

ARE YOU AN ENABLER OR A SPOILER?

Today's Text: Amos Chap. 7

Extracts:

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said: 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive from their own land.'" Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, and there prophesy, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is the royal residence." Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: "I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet; but I was a sheephreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel'" [Amos 7: 10-15]

On Tuesday, 4 March 2008, Democratic Primaries were held in the big states of Texas and Ohio (USA). Before then, Senator Barack Obama had had the momentum, having won eleven straight primaries. The general feeling was that there would be pressure on his rival, Senator Hilary Clinton, to pull out should she lose the races in those two states, especially as the Republicans had concluded their own primaries. Three days to those races, there were some interesting developments that hurt Obama's campaigns. The media raised doubts about his credibility, following the court trial of a friend in his home state of Illinois (with whom he had had a land deal) and a past contributor to his campaigns, and an allegation that his campaign aides had told Canadian embassy officials to ignore Obama's public views on NAFTA (the North America Free Trade Agreement). Even though Obama's integrity was not in question in his friend's court case and the Canadian Government had denied the NAFTA allegation, the media played down the truth until after the elections. Clinton won in both states.

Was that a mere coincidence or the media was playing the spoiler role? We may never know. However, we do find ourselves playing roles. For example, you may be a parent or ward, master or servant, teacher or student, supervisor or subordinate, and so on. In your place of worship, you may be a pastor or prophet, an administrator or a teacher or a financier. No matter the role in which we find ourselves, God expects us to perform it for His own glory. Can you say that of your current role (s)? Do you use your position to glorify God (enabler) or do you use it to destroy others (spoiler)? Let us find out from today's study.

1. Role playing is like acting!

Jack Nicholson is a famous American actor who has successfully played varied roles in numerous movies.¹ For example, in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), he played the role of a deranged criminal in a mental institution. In *As Good As It Gets* (1997), he was the neurotic author with OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) who fell in love with an erratic waitress. In both roles, he won *Oscars* (Academy Awards) for Best Actor. That suggests that in every role, Nicholson behaves *as closely as possible* like the characters he plays. Whether as the Joker in *Batman* (1989) or the Guantanamo Bay army Colonel in *A Few Good Men* (1992), he was most credible as a villain and a ruthless officer respectively. That is why it is said that art imitates life (and vice versa). Therefore, it may not surprise you to find that we effectively play the roles in which we find ourselves when we relate to other people.

If time and chance place us where we find ourselves [Eccl. 9: 11], it follows that He who determines both time and chance has placed us there for His purpose. So, how well we perform our roles must be benchmarked by God's standards. He says that the whole duty of humans on earth is to fear God and keep His commandments and He "will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or bad" [Eccl. 12: 13-14].

How well do people use their positions and privileges to glorify God? Let us examine a few cases as follows:

a) *The mercenary*

The mercenary is the person who is mainly interested in using a privileged position for pecuniary gains. S(he) is mainly interested in self-enrichment or self-aggrandizement, even if it takes destroying others (by mouth or weapons) to achieve it. For example, politicians in many developing countries are not interested in the people's welfare but in how to steal public funds for their own private/personal use. They will cheat so as to win elections or remain in power beyond their welcome. In the end, they use their positions to impoverish the people they are elected to serve and offend God they profess to worship. Therefore, mercenaries are spoilers.

Take the case of Elisha the prophet and his servant, Gehazi [2 Kgs 5: 1-27]. A Syrian army commander, Naaman, was sent by his king to the king of Israel because he had heard through his wife's maid that he could be cured of his leprosy there. When Elisha the prophet heard of it, he asked the king of Israel to send the general to him "and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." The prophet told the general to dip himself in the Jordan River seven times and be healed. He did and became miraculously cured. In appreciation, he offered the prophet a gift which the prophet refused, saying, "As the Lord

¹ See Jack Nicholson Filmography, <http://www.fandango.com/jacknicholson/filmography/p104455>

lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing.” Even when Naaman urged him to take it, he refused. In appreciation of that, the commander asked to be given two mule-loads of earth (apparently to build a new place of worship in his own country) “for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord.” The prophet played his role to glorify God; he was an enabler.

