

Grace, mercy and peace to you, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Could I say that an inch is the distance on my thumb from the knuckle to the thumb tip and be true? Or could I say that a foot, that is 12 inches, is the distance on my arm from my elbow to my wrist? Or a yard, could I say a yard is the distance up from the ground to my waist? Of course not. I could say that in estimating distances and measurements. But these are not standards. These measurements are not subjective. There is a standard for centimeters, and inches, and meters, and even seconds. An inch is 2.54 centimeters. A centimeter is 100ths of a meter, and the international definition of the meter are two notches on a an iron bar kept in Paris, France. That is the international standard for a meter so that for anywhere in the world, people have a common measurement to use.

God shows His prophet Amos a standard in Amos' vision from the Lord. "This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?' 'A plumb line,' I replied. Then the Lord said, 'Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.'" Amos beholds a standard, a plumb line. A plumb line is what a builder would use to be sure that walls and buildings would be straight and square, and not at weird angles or sloped. A plumb line was a simple enough tool. It was just a weight on a line of some kind, not real heavy, a light weight that was shaped to be symmetrical and at a point to make sure it was pointed straight down. And held up to make sure it was straight and pointing to the ground.

God shows to Amos a plumb line that He is putting among His covenant people Israel. He is showing that they are not measuring up and will no longer spare them.

Sounds rather harsh, does it not? God will put up with His people no longer. The time of grace is over. God's mercy is spent. Does it sound like our merciful and gracious God? "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer." I will spare them no longer, says God.

Our text is from the prophet Amos. Amos' prophecy comes from the scroll of the Minor Prophets. If you want to call them major prophets, other prophecies in the Old Testament have their own scroll, their own books. Such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, these prophets have their own scrolls. But they are no better nor more important than the other prophets, such as, Hosea, Malachi, Hezekiah, and Amos.

Amos was a shepherd and took care of sycamore-fig trees. His prophecy begins, "The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—what he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash a was king of Israel. He said: 'The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.'"

For awhile now, the prophets we've heard from are sent by the Lord to console and encourage a broken nation in exile. Some were still in a conquered Jerusalem, like Jeremiah, others in foreign lands like Isaiah. The prophets' prophecy we've heard from are later in Israel's history but before Jesus' time.

Amos prophecies during a stretch of Israel's history before foreign powers conquer her in punishment. Amos comes onto the scene of Israel's time after David and

Solomon. Israel enjoys prosperity and dominion under these two great kings of Israel. Israel conquers nearby lands and expands her dominion when David is king and when wise king Solomon rules. But Israel begins to fall apart after Solomon. Despite the prosperity that Israel enjoys, she falls into idolatry, and is lead to follow other gods.

First, the powerful nation is divided. Israel is the northern kingdom, Judah is the south. Being divided from Judah, Bethel is made the capital city of Israel, and of course it has a temple dedicated to a false idol, false god not to the true God. Israel is plagued with wicked and idolatrous kings who lead their people of Israel from the one true god. The northern kingdom, Israel is ruined by her own success. She had enjoyed the prosperity won by kings David and Solomon. Their triumphant reigns had Israel enjoying trade, and luxuries, and fineries. But this success lead her away after pleasure and into neglect. And with each king, Israel is lead more and more down the path of sinfulness. These are the times of wicked kings Omri and Ahab and queen Jezebel. These are the times when Jezebel and Ahab had prophets killed and Elijah ran for his life. These are times when Israel would forsake her God.

Now, enter Amos.

It is at the time of Jehu as Israel is prosperous and is being lead away by pleasure and tempted, and will fall away. Amos is called to preach to Israel. God foresees that she will only continue down this downward spiral. He still calls to her. Turn, He beckons. Turn from your sinful ways and live, God calls her. But she will only sin more.

Amos proclaims. Amos the shepherd, leaves his sycamore-fig trees and prophecies, “The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—what he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and

Jeroboam son of Jehoash a was king of Israel. He said: ‘The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.’”

God wields the hammer of justice. Yes, He is merciful and He is just.

Which means there are those who will be judged unrighteous, which means judgment to condemnation. Punishment. Eternal chastisement. Amos declares that God was going to judge His unfaithful, disobedient, covenant-breaking people. She was His chosen people, she enjoyed God’s kindness in her exodus, and her in conquests under David and Solomon. Judgment was coming on her idolatry and covenant breaking.

Her punishment was going to be no slap on the wrist. It would be al most complete destruction. God would uproot His chosen people by the hands of a pagan nation.

Amos prophecies judgment comes. “Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel, I will spare them no more.”

God does have a standard. He has the law. A young man comes to Jesus needing the obvious. The gospel of Mark reads, “As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” Jesus makes this sound so simple. Do this and you shall live. Live the 10 Commandments, live God’s law and you will live. You will be blessed.

And the more we behold God's standard, we realize we do not live up to it. Do you fear, love, and trust in God above all things? Or do you find comfort and certainty in a fat bank balance? Do you call upon God's name only in prayer, and give him thanks and praise? Or do you silently curse to yourself when another has wronged you? Have you held God's preaching and His word sacred? Or have you looked for excuses to neglect and avoid his words of life?

And your neighbors! Do you value your parents as the God given gifts they are? Or does their value to you come from what you can squeeze from them? Your other neighbors? And I speak not of those who you fraternize and rub elbows with. What of those Jesus tells you to be neighborly to? Those you avoid, those you can't think of a kind word about, do you seek to be the bigger person and seek their welfare? Do you still find something, anything, to speak well of? My friends, need I go on?

The mirror that is God's law shows how much we do not measure up.

God has set a plumb line for his covenant people, and we too do not measure up. Will God relent?

We have a God who keeps His promises. We have a Savior who takes on our punishment, our chastisement.

Our God, our Savior stepped down and took our very broken flesh, and was born, lived, and died as you and me. But He conquered that sinful death and rose triumphant over that death so that we may live. The merits of Jesus work are given to you and me, as we have faith in this great act of redemption. Jesus says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Our God is a just God. He is right in executing judgment. And His mercy satisfies His verdict.

Amos is raised from shepherding and tree herding, to be a prophet of the Lord. He pronounces judgment on God's covenant people. He will spare them no more. God does execute condemnation. And He keeps His promises. His mercy for you and me satisfies. He pours upon Jesus the penalty for our sins, and gives to us life. Life full and free. Life lived in Jesus victory. In His name. Amen.