

What Tips the Scale of Your Heart?

A sermon on Amos 8:4-7

Turn on your TV in the early hours of the morning, especially on a weekend morning, and what are you most likely to see? Infomercials. And not just any infomercials. Infomercials probably trying to sell you the latest fitness product, whether it be protein shakes, exercise equipment, or workout videos. Many people today have an obsession with getting fit. They diet, exercise, join gyms, and go through training programs, and what's the point? To lose weight.

You know, working out to shed some pounds is tough, but sometimes that's not even the toughest part of losing weight. Sometimes what's hardest about losing the weight is having to face the dreaded scale, seeing the results of your hard work, whether you lost weight or not.

Well, like it or not, we will all have to face a different scale one day, a spiritual scale. In our first lesson for this morning, Amos gives us the contents being weighed on this scale: greed, a love for money, or love for God. And you can't have both. Either greed or God will tip your scale. Soon, God will weigh your hearts, all your motives, and what will the scale read? **What Tips the Scale of Your Heart?** Is it a love for the greedy gains that fail? Or is it a love for the generous God who forgets?

Now, Amos is one of those people in the Bible you probably aren't too familiar with. Oh sure, maybe you could rapidly spout off his name when naming all the books of the Bible. But how much do you really know about Amos? Well, Amos was an Old Testament prophet.

Amos had an important message from God to speak to the divided Northern Kingdom of Israel. You see, Israel was enjoying a period of peace and prosperity, peace and prosperity lovingly given to them by God. Life was going well for the Israelites, so you can probably guess what happened. The people began looking at themselves as the source of this peace and prosperity instead of at God. Once God took a backseat in the lives of the people, so did their morals. The people became corrupt and disobedient to God. God's patience with them was wearing thin. So he sent Amos to speak his judgment against the Israelites for their unfaithfulness.

But what exactly was this corruption in morality among the people of Israel? Verse 4-6 of Amos 8 spell out this immorality: they were trampling the needy, crushing them, and they were doing away with the poor of the land. During this period of prosperity in Israel, merchants had become quite wealthy. But they could never have enough money, and greed took over their lives. And being greedy, they started dealing dishonestly. They skimmed the measure and cheated with dishonest scales. These merchants had two different sets of measuring containers. One would be an oversized basket for those who came selling grain, so these merchants could get more for their money. When someone came to buy grain from these merchants, they would use a smaller basket, making the customer pay more money for less product.

But these merchants didn't stop at cheating others in the grain trade. They also involved themselves in a form of slave trade. Now, perhaps a poor worker would have needed to borrow a small amount of money, giving a pair of sandals as collateral that he would pay back the debt. But when he failed to pay

back the loan, the merchant would sell him as a slave, over a PAIR OF SANDALS! The merchants had no regard for God's command, "Do NOT be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs."

This love for greedy gains of money completely tipped the scales of the hearts of the Israelites. They had no room left for God. Even during religious festivals, like the New Moon festival and the Sabbath, days on which the markets could not be open, all the merchants could think about was how they were going to make their next dollar. These people didn't give God the honor and love he deserved. No, these corrupt merchants worshiped God in vain. Their hearts weren't in it. Money was their new god, their idol.

John Rockefeller, founder of Standard Oil company and one of the richest men of the early 1900s was once asked, "How much money is enough money?" His reply? "Just a little more." Just a little more. I imagine that was the motto of the corrupt Israelite merchants Amos preached against. "Just a little more." These people were not happy with what they had but were always wanting a little more, no matter how dishonest they had to be. A love for money had become number one in their lives, and a lust for wealth had consumed their hearts. They had become wealthy—but they had also become the objects of God's anger. Listen to what God thought of their greed: **"The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: 'I will never forget anything they have done.'**

The Lord was not going to sit idly by as these Israelite merchants were stepping all over the poor, as the rich kept getting richer through dishonest dealings. More importantly, God would not tolerate their sinful idolatry any longer: "I will NEVER forget anything they have done." These people had not only trampled the needy. By their greed and idolatry and unfaithfulness, they had really trampled God. They would pay for their sinful acts. God would not let their disobedience go unpunished. God would NEVER forget their acts of defiance. Because of their unwillingness to repent, God was going to destroy them and send them to a place where he would leave them and forget about them for all eternity, hell. Their love failed because God vowed to not FORGET their love for greedy gain.

