A Deaf Ear

As I look around this morning, I am going to make an educated guess. Most of us have children, have had children, know people who have children, or were a child. Did I cover the bases? Given this to be true, we may remember the times when we spoke to a child and said something that was not well received. Perhaps the child placed their hands firmly over their ears so as to shut out the words they did not want to hear. As we remember this behavior, we may smile and think about the juvenile actions. It brings a little humor as we remember. Yet, when this was happening to us as parents, we were frustrated and ready to take drastic actions to stop the behavior.

The pity is that this type of behavior is not reserved for the children. Adults may not physically place their hands over their ears but they stop listening. Some may even instruct us to be silent. Some may suggest that we are filled with hate for speaking the truth. This is not a new phenomenon. Let’s open our Bible to the book of Amos. (Where is this? This is a Minor Prophet and follows the Major Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah. Amos is found between Joel and Obadiah.)

Amos is one of the oldest books of the Old Testament and is the oldest written book of prophecy. Amos was an early contemporary of Hosea and Micah. His prophecies were during the reigns of Jeroboam in Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Uzziah in Judah. Most likely, his prophecies were around 750-748 BC or approximately 16 to 18 years before the initial Assyrian invasion and conquest of the Northern Kingdom and subsequent exile.

As we will see in just a few moments, Amos took the message of God to warn the Northern Kingdom about their failure to live according to God’s law. He called for living the commandments rather than using the commandments to define limits. He railed against the failure of neighbors to address the needs of the poor and those lacking political clout. Amos was not a religious leader nor did he have any formal religious training. He was, in our terms, a “blue collar” laborer who was called, equipped, and sent by God to deliver a message. Let’s look at the 7th chapter to catch a glimpse of his message and his reception.

In the 7th chapter, God told Amos that He would send locust to consume all of the vegetation in the land. Amos begged God not to do this. God then said that He would send fire that would consume them, the land and even the great sea. Again, Amos pleaded with God to spare the land and people. Then, in the 7th verse we begin and read: Thus, He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. The Lord said to me, “What do you see, Amos?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said, “Behold I am about to put a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be desolated And the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. Then I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” (Amos 7:7-9 NASB)

Hold your place here. We will resume in just a minute. God had told Amos about His plan to destroy Israel and Amos had diverted the wrath of God. Now, we see the image of a plumb line. In the Bible, when we see God dropping a plumb line, it is an image of judgement. God is saying: “Here is the standard. How do you measure against the standard?” God tells Amos that He will act to correct the situation. He mentions that He (God) will take action against the king and his family. God also tells that He will destroy the places of worship. How was this message received? We continue starting with verse 10.
Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. For thus Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.'" Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence."

(Amos 7:10-13 NASB)

Amos had prophesied about the king’s death and destruction of the “holy places” and we see the reaction of a priest. First, Amaziah tells the king that Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. Then, just like the children we mentioned earlier, Amaziah, in a figurative sense, places his hands over his ears and points Amos away. He tells Amos to go to Judah. He tells Amos to stop speaking of destruction of the sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.

Amos has the last word in this exchange, as we see beginning in verse 14.

Then Amos replied to Amaziah, “I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. But the L ORD took me from following the flock and the L ORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to My people Israel.’ Now hear the word of the L ORD: you are saying, ‘You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.’ Therefore, thus says the L ORD, ‘Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parcelled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’” (Amos 7:14-17 NASB)

Amos points out that he is an ordinary person. His life was agricultural in nature and was not like the priest Amaziah stepping into the family tradition. Amos was specifically called by God for a specific purpose. Amaziah did not want to hear the message. In effect, he placed his hands over his ears like the children we mentioned earlier.

Within this last few verses we read, there are two things to notice. First, Amaziah, the priest of God, refused to hear the words of God so Amos had some specific words for him personally. Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parcelled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. When a person stands up to speak for God or to represent God before others, they have a heavy weight to bear. Should they fail to do God’s will, they carry the responsibility of all whom they bring God’s judgement.

Second, the refusal to hear the message from God does not change the outcome. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile. When we hear a preacher tell us about sin, when we read in the Bible about sin, and then refuse to accept that truth; we do not escape the consequence of that sin. Turning a deaf ear to the message of God does not and never will change the message or the consequences.

Amos did exactly what God called him to do. He delivered the message clearly and timely so that the king, Jeroboam and the priest Amaziah could have acted to change the outcome. Amos could now depart knowing he had competed God’s assignment for him.

Paul charges a young preacher named Timothy to deliver the message of God regardless of how it is received. Consider 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But
you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 
(2 Timothy 4:1-5 NASB)

Times change. The trappings of our life differ based on society and available “toys.” Human nature is always the same. Just as Amaziah turned his ears away from the message from Amos, Paul tells Timothy that people will do the same.

In the chapter before the one we just read; Paul tells Timothy about the nature of people. We often hear this passage when we are warned of eminent doomsday approaching. Well, I do believe the end will come just as revealed in the Bible. However, just as Jesus told us, we won’t know when. These words are about the times when Timothy was a preacher and they are still true today. They will be true if God allows this world millennia unimagined.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. (2 Timothy 3:1-5 NASB)

We have a duty to share the word of God. His message of salvation and love; however, when it is refused, we are to Avoid such men as these.

For us here today, God has given us His message. Preachers, like myself, and the Bible reveal that message. God’s message really hasn’t changed. Jesus paid debts that we could never pay and Jesus was a part of God’s plan from before the world was created. The message of God is laid out in His word many times. Moses spells it out to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 30:15-18.

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish.” (Deuteronomy 30:15-18 NASB)

A few weeks ago, I heard Howard Robertson use the term binary. I like that term. It means there are only two choices. We do not face 50 shades of right and wrong. We choose God or not. We listen to God or we turn a deaf ear.