

A. Introduction

1. Cows: For the last three years, we have used a hay wagon for our float in the Aurora Christmas parade. We borrowed this from Clare Eves who lives up Woodbine on a century-old farm. Now when we are up there, we usually spend some time in talking with Nancy and Clare, mostly Clare, generally in the lane or by the barn. Inevitably, as we are talking, the cows, no matter where they may have been in the field, drift over to stand as near to us as they can get, chewing their cud and regarding us with their great big eyes. And they will stand there, comfortably and calmly the whole time that we are talking, interested purely, it seems, in watching these two or three people standing there talking. If you have ever had anything to do with cows, you will recognize this behaviour of theirs.
2. now, Amos, was a much braver man than I, for here he is a rustic shepherd from the south, from Judah, visiting up in Samaria among the well-to-do, affluent Samaritans
 - a. calling their wives, the prosperous women, "Cows" (which the King James version renders as "kine")
 - b. and that is not a very flattering term, I am sure
 - c. nor, was it meant to be – because sometimes God has to speak harshly to people to get their attention
3. but it wasn't quite as insulting as it may sound
 - a. in an agrarian society, making comparisons with the animals could even be flattering
 - b. I wouldn't suggest any of you young men complimenting your lady love by saying that her teeth are like a flock of sheep, but that is what the bridegroom does to his bride in the love poem, Song of Solomon (4:2, 6:6)
 - c. and I have heard of farmers calling to their wife-to-be, their 'young filly' or their 'heifer" as an endearment
 - d. but that isn't what is intended here! It was a natural way for Amos the farmer to portray these women

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B. Why is Amos speaking against the women?

1. The expectation about women

a. when there is oppression in society

(A) it is usually the women and children who suffer first

(B) because of their physical weakness or their depressed position in society

b. also, God appears to have endowed women with a nature, a maternal character, whereby they are willing, even perhaps glad, to give of themselves for the protection and care of their children and those whom they love

c. from these things, it is expected

(A) much more so than men, particularly those hardened by fighting in war, or made cruel by their own greed

(B) that women would be able to identify with the poor and the needy and the oppressed in society

(C) and reach out in care and love to help them

d. history has often shown women meeting this expectation

2. The women of Samaria

a. however, were 'cows of Bashan' (4:1)

(A) Bashan was that grassy, fertile land east of the Jordan river, well watered, suitable for cattle

(B) which the two and one-half tribes: Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, had chosen for their inheritance, for they had great herds of cattle

(C) so the cows of Bashan

(1) were well nourished

(2) and sleek and fit and healthy and good to look at

b. this seems fairly descriptive of these women, now dwelt 'on the mountain of Samaria'

c. for they were comfortable in the midst of their prosperity

d. and lived in apparent, total unconcern

(A) that the luxury that they enjoyed

(B) the comfort in which they revelled

(C) came at the cost of other's suffering, either directly or indirectly, for Amos accuses them that they

(D) 'oppress the poor ... crush the needy'

3. so what a contrast existed between the expectations for these women and their actual thoughts and actions!
 - a. so that as they wallowed in their riches and comforts
 - b. the called upon their husbands (in some translations it is rendered 'lords' or 'masters' but it is the same word that Sarah uses to address her husband Abraham, Gen 18:12) to fetch food and drink to continue their self-indulgence
 - c. unaware or unconcerned that every bite they took came out of the poor in the midst of their land
4. Amos warns these women
 - a. that just as cows are led by rings placed in their noses
 - b. the walls of their city and of their houses would be broken down, the invaders enter, and,
 - c. the Holy God promises that they were going to be led away into captivity with hooks
 - d. in the face of this warning, these women might protest,

C. What about their religious acts?

1. these people thought that they were alright with God
 - a. they did not see
 - (A) the two golden calves at Dan and Bethel as idols
 - (B) but as real representations of the God that brought them out of the land of Egypt; of their Yahweh
 - b. thinking that as they went to Bethel and Gilgal they were worshipping – yet, listen to God's indictment of it, 'Enter Bethel and transgress; in Gilgal multiply transgressions' (v4)
 - c. the Hebrew is 'every three days' but some translations interpret this as 'every three full years' in order that it should agree with the instructions given in Deuteronomy (14:22-29) but this misses the point
 - d. Amos is using hyperbole (that's a \$10 word meaning 'exaggeration') in order to make God's message clear – that's something that Jesus did in His teaching, such as when he talked about a person with a great board in their eye endeavouring to remove a small speck from another's

2. he is showing how useless all there religious acts were to God
 - a. though they 'bring your sacrifices every morning' (v 4), and the word here is not that used of the regular morning sacrifices commanded in Numbers (28:3) but extra ones; as far as God was concerned, these were transgressions
 - b. though they brought 'your tithes every three days' (v 4) as opposed to those required every three years; as far as God was concerned, these were transgressions
 - c. no, says God through Amos,
 - (A) those thank-offerings offered with leaven, which were the offerings of rejoicing which were commanded by Moses in the peace-offerings, in the Feast of Weeks (or, Pentecost), and at other times
 - (B) those freewill offerings, made above and beyond the commands of God
 - (C) were not done to please God, to worship God
 - (D) but were all done for their own entertainment and pleasure: "...for so you love to do, you sons of Israel," declares the Lord God' (verse 5)
 - d. how easy it can become for our Sunday worship to come to be for our own satisfaction in place of exalting God! There are available at the back a number of reprints of a thought-provoking article, "Remembering the Sabbath," touching on this, by David T.E. S. Cooke.

D. Comfortable Christians

1. The application of this message, this morning, is not being directed to the ladies present but to every one of us
 - a. because the expectation that there be tenderness, care, concern for those who are less fortunate than ourselves
 - b. is not intended to be restricted among Christians to just the one gender, but to be shared by all
 - c. and what a contrast so often unfortunately exists between
 - (A) God's expectation for us
 - (B) and our own actual thoughts and actions
2. It is so easy become engaged in a comfortable Christianity

- a. it is the prevalent attitude of our society
 - (A) 'if it feels good, do it'
 - (B) 'go ahead, buy this, indulge yourself, you deserve it'
 - (C) we read from Psalm 49 at our Deacons' and Leaders' meeting on Wednesday and noted that the attitude of the rich was the same then as it is now: 'money can buy anything; I don't need God' – but they were wrong!
- b. and, unfortunately, that same attitude can rub off on us
 - (A) saying to ourselves in false confidence
 - (B) 'Look at all the blessings I have! God must really be pleased with me!'
 - (C) as the poet Robert Browning expressed it 'God's in his heaven — All's right with the world' ^{3}.
 - (D) seemingly unaware that God has blessed us so that we as His ambassadors could bring blessing to others

3. now I hope that

- a. those I know of you who already take very seriously
 - (A) their debt to God and responsibility to society
 - (B) giving and caring for others
 - (C) who are sensitive to the teachings of Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit in this matter
 - (D) and on you I would not seek to lay any burden beyond that which you already so willingly bear
- b. but for the rest of us
 - (A) who may have grown indifferent to other's cares
 - (B) having become comfortable in our Christianity
 - (C) that we may remember the example of our Lord Jesus
 - (D) For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NAS), and that
 - (E) "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28 (NAS)
- c. we should ask of ourselves the questions which we find in our closing hymn, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?"

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick's database are identified by "Kerux" followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. With acknowledgement of ideas drawn from the message, "Prepare To Meet Your God" by Rev. Simon Scott of The Round Church at St. Andrew the Great (Anglican); Cambridge, England – Kerux sermons #20440.
3. From part I of "Pippa Passes" (1841), Robert Browning