

In its “Big Cat Country,” the St. Louis Zoo in the majestic Forest Park area of that great city has one of the biggest lions I’ve ever seen. His name is Oba. That’s O-B-A. Now, if there is a fight, let me publicly make it as clear as possible: I’m on Oba’s side! Why, Oba weighs almost 500 pounds, boasts a huge mane, and has absolutely enormous paws.

Oba is *panthera leo* for Latin lovers and the king of the beasts for nature lovers. And thankfully, Oba is behind bars for lovers of life!

Oh, I know, Oba should be free, roaming through Forest Park feasting upon its squirrels and rabbits. But who in St. Louis, Missouri, wants to wake up to a “Lion Alert”? I know if I still lived there like I did back in my Seminary days, I most certainly would not! I mean, who in their right mind wants an up close and personal visitation from this beast? Not me. This lion must forever remain in his cage!

And I’m not the only one who feels this way. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, is building a career around keeping the Lion in his cage. Only this Lion’s name is the LORD or in Hebrew “Yahweh.”

In Amos 1:2 the prophet announces, “The LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem!” The last thing Amaziah wants to see is a “Lion Alert.” So, whatever the cost, whatever the compromise, this Lion must never, ever rumble in Israel’s jungle. Amaziah’s policy means that anyone who rattles, shakes, and opens cages must get out of Dodge immediately.

Enter one Amos, a Judean cattleman and fig picker from the town of Tekoa (Amos 1:1; 7:14).

“Lion alert! Lion alert! Call 911!” Amaziah must begin operation “Safe Church Policy” because it is through Amos that this Lion is saying to Israel, “For three sins of Israel and for four, I will not turn back My wrath” (Amos 2:6). “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your sins” (3:2). “Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD; it will be a day of darkness and not light” (5:18). “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies” (5:21). “Woe to you who are at ease in Zion who do not grieve over Joseph’s ruin” (6:1, 6).

This is no “still, small voice!” This is no “gentle Jesus meek and mild.” And this is no tame, purring little kitty cat. In Amos 3:8 the prophet announces, “The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken, who can but prophesy?”

Amaziah says to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there” (Amos 7:12). When

interpreted, Amaziah is saying, “Amos, this temple isn’t big enough for the two of us. So, get out of my face you fig pickin’, dim-witted shepherd boy, prophet wannabe! My motto is tolerate, let sleeping dogs lie. I long to cooperate, to all radicals I say ‘bye!’”

This priest is an expert in image building, marketing techniques, public relations, and salesmanship. In fact, in Amos 7:11, when he reports to his boss what the prophet is preaching, Amaziah conveniently avoids the sticky issues of syncretistic worship, poverty, oppression, and social injustice. His king, Jeroboam ben Joash, will no doubt recommend a raise for Amaziah because at Bethel this priest is running such a smooth religious operation.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, do not be deceived! There are powerful forces in our lives, in the church, and in our world shouting to us, “Be an Amaziah clone! Be content with religious clichés and jargon instead of blazing, burning truth! Sit satisfied in church with the motto, ‘Come weal, come woe, my status is quo!’”

We live in a culture that systematically domesticates, de-fangs, and de-claws the roaring Lion. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul states, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days . . . people will have the form of godliness but deny its power.”

But living in the power, Amos says, “I was neither a prophet nor a professional prophet” (Amos 7:14). When interpreted, Amos is saying, “I am not a religious professional, paid to make pious pronouncements on public platforms. I will not be bought, compromised, deterred, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won’t give up, back up, or let up until I’ve preached up, prayed up, and stayed up.”

And why should this shock us? Moses confronts Pharaoh with the LORD’S thunderous, “Let my people go” (Exodus 5:1). Nathan courageously puts his ecclesiastical career on the line when he summons King David with the words, “You are the man” who has sinned. (2 Samuel 12:7). And the prophet Elijah takes the heat from the wicked king Ahab, who calls him “the troubler in Israel”.

Joining this “goodly fellowship” of the politically incorrect is Israel’s greatest radical. Why, he once had the courage to make a whip and then use it to cleanse His Father’s house (John 2:13–16). Another time He looked the religious leaders of His day straight in the eye and said, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones”

(Matthew 23:27). Climactically, He stands before His high priest and confesses, “In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62).

But this Lion is also the Lamb, and His mighty power is made most perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Jesus allows soldiers to march Him along the Via Dolorosa while He shoulders His crossbar with blood dripping from His butchered back. Jesus lets His executioners strip Him naked, shove Him to the ground, and pin Him to wood with their tools of torture. And Jesus absorbs the spit and the insults without asking His Father to dispense twelve legions of angels.

Societies don’t execute Captain Kangaroo, Mr. Rogers, or Sponge Bob, but they do destroy people who shake their religious establishments to the very core. “There,” they said on that Friday afternoon, “no need to call 911. There is no more Lion alert. He’s crucified, dead, and buried!”

But, coming forth from the tomb, the Lion rumbles in His jungle! Revelation 5:5 states: “See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, He has triumphed!” There is nothing dead about our Jesus! His is no syrupy, sentimental love. But His fierce love for you is driven by nails, marked with scars, and crowned with thorns.

Now what do you suppose Amaziah will say to Amos if the prophet finally gives up, gives in, and goes along, just to be a good ol’ boy? What will this priest say if Amos becomes a “yes” man to Jeroboam ben Joash? Amaziah—and all those like him—will say, “Welcome to our religious country club, where our motto is ‘Come weal or woe, the status must forever remain quo!’”

But what do you think Amos will say if Amaziah confesses, “Enough is enough. I will no longer sell my soul on the altar called compromise; it is time to let the Lion loose!” Amos will raise a hand, make the sign of the cross, and announce what you hear in the absolution of your sins: “I forgive you of all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”