

Cause and Effect

(Amos 3: 1-8)

We are having a problem with our dog Gruffy. When we take him for a walk, we often experience Gruffy taking us for a walk. He pulls on his lead and down the street we go. So in order to try and temper this enthusiasm, on goes the choke collar. We pull him up short and say “heal”. It may or may not create the desired effect. If it does work, it doesn’t do so consistently. So last week we changed tactics. It was time for the muzzle restraint. This harness attaches onto his muzzle and then clips on behind his ears. Now when he begins to pull, I yank his head up and say “heal”. Providing that I attach the thing correctly it has the desired effect. Yes, here is a type of cause of effect that seems to be working. I hope it lasts.

Cause and Effect.

Parents make the connection between cause and effect to teach their children about the dangers of fire. It will burn you if you do not treat it with care. The nearby river needs to be approached with respect or you may drown. Crossing the street inattentively could result in your being hit by a car. Drivers realize that speeding may effect an expensive ticket, as I found out three times in one year, back in 2002. Dog owners discover that the bylaw enforcement officer does not take kindly to dogs being off leash when in a lane way, as my neighbour found out with a \$135.00 ticket a few years back. Nor do they take kindly to dogs who are AWOL (Absent without Leave), the gate was left open again. We found this out when Gruffy was brought back to us in the bylaw officer’s van two weeks ago. The fine was only for \$26.00. But it was accompanied by a warning that the next time would see the fine increase exponentially to a possible fine of \$3000.00. How do I know that the fine could be that high? Someone told Peggy that their dog had been returned three times by an officer. They were warned that if there was a fourth time..... \$3000.00 to the city would be the cost. Ouch! Here is a cause and effect scenario I **never** want to experience!

As we turn to Amos chapter 3 the Prophet uses a literary formula in verses 3-8 that relies on cause and effect. In verses 1-2 he sets this device up by saying,

Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt:

² You only have I known

of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your iniquities.

Here God is declaring through Amos that he had a relationship with Israel that was unique. It is as if he is saying that I had eyes for you alone. But you spurned my love and know I will punish you. But notice what Amos says next. He doesn't just begin to catalogue their sins and the corresponding punishment. No Amos is subtle and gets them thinking by asking a series of questions. Look at verses 3-5:

³ Do two walk together
unless they have made an appointment?
⁴ Does a lion roar in the forest,
when it has no prey?
Does a young lion cry out from its den,
if it has caught nothing?
⁵ Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth,
when there is no trap for it?
Does a snare spring up from the ground,
when it has taken nothing?

Each question in verses 3 to 5 expects the answer "No". Everyone knows that two people do not enjoy the effects of walking somewhere together unless there is the preceding cause that they agree with one another. Enemies do not walk together. In the Near Eastern World many people met and walked together by chance. When they were on the road they naturally found it more comfortable to walk with a person they agreed with on political, economic or religious issues.

Amos' second illustration comes from nature. People are acquainted with the habits of lions who roar (the effect) because they are attacking their prey (the cause). Do lions foolishly roar before their attack and give prey a premature warning to run? The young lion in the second half of the verse also hunts from his "hiding place" and growls at the appropriate time.

A similar logic fits the behavior of traps (3:5). A bird does not get caught in a snare (the effect), unless someone has set the trap (the cause). Likewise, a trap does not jump shut (the effect), unless some animal has been around and sprung the trigger mechanism (the cause).

In 3:6 Amos changes the order and lists the cause before the effect. Please follow along as I read:

⁶Is a trumpet blown in a city,
and the people are not afraid?
Does disaster befall a city,
unless the LORD has done it?

Amos begins by asking if a watchman's trumpet blast from the city wall will have the effect of causing the people in the city to fear for their lives and make preparations to fight the approaching enemy. The natural answer is Yes. Only a stupid person ignores a watchman's signal.

The second half of 3:6 expands the questioning to ask who causes cities to fall. Most Israelites would agree that cities are destroyed by divine action. Soldiers and generals may do the fighting, but in the end these things are determined by the sovereign power of God.

Now Amos gets to the punch line with these cause and effect sayings when at verse 7 he says:

⁷Surely the Lord GOD does nothing,
without revealing his secret
to his servants the prophets.
⁸The lion has roared;
who will not fear?
The Lord GOD has spoken;
who can but prophesy?

