

April 6, 2025

Return: God's Desire for the Righteous

Amos 5:18-27

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction... As we go along today, you might be thinking to yourself, "Haven't we already heard this message before?" The answer is yes, as the theme of returning to a right relationship with God and the right way to worship him is constant throughout much of the minor prophets. So if God saw fit to tell Israel and Judah the same message over 12 books of the Bible we better pay attention, for God's word has much to say to us today.

As Pastor Bruce mentioned to us last week as we started into the Book of Amos, Amos the Prophet was from the Southern Kingdom but much of his prophecy was to the North and, as we have seen over the course of our series so far, the Northern Kingdom was corrupt, vile and filled with injustice. The poor were oppressed and the wicked threatened any prophet who tried to speak up even killing many of them.

And into this dismal situation, God sends another prophet, this one named Amos. And what we have here today, is the very heart of Amos' message to Israel. Chapters 1 and 2 of the book contain God's message to the nations and to Israel, chapters 3-6, where we find ourselves today, contain the message to Israel and its leaders and then 7-9 describe 5 visions that God gives to Amos depicting what is to come for Israel and then the book ends with a promise of hope and restoration. But the message in our passage today is simply this, God is not pleased with outward signs of worship and religion when they are not accompanied by righteousness and justice. Though God must confront humanity's evil, his long-term purpose is to restore humanity and all of creation. Amos' words are a call to embrace the true worship of God that should always include acts of justice, righteousness, and love for one's neighbor. So now with that as an introduction, lets jump right into Amos ch. 5. If you're able, please stand with me as I read the word of God to the Prophet Amos. [Read Amos 5:18-27]

The first point we come across in this passage is that Amos, like most of God's prophets, is warning Israel of God's coming day of judgment in vs. 18-20. The term "the day of the Lord," when used in the Scriptures, refers ultimately to that day when Christ returns and eradicates all evil and establishes his eternal kingdom. But in the Old Testament, the day of the LORD language is also used to describe God's judgments in history that are types of, or point us to, that coming final judgment of God. Context is always the key to figuring out which "day" the author is referring to, and it seems, here, Amos is pointing to God's coming judgment to Israel, in their own lifetime, at the hands of the Assyrians. Also a key is how most translators handle these verses. You'll notice in your Bible that the word "day" is lowercase indicating an event that is about to happen, as opposed to the uppercase "Day" which refers directly to the final judgment.

But what should jump off the page to us is the fact that even though the day of the LORD was a day of great judgment, it seems that many in Israel were waiting for, and even desiring, for it to come. For they thought correctly, like Pastor Bruce mentioned last week, that the day of the LORD meant God's judgment on his enemies. What they didn't realize

was that, unless they returned to the LORD, they were counted in that number. And Amos pronounces a woe to those who desire this day. Amos says that this will not be a good day for those in Israel and is not something they should be looking forward to.

How many of you have seen the movie “The Princess Bride?” At the beginning of the movie, we meet a group of loveable bandits who are kidnapping a princess. One of them, named Vizzini, thinks that everything should go according to his plan, and whenever things don’t, he cries out “inconceivable.” Finally, another of the bandits with him, named Inigo Montoya, turns to him and says, “You keep using that word, I do not think it means what you think it means.”

And similarly, the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were probably saying things like, “I just can’t wait till the Day of the Lord!” “God’s going to finally deal with our enemies!” And Amos is telling them, “I do not think that means what you think it means.”

It’s like this. Imagine, a mother leaves the house to run some errands and leaves her children home alone for a little while. Before leaving she tells the kids, “make sure that while I’m gone, you clean up your rooms!” So the mom leaves and the kids do what kids usually do, they begin running around the house playing and having a good time. Well, their mom pulls back in the driveway, and the kids are so excited to see their mom again. They run to the door, shouting “mom is home,” and ready to rat out their siblings for everything they were doing wrong. But this reunion is not going to be a happy one is it? Why? Because they didn’t do what their mom asked them to do.

And in the same way, the people of Israel were looking forward to the day of the Lord. But little do they realize that because of their actions of selfishness and injustice towards others, this is not going to be a good thing for them.

And what will the day of the Lord be like? It will be a day of darkness. Notice how Amos stresses the darkness of this day 3 times in