

Series: **BLING! BLING!** February 11, 2007

**JUSTICE FOR ALL...JUST FOR US ALL?
Amos 5:21-24**

I. INTRO

- A. I have a confession to make this morning. Many of you know John Deacon—head of Branch Out here. Well, we have these email sparring matches—he sends me stuff, I send him stuff—we dialogue. He’s more of a help to me than I am to him.
- Well, we were sparring over something a couple of months ago, and in one of his return emails, he addressed me like this; ***My dear recovering fundamentalist friend...!*** I laughed—but I’ve thought since then, “You know, he’s more right than I’d like to believe.”
- I grew up nostril deep in legalism. That God’s list of right things to do didn’t include dancing, playing cards, wine—and even roller-skating was suspect because, when you included music, it was a little too much like dancing. I mean, I didn’t smoke, chew...or go with girls “who do.” Lori doesn’t smoke or chew, but she does dip a little snuff—you know, a pinch between the cheek and the gum...
- The only sin that was legal on Sunday was gluttony—you could stuff yourself until you couldn’t move—but you couldn’t go out and do any exercise to work it off..
1. With legalism came this sense that God was probably most ticked off with people who did this stuff. I kid you not! What I want to get at here is the blindness that I’m still recovering from. With some shame, I need to say that I grew up right in the middle of the Civil Right’s Movement.
We had four riots in my high school when I was in Grade 10 and riot policemen stationed in our hallways. Somehow I never connected it to injustice or to the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr.
 2. My blindness was more extensive than that. In my first 15 years as a pastor, I knew about poverty and starvation—and almost totally relegated it to the way the countries were run. I saw poverty around me—a lot of people on welfare, living in trailers and squalid apartments—and was puzzled by the question, “Why don’t you stop drinking and get a job?”
- When the AIDS crisis hit—and started it’s devastating run through our world, I was terrified by it—and almost totally relegated it to lifestyle. I thought, “If people choose that lifestyle—then they have to live with the consequences of it.” When it came to addressing poverty in the world, I contributed regularly to missions programs, thinking, “Well, people most need to hear the Good News—and, after all, the missions program I support **does** have a relief arm to it.
- Pathetic, isn’t it? I’ve thought, “How could I have been so **blind?** Was I just intentionally ignorant? Was I just too busy to stop and notice—or was I hard-hearted? Or was I just insulated?
- All that time, I read God’s Word faithfully, talked to God, sang, led worship—I had the “**love God**” part of life nailed pretty good—at least that’s what I thought.

- B. Anyone here who likes to read the **prophets** of the Old Testament—particularly what are called the **minor prophets**—the short books at the end of the OT? Again, a confession. I’ve read the Bible a number of times, but never really read much of the minor prophets in the **sticky pages**—you know, where the pages are still brand new and stuck together. They always seemed, well—**angry**.

-Amos, a shepherd by trade, is one of the authors, and represents/quotes God as basically saying, “Shut down the worship service, stop the songs—**leave the building--** it’s making me sick!” The question is...**why would God say something like that?** And does it apply to me—to **us?**

-I’ve learned a lot over the past few years—from John Deacon, from Bill Hybels and Rick Warren—about social justice; about loving and caring for the poor and broken and marginalized. The person I am most indebted to for some of the understandings I’m going to share with you this morning is a guy named Rob Bell. What I’m learning is messing with my mind—and re-arranging my heart. It’s hard truth.

-My question for you is--will you walk with me for a while on this journey, think hard, and not kill me when we’re done—cause I’m a chicken. Will you?

II. GOD’S FRUSTRATION WITH “JUST FOR US”

- A. At the top, let me read what God said through Amos:

I hate, I despise your religious festivals; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:5-8 TNIV)!

1. Now, am I exaggerating when I say that God sounds angry and frustrated? And the question is...**why?** Well, let me *read* about “why.”
Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"— skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat (Amos 8:4-6 TNIV).
-It makes God angry when people who claim to know Him love money more than people—and more than God. These people were sweeping up the dirt with the wheat—knowing that poverty-stricken people would buy it anyway because they’re hungry. He **hates** it when people compartmentalize how they treat the poor—and then go into a worship service and try to scam God into blessing them. God says, **Stop it! Just stop the charade! Stop the music! Stop the offerings. Don’t treat me like I’m a fool!**
2. Now. Here’s the question: Are you okay with a God who gets angry and frustrated? What’s worse: A God who gets angry, or a God who sees blatant injustice, old people victimized, violence, rape--and does **nothing?** Says, “Not a big deal.”

