



Handout for week of 9/16/19 Lk. 16: 1-13 & Amos 8:4-7

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Amos 8: Amos 8:4 Hear this, O ye that would swallow the needy, and destroy the poor of the land, 5 Saying: 'When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell grain? and the sabbath, that we may set forth corn? making the [ephah](#) small, and the [shekel](#) great, and falsifying the balances of deceit; 6 That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the corn?' 7 The LORD hath sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their works.

#### COMMENTARY :

Last week I made much of the notion that the prophets, and Amos in particular, were precise in their judgments of the Israelites. They regularly targeted specific groups, charged according to their set responsibilities. Today's passage from Amos seems to belie that idea since the part that identifies those charged has been neatly clipped out of our liturgical selection. The full account of the first verse, including the

missing second part, reads thus:

"Woe to the complacent in Zion, to the overconfident on the mount of Samaria, Leaders of a nation favored from the first, to whom the people of Israel have recourse!"

The complacent ones that upset the prophet turn out to be the leaders of the nation God favors. The rationale for Amos's charge is already contained in this snippet, which points out that the leaders are those whom Israel must rely on. They have failed this duty, lining their own coffers at the expense of the people. Their stewardship of the national treasure has been turned to private profit.

Without this information it would give the impression that the prophet is disturbed by fine living, maybe considered to be decadence. It would appear that he dislikes sophistication and aesthetic qualities. Which is nonsense, given the fact that his little poem is a masterpiece of Hebrew poetry, operating in at least three levels of parallelism, the main trope of biblical verse. It doesn't get more sophisticated than this.

But once we know the context, we can see that he is charging those entrusted with caring for God's people with exploiting them instead. It concerns a complacency of power, and not simply a complacency of wealth.

Complacency was Amos's theme, since he could see on the horizon the dark clouds of the Assyrian empire on the rise. And he understood that this could mean difficulties for the Israelite nation. He was correct, but he was ahead of his time. Always a problem for prophets. Fr. Robert Beck. Witness: 6/2/07