As soon as Naaman had left, Elisha’s servant, Gehazi said to himself, “Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something from him.” He ran after the Syrian general and, on meeting him, he lied that his master had just received visitors (young prophets) for whom he needed money and clothes. The general gave Gehazi more than he had asked for. He took them and went to hide them in his own house without telling Elisha! What did the mercenary succeed in doing? The Syrian that had just been miraculously healed would go home, feeling that he had paid his medical bills. Therefore, he could well throw away the earth he had taken from Israel to build a place of worship in Syria. Gehazi played the spoiler, not an enabler. That was why God punished him by putting Naaman’s leprosy on him and his descendants.

b) *The hypocrite*

The hypocrite puts up a public show of righteousness but secretly does great harm to godliness. Hypocrites just want to impress other people and receive public praise. Therefore, in public, they give the impression that they are enablers but secretly, they are spoilers. Jesus saw such hypocrisy in the scribes and Pharisees whom He described in the following words: “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers, but all their works they do to be seen by men. ...*He who is greatest among you shall be your servant*” [Matt. 23: 4-5, 11]. So, a hypocrite is a spoiler, not an enabler.

c) *The weakling*

The weakling has a burning desire to do things God’s way but is handicapped by personal weaknesses. For example, some subordinates know that what their boss is asking them to do is morally wrong but they go along for fear of losing their jobs. Some people are overwhelmed by the odds around them. They succumb by claiming, “If you can’t beat them, join them!” Some people are desirous to help those in need around them but they may lack the means or the time to do so. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus talked of some people who have received the word of God but due to the cares of this world, it does not stay long in their hearts [Lk 8: 13]. If age, fear, shame or family will prevent you from glorifying God with your position, then you are a spoiler, not an enabler.

d) *The missionary*

The missionary is the one who is ready and able to do what is right by others, no matter the odds or costs. People in this category may not necessarily occupy high positions or play their roles in a loud way. For example, Rahab the harlot, put her life and those of her family members at risk when she gave cover to the two spies from Joshua that were being sought by the men of the king of Jericho. She saved the lives of the spies because she believed that the God of Israel “is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” [**Josh. 2: 1-11**]. The maid to Naaman’s wife was a captive from Israel. Yet, she used her position of servitude to preach Elisha’s healing ministry to the general [**2 Kgs 5: 2-3**].

Out of Mary Magdalene Jesus cast out seven demons [**Lk 8: 2**]. It was this lowly woman, not the twelve apostles who first preached the good news of Christ’s resurrection [**Lk 24: 1-11**]. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, though influential were secret followers of Jesus. But for them who had approached Pontius Pilate for permission to take the body of Jesus down from the cross and bury Him in the grave that Joseph of Arimathea had dug for himself [**Jn 19: 38-42**], our Lord could have been buried in an unknown grave by the Roman soldiers and the message of the empty tomb would have been more difficult to preach today.

From the forgoing, we can conclude that mercenaries and hypocrites are more interested in themselves than in others or God. They are spoilers. The weaklings have the potential to enable others, provided they are ready to step up to godliness instead of succumbing to sinful pressures. *Missionaries are those that take great personal risks and do the right things by others that glorify God. They are enablers, as God expects us to be.* Let us apply that framework to examine how Amos the prophet and Amaziah the priest played their roles in ancient Israel.

2. A prophet and a priest play roles in Israel

The prophet Amos had been sent by God from Judah to deliver messages to Jeroboam II, the then reigning king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In the process, however, Amaziah the priest got in his way. Here, we have two key actors: the prophet and the priest, whose main roles were to bring the king and his people to do as God had commanded. Given the overall national interest of Israel, how did each play his role? Let us examine both cases.

a) *The prophet as a watchman*

As we saw last week, God does nothing without first revealing His secrets through His prophets [**Amos 3: 7**]. When we sin against Him, He sends us prophets to warn us to repent, failing which He could visit judgment on us.