-The message that screams at us from the Bible is that how the vulnerable people of our world get treated is a **big** deal with God! Jesus made that very clear. What we're going to do is take a look at two stories He told and what they reveal.

We're going to look at how Jesus responded when **He** got angry. Then I'm going to ask **you** to get appropriately angry. And then we're done!

- B. Let's take them in order. The first story you're probably familiar with. Jesus is teaching, and this guy interrupts him right in the middle of what he's saying. He asks Jesus to settle a problem he and his brother are having over an inheritance. An inheritance in that culture always involved land. So think about it—two brothers in the Middle East having a conflict over who owns the land. Sound familiar?

-Now, this guy has already decided what he thinks is fair. And now He's asking Jesus to coerce his brother to go along with his decision.

1. And that's when Jesus steps in, makes an assessment of what's **really** happening—and tells a story. He says:

Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.” Then he told them a story: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!””

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’ “Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God (Luke 12:15-21 NLT).”

-Just so we're clear, the word Jesus uses to refer to **life** is not just breathing and a beating heart.

It's talking about quality of life. A blessed life. Life that's fulfilling and satisfying. Jesus says, “Be careful—greed will screw it up for you! Don't be deceived into thinking that you could **really** live if you had more!”

2. Now, there are some things I've recently come to understand about this passage that I never knew. Kenneth Bailey, an expert on life in that culture, says that the first clue that something's wrong in this story is this guy **thinking to himself**.

-In our culture, we fly solo when it comes to money and business decisions. But then people lived in community. It was unthinkable that a person would make a life decision **all by himself**. People in that culture took great joy in traveling with friends, discussing their ideas and problems with friends.

-The first thought that would have gone through people's minds listening to this story is, “Wow! This guy's **all alone!** His money has **totally** isolated him from the community of people everyone needs around them!” And his aloneness—and self-pre-occupation continues. See if you can pick it up:

What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come (vs. 17-19 NLT).

3. Now, think about the absurdity of this conversation this guy's having with himself. In that day, taxation was horrendous—80-90% of people's income. A lot of people

had lost their land. Starvation and poverty was rampant. And this guy's saying, "Gee, I don't know what to do with all this leftover food!" It's like a person coming up with a cure for AIDS—and they've produced way more than could ever be used—and they're in a village in Sudan—orphans, people in various stages of dying all around—and they're thinking, "Wow! It's too bad these people can't afford my medicine!"

4. Jesus has a single word for this man. **Fool**. The word Jesus chooses is very significant. In Greek, it's **Aphron**. **Phron** was the seat of life. **Euphron** was the good life, filled with the very best life has. We get the word **euphoria** from it. To be **aphron** was to be without life, without breath—dead. Without wisdom or awareness. And then this statement from God, "Your life has been on loan, and **now** I want it **back!**" And he doesn't even have time to pack his bags.

-There's some sense in this story that God takes this guy's life. Zaps him and beams him up. He's not a serial killer, a child molester; there's no sense that he's starting his own cult. He's just greedy. He has a bunch of surplus—and with need all around him, he refuses to share it with anyone.

-Last week we all said something together: **God owns; I manage**. It's hard—but I think we realize our stuff is on loan—and we need to give a tithe—a tenth—back to God to let Him know we get that. But in this story it's clear; **life** is a gift. God doesn't say to him, "Give me back all the food in the barn, the plane, the cars, the boats. In this story, the guy's wealth and soul are connected, and God says, "I'll take it all!"

-In our world, it's possible to let what we have insulate us and isolate us from the suffering of the world. It's possible to gain the world—and **lose** your soul. And it's apparently possible to so frustrate God with our self-centeredness—that the one word He writes on our tombstone is—**Fool. You fool!**

C. Jesus tells another story. This one, in my opinion, is even more profound. It's found in Luke 16, which has to be the chapter of odd stories. This one is about an extremely wealthy guy with a sick man at his gate. The story starts at Luke 16:19:

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will

repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead (Luke 16:19-31 TNIV).'"

1. This is a **very** strange story by anyone's standards. A very **troubling** story. It starts with a rich man living behind his gate. And this guy lives in unbelievable extravagance. Most people could only feast a few times a year—this guy feasts every day. He's wearing silk underwear and dresses in purple—the kind of clothing royalty wore.

