

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 18 – September 23rd and 26th, 2010

Amos 8:4-7

Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, “When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?” — skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: “I will never forget anything they have done.

Dear friends in Christ

Do you know what the Nobel Prize is? I think that most people have a general idea what one area of the Nobel Prize is – the Nobel Peace Prize. The Nobel Peace Prize is the highest award that can be given to a person who has made some wonderful and outstanding contribution to the ongoing work of peace of this world. There are other Nobel Prizes given to people who have done great things in other areas such as physics, medicine and literature. But there is more to the story about what exactly the Nobel Prize is.

The prize is named after Alfred Nobel, a chemist from Sweden who made lots of money by inventing powerful explosives and then selling the formula to governments to make weapons. One day Alfred's brother died, and the newspaper accidentally printed an obituary notice about Alfred – instead of his deceased brother. The obituary had this to say about the living Mr. Alfred Nobel. The obituary was titled, “merchant of death is dead” and it said that he was the inventor of dynamite, who made a fortune by enabling armies to achieve new levels of mass destruction. Alfred Nobel, after reading his own obituary, was shocked as how he was going to be remembered. He was best known and remembered as a seller of death and destruction. That is not what he wanted. So, Mr. Nobel took his money and used it to establish awards for people who made accomplishments in contributing to life rather than death. And today, Alfred Nobel is remembered for his contribution to peace and human achievement – rather than explosive and mass destruction. Nobel spent a large portion of his life being “successful” in the business world – only to realize that he had made a huge mistake. Like Scrooge in Charles Dickens, “A Christmas Carol”, Nobel got a glimpse into the future and he didn't lie what he saw, so he made some changes in his life.

How about you? What would your obituary say if you died today? Picture your children or relatives or friends gathered around the table after your death. What would they be saying about you and your life? What would you want them to say? So I am asking everyone gathered here today to think about this question which will serve as our Sermon theme:

Sermon Theme: What Legacy Will You Leave Behind?

- 1. One of Greed and hypocrisy**
- 2. One of Forgiveness in Jesus**

The history for our text for today which is written by the prophet Amos was dated around 750 B.C. The Lord had just blessed the King – a man named Jeroboam II – with success as he won a key battle and delivered the Northern Kingdom of Israel from foreign countries that were attacking Israel. In fact, the people of Israel were prospering by worldly standards. Their borders were increasing and the material wealth of the people was increasing. However, and this is a big however, the king and the

majority of the people of Israel remained devoted to the false religions that their forefathers had followed.

To put it bluntly, the people of Israel were rich materially, but spiritually bankrupt. Reading through the book of Amos gives you a pretty good idea of what kind of lifestyle the people were living. Rich Israelites were stealing from their poor brothers. Corrupt courts took bribes to declare the guilty innocent. Temples to false gods were filled with people worshipping these false gods. The zeal for the Lord had almost disappeared from Israel. While it might have looked like the people were getting away with this ungodly living, Amos was sent to tell the people that the Lord's patience was coming to an end. He wrote in **8:2**, **"He will spare them no longer."** Within a generation Samaria – the Northern Kingdom – would fall to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The best of Israel would be exiled and the Northern Kingdom of Israel would be basically wiped from the history of mankind.

Maybe we need to ask the question that is serving as our theme, What kind of Legacy did the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom leave behind? Are they remembered for their wealth and fame? No, it is quite the opposite. Their legacy is one where you look back and want to just shake your head in disgust. Our text for today tells some of the awful things that is their legacy, **"Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?" — skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: "I will never forget anything they have done."** They cheated the poor, whose families were hungry and dependant on the grain that was on sale to live. The people pretended to be faithful in their worship to the Lord, but they were actually worshipping reluctantly because they really didn't want to close their business on the Sabbath and the New Moon festival. They worshipped impatiently, waiting for the services to end so they could go back to their business and make more money by being dishonest. Their bodies were inside the Church, but their hearts were lost in their profits and dishonest dealings. And the list of sins goes on. The awful legacy that these Israelites left behind was obvious to everyone. Their legacy was one that was rotten through and through and the Lord was not pleased as he said in our text, **"I will never forget anything they have done."**

