

The Affliction of Joseph

Amos 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Sunday, September 25, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Introduction: I once was on a cruise with Jeanne to the Bahamas and when we arrived at port, I was startled at the size of the cruise ship. It was massive. In fact, I don't think I had ever seen a ship that big before, at least not in person. Then I saw some of the other, newer cruise ships at port. They were larger and more modern. It was astonishing. As I was preparing this sermon, I pondered those ships and tried to imagine what one of their luxury cabins were like. I tried to envision all the amenities, the view over the ocean, the food and entertainment, the furniture and all the luxuries that came along with it. Then I imagined that I was enjoying the view out of my own private balcony and watching the ocean in all its splendor when one of the crew knocked on my door and suggested that I quickly pack my essentials and join him in leaving the ship. I asked why? After all, I'm in one of the best cabins in one of the very finest cruise ships in the world. I have a seven-day trip and we're just three days into it. I want to rest a little before we reach port and go shopping, and I'm really enjoying all the luxuries and extras that come with this cabin. All true, the crewmember replied, but the ship is breached and is sinking and if you stay here long enough you will go down with the ship. I packed as quickly as I could and left. There are times when all the luxury in the world would not be enough for you to stay. Here are situations in the Bible that claim to be equally as dangerous.

The rich people in Amos have not a care in the world

⁶ Who drink wine from bowls, And anoint yourselves with the best ointments, But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

Amos 6:6

The ancient prophet Amos warned of impending judgment and, in this passage, singled out Samaria for their carelessness and lack of concern about the suffering of others and about the increasingly dire political situation. He mentioned the family of Joseph, whose descendants settled the Northern Kingdom. There is a stinging double-entendre there. Joseph was also the man who was sold into slavery by his own brothers. Likewise, the leaders of the Northern Kingdom, peopled by the descendants of that same Joseph, are too busy wallowing in their own wealth and comfort to bother with the suffering of the impoverished people or the impending invasion by the notorious Syrian Empire. Disaster and judgment are coming, but the leaders rest on expensive wooden beds lined with ivory, they eat only the best foods, and they drink so much alcohol that they don't bother with goblets anymore, they drink from bowls. Their fun and comfort are all that matter. That the people are suffering poverty and doom approaches does not matter. Amos prophesied that these selfish, greedy leaders would be among the first to be taken prisoner to Syria, and they would not return. When a nation's leadership is too busy having fun to be concerned about suffering people, the nation has gone to a very bad place.

1 Timothy tells us that wealth can be toxic

1 Timothy 6:9 (NIV)

9People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

The Apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy, warns that the rush to riches can be toxic. People who become very rich face the temptation to ignore the poor and spend only on themselves. The wording in verse nine is telling. People who want to get rich, not want to have some sort of financial stability but who want money just to have money and to spend money only on themselves with no love for those who suffer become hardened to everybody's trouble but their own. The result is a trap that will "plunge men into ruin and destruction." The literal translation is that they will drown in their own ruin, like someone clinging to a luxury cabin on a sinking ship. It's a trite phrase, but always love people and use money. Once you start loving money and using people, your ship is beginning to sink. Never forget the suffering of the poor.

How to help the poor

Helping people in poverty can be difficult and there are people who try to take advantage of people's kindness, but I have a few thoughts. First, single mothers and children are a priority. From what I understand, becoming a single mother is one of the fastest ways to poverty as caring for a child and being the only breadwinner in the family is notoriously difficult. That doesn't mean never help families with a husband but plan for families that have no fathers to help. Also, as best as you are able, plan for the eventuality that someone will need your help. The hero of the Good Samaritan parable clearly had made arrangements and was prepared when he found the wounded Jewish traveler who needed help. Also, in the days of Jesus, farmer left the corners of their field unharvested so the poor would have a food supply. Planning to be ready to help someone in poverty is wise and biblical.

Conclusion

Money is to do good and help people who are suffering. Having wealth and a comfortable financial situation is good, becoming so enamored with your own luxury is a dangerous state of being. There is a danger to being rich in that you can fall into that state and experience misfortune and the displeasure of God. The suffering of Joseph, the troubles of the poor and those in distress, must never be disregarded.