-In absolute contrast is a man who's sick, covered with sores, is laid outside this man's gate, waiting for the garbage to be scraped from the dinner plates. He dies—and he's carried by the angels to Abraham's side. When people feasted in that day, they reclined around a table and leaned against someone's side. This guy, who had once been poor and sick and excluded got to lean on **Abraham!** The patriarch of the Jewish people. .

-Again, a contrast. Jesus simply says that the rich guy died—and ends isolated from God and everything good in a place called **Hades**.
2. To recap: This guy lived in one of the first gated communities. And the reason is clear. He really doesn't want to see or know about the man with sores who lives outside his gate every day. Gates do that—they keep people out. But they also keep people in. When he dies—he gets what he wants, disconnection from Lazarus.
 - a. Jesus is making the point that wealth can isolate us. It gives us luxury—that's true—but it also can serve as insulation that separates us from the way the rest of the world lives.
 - b. Lazarus needed the rich man. But, the rich man also needed Lazarus because, see, without Lazarus, his wealth was all about him. People who have a lot, like we do, need the poor every bit as much as they need us—so that our money doesn't become all about us and turn us into self-centered monsters.
3. Now. This is where the story takes some very puzzling turns. Abraham tells the rich man that there's a huge chasm that separates them. What is it? They can talk across it—and not yell. It can't be **that** big. And it can't be crossed. I can understand why the rich man would want to go to Abraham's side—but why would Lazarus want to go to the Hades? The chasm must be some kind of metaphor in the story.

-Something else that's curious. The rich man starts calling to Abraham across this chasm—making **demands**. "Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue"—like that would help if you're actually on fire? People on fire don't usually have long conversations, right? Then he **argues** with Abraham about sending Lazarus to talk to his brothers. Think about that! You don't argue with Abraham—cause Father Abraham has many sons. Many sons has Father Abraham. I am one of them...

-Abraham shuts him down. They have Moses and the prophets—if they won't listen to them, they won't listen **even if someone rises from the dead**. And the story **ends!** Suddenly the credits are rolling—everyone is scratching their heads. No song, no bloopers. What is this story about? Well, it has something to do with wealth and selfishness and class-ism and racism.

 - a. What is this **vast chasm**? What kind of vast chasm can people talk across? Look at the clues. The first request this guy makes is, "Have

Lazarus travel over here, dip his finger in water and cool **my** tongue!”
 What would you call someone who would go and do something like that for you? A **slave!** This rich man is in Hades—and he **still** thinks he’s better than Lazarus!

-Ehhhh! That request gets nailed. “So—have Lazarus go and tell my brothers...” He **still** sees Lazarus as a servant. Do you see the point Jesus is making. This vast chasm is **in this rich guy’s heart!** He’s in hell, and he **still** thinks he’s better. The **arrogance** is unbelievable!

- b. That’s not all—he’s arguing...he has a better plan than **Abraham!** Do you see what’s happened? This guy has been in the winner’s circle his whole life. He has a **gate**, a big house, purple, fine linens, feasts. He’s a **winner!** He’s faster, smarter, luckier—have you seen his cars, where he vacations, all the cool things he’s acquired from his travels. Suddenly, he’s in this awful place—but he’s **still da man!** “Send Lazarus here to **serve** me!” He’s still cocky, arrogant—and thinks his wealth has earned him a place of special standing. For him it just doesn’t compute that God isn’t impressed by him.

3. I’ve said this before—we live in a culture **obsessed** with ascent. **Up!** How smooth and clear your skin is, how thin you are, whether your muscles bulge through the tan. What you drive, where you live, what you wear. How good your grades are, what university you attend. More, higher, better, faster, slimmer—and Jesus is making it clear that the **arrogance** that can come with that mentality can make you just like this guy. A person who has literally come to believe his own press—that he really **is** better—better than Lazarus—even better than Abraham—and **even in death** he can’t give it up!

-And God finds this arrogance and self-sufficiency repulsive. That’s why God warns us all through the Bible; Watch out! Don’t let money steal your heart, insulate you and isolate you from the people you need to see. It can harden your heart and make you think that all you have is just for **you**—and throw your scraps to the poor—that **Jesus** loves.

