

Have you ever had to deliver some unpleasant news? Probably, most of us have that task at some point in their life. How about the worst kind of unpleasant news to deliver; telling someone they've done wrong? That might not be the worst kind of news, but I think it's the worst kind of news to deliver. I mean, no matter what, the reaction is probably going to be bad, right? Either they're going to take the obvious path, straight to denial and anger which you'll probably bear the brunt of, or they're going to actually recognize their fault and then you've made them feel bad.

It's never a fun job, but frankly sometimes it just has to be done. And this is just as true when it comes to some of the truth that our God has to speak to us and asks us to have him share with others. So for our own understanding of this, let's take a look at an example of this from Scripture, with the prophet Amos: <Read text: Amos 7:10-17>.

Amos had been given an assignment by God. It was not a fun assignment. His calling was to leave his homeland of Judah and travel up into the northern kingdom of Israel. Now, remember when the kingdoms split after King Solomon, the southern kingdom, Judah has some times where it actually returned to proper worship of the true God and did alright. But the northern kingdom, Israel, never did. It only ever got worse and worse, and of the two it was the first to be destroyed by God as a result.

And now Amos has to go into this land of people who really are his national brothers and sisters, but are so far removed by their pagan influences it might as well be a foreign country. And he has to go into that land and tell them all that they will be destroyed because of their sin, because they have abandoned the true God. And of course in that message is singled out their current king, because as king it was Jeroboam's responsibility to lead the people on the right spiritual path, instead of leading them further astray like he'd done.

This was not a fun assignment. In fact, given the day and age in which this took place, Amos had to acknowledge the possibility that he might not return from it alive. But that didn't stop him. Because his motivation was greater than the danger to himself, greater than the trouble it would bring him. We see that in his conversation with the "priest" Amaziah. Amaziah simply assumed that Amos was like him or like the other "prophets" in Israel. There was no true religious aspect to their work. They did what they did at the king's command and kept the people in line. When they did their priestly duties it was to earn their wages for the day. When they prophesied, it was to say what the king wanted to hear, because that's what they were paid to do. Amaziah's command to Amos to "go earn your bread" in Judah makes his attitude clear. To him a prophet did what he did for his stomach, it was just a job you did because that was how you made your living.

If that had been Amos' reason for being there, then he probably would have picked up and left. But this wasn't a job to him, he wasn't doing this to make his way in the world. In fact he had a job already. He was a shepherd and a gardener. He didn't become a prophet because it was the family business. He didn't need food or money. He was where he was and he was saying what he was saying because his God told him to. He had the right understanding. By definition a prophet is someone who speaks the word of God. And that was Amos' calling. To speak the truth in love.

And it was love that brought Amos here. Not love for himself, not love of earning a living, it was love for his God. The God he understood loved him before he was loveable. The God who promised him salvation, even though Amos had no idea how. The God Amos trusted. Amos' love for the Lord God meant that when God asked him to go, he went. And it is that same motivation that moves us when we are asked by our God to speak the truth in love.

We may not have a calling like Amos, to go to a specific place and speak a specific message, but we have a much broader calling from our Lord. We are to speak his truth to all nations. But the general task remains the same, we speak the truth of God. And our motivation is identical to Amos. We do this out of love for our Lord who rescued us. In our natural lives before God we were trapped in darkness, like being buried underground in a series of unending caves. It was a miserable existence, but it was all we knew. Until the moment we saw light. At first the light stings, it burns our tender eyes and we might want it to go away, but as we got used to it we understood. We understood what our lives had been in that miserable darkness. And now our God showed us something better and told us he could rescue us from this pit and bring us to where we could truly be alive.

The joy of this rescue, the relief of being saved and the new perspective of seeing the light; these things define our new lives. And in that joy we look to our rescuer and say, "How can I ever repay you?" His answer is simple, "Help me. There are too many trapped, there are not enough looking. Help shine this light wherever you can so that others can see and be saved." This one who rescued us, who could have demanded anything in repayment, his request is so selfless we can't help but want to do what he asks. So out of love for our rescuer, we take the light of his truth and we shine it in the world.