That is why prophets are watchmen. For example, God said to the prophet Ezekiel [**Ezek. 3: 17-19**]:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me. When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you warn the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your soul.

In the role of a watchman, Amos came to Israel with a series of warnings for the king. In today's lesson, God showed the prophet three visions. In the first vision, God showed him how the Lord planned to send locust swarms to eat up the grass of the land. Amos pleaded with God, saying, "O Lord God, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small." God relented and promised, "It shall not be" [**Amos 7: 1-3**]. In the second vision, God called for a conflict of fire that devoured the land. Again, the prophet interceded on behalf of the nation and God again relented [**vv. 4-6**]. Finally, Amos saw the Lord standing on a wall, with a plumb line in His hand. The Lord told him that that signified a gulf between Him and the wicked nation that He would allow the enemy to ravage with the sword [**vv. 7-9**].

We see from the forgoing that Amos played his role well. He passed God's warning to the affected people and, where necessary or possible, he interceded with God on their behalf. He had to give up his profession as a farmer in Judah to come to Israel as God's prophet [**vv. 14-15**]. He was a missionary, an enabler.

b) *The priest as the law-keeper*

Under the Law of Moses, the priest offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people [**Lev. 1: 1-17**] and taught them the law [**Lev. 10; 11**]. He was the one that God authorized to bless the people [**Num. 6: 23-27**]. Therefore, the priest played the role of ensuring that the people worshipped God as He had commanded them.

When Amos came to Israel, Amaziah was the priest of Bethel, the city where King Jeroboam II dwelt [**Amos 7: 13**]. You would expect that his role should be to reinforce the prophet's message. He did not. Instead, he poisoned the king's mind against Amos by saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words" [**Amos 7: 10**]. He gave the king the impression that God's message was nothing but Amos' wicked designs to destroy Jerusalem and send the people into exile [**v. 11**]. Then, the priest turned to the prophet and said, "Go, you seer! Flee to the

land of Judah... but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is the royal residence" [vv. 12-13].

One plausible reason for the priest's reaction could be envy. The prophet had come all the way from Judah to "invade" the priest's territory. As one of the key advisers to king Jeroboam II, it is also quite plausible that lying was a key way for Amaziah and other key officers of the king to keep their jobs for "if a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked" [Prov. 29: 12]. Amaziah was more interested in his tenure than in the spiritual state of his nation. His role would hardly facilitate the king and his people's repentance. Instead, it would reinforce their waywardness. He was using his position merely for his self-aggrandizement. Therefore, he was playing the spoiler.

The spoiler gets an instant reward, just as Naaman's leprosy went to Elisha's servant Gehazi and his descendants. For blocking God's message to the king and his people, God's judgment came upon Amaziah and the people of Israel, as follows: "Your wife shall be a harlot in the city; your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword; your land shall be divided by a survey line; you shall die in a defiled land; and Israel shall surely be led away captive from his own land" [Amos 7: 17]. According to an African proverb, the ear that will not heed a warning will go with the severed head!

3. Conclusion: Role playing is a privilege to follow Christ!

During one of Christ's earthly journeys, some people were desirous to follow Him. He invited one to follow Him but he excused himself to first go and bury his father. Another one excused himself to first go and bid farewell to his family members. Jesus told them, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" [Lk 9: 57-62].

Whatever position you occupy in life *right now*, Jesus has invited you to follow Him. Are you giving Him excuses like those people? When you play the mercenary or hypocrite or weakling, you are giving excuses. You are playing the spoiler. But when you come forward as a missionary who is not counting the cost of discipleship but looking forward to its eternal reward, you are an enabler. You are fit for God's kingdom.

Be an enabler, not a spoiler!