience
 - Wholesale trafficking of people for economic gain
 - Alliances made with countries for economic gain
 - Disrespect for life on all sorts of levels

THIS IS LIFE WITHOUT GOD AND AMERICA IS INCLUDED!

Like in Amos our nation will feel the destructive power of sin on a daily basis.

- The single greatest issue that Amos raises is how as God's people we are to treat the marginalized and hurting people of our society.
- Don't mistreat your neighbors for they are loved by God.
- Love your neighbor because that is how you love God.
- By mistreating & disrespecting your neighbors – you do the same to God.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

- **"Identificational Repentance"... partly anyhow!**
 - **Identify National Sin**
 - **Confess the Sin**
 - **Walk in obedience**

"If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2

Chronicles 7:14

- **The key:** People of God identifying, their own part in the corporate sin of their nation, city or people group.
- **The focus must be on Jesus so that...**
 - We move away from inward focus.
 - We understand our culture in a way that allows us to engage it.
 - We move away from individualism toward community.
 - We remain humble.

Discussion Questions:

- **How does repentance help us do the four things above?**
- **What do you think; does God still send specific punishments to nations?**
- **How has our nation begun to devalue life or has it?**
- **Where have you seen increased competition in your life as a result of life without God: personally, in business and in other relationships?**
- **Why is it so easy to see the sins of others?**