Of course, you can see here that love for our God is not the only love in play here. It's also love for the ones we're trying to find and rescue. We know what it's like to be trapped in that darkness. We know what it's like to despair in that life with no hope. And so naturally we want to reach out to them, to show them the light that saves. To teach them the truth of salvation by the grace of God alone. Of course, to rescue them from the dark, we have to shine the light on them. And that can be just as painful as it was for us. In order to be saved we need to first understand how we are trapped in that darkness. How we only ever dig ourselves deeper. How we cannot possibly rescue ourselves. Our pride has to be smashed, our delusions that we can do no wrong have to be destroyed. And that can be painful to admit. But until we do, we can't be rescued. If we think we can get ourselves out of that mess, then we'll always run away from the light when we see it. If we refuse to admit we're trapped and need help, we'll be stuck forever.

And so rescuing others means bringing this same unpleasant truth to them. It means telling them that they are trapped and not good enough to rescue themselves. It means telling them what will happen if they are not rescued. It's hard to hear. It's hard to say. But if it's not said, they will die. If they are not warned they will never have a chance. It may hurt to shine that light in their eyes; but it'll hurt a lot more in the end if you don't. And so out of love for our God and out of love for the souls of the lost, we take that light into the darkness of the world and we shine it where it is needed. Never maliciously, never trying to gloat over what someone else did wrong that you haven't. But only ever to show them the light that God can save them.

This is what it means to speak the truth in love. Sometimes that truth is harsh and unpleasant. But where the truth of the law is heard and accepted, where sinners admit who they are and what they've done, then it is immediately followed by the comfort of the gospel promise. That each of those faults are removed by the blood of Christ. Without the "bad news" the good news has nothing to offer. And as we each search the world with this light we continually keep the lights on each other, to help each other from wandering back into the darkness. Again, this task is sometimes painful, but always done in love, out of care for the other soul.

But do note carefully here that our calling is to speak *the truth* in love. That means what we find in God's word. As we carry out this task we have to be very careful not to speak anything else harsh that doesn't belong. That means our opinions or our assumptions don't belong there. When we're dealing with each other in Christian love, we can't call sin "sin" until we have all the facts. And we almost never have all the facts to start with. Apply the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment everywhere. Take words and actions in the kindest possible way and do not repeat anything negative about someone else, even if it's true. If your love finds you concerned about a brother or sister, then go to that person directly. Speak to them and express your concerns. Get the facts and if it is necessary to confess sin then, you can be there to offer them the forgiveness of Christ.

One last point I'd like to make here about Amos' calling and ours is what is *not* said when we are called to speak the truth in love. There are no other qualifiers given to the directive for us as Christians. What I mean is, it doesn't matter who you are, this calling is given to you. Spreading the gospel is not just the pastor's job. Yes, he has a unique calling to preach it publicly and to shine law and gospel on those in his care who need it. But this calling to speak the truth in love is still yours. Amos wasn't trained professionally. He was simply told by God where to go and what to say. You have been given both of those things.

And this calling also does not have any restrictions on whom it is applied. I mean, you want to talk about the people least likely to take Amos seriously, it was the king and his attendants. There was basically zero chance that his message was going to have an effect. But that did not stop Amos. That was not his determination to make. He was called to speak the truth regardless of how it would be received. He would speak. The results were between God and his listeners. And so we do the same. We speak the truth indiscriminately. We never judge ahead of time if it's going to be effective or not and hold speaking because of this. The Lord that we love has asked us to speak. The other soul that we love needs to hear us speak.

And so we speak when and where we can. Where we have the truth, we bring it in love to those who need to hear it. We are not motivated by earthly reward, we are not motivated by the tangible results it might produce. We speak the truth out of love for the one who has saved us from darkness. And we speak the truth out of love for those who still need rescuing.

Brothers and sisters this is our calling in these days after Pentecost. Take the truth of God's word, and speak that truth in love. Amen.