

**Theme:** Return: Realigning w/God

**Message:** But Who's Counting? – Amos 1:1-2:16

**Aim:** Know that God's judgment is sure, but so is His grace.

**Intro:** Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote her “Sonnet 43” in the mid-1800's, reportedly on the occasion of Valentine's Day. In it she asks & answers the question, “How do I love thee?” – as every Valentine wants to know. It wasn't a list of the things she saw in her love's life but rather, as quoted from the “Academy of American Poets website, “It expresses deep and profound love, detailing the various dimensions of the speaker's affection.” “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight For the ends of being and ideal grace. I love thee to the level of every day's Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely, as men strive for right. I love thee purely, as they turn from praise. I love thee with the passion put to use In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith. I love thee with a love I seemed to lose With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath, Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death.”

Browning could have written, “I love you to this extent, in all these numerous ways, but who's counting?” That would have been less poetic but to the point. We want those “ways” to be counted, don't we? “Tell me how much you love me. Tell me the good things about me that you find pleasing. But we don't like to be confronted w/our failures, shortcomings, tho we don't mind hearing or listing those of others.

Theme: Return: Realigning w/God. If we're going to align (or realign) w/God we must face the ways that we do not align w/Him. That's part of the purpose of the book/prophecy of Amos, the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of Minor Prophets we are visiting in series, w/this theme. READ 1:1 - **Amos** = “burden, burden bearer.” He was a contemporary of Jonah, Hosea, & Isaiah, in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BC. He was not your usual prophet, but a layman called into duty by God during the reigns of Jeroboam II (northern kingdom) & Uzziah (southern kingdom). His everyday job was a herdsman & dresser/tender of Sycamore fruit. I didn't realize that Sycamore's produced fruit, but in the mid-east there is (or was) such a thing as a sycamore fig, cultivated since ancient times. Amos was from

Tekoa, about 10 miles south of Jerusalem, & according to 7:13, he delivered his prophetic message from Bethel, which is north of Jerusalem. But Amos didn't aspire to be a prophet. He wasn't counted among the prophets of the day. He was made a prophet by God. You/I don't have to be anyone special to be used by God. Amos was perhaps a reluctant prophet, but he willingly obeyed God. We must be willing; God will make us able. READ 1:2-2:3 Here **God promised to judge/punish Israel's enemies/neighbors**. The descriptive words of vs2 express the gravity of the situation. "The Lord roars from Zion & utters His voice from Jerusalem; the pastures mourn...the top of Mt. Carmel withers." Puts us in mind of God's awful presence on Mt. Sinai, when God came down upon it & spoke to the children of Israel & the whole mountain shook & smoked. The people said to Moses, "You hear from God, Moses, & talk to us. We don't want to experience that again." Through Amos God listed the enemies – Syria (Damascus its capitol), Gaza (in the "news" then as it is today) - Philistines, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites & Moab – 6 listed here, but who's counting? God is. Now, this prophesy was primarily directed to Israel (the northern kingdom – vs1), but God was making a point. The theme of Amos, suggested by J. Vernon McGee, is the presentation of "God as Ruler of the world. All nations are responsible to Him." That is, of course, still true today. Kingdoms & nations are under God's watchful eye & nothing goes unnoticed, nor will it go unpunished. God thru Amos listed the sins of these neighboring nations which He would judge/punish. "For 3 transgressions...& for 4, I will not revoke the punishment." David Gudzik points out that "it wasn't that each nation only committed 3 sins, & then God thought of a 4<sup>th</sup>. The idea is sin upon sin upon sin." 3, 4 – but who's counting? God is. These neighboring nations had oppressed & mistreated Israel for years & they got away w/it for some time, but God took notice. The judgment would be specific for each nation but the results would be the same – devastation. Assyria came against Syria/Damascus & took them captive (II Kings 16). Gaza was, at that time, a city of the Philistines, long-time enemies/harassers of Israel. But the Philistines went out of existence. "The remnant of the Philistines shall perish." Tyre was a city of Lebanon; its walls were its defense. If

they were destroyed, they would be helpless, & they were. Edom attacked Judah (II Kings 8) & God promised judgment, as He did for the Ammonites, because of their attack against Israel; & Moab's rulers would be cut off & the nation itself devoured. God will judge our enemies. We can imagine that Israel & Judah, hearing this 1<sup>st</sup> part, were delighted. "Get 'em God!" We, like they, celebrate when enemies "get their due." It's natural, but we should remember Jesus' injunction to "Love your enemies, & pray for those who persecute you" (Mt.5:44).

