

Ripe for Judgement
Amos 8:1-6

Date

SERMON NOTES

A. Introduction: in a bowl or basket of fruit we can see

B. The Vision of Summer Fruit Amos 8:1-3

1. what is the connection of the vision of fruit to the prophecy?

2. how would Israel see this fruit?

a. because (Psalm 10:4), they ...

3. how did God see this fruit?

a. because God was (1 Samuel 8:7) ...

4. Christians now live (Colossians 1:13, 1 Peter 2:9-10) ...

5. Christ even now is (Revelation 1:6-7) ...

6. Christ publicly will be (Revelation 17:14) ...

C. three kinds (differing in degree and quality) of righteousness

1. God is ...

2. Through Christ we can have (2 Cor, 5:21, Philippians 3:9) ...

3. By the Spirit, believers show or follow (1 Timothy 6:11) ...

D. The Failure of Justice (in Israel)

1. religion was viewed as ...

2. Judah was exiled 70 years (2 Chron. 36:21) so that ...

3. the Sabbath was made (Mark 2:27) ...

4. Hebrews 10:24-25 reminds Christians to ...

5. a mark of the God-lessness of this world (present and future) is (Romans 1:31, 2 Timothy 3:3) ...

6. God's love in us should be proven by (1 John 3:17) ...

A. Introduction

1. there is in front of me, and of you, a bowl filled with fruit
 - a. most of these are summer fruit
 - b. mostly fruit grown right around this area
 - c. and the greater part of you find that this is an agreeable picture, something very pleasant to look at
 - d. because, of course, we associate a distinct taste with these

2. there are a number of associations we have with such fruit
 - a. you and I probably see them as God’s bountiful provision
 - b. indeed, it is surprising just how much fruit can be produced with relatively little effort on our part
 - c. now, I do not mean completely without any work at all
 - (A) after all, the curse caused by Adam’s sin is still in effect and weeds and disease still invade our gardens
 - (B) I shall have to start spraying our apple trees if they are going to produce a clean crop in the coming years
 - (C) over the past week or so, Maureen, too, has been busy working on these things: baking, preserving, freezing
 - (1) picking gooseberries to make tarts or a pie
 - (2) one day, making pies with fresh-tinned cherries
 - (3) another, making jelly from currants off our bush
 - d. but, the bounty of God in this fashion is amazing
 - (A) Maureen picked a heaping bowl of currants, giving well over a litre of juice, from one small currant bush
 - (B) we have such a crop of blackberries this year, far more than we can use, so once they start ripening, which goes on for weeks, we shall have to invite you to come and pick for yourselves
 - e. some of you who are of a more artistic flair will see in this fruit a beautiful subject for a still-life painting or drawing

- f. the more mundane among us will be thinking of delicious deserts; of food and eating!
3. 'This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit.' (Amos 8: 1 NIV)
 - a. this is the fourth vision that Amos received from the Lord
 - b. a basket of ripe or summer fruit
 - c. a question: if I should leave this bowl of fruit here in this building, what would we see when we arrived back next week? – rotten, useless, dried up fruit
 - d. now that gives quite a different set of associations to this bowl of fruit, ones not so filled with beauty nor so pleasant
 - e. the same was true of this basket of ripe or summer fruit which the LORD showed to Amos
 - (A) it may have had one association for the people of Israel
 - (B) but God, through His words to the prophet, gave to it a completely different association
 - (C) and we shall look at these two this morning
 - f. but also, we shall look at two associations, two points of view concerning justice
 - (A) that of the people of Israel
 - (B) and God's view ^{–{2}}.

B. The Vision of the Summer Fruit

1. This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. 'What do you see, Amos?' he asked. 'A basket of ripe fruit,' I answered. Then the LORD said to me, 'The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.' (Amos 8: 1-2 NIV)
2. Now I read from the NIV because the translators have sought to make apparent in the English, through the use of the word, 'ripe' a relationship that exists in the original Hebrew between the word for 'summer fruit' and 'the end' that was come to the people of Israel – these two words are both derived from the same root ^{–{3}}. which means 'to cut off'. So another, albeit rather loose translation of this verse could be, 'Thus did the Lord Yahweh show me: a basket of fresh-cut summer fruit; and He asked, "What do you see, Amos?" and I answered, "A basket of fresh-cut summer fruit." Then Yahweh said to me, "The cutting-off time is come for my people Israel and I will spare them no longer."' – so you can see the vision had a relevance

3. How would Israel see this basket of fruit?
 - a. it was certainly a picture of the prosperity they enjoyed
 - b. but Israel was so far off from a right relationship with God that did not see God's hand in this; Israel was like the man in Psalm 10:4: *'In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.'* (NIV)
 - c. things were going well – what was there to worry about?
 - (A) the armies of Syria had been driven off by Jeroboam II
 - (B) they were living comfortably in Samaria – on ivory beds and with storehouses of full goods
 - (C) any thoughts of religion, of God, were but a token service; a kind of insurance against the possibility that there might, indeed, be a God
 - (D) we live in such an age, in such a town, and in such affluence that for many it can be said, *'in all their thoughts there is no room for God'* and we Christians, are in great danger of following the same path

