

SPIRITUAL LETHARGY

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" Amos 6:1.

The Book of Amos is one of the noblest pieces of writing in the literature of the world. Our knowledge of the man who penned it can be summarized in a few sentences. Amos was reared on the edge of the desert. He resided at a little village in Judah named Tekoa, about six miles from Bethlehem. He lived close to nature. Before he became a prophet, he was a shepherd who raised a peculiar breed of small, ugly sheep, but they were highly esteemed on account of their fine wool. He was also a gatherer of sycamore fruit (7:14). As a herdsman his income was not sufficient, so he supplemented it by gathering and selling sycamore fruit—fig-mulberries.

One day, during the reign of Jeroboam II, God called Amos from his work in the field and commissioned him to warn the people of the punishment which he was about to send upon them because of their gross wickedness. Amos was not an unlettered man. In all probability he had been educated in the capital twelve miles away. In his secluded life away from the turmoil of the ever-present crowds he had time to think.

Wilderness life gave to a strong man like Amos just the training which he needed to equip him for the most effective ministry. The solitude, the loneliness, the glory of God in nature, the silent communion with God, the mental concentration, the prolonged meditation on great thoughts, the hardships, the inspiration from great natural scenes, and the contacts with traders and travelers combined with his natural gifts to produce a rare specimen of manhood. Amos had a strong body, an alert mind and a sensitive spiritual appreciation.

As we read the nine scant chapters which are the sole monument of his genius, we come into contact with many men in one. He was a sociologist, a philosopher, a world historian, a theologian, an orator and a poet. He had seen enough of the world beyond his own mountains to be impressed with the unjust inequalities of fortune. He knew that the rich oppressed the poor, that wanton luxury and grinding poverty existed side by side, and that unspeakable vice prevailed in the precincts of the temple itself.

As he pastured his sheep and cultivated his figs out there in the solitude, Amos meditated deeply upon God, and thought much about the sad religious conditions of his people. Day after day he reflected, pondered and meditated; and, when a man gets to thinking, watch out for him, for soon he will be up and doing. Take note of the man who thinks about God and man and their relationship to each other.

At the time that our text was written the Jews were rapidly becoming degenerate. They were outwardly prosperous, but inwardly corrupt. Both Samaria and Jerusalem occupied very strong positions. Both were regarded as almost impregnable. In part that accounted for the feeling of security which the people had. Amos warned them against this, and the reasonableness of his warning was soon discovered. About sixty years later Samaria was besieged, and in only one hundred and thirty years Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar.

Because of their imaginary superiority Judah and Israel, the one having its seat in Zion and the other in Samaria, settled down in carnal security. Those who dwelt in Zion, or Jerusalem, felt themselves safe because of its historic grandeur, its temple—the dwellingplace of the Almighty, and its mountain fortifications. Those who dwelt in Samaria, the ten tribes, had the same false confidence in their safety. Without any fear of danger they proudly overrated their strength.

God's thoughts are not as ours. He sees things as they are; we see but one side of them. He sees the inner reality of things; we see but their outward semblance. He sees the

tendency and ultimate result of things; we but guess at their probable tendency, knowing nothing whatever of distant results. Hence, "the wisdom of men is foolishness with God." Our text is an illustration of this fact. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" Amos 6:1.

Men are at ease in their sins, their indifference to religion through the absorbing power of worldliness, through carnal presumption resting on the exercise of the final mercy of God, and on account of the delusion of self-righteousness. But, to none of these does our text refer. It definitely refers to those who are the children of God.

It was a great advantage for Judah to have Zion and Israel to have Samaria. But these advantages proved to be most disastrous to them because they were overrated, trusted in and put in the place of God Himself.

I. Causes Of Spiritual Lethargy.

1. Ignorance of the nature of the Christian life.
It is not forms and ceremonies, but faith and obedience.
2. Dislike of the duties which God enjoins.
Not many are willing to deny themselves and put their best into the conflict for Him. Spiritual matters are entitled to our first, best and continuous attention, but many times they do not get it.
3. Belief that we are too strong to be overcome.
Self-confidence has been the ruin of thousands.
4. Presumption upon the continuance of our present privileges.
With many there is an undue reliance upon the maintenance of the status quo. They assume that there will not be any changes whatever. However, the continuance of the privileges we enjoy is conditional on our obedience and faithfulness.

II. The Curse Of Spiritual Lethargy.

1. It is evil in itself.
Therefore, it is displeasing to God and grieves the Holy Spirit deeply.
2. It is evil in its influence.
It robs the soul of peace and renders the life barren of spiritual fruit. It has a withering effect upon others, lulling them into a state of spiritual lethargy. It weakens the influence of a church and causes the adversaries of Christ and His cause to rejoice.

III. The Cure For Spiritual Lethargy.

Christian activity is the proper attitude of the Christian. Our Saviour and Lord said, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Paul wrote, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Doing things for Christ is the best antidote to a murmuring and complaining spirit, as well as the secret of happiness. Christian activity is essential to the welfare of our souls, to the discharge of the duties of the Christian life, to the prosperity of the church and to the extension of the kingdom of our Lord in this world.