III. GET ANGRY!

- A. Anyone here ever gotten angry? I’ve gotten angry in both **bad** ways and **good** ways. When I was in college, I **loved** my car. It was this 67 Ford Falcon that I bought for \$300 and fixed up—had it painted, jacked up the back end—put chrome wheels on. It **looked** hot—but it **wasn’t!** One day on my way to work, some guy pulled right out in front of me—I literally was sliding down the road, tires smoking—and almost hit him.

-Then he **just drove off**—didn’t apologize, nothing. I was **furious!** So, I chased him! When I caught up to him in his parking lot, I realized that I’d never thought through the strategy of “What will I do if I catch him?” He apparently was a doctor—came over to my window and challenged me to get out and fight. So—I **slunk off!** Went to work—and hated myself for being a wuss!

-I’d think of that scene from time to time—and just find myself hardening up, twitching, my neck hot—wishing I’d punched him in the face, or slit his tires! Anger is a weird thing. When it comes over you, you feel like King Kong. Our problem isn’t that we get **angry**. It’s that we get angry at the wrong things, or that we don’t know what to do with it.

Anyone here ever gotten so angry you’ve broken something?

1. As I read to you at the beginning form Amos, God was angry with the Israelites because of their greed and the way they treated the poor. But it’s hard to get a handle on that—to **see** what that looks like. Well, Jesus is a snapshot of God—

God in flesh—what was **He** like? Interestingly enough, there are two incidents recorded when Jesus was angry—and both had to do with the mistreatment of people. The first was the cluttering of the temple. Remember that—where a whole bazaar had been set up to scam visitors?

-The religious hierarchy had set things up so that the whole **visitors** section of the temple, the Court of the Gentiles, was set up with pens with animals to sell to unsuspecting visitors for sacrifice—and then they could only buy those animals with special temple coins. Not only did they stink up the whole visitors section with the animals—they scammed the visitors **twice!** And Jesus was **angry**. Remember his words? My house will be called a house of prayer for **ALL nations!**

-I don't know about you, but the flannelgraph Jesus with the lamb in his arms and Clairol hair, and robe that never had sweat stains somehow doesn't fit this picture of an angry Messiah with a whip in his hand—turning over tables, with all these scam artists running to save their sorry butts! Jesus anger created **action!** That's one expression.

2. But there's another one that's quite interesting as well. Let me read the story: **Then he went back in the meeting place where he found a man with a crippled hand. The Pharisees had their eyes on Jesus to see if he would heal him, hoping to catch him in a Sabbath infraction. He said to the man with the crippled hand, "Stand here where we can see you." Then he spoke to the people: "What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil? Helping people or leaving them helpless?" No one said a word. He looked them in the eye, one after another, angry now, furious at their hard-nosed religion. He said to the man, "Hold out your hand." He held it out—it was as good as new! The Pharisees got out as fast as they could, sputtering about how they would join forces with Herod's followers and ruin him (Mark 3:1-6 Msg.)**

- a. There's some evidence that the Pharisees had planted this guy there in the Synagogue to trap Jesus. See, if he healed this guy, they could charge him with sin—with breaking the Sabbath—and they **knew** he was a sucker for broken people. They thought, "We've **got** him!"

-Well, Jesus walks into the synagogue, sees immediately what's going on—and takes them on. He has this man with a crippled arm to stand. He asks the question. **"What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil? Helping people or leaving them helpless?"** Suddenly, Jesus has them in a headlock. He's got them and they **hate** it. And Him. They are so into protecting their little religion kingdom that they won't even answer him. And Jesus is **angry**. Furious with them.

-The Greek word is **orge**. Desire—compassion—mixed with deep sadness and grief. It's not a selfish anger; a low-grade boiling under the surface anger. It's more a **you're breaking my heart** anger—anger that moves you to action.

- b. Let's bring this full circle. **This**, friends, is the same anger that God had and expresses in the book of Amos. It's a God who sees everything. A God who sees the injustice of a person who slaves away—is half-starving, hardly able to feed his family. Then he comes into a market place where he will get taken advantage of so someone who has enough can have more.

God sees the whole thing. People who get richer and richer and richer. **And** people for whom things get worse—whose lives grow more hopeless every day.

-Just like the rich farmer stockpiling food—willingly oblivious to people starving all around him. Just like a rich guy with silk boxers who buys an expensive gate to make sure that a sick man, covered with sores, doesn't get too close. In this case, it's wealthy religious professionals who will humiliate a crippled man—heartless toward his need—to trap someone they hate. Someone they don't **realize** is the God they claim to serve.

