

Are you familiar with the term “selective listening”? That’s when you choose how attentive you want to be when someone else is talking. You ‘hear’ them talking, but you ‘select’ or choose when you really want to ‘tune in’ to listen closely to what they are saying. This means you’re usually ‘tuned out’ until your attention is triggered. And that trigger might be the name of a person, or reference to a place, or thing, or activity that is important to you. For example: many people perk up and pay attention when they hear “Green Bay Packers.” Other people ‘tune in’ when topics like “fishing” – or “the stock market” – or “on sale” are mentioned. Other people respond to “dessert” – or “vacation” – or “new car.” And almost everyone ‘tunes in’ at the sound of their own name – having developed that survival skill to rebound from day dreaming in school.

But in our reading from Amos, people aren’t inattentive because they are day dreaming. No, for quite a while the people of God had been deliberately ‘tuning out’ much of what God said to them, because they had been turning away from God. So how was Amos going to get their attention so they would listen to the message God wanted Amos to deliver to them? He had to find the key to the selective listening of the people of Israel. And Amos hit upon the words “Judgment Day.” That got their attention. The people were like, “What!?! Wait a minute! What did he just say?! Why is he talking about Judgment Day? Who is this guy? What does he know about it?!”

When Amos had their attention he proceeded to give them quite a bit to listen to:

- God will turn off the sun.
- Not only will the party will be over, funeral music will drown out everything else.
- Instead of wearing glad rags, you’ll be tearing your clothes into rags in mourning.
- Picture the worst thing that could happen to break your heart, to change your lives: is it your dearest loved one being murdered? Perhaps your only son?
- Then consider *all of that* as being just a smidgen of what Judgment Day will be like!

Oh, and by the way, there will also be a famine. It won’t be a famine of food or water – it will be a famine of God’s Word. You’ll find yourselves longing to hear God speak God’s Word – but you won’t be able to hear it. No matter where you go, no matter what you do, no matter who else you might listen to, you will NOT be able to hear God’s Word.

All this time you thought you didn’t need to listen to God. That you could do whatever you wanted: walk all over the weak; treat poor people like dirt; lie and cheat and exploit others for your own gain and amusement. You can’t continue to act like everything is fine and dandy when you’re living like that! The injustices you’re committing can’t go on. Because you haven’t listened to God calling you to turn and repent from your sinful

ways, now you're going to SEE God's judgment. Now you're going to LIVE out that judgment which you've brought on yourselves.

Do you think the people of Israel wanted to hear that it was their own dang fault that Judgment Day was coming? Of course not! And that helps to make this a self-fulfilling prophecy. By NOT wanting to listen to anything more from Amos – the people of Israel also set themselves up to not hear the Word of God.

Now you might be wondering, “Where is the GOOD NEWS in this?” Good question! At first blush, God's judgment appears to be all bad news. . . . *Unless* you happen to be someone who has been walked all over by other people. Or you've spent your whole life being treated like dirt. Or you've been lied to, cheated, or exploited. Because if you are anyone who has gone through that kind of stuff, well! In your ears it probably sounds like good news to hear God say, “That stuff has got to stop! I'm not going to let people be treated that way.” It would be good news to hear that God's steadfast love is paired with God's unending commitment to justice. It would be good news to hear that change is coming. That the rich will NOT just keep getting richer from exploiting you. That you would no longer have to keep paying more and receiving less than what you paid for. That you could trust that you've been told the truth, and not a lie. . . . So if that is ‘good news’ to you – then you will probably still hear God's Word when others can't.

And what about us? Do we use ‘selective listening’ to **not** listen to God – or do we long to hear God's Word for us? Are we fearful of the justice/judgment side of God's love, or are we in need of that ‘good news’? Because what we listen for, and what we will listen to, reflects how we view the balance of steadfast love and justice in our relationship with God. If all we want is God's love without any accountability for our actions, we really don't understand God's love and justice. If we want God to hold everyone else accountable for what they have done, but automatically forgive us for anything and everything that we do, we really don't understand God's love and justice. Because God's love and justice isn't just for us – it is for everyone, and all creation, every living thing, all the time. To uphold justice and have steadfast love – those are basic characteristics of who God is, and they are not going to change.

If we are going to live as the children of God, those should also be characteristics of who we are. If we will devote ourselves to being just and loving, listening to God's Word, we will not only hear the ‘good news’ but we will live it out. Not just because it is good for us, but because it is good for everyone and everything in all creation.

Amen.