October 21, 2018—Charles Yu  
Series: Amos: Blind Spots  
Message: Blind Spots  
Main Idea: The Book of Amos tells the story of an outsider who comes into the people of God and points out their blind spots.  
Purpose: To introduce the Book of Amos and help people understand the concept of in-history judgment.  
Text: Book of Amos

I. Introduction to Sermon and Series

• When it comes to seeing the blind spots of our lives, we can’t see our lives objectively.
  - We are oblivious to what is obvious to others. It’s very odd and frustrating.
  - Sometimes, the only way we can see is if somebody comes along and tells us and shows us, and even then we don’t believe them and don’t want to hear it.
  - Not seeing what’s in our blind spots while driving can lead to accidents. Not seeing the blind spots in our lives could lead to worse.

• Intro of Amos Series
  - Today we are starting a series called Blind Spots, focused on those of us who are Christ-followers.
  - This series is about a taking a hard, unflinching look at who we are as the community of the people of God. It’s about exposing our blind spots, exposing our assumptions and our practices that are contrary to how God perceives the world and how he wants us to act in the world.
  - It’s not fun having your blind spots exposed and pointed out, so why are we doing this right now, at this point in the life of our church?

• We are in a difficult period in the life of our country.
  - It has become so tribalized, so radicalized. Extreme. It’s always been there, but it’s getting worse.
  - We are angry, frustrated, and want to lash out. Talking about peace doesn’t really work.

• We need to be reminded that in a time of conflict, when the instinct is to circle our wagons and strike against those on the outside, we must begin with self-examination.
  - We look at ourselves first. This is what Christ-followers do. It’s so easy to lash out at others.
  - What about you? Look at the dust in your eyes, but I can’t see the log that is in mine.

• We need to develop that most Christian of disciplines: self-examination.
  - Where are my blind spots? We need to have a willing attitude.

• That’s what this series is about, to help us learn about our blind spots.
  - We are going to spend time in a book of the Bible that is all about blind spots, the Book of Amos.
  - In 8th Century BC, 2800 years ago, God sent a prophet named Amos to point out the blind spots of the people of God in the northern kingdom of Israel.

II. Historical Context

• To read the Book of Amos properly and effectively, we need a little background.
  - Amos was a prophet.
    - A prophet is not a person who predicts the future.
    - Sometimes a prophet will predict the future, but that’s not the job.
    - A prophet is a spokesperson for God, kind of like a press secretary. He or she represents God.
    - God sent Amos to speak

• Brief historical situation:
  - Norther kingdom and southern kingdom
  - Revival of Assyria undermines Aram, allows success [2 Kings 14:25-28]
  - Prospering of international trade
- Urbanization
- City/rural divide (famine in the countryside)
- Leisured upper class

- Here’s what we can say about Israel in mid-8th Century BC.
  - These decades were the pinnacle of Israel’s history.
  - They achieved unparalleled wealth and international prestige. They experienced unprecedented military success, and they are confident in the prowess of their military.
  - In all this, they practiced the worship of their God Yahweh with great enthusiasm.

- Israel would be completely destroyed within three decades because they didn’t check their blind spots.
  - For this series, we are going to look at their blind spots—the ones that Amos pointed out—and ask the question: Do we have the same ones? It’s our chance to learn from their mistakes.
  - They were the ancient people of God. We are the church, the new people of God; but people are people. We tend to repeat the same mistakes.

III. New Series

- Here’s a preview of the sermon series.
  - Amos’s points about Israel’s sense of superiority over outsiders, their tribalism. In what ways do we the church have the same outlook?
  - False worship. Amos tore apart their enthusiastic worship and told them their corporate worship was actually a source of danger for them because it got in the way of hearing God. Do we have blind spots in our worship?
  - Amos tells them that they don’t understand what it means to seek God. They think it’s about going to spiritual sites and doing sacrifices. Amos says they are missing the point—it’s about establishing justice in your community. Today, do we also miss the point?
  - The Book of Amos reveals how people responded to Amos. Their defense mechanisms kick in, and they set up all kinds of barriers so they don’t have to listen to Amos. What kinds of barriers do we set up to avoid hearing God?
  - Amos tells them that they’ve misunderstood the hope they have in God. There is hope, and it’s coming, but is not what they think. Are we hoping in the wrong things?

IV. Blind Spots

- Today we’re going to tackle the first and most prominent blind spot that the Israelites had: They didn’t know that God was going to utterly destroy them (Amos 3:1-2).
  - If you are an ancient Israelite, “What?” would be your response.
  - Something is horribly wrong with the logic of this verse.
  - In Genesis, the story of Abraham: “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth.”
  - Genesis 12:2-3 They are a chosen people. They are chosen to have this special relationship with God to help him redeem the world, unlike any other nations.
  - This idea is repeated after they escape from Egypt (Exodus 19:5-6).
  - Israel knows her history. They know they are God’s treasured possession. They are God’s favorite, given a special task unlike any other nation. How can God destroy them? That would be silly.
  - And God made a promise to Abraham right there in the founding story (Genesis 17:7-8).