3. We have a whole generation of people **furious** at the way the world is. Think about the name of the band, **Rage Against The Machine**. What is so fantastic about this story is to see what Jesus does when He gets **really** angry. Our anger often leads to stupidity; to breaking the law, breaking hearts, or breaking things. To saying awful words we can never reel back in, push the **delete** button on.

-What does Jesus do?

...**Furious at their hard-nosed religion. He said to the man, "Hold out your hand." He held it out—it was as good as new (Mark 3:5 Msg)!**

Jesus anger leads to healing and restoration. It leads to **justice! Peace!** A man whose life is totally transformed. Incidentally, this ultimately cost Jesus his life.

This says that this incident was the turning point when the religious professionals began plotting Jesus' death.

- B. What does your anger lead to? If it's motivated by the right stuff—and not a form of selfishness—**something** good should come from it!

-Martin Luther was **furious** with a corrupt religious system—and the reformation was the result. Wilberforce was **furious** with slavery—and started a movement to end slavery that went around the world. Mother Theresa saw how the poor died in the street—and devoted her life to changing the system. Martin Luther King was angry over racism and prejudice—and the Civil Rights Movement that resulted changed the system forever.

And Jesus true followers have done the same thing wherever they've gone.

1. What makes **you** angry—cause, see, there are some things in this world that we **should** be angry about. In fact, you might find your calling in it. Back in 1987, I began a personal journey that left me really angry about the attitude of the church toward undecided people. This self-righteousness attitude that turned the church into a kind of exclusive club that wouldn't change even change their music to reach the very people Jesus crossed eternity to reach and love. The message was, "Well, if you will come to **us**—do things **our** way--sing all the songs **we** enjoy—we will let you hang with us. **But don't think we're going to change things for the likes of YOU!**"

-The anger and frustration I felt led me to the very core of my calling. To help people who are far from God understand and love Jesus.

2. What I want to do in closing this morning is simply list some facts. Think about the **just for US all world** we live in—and ask—is that right? Is there something in these facts that makes you angry; makes you think, "**Somebody** ought to do something about that!

***40% of the world's population lacks basic sanitation facilities. Does that make you angry?**

*Over 1 billion people still use unsafe drinking sources.

*There are 2.2 billion children in the world; 1 billion of them live in poverty. And for a lot of them, this is extreme poverty—which means that they may die from it.

*Over 1 billion people in the world live on less than 1 dollar a day.

*Around the world, 114 million children do not get a basic education.

*More than 800 million people in the world go to bed hungry every day. 300 million of them are children.

*Every 3.6 seconds somebody dies of hunger, and the large majority of these are under the age of 5. Does *that* make you angry?

*A woman in North America has a 1 in 3700 chance of dying in giving birth; a woman in sub-Saharan Africa has a 1 in 16 chance of dying while giving birth.

*By a conservative estimate, more than 27 million people in the world are slaves—more than at any other time in history. You thought slavery ended? I did

3. Friends, we live in a world where people get angry about the things that ***don't matter***—and ***don't*** get angry about the things that ***do matter***. I wonder if maybe it's time for the church of Jesus to get angry about the same things that God gets angry about. From what I'm learning and from what I've seen in the Bible—I'd say it's almost always about issues of violence, justice, compassion and generosity.

IV. **WHAT ARE YOU ANGRY ABOUT?**

If you find yourself wanting to maim, stomp on, throw pop cans at or mutilate a guy wearing ice skates and a striped shirt, you may have anger issues. If you find yourself getting furious and standing on your horn and using sign language at someone who waits just a millionth of a second at a traffic light before peeling out—you may have anger issues. If you find yourself waiting in line at a store or restaurant and thinking racist, contempt-filled thoughts about the people who aren't serving you in the way you think you should be served—you may have anger issues.

-So, why not direct your anger in a redemptive, compassionate way. Rob Bell, the guy I'm indebted to for many of the insights this morning says, "We have a lot of people in our world looking for a fight because they aren't already *in* one. People engaged in the real life issues in the real world have far less anger for stuff that doesn't matter." In case you're wondering—all we have—all the advantages, all the freedom, all the resources are ***not JUST FOR US ALL***. God's interested that we be His agents in bringing **JUSTICE FOR ALL!**