Verse 8B says it all. God has spoken, The cause. Because of this Amos says “I must prophesy”, the effect. As you move back through the first part of verse 8 Amos says the same thing a little differently. He has heard the Lion, God roar. This is another way to say “God has spoken”. And while at this point the Israelites may not fear the Lion’s roar, Amos is afraid. Why? Look at verse 7. God has revealed his plans to the prophets. More specifically, he has revealed to Amos he plans for Israel. And here is Amos, so to speak sounding the trumpet with the hope that the people will respond. He wants them to hear what God is saying to them through Amos and so reverse the

impending judgement that God will bring upon Israel.

We could summarize that the reason Amos uses these cause and effect questions is because he wants us the readers to recognize that because God has spoken we are to listen.

But we may ask. How has God spoken?

First and foremost Christians believe that God has spoken through the person of Jesus Christ. For thousands of years the church has taught us that the fullness of this word is contained in a recorded form in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. As a Christian I believe the Bible is to fill my memories, rule my heart and guide my feet. As a priest my most foremost responsibility towards God and you is to help you believe that God speaks through the Bible so that his words to fill your memories, rule your hearts and guide your feet.

Now most books supply the prospective reader with the information he wants about who wrote them and why. Either the author tells us candidly in a preface about himself and his object in writing, or the publisher does so in the “blurb” on the dustcover. Most readers spend time examining these before committing themselves to buy, borrow or read the book.

It is a great pity that readers of the Bible do not always ask the same questions. Many appear to pick it up and begin their reading at random. Some start at Genesis and get stuck in Leviticus. Others may doggedly persevere from a sense of duty, even setting (and achieving) a target of reading the whole Bible through section by section in five years, but without deriving much benefit from their study because they lack understanding of the book’s overall purpose. Or indeed many give up Bible reading altogether, or never start it, because they cannot see how the tale of a faraway people in a faraway age could have any relevance for them today. But when the Bible comes to life for someone because the Holy Spirit is at work in their life than they will realize you can learn more about human nature by reading the Bible than by living in New York.

But the question may be asked. How can the Bible, which in fact is not a book but a library of sixty-six books, possibly be said to have a “purpose”? Was it not compiled by different authors at different times with different objectives? Yes and no. There is indeed a wide variety of human authors and themes. Yet behind these, Christians

believe, there lies a single divine Author with a single unifying theme.

The Bible itself declares what this theme is. It is stated several times in several places, but perhaps nowhere more succinctly than by the apostle Paul to Timothy:

From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

Here the apostle brings together both the origin and the object of Scripture, where it comes from and what it is intended for. Its origin or we could say its cause: “God-breathed.” Its object or we could say effect: “useful” for human beings. Indeed, it is useful for us only because it is God-breathed inspired by God.

Because it is so inspired, its teaching is to be followed carefully. For you see God did not write a book and send it by a messenger to be read at a distance by unaided minds. Rather God spoke a Book and lives in the spoken words, constantly speaking God’s words and causing the power of them to persist across the years.

And so while the Bible has this authority because God has spoken and speaks through its pages, for many people its power has no effect in their lives. Indeed if all the neglected Bibles were dusted simultaneously, we would have a record dust storm and the sun would go into eclipse for a week. But when like Amos, our hearts and minds are drawn to God we come to that place where we cannot ignore God’s word. Oh there may be times when we have tried or will try to. But when God gets a hold of us we realize with Dwight L. Moody that while Sin may keep us from this book, the Book will keep us from sin and we will not let it collect dust ever again.

God has caused this book to be written my dear brothers and sisters. What kind of effect is it having in your life? It might be that you are saying “You know the Bible has never had the kind of meaning it has in my life at present. It may be that you are a new Christian and you are discovering this Book for the first time. For you it is like falling in love. You can’t wait to see what your lover has for you today.”

For others, it may be that you have been Christians for many years and just as a love can grow stale and taken for granted, so to our reading of Scripture can also lose its

luster. If you are in this place today these it is important for us to reflect on the words we heard from Amos. God has spoken and is speaking through his word. And even when we go through those seasons of life when it isn't alive as we hope it would be, remember that it has an authority, not because of how you feel about it on any given day; No it has authority because it is God Breathed. We have this book because God caused it to be written.

May we be more attentive to God than Gruffy is to my command to heal. Such is the effect that He wants this book to have in our lives and this is why he caused it to be written.