READ 2:4-16 **God would judge Judah & Israel.** Isn't it interesting that God used the same wording here as He did w/Israel's enemies. 3-4, sin, upon sin, upon sin, but who's counting? God is. Of course, this was a time of the divided kingdom. Judah & Israel didn't like each other, even considered each other enemies at times. However, John MacArthur wrote that "Politically, [this] was a time of prosperity under the long & secure reign of Jeroboam II. It was also a time of peace (for Israel) w/both Judah & her more distant neighbors. The ever-present menace of Assyria was subdued earlier that century because of Ninevah's repentance at the preaching of Jonah. Spiritually, however, it was a time of rampant corruption & moral decay, [their] apostasy evidenced by their continual, willful rejection of the prophetic message of Amos & the promised divine judgment." Perhaps Israel & Judah thought that because they were "God's chosen people" that He would not punish them. He would deal w/their enemies but only bless them. But they had forgotten God; they went after other so-called gods & worshipped them – spiritual adultery. They looked to other nations to help them, instead of to God. They mistreated the vulnerable. God would & did judge/punish them. Assyria would come against Israel & Judah & take Israel captive. Babylon would come against Judah & take them captive. Yes, it was sometime later, but judgment would/did come. God saw their sin as it mounted up. He counted their sins as they increased day by day, year by year. He warned them again & again, but they would not listen. They said they were God's people; they went thru the motions of faith; they brought their sacrifices & kept their feasts (some of the time). They said they believed God & belonged to Him, but they didn't live that way. And we need to understand, God will judge us! Judgment is very real.

God does count our sins. He knows! He is not blind to our shortcomings. Why do we try to fool God? We say we believe, but do we live like it? It's very important to know – said it before – “faith is life response.” Saying you believe in God, in Jesus, is not enough. James reminds us that “even the demons believe, & shudder!” “Faith apart from works is dead” (2:19, 26). We're not saved by works, but our faith is exhibited by works – how we live. If you say you believe in Jesus as Savior/Lord but aren't submitted to Him as Lord, you're lying/deceiving yourself. That doesn't mean that Christians are perfect – far from it; but Christians are changed, growing, seeking to follow Christ, pursuing Christ-likeness, engaged in Christ's kingdom work, & not pursuing the world, our own way. God will judge us! That puts us in quite the predicament, doesn't it? Who can stand before a holy God? We're as guilty as the nations Amos listed, as guilty as Judah & Israel. What can we do? Enter Jesus! Jesus is the reason God the Father preserved the Jewish nation/people – that the Messiah would come into the world thru them. **Our only hope is Christ.** “In Christ alone, my hope is found.” God's final judgment for the Christian will be different from the judgment of unbelievers, in one sense. In Rev.20:11-15, John shares his vision of the “great white throne” judgment, when all who have ever lived will stand before the Judge, Jesus. Books will be brought forth, listing the deeds of each one, good or bad. God knows. God counts! And since no one will merit God's favor, each one will be thrown into the lake of fire, which will destroy forever. The wages of sin is death, which everyone deserves. This is very real. Everyone deserves God's judgment & will be judged & punished/destroyed. EXCEPT... There is another book, called the Book of Life. Paul, in Phil.4:3 speaks of those “whose names are in the book of life.” Rev.13:8 & 21:27 clarify that it is “the Lamb's book of life.” We will still be judged by our deeds, but for those who believe/receive Christ as Savior/Lord, the judgment of those deeds fell upon Christ on the cross, & He paid the full penalty. When the Judge will read the list of our deeds, He will then open the Book of Life & search for our name (at least symbolically, because “The Lord knows those who are His” (II Tim. 2:19). When the Judge sees our name, which He has written in the Book of Life, He will say, “enter in...” It's those whose names are not

written in the Lamb's Book of Life who will be cast into the Lake of fire, which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> death. What matters most is that you believe/receive Christ as Savior/Lord. That Scripture (John 5:25-29) which was read earlier puts it thus. There are 2 resurrections, a spiritual resurrection & a physical resurrection. Jesus said, "***An hour is coming & is now here – right then & there & today – when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God & those who hear will live.***" Those who believe/receive Christ have been resurrected from spiritual death to life in Him – awakened, regenerated by the Holy Spirit. "***This is the 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection. Blessed & holy is the one who shares in the 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection! Over such the 2<sup>nd</sup> death has no power...***" (Rev.20:5-6). Then Jesus said, "***The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice & come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, & those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.***" But I haven't done enough good to cancel out all the evil. There's where that wonderful verse comes into play – II Cor.5:21 – "***For our sake He (God the Father) made Him (Christ the Son) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.***" A glorious exchange was made at the cross. Our deeds were counted against Him & His righteousness (perfectly righteous deeds) are counted for us. If we are in Christ, we are those who have done good, in whose stead He has done good. Now, for those who are in Christ, regarding our sins, God says, "Who's counting? Not Me." Tho He surely knows their number, He doesn't count them against us any longer. I Cor.13:5 (NKJV) – "Love keeps no record of wrongs." The Psalmist David, who was looking for the Messiah, God's promised One, declared this beautiful truth: "***If You, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But w/You there is forgiveness...***" (Ps.130:3-4). Because of Christ, there is forgiveness! So, the most important question in all of life, is "What have you done/will you do w/Christ?" Do you believe Him, have you received Him by faith? Have you given Him your life? Is your name written by Him in His Book of Life? If you don't know Christ, turn to Him. He is your Judge but will be your Savior. If you have strayed from following Christ, return to Him. Realign w/God. True faith is what counts!