4. but, how did God see this basket of fruit?
 - a. like those who are perceptive among you could see that this bowl of fruit left here, without refrigeration, would in a week's time be rotten and withered
 - b. so God saw the rot that had undermined Israel's society
 - c. Israel was a theocracy; for example, the people of Israel asked Samuel for a king, the LORD comforted him, saying, *'... for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.'* (1 Samuel 8:7, NAS).
 - (A) the LORD was to be Israel's king
 - (B) and, as a society they were to testify, to witness to the LORD's own nature, to reflect their Redeemer-King
 - (C) they were to be a people of practical righteousness, of justice, imitating the righteous God they served
 - (D) but in this they failed, as we shall see
 - d. now God says that their false, complacent picture of their prosperity was about to be shattered: verse 3 says *'In that day,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'the songs in the temple {or, palace} will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies — flung everywhere! Silence!'* (Amos 8:3 NIV)

- e. now, we do not live in a theocracy as did Israel
 - (A) and so the Old Testament laws for a society of justice cannot be transplanted to Canada
 - (B) because we do not live under that covenant, and,
 - (C) because God has created in the Lord Jesus Christ, a new spiritual theocracy,
 - (1) For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13 NAS)
 - (2) described in the same terms as the old: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10 NAS)
 - (D) so, we live in a day of grace, and a political theocracy will not exist until Jesus Christ, who is even now the 'ruler of the kings of the earth' (Revelation 1:6-7) returns to earth to take up His Messianic throne as 'Lord of lords and King of kings' (Revelation 17:14)
 - (E) but, all that said, we as Christians are to be concerned with, and to seek, justice and righteousness

5. Let me digress to consider justice and righteousness:

- a. in the Bible, these two are different aspects of the same fundamental idea – righteousness is that quality within which gives rise to the exercise of justice without
- b. justice must be distinguished from what our law courts do:
 - (A) assessing the legal rights of individuals
 - (B) punishing those who break the laws of the land
- c. righteousness differs from holiness
 - (A) holiness is the freedom from any taint of evil
 - (B) righteousness is concerned for what is right and fair
- d. finally, let me outline three kinds of righteousness
 - (A) first, there is the absolute righteousness of God which is His and His alone; only He alone is fully concerned for justice and can always do that which is right: God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is absolutely righteous
 - (B) second, there is the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ received by faith; by this righteousness

alone a man, a woman, a boy, a girl of any age and any time can approach and stand before God; Abraham had it, Peter and John had it, Paul had it; you can have it through faith by accepting Christ's dying for your sin

- (C) third, there is practical righteousness, whereby the Holy Spirit works in us to conform our lives into the image of the Son of God (as Romans 8:29 puts it);
 - (1) the Bible describes such people of God who show this as being just or righteous (eg., Anna, Joseph)
 - (2) these are lights in the world who reflect the Light of the world who is Jesus Christ

6. let us now look at how Israel's society failed to be just

C. The Failure of Justice

1. Religion was viewed as an imposition

- a. the Sabbath predated the Law by millennia – God was not tired after creation, but He ceased His work, demonstrating to man a Divine order and man's own need of a rest
- b. Some have tried to improve upon this seven-day pattern only to repent later. During the French Revolution, anti-Christian leaders abolished the seven-day week, but they found that the health of the nation weakened, and they had to reinstate it. Certain communist systems, such as the former Soviet Union, proclaimed the new man theory and inaugurated a ten-day week. The social experiment failed, and the venturesome Marxist thinkers were left standing irrelevantly pattering on the sidelines. God's seven-day rhythm is best for men and women because God created them. ^{—{4}}.
- c. this was not the only Sabbath law that Israel neglected
 - (A) the land was to have its rest every seven years – which is practised even today by some farmers; because it wasn't, they went into exile for 70 years until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths (2 Chronicles 36:21)
 - (B) debts were to be forgiven and lands restored every jubilee – after 7 sabbatical years – so that there might be no enduring poverty in the land
 - (C) but these practices were not good for business
 - (D) originally we had Sunday blue laws that were intended for the benefit of workers – but these were not good for business, so they are long gone