- Israel had a blind spot.
  - They thought: We are God’s favorite, and we have his promise. In any case, we’re better than those around us. How can God punish us? What about the other nations?
  - The people don’t understand. That eternal promise that God gave to Abraham—God can and will fulfill in a different way (as we find out in the New Testament, through Jesus and the church), which leaves
them open to the reality that they have made a covenant with Yahweh, the creator God of the universe.

- One way to describe a covenant in this context is to think about a blood oath, a ritual that binds a person to a special group such that any kind of betrayal is punished by death.
- Israel took a blood oath with God. That’s the logic of Amos 3:2.
  - You only have I chosen; you’re the nation that took a blood oath with me.
  - You’re the special nation that is supposed to help me redeem the world.
  - But your blind spots! You can’t even see how much you have betrayed me, how what you’re doing turns people away from me rather than toward me.
  - “Therefore I will punish you for all your sins.” Not the other nations. I will punish them for egregious evil, like crimes against humanity kinds of stuff. I hold you to a different standard.
  - You have broken the blood oath, and now there’s hell to pay. (Amos 5:1-2; 7:7-9; 8:1-8:3).

V. How Can We Learn from This?

• Amos’s message begins a unique tradition in the history of world religion.
  - He is the first to declare that the end of God’s people is coming because they failed to live according to divine standards.
  - Other prophets will come fast and furious as we get closer and closer to final destruction of Israel.

• The Bible is not written to us, but for us. Amos is talking to mid-8th Century Israel. How are we different?
  - Today, the people of God is not a nation, it’s not a geo-political entity with geographical borders.
  - Today, the people of God is the church. We are all over the world, in every nation, every people, every ethnicity.
    - This is important to clarify, because some people make this mistake of thinking America as the kingdom of God, so they apply the message of Amos to our country.
  - So let me be clear: America is not a Christian nation.
    - America is a country with a lot of Christians living in it.
    - Because of its history and its structure as a democracy, we exercise quite a bit of influence, but that influence has been decreasing in recent decades.
    - That does not mean somehow that America is betraying her covenant with God.
    - God never made a covenant with America.

• God made a covenant with the Church.
  - That bit of bread and cup of juice we eat and drink once a month, that’s the ritual for blood oath.
  - For the Christ-followers here, we have taken a blood oath with God.
  - We renew this oath every month. That should change how we experience communion.

• The blood oath that we have taken as the church is different from the one taken by ancient Israel.
  - For us, the blood that seals the oath is based on the blood shed on the cross when Jesus died.
  - When we betray the covenant, when we have blind spots and refuse to look at them, when we do things that hurt God’s mission to redeem the world and turn people away from God, the wrath of God, the punishment falls on Jesus. If you think that’s unfair, you’re absolutely right.
    - There is nothing fair about the covenant we signed with God. It is as one-sided a thing as you’ve ever seen. It’s all grace; we get all the up-sides and down-sides.

• This is where we need to look at our blind spots.
  - Especially for the Christ-followers and the church that takes advantage of God’s grace.
    - Let me just acknowledge that for many of us, we don’t get grace yet. Many of us come out of traditions where we see God as this tyrant, this stereotypical, rule-bound drill instructor.
    - So many of us come out traditions that emphasize rule-following. They don’t get grace.
  - Blind spot: Grace is not a license to sin.
- Blind spot: There is still discipline for the individuals and the community. God is committed to transforming his children.

VI. Pastoral Questions

• How do we understand suffering?
  - How do we understand God’s judgment in this world?
    - Suffering does not automatically mean judgment *(Book of Job. Jesus? Paul?).
    - “Random” “chaotic” disasters.
    - God disciplines his children *(Hebrew 12).*
    - There is “random” suffering as a result of living in a broken world.
    - There is “redemptive suffering” as a result of being the people of God.
    - There is suffering as a result of egregious sin and rebellion (individual, church, and nation).

• Without the prophetic word from God. We don’t know the cause of suffering (if any).

VII. Pastoral Advice

• Don’t assess the cause of other people’s suffering (it’s not for you to know).
  - If it’s judgment, God makes it clear (otherwise, there’s no point).

• We don’t want to wait until judgment.
  - How do we see our blind spots?
    - In a car, we turn our heads. We change our vantage point.
    - In life, it’s hard to change our vantage points.
    - Another person in the car, they see different things. Don’t dismiss the voices of people who see things differently.
    - Soft-heart. I don’t care how smart you are. You can’t see everything.

• When we start listening, really listening, not trying to talk, not preparing a riposte, it’s amazing what we hear.
  - We need each other—not just individually, but different communities of people, people with vastly different histories, cultures, and ethnicities.
  - God brought in a foreign consultant from south of the border to Israel. He sees clearly.