It is easy to point the finger at Israel and see that their legacy was horrible, but what about us? What legacy will we leave behind? Nothing like the Israelites business, right? Or are we closer to them than we like to admit? Do we sometimes neglect worship in order to make extra income on our overtime pay so that we can spend it on luxuries? Do we occupy our minds with the thoughts of profit and loss even while our mouths pray and sing hymns? Do we go to church reluctantly or participate in public worship half-heartily because we don't really want to be in Church, because we have some may other things that we think are more important and "need" to get done and church seems like a big waste of our time? Do we get all worked up when Church talks about being cheerful and generous with our offerings, because we worked so hard to get this money and the Church just wants to take it and spend it? Do we love our Savior so little that we spend a very small amount of our time actually growing in God's Word? Do we care so little for the work of the Lord that we actually spend little or no time in inviting a friend to come to Church, a Bible Class or a Bible Information Class? Maybe our legacy is closer to that of the Israelites, and the words of our God through the prophet Amos are hitting all too close to home when he says, **"I will never forget anything you have done."**

What legacy will you leave behind? As you think about that question, let's first remember the legacy that Jesus left behind – a legacy of forgiveness. Jesus came into this world to save me from my sins – that is a legacy of forgiveness. How many times in the Gospels do we hear Jesus talking about this message of forgiveness? Healing the paralyzed man lowered through the roof by his friends, Jesus

said, **“Take heart son; your sins are forgiven.” Matthew 9:2.** So angered by this the Pharisees asked Jesus, **“Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Luke 5:21.** Jesus after having his feet anointed with expensive perfume by a sinful woman turns to her and says, **“Your sins are forgiven. The other guests began to say to among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins.” Luke 7:48-49.** It is Jesus who says, **“If your brother sins, rebuke him and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, I repent. Forgive him.”** Jesus even threatened God’s wrath and punishment, **“that is how may heavenly Father will treat you unless you forgive your brother from the heart.” Matthew 18:35.** Jesus told Peter to forgive 70 times seven – showing him that forgiveness never ends. And who can forget Jesus hanging on the cross in agony and saying, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34.** Jesus’ life was one of forgiveness.

Is your life one of forgiveness? Thankfully our lives are forgiven too? Jesus not only lived to set a good example for us, but he left us a legacy of forgiveness that will last a lifetime. He not only forgave, but earned our forgiveness and gave us the ability to forgive and forget. Through Jesus’ perfect life and innocent death, he left us something that we could never do on our own. He gave us full and complete forgiveness, **“He was pierced for our transgression, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray ... and the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:5-6.** Once God has forgiven our sins, they are gone forever. They are separated from us, **“as far as the east is from the west.” Psalm 103:12**

How can we ever thank Jesus for giving us his legacy of forgiveness? How can we ever pass on this legacy? Looking back at the words of Amos, we see that he instructs us as forgiven sinners to bear witness to our Christian faith by living lives that will show our love for our God. We will be honest in all our dealing with others. We are reminded that we worship our God not only by being in Church to hear his Word, but also by helping others as we live our lives in this sinful world. It is our calling to live in daily repentance and to confess our sins to all merciful God.

Let’s just take a minute to digress. What are you thinking right now? Are you wishing that I would hurry up and finish the sermon so that you can get out of here in our normal hour time? Are you thinking ahead to the Communion part of the service and thinking that you don’t really want to sit through communion because it is too long, and even worse are you thinking that skipping out before sounds like a good idea? Are you thinking about what kind of plans you might have for the rest of today or maybe this coming week? Are you bitter or angry or maybe holding a grudge? Remember the Lord’s words, **“I will never forget anything you have done.”**

May each of us humbly fall before Lord each and every day and plead for his mercy. May we go about our daily business with a new heart and a new attitude. May we approach the work that the Lord has given to us as parents, teachers, friends, neighbors and as a congregation with a new attitude – one of forgiveness – and one of urgency in sharing the wonderful news of God’s forgiveness. You can do it because the Lord died and gave you that ability. Leave a legacy like Jesus behind – one of forgiveness — and one of love for God’s Word and worship as we attend Church, study our Bibles and love one another. With the Lord’s strength and guidance let us live to leave a legacy that points to our Savior who has given us everything. What legacy will you leave behind?