- d. so the very times that God had set aside, sanctified
- (A) for our good – Jesus tells us the Sabbath was made for man and not vice-versa (Mark 2:27)
 - (B) so the Sabbath, as well as the other festivals given to remind Israel of the goodness of Yahweh their God
 - (C) was considered an imposition, a restriction of business
 - (D) these words seem to be addressed to those who still practised the form of the true religion of Judah-Israel
 - (E) Rev. Scott Hoezee paraphrases the message of these verses: ^{—{5}}. 'Amos puts it pointedly when he pictures people twiddling their thumbs on the Sabbath. What a waste of time the Sabbath was! There was, after all, money to be made! And so they'd sit in the Temple but their mind would not be on the worship. If they had had wristwatches, they would have been constantly checking them. They just couldn't abide holidays and holy days and sacred festivals. What they wanted to hear more than anything was not the sound of the shofar trumpet announcing Sabbath worship but the clang of the opening bell at the stock market first thing Monday morning! Only then did life begin again!
 - (F) 'Not surprisingly, since money had come to assume such a very high profile in their lives, they also adopted an 'Anything Goes' philosophy toward business. So Amos goes on sadly to note that the poor themselves were being bought and sold, cheated and mistreated.'
 - (G) before going on to this other point, let us remind us of the injunction in Hebrews 10:24-25: 'and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.' (NAS), and with what we have heard from the Middle East this past week that day is certainly drawing near.

2. People were seen as an opportunity, an opportunity for profit

- a. these were a people without natural affection – this is the mark of the God-less world in which we live (Romans 1:31, 2 Timothy 3:3) and from which we should stand out as a light upon a hill; light in sharp contrast to darkness around
- b. what did they see when they saw the needy and the poor?
 - (A) someone whom they could help?

(B) needy people as Yahweh their God saw them?

- (1) in the prophets there are 3 groups that the Lord repeatedly uses to illustrate His desire for justice
- (2) the widows, the orphans and the aliens in the land
- (3) people for whom the Law made special provisions
- (4) because these were a vulnerable people, a people without strength to stand up for themselves

(C) but Israelite merchants viewed them as opportunities

- (1) an opportunity to swindle
- (2) they made the ephah or bushel short: this meant that they gave less than promised in their sales
- (3) they make the shekel bigger: the scales to weigh the money were falsified to take in more money
- (4) those of us who lived through metrification can remember when the price of gas went from \$0.83 a gallon to \$0.20 a litre – an 8% increase slipped in – and I have been told on reliable authority that the price per litre has increased much faster than the price per barrel of oil – things haven't changed

c. but if cheating was not enough, it went even further

(A) those who were in the greatest need

(B) to whom they could get away with selling the poorest merchandise – the refuse (poorest part) of the wheat

(C) could themselves be made merchandise of

- (1) could be enslaved, sold, owned, used
- (2) for some great reward or price?
- (3) no, but for just a pair of old, worthless shoes

d. The headline on the Era-Banner on Thursday was, 'No Money? You Don't' Exist.' Things have not changed. I won't labour the point, but there are still in our society those who are exploited, that God loves and whom only you can help; we referred to this verse this morning in our Bible class: **'But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?'** (1 John 3:17 NAS)

D. Conclusion

1. God has used his people to accomplish great social changes

a. William Wilberforce ^{—{6}}.

- (A) was an evangelical Christian, opposed to slavery
- (B) in 1785 elected to the British House of Commons and for 22 years laboured to stop the slave trade, so that in 1807 the bill was passed to abolish it in the British Empire
- (C) slavery continued, however, and for a further 25 years he sought to have slavery itself abolished
- (D) a month after he died, in 1833, Parliament finally abolished slavery throughout the British Empire

b. William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army ^{—{7}}.

- (A) confronted sin in society and took positive steps to help the poor.
- (B) he was furious at the way workers were treated in Britain's match factories. Women and children worked 16 hours every day, earning only pennies an hour. As well, they were exposed to yellow phosphorus, which eventually ate away their jaws and resulted in death.
- (C) so Booth set up his own factories that hired people to make matches using harmless, red phosphorus. We know them as "safety matches."
- (D) he didn't stop there; he got newspapers and politicians interested, and the use of deadly yellow phosphorus was abandoned. Though unpopular, he didn't care. He sought to save souls and to bring justice to society.

2. You, too, can make great changes in your world

a. you may not be a William – Wilberforce or Booth

b. but you live, like them, in an evil world

c. and you are to be, in Jesus's words, 'the light of the world'

d. you may be one of but a few – perhaps the only one – in your place of work, or in your classroom, or on your street, who bears the name of Christ; who is Christian

e. your voice against wrong and for the right may not be popular – and I am honoured to know of some of you who have stood up for such things in such places and have had to pay the price for it – but if you will not care and be counted for Christ, then what?

f. our closing hymn is a reminder to everyone of us who names the name of Jesus Christ that we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world

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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. I am indebted to a message by Rev. Scott Hoezee, ‘Summer Fruit’, for some of the thoughts in this message (Kerux sermons #16754)
3. This is based upon Edward Robinson's 1936 translation of the work of Gesenius, which shows both words are from the root qtz, to cut off. BDB's edition of this work unfortunately ignores this primitive meaning and references only the derived meaning of ‘summer heat’.
4. Michael G. Moriarty, Kerux illustrations #29561
5. See footnote number 1
6. Excerpted from article on page 14, Christianity Today, January 1982, in Kerux illustrations #1804
7. By David Holwick, from Kerux illustration #1401