

**What Can I Do for My Country?
Amos 7:1-8:2**

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Text Introduction: On this Sunday before Independence Day, the contributions of so many stand out as we reflect on our freedom. I am thankful for the heroes, famous and obscure, living and dead, who have fought for and maintained our freedom. I am grateful for the men and women who serve us now. Their contributions to our freedom and quality of life should not and cannot be overlooked.

As valuable as the contributions of these individuals are, I want to speak today on the subject of “What Can I Do for My Country.” As believers in Christ and members of His church, we can make a contribution in America that cannot even be made on the battlefield.

Such is the message of the prophet Amos. (Read Amos 7:1-8:2)

Text: The Lord GOD showed me this: He was forming a swarm of locusts at the time the spring crop first began to sprout—after the cutting of the king’s hay. ²When the locusts finished eating the vegetation of the land, I said, “Lord GOD, please forgive! How will Jacob survive since he is so small?”

³The LORD relented concerning this. “It will not happen,” He said.

⁴The Lord GOD showed me this: The Lord GOD was calling for a judgment by fire. It consumed the great deep and devoured the land. ⁵Then I said, “Lord GOD, please stop! How will Jacob survive since he is so small?”

⁶The LORD relented concerning this. “This will not happen either,” said the Lord GOD.

⁷He showed me this: The Lord was standing there by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. ⁸The LORD asked me, “What do you see, Amos?”

I replied, “A plumb line.”

Then the Lord said, “I am setting a plumb line among My people Israel; I will no longer spare them:

⁹Isaac’s high places will be deserted,
and Israel’s sanctuaries will be in ruins;
I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam
with a sword.”

¹⁰Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you right here in the house of Israel. The land cannot endure all his words, ¹¹for Amos has said this: ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into exile from its homeland.’”

¹² Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Go away, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. Earn your living and give your prophecies there, ¹³ but don’t ever prophesy at Bethel again, for it is the king’s sanctuary and a royal temple.”

¹⁴ So Amos answered Amaziah, “I was not a prophet or the son of a prophet; rather, I was a herdsman, and I took care of sycamore figs. ¹⁵ But the LORD took me from following the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel.’”

¹⁶ Now hear the word of the LORD. You say:

Do not prophesy against Israel;
do not preach against the house of Isaac.

¹⁷ Therefore, this is what the LORD says:

Your wife will be a prostitute in the city,
your sons and daughters will fall by the sword,
and your land will be divided up
with a measuring line.
You yourself will die on pagan soil,
and Israel will certainly go into exile
from its homeland.

8 The Lord GOD showed me this: A basket of summer fruit. ² He asked me, “What do you see, Amos?”

I replied, “A basket of summer fruit.”

The LORD said to me, “The end has come for My people Israel; I will no longer spare them.

Introduction: It was John F. Kennedy, in his inauguration address in 1961, who so famously said, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Borrowing from these famous lines, I title the message today “What Can I Do for My Country?” I can do something. I may not be able to do everything, but I can do something. We all can do something.

In a much different way than President Kennedy proposed, from our text in Amos, I want to indicate two things that all of us can do. Believing that these two things will make a difference, I offer this as an elaboration from our text in Amos.

I can pray in a sustained way.

The first unique contribution that a Christian can make is to pray in a sustained way. Sustained prayer comes as the result of a burden that cannot be quenched. Amos’ name in the Hebrew language literally means, “burden bearer.” Amos prophesied in a time of national optimism for Israel. The book tells us that Uzziah is king in Judah and Jeroboam is king in Israel. On the surface, most thought that things were good in Israel. Businesses were booming; boundaries were growing. They were experiencing a time of relative peace. In the midst of their prosperity, their hearts were far from God. In summary, the Israel of the 8th century B.C. was much like America 2014.

In this scene, God raised up a farmer, a sheepbreeder and a sycamore fruit grower, named Amos and placed upon this farmer a burden that could not be quenched. Have you noticed how having a burden is hard work? We find it much easier to be mad than to be burdened. I know lots of mad Americans, but few burdened Americans. Have you noticed how we find it much easier to be sarcastic than to be burdened? I know lots of sarcastic Americans and even sarcastic Christian Americans, but very few burdened Americans. A unique contribution that you can make to America is to be a burdened Christian living in America—having a burden that cannot be quenched.

The Reason for the Burden—The dominant feature of this text is the description of visions that Amos sees. Each of these visions helps us to see something of the reason for Amos’ burden.

- We begin to be burdened when we see what others do not see. (7:1-2)

The first vision concerns a locust swarm. This leads Amos to pray “O Lord God, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he is small!” Amos understood that Israel was small in God’s sight. Most of the citizens of Israel did not have this opinion about themselves. Chapter 6 reveals what most in Israel thought. Verse one says, “Woe to you who are *at ease* in Zion.” Verse four indicates, Woe to you “ who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall.”

