

Amos 6:1 - 7:1 Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come! ² Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours? ³ You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. ⁴ You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. ⁵ You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. ⁶ You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. ⁷ Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end. ⁸ The Sovereign LORD has sworn by himself-- the LORD God Almighty declares: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it." ⁹ If ten men are left in one house, they too will die. ¹⁰ And if a relative who is to burn the bodies comes to carry them out of the house and asks anyone still hiding there, "Is anyone with you?" and he says, "No," then he will say, "Hush! We must not mention the name of the LORD." ¹¹ For the LORD has given the command, and he will smash the great house into pieces and the small house into bits. ¹² Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness-- ¹³ you who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar {13 Lo Debar means nothing.} and say, "Did we not take Karnaim {13 Karnaim means horns; horn here symbolizes strength.} by our own strength?" ¹⁴ For the LORD God Almighty declares, "I will stir up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo {14 Or from the entrance to} Hamath to the valley of the Arabah."

"To the Complacent and Secure"

Complacency, I've always thought that word to mean just not caring, but there is more to it. It is not caring in the face of an impending doom. It is a form of ignorant arrogant false security that sounds like, "The world can fall apart around me. I don't care. I've made my millions. I've got my private palace on a mountain and I'm secure. Who's up for a Martini?" The other day I came across a little gem of irony concerning complacency in an online magazine called Canadaone. The name of the article was *Fighting the Complacency Trap: 5 Steps to Keeping Your Business Growing* written by a man named William Young, MBA. It begins:

"We have a lot of franchisees who reach a certain level of success, and then just stay there, even in markets when they could be experiencing major growth." This was the comment made to me this morning from the director of operations for a services franchise. It represents a problem very common in today's marketplace; complacency. It's the by-product of moderate success, demonstrated by a lack of urgency and illusion of comfort, and often precedes serious problems.

Reading this after sitting for a bit in this passage of Amos I thought to myself, "How ironic; big money-makers becoming complacent about making even bigger money." But anyway, even financial advisors know complacency is bad.

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But, this financial advisor’s idea of complacency isn’t the one we hear coming from God through Amos. The kind of complacency the LORD gets upset about is when people are well of and comfortable, secure, just don’t seem to care about the poverty, suffering, and violence that’s around them. But, get this. If there is poverty, suffering, and violence around, then there is something seriously wrong with the system and it will eventually implode. Any sense of security can only be a false sense of security.

Here’s another irony or more like an oxymoron; market securities. As Wikipedia defines it, a security is “a fungible, negotiable instrument representing financial value.” I had to look up fungible because it was such funny word and it means, well, all shares of stock in the same company will always cost the negotiated price. Investors are not offered deals where a share by itself costs \$5 but if you buy five you get one free which would devalue the worth of the stock from \$5 to \$4.20. Fungibility is what makes stocks secure because it prevents backroom deals. But let’s think about this. The way stocks work is basically that you are giving a company operating capital in exchange for a share of ownership in the company and it’s bottom line profit or loss, the dividend. But, the price of a company’s stock on the market is negotiable and therefore it is swayed by the subjective concerns of greedy people. If a company is doing well, greed guarantees more people will want to buy stock in it. The more people want to buy that particular stock, the more its perceived worth will go up and that drives up cost per share. When the stock is hot, the price per share goes up disproportionately to the actual earnings of the company so that people are making money on the buying and selling of the stock rather than the dividend. Subjective opinion, or rather greed, in the negotiation of the cost of a share of stock actually makes the security created by fungibility to be simply an illusion. The market is not secure. The whole free market system is a gamble.

Looking at Amos, it was the big money makers in Israel and Judah that the LORD sent Amos to confront for their complacency and their feelings of security, for their arrogance, for their not caring about the suffering around them. The Assyrians were ploughing through the surrounding nations destabilizing trade particularly food supplies. The people of the land were coming to the rich and powerful looking for help and all they were finding were people who just had who just did not care. Instead of aiding the people, they themselves were using terror to keep the people at bay while lounging about on ivory beds and couches, eating lamb and veal, and drinking wine by the bowlful all the while not realizing that this was not a situation they could take advantage of. Their time had come.

The LORD says to these complacent and secure ones, “I swear by the entirety of who I am, God, I swear by my very self that I loathe, I hate, I am disgusted with your arrogance and your fortress-like palaces. I will destroy your little self-contained universes and everything in them and you will be the first to go into exile.” Back then usually the very rich had nothing to worry about when war broke out, all they had to do was bribe the leaders of the invaders and promise not to cause any trouble and life go on. Forty years later, the Assyrians did exactly what God said he would do. The very rich lost everything and were the first to go into exile.

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So what does this say to us? It is a timely passage to hear. It makes me look south and think about those CEO's and board members of those financial institutions who for greed gambled peoples homes and retirements away on risky investments. Who will also walk away from this crisis with some pretty fat pockets having committed no crimes. If Amos were speaking to them today it would sound not like, “what you have done is morally disgusting.” No, it would be more like, “I the LORD swear by my very self, the entirety of who I am, that I am revolted at your arrogance and what you have done. The only hope you have of escaping my judgment is to give it all away and seek me.”

I think hearing Amos words that the very rich who take advantage of our trust will get their due should sound comforting to us, but...I can't stand here pointing the finger in judgment like that. We have to look at ourselves. Let's widen the lens and imagine what we North Americans look like to impoverished Africans or Latin Americans whose cultures were destroyed by white colonialism, whose homes still have dirt floors, who don't have clean water who live with the real threat of war, famine, and disease in their lands. Maybe they like Amos and see our complacency and false sense of security. While we just think we're good hardworking people doing the best we can for our families but the social and economic systems we live by are based on greed and covetousness and require that there will always be an ever increasing percentage of impoverished people.

Let's shrink the lens a bit and look closer to home. How do the first nations people who make up a disproportionate amount of the necessary percentage of impoverished people in this nation, how do they see white North America? Would not they see us with the eyes of Amos? I'm sure they see our complacency and false sense of security? Would they hear a word of hope here in Amos? Would they hear that the day will come when the LORD will judge the white man's complacency and false sense of security, the white man's idolatrous way of life and unjust economic and social systems? How much longer will the LORD bide his anger particularly with us rich Christians who should know better. Ponder these things.

Today we gather around the table of the LORD as his people, people filled with his Spirit. This meal we share now is a foretaste of a feast we will share when the Father finally says enough and Jesus comes with the fullness of his reign and creation will be made new. We gather here as the embryonic form of the new humanity that will be born on that day. We gather around here as a community whose foundation is Christ Jesus who in love gave himself up for us and so as his family, his disciples, we follow and strive to do likewise. We in the love and faithfulness of God shown to us in, through, and as Jesus Christ and poured upon and into us as the Holy Spirit we like him must...must...give ourselves away for the sake of others. That is not negotiable. It is we who gather around this table that God has entrusted to turn away from the evil idolatrous systems of the world and live in such a way that the world will catch a glimpse of a new day. The Christian faith is not a crutch religion that gets us through the day if we can delude ourselves enough with it. We Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus Christ are God's new creation breaking forth into this fallen creation. Come to the table and let us be nourished for the task. Amen.