In Matthew 25, Jesus reiterates God won't forget about unfaithfulness, especially on the Last Day: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me...I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment."

We have here two pretty strong and serious warnings from Jesus and Amos. God does not forget. If we love greedy gain and allow it to tip the scales of our heart like the Israelites, we will also fail before God's judgment throne. So where is your heart at? What does the scale of your heart read? Now, you may be thinking, "Me?!? Of course God has the top spot in my heart." But then you start picking up overtime hours at work, so many hours you can't find time to go to church anymore. "Well, I need a job. I have to pay the bills and take care of my family. Surely God understands if I miss church so I can work."

Or...the collection plate comes along, and you grab whatever change is in your pocket and just toss it in, as if God were only an afterthought, not worth your best, your first-fruits.

Your greed makes money your idol, your god. Too often, we let a love for the greedy gains of this life take over. Sure, we may enjoy these gains in this life. But in the long run, in our eternity, those greedy gains will only fail. And failure in eternity means life in hell. A life full of love for greedy gains will not go unnoticed by God and, ultimately, will not go unpunished. God will say the same thing to us that he said to Israel: **I will not forget!**

God did not want us to fail; he wanted us to be his own. You see, you and I aren't the only ones who are greedy. God is greedy as well. He's greedy for our souls. He wants all people, every single one of us, to be with him in heaven. So God did what no idol, what no amount of money could do. He saved us. Even when we were slaves to sin, doomed to hell, God never forgot about us. He redeemed us. He bought us back. And the price? His one and only beloved Son, Jesus, whom he willingly sent to earth to pay for all our failures, to repay our massive debt of sin.

Jesus repaid our debt by living a perfect life. He never gave in to the temptation of greed, the temptation to let anything become more important than his Father. Jesus repaid our debt by dying on the cross. He purchased and won us from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with the payment of his holy, precious blood, a blood which completely covered over all our sins and washed our guilt away. And Jesus repaid our debt by rising from the grave. His death wasn't a failure. No, Jesus rose to show his almighty power over death. Jesus rose to show us one day we will ultimately rise up to live with him in heaven forever.

What tipped the scale of Jesus' heart? Not a lust for the greedy gains for worldly wealth which will always fail. It was a perfect love for us, who were worthless because of our sins but priceless in the eyes of God. Jesus' work on the cross has led God to forget our sins. God says, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." God generously forgives and forgets. God doesn't keep a record of our wrongs. When Jesus wiped away our sins, they were paid for in full, never to be remembered by God again. What a comfort to know our generous God has lovingly forgotten all our sins!

Yes, out of his immense love and greed for our souls, Jesus lived, died, and rose. And now, he wants us to be greedy, not greedy for worldly gains, but greedy for our generous God, our gracious God. Because of Jesus' work and with God's help, you can let love for your generous God tip the scale of your heart. You show love for your generous God when you give God the top place of honor in your hearts and in your lives. You show love for your generous God when you keep his Word as a priority in your lives, studying it, learning from it, living it. You show love for your generous God when you obey his commands and shun the temptations of the world. You show love for your generous God when you faithfully carry out his mission, spreading the good news of his Son with the world.

Your final weigh-in is fast approaching. You can't avoid the scale. So what will tip the scale of your heart? Because of the great love God has shown us, sending his Son to pay for all our sins, it won't be love for the greedy gains that will always fail. No, it will be a joyful love for our generous God whose

boundless love never forgets about us, but because of Jesus' work, has completely forgotten about our sins. Amen.