As Christians, we can see the real spiritual condition of America. While some will see America as an advanced culture that have bought into the lies of tolerance, as Christians, we will see our society as a depraved country.

Someone wrote these words. They are often attributed to Alexander Fraser Tytler , a Scottish jurist and professor at the University of Edinburgh, in “The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic” in 1801. However, he never wrote such a book. So, though the exact place of the quotation is obscure, the words ring true.

“A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the Public Treasury. From that moment the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the Public Treasury with a result that democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy. The average age of the world’s greatest civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence:

- (1) From bondage to spiritual faith
- (2) From spiritual faith to great courage
- (3) From great courage to liberty
- (4) From liberty to abundance
- (5) From abundance to selfishness
- (6) From selfishness to complacency
- (7) From complacency to apathy
- (8) From apathy to dependency
- (9) From dependency to bondage”

- We continue to be burdened when we understand that the crisis is now. (7:4-6) The second vision revealed to Amos is that of a conflict of great fire. The original language of the text

implies that the fire is an unstoppable fire that has already begun. The idea is that the process of God's judgment has begun.

- We do not cease in our burden when we understand that this could be the critical hour. (7:7-9) Up until now, God has relented, but not this time in the vision of the plumb line. Like Amos, we must carry this burden for our country that this is a very critical hour.

The Result of the Burden—What is the result of Amos' burden? **PRAYER!**

Notice the attitude and content of Amos' prayer. Both indicate a contrite and humble heart before the Lord.

The Response of the Burden—God's response to Amos' prayer is difficult to swallow. The fact is that the first two visions and subsequent prayers indicate that God relented. The vision of the plumb line indicates that God, this time, did not relent. When we pray, we must recognize that God is sovereign and only He knows where America stands in relationship to His judgment. So why pray? Our burden ought to be such that whether God relents or not, we desire repentance so badly that we pray unceasingly for that to happen.

Vance Havner, a great preacher of yesteryear, once wrote, "The reason America doesn't have revival is because while the situation is desperate, the saints are not." Are you desperate for revival in America? Does your prayer life indicate that you are desperate? I remind you of that oft-quoted verse in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

First Baptist Church, Lafayette, let me ask you a very pointed question: If revival in America were dependent upon your prayer life, what would the chances of revival be?

Ask God to give you a burden that cannot be quenched!

I can say something.

Sometimes, I see signs that say "If you see something, say something." These signs are the result of an effort by the Department of Homeland Security to get the public involved at the earliest sign that something is not right.

The second contribution that a Christian can make in America is to have a voice that cannot be quieted. As believers, we ought to be able to say, "We see something!" Like most prophets of God, Amos' message met resistance. The king wanted to silence Amos. The prophetic voice of the church today meets similar resistance.

The Rejection of God's Word (7:10-13)

Amos' message was not welcomed. Amos was sent away for two reasons. First, Amos' message was not liked. They could not "bear all his words." Isn't it interesting when people do not like what we have to say, they discredit what we have said? Second, in verse 12, Amaziah makes clear that Amos is free to go to Judah, a place that might still receive Amos' message. That is the equivalent of someone saying that God's message is out of date for the advanced nature of our society. Chapter 8:11 shows the

ultimate outcome of a society that continues to reject God's Word. "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God, "that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of *hearing the words of the Lord.*"

The Resiliency of God's People (7:14-17)

In the midst of people rejecting our message, like Amos, we must be resilient in having a voice that will not be quiet. Martin Niemoller was a German pastor during World War II. At first, he fought for the Germans, but then he came to realize that what Hitler was doing was evil. He was arrested for working against Hitler, spent time in the concentration camps, and narrowly avoided being executed before the war ended. Niemoller is rather famous for saying something like this, "First they came for the Socialists, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionist and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me."

There are four words that must describe our voices in the midst of this rejection. First, we must have **common** voices. It is not the voice of the clergy of America that will stem the tide; it is the common voice. Next, we must have **contrite** voices. Third, we must have **consistent** voices. Amos was known as the "prophet of righteousness." His lifestyle matched his word. Finally, we must have **compassionate** voices. Sometimes we are rejected, because there is no love in what we say. Sometimes we talk about the judgment of God as though we are looking forward to some people receiving the judgment of God.

Peter Cartwright was a Methodist Evangelist in the days of President Andrew Jackson. Cartwright was known for his fiery sermons and dealing pretty straightforward with sin. One evening before the service, someone came to the evangelist and asked him to "tone down his sermon" because they were expecting the President to be in attendance. When Cartwright got up to preach that evening, he said, "I understand that we have a distinguished guest with us this evening, the President. I have been asked to be guarded in my comments because of his presence, but let me say this: the president will go to Hell when he dies the same as any man, unless he repents." When the service was over, Jackson reportedly took the preacher by the hand and said, "If I had a regiment of men like you, I could conquer the world."

God, give us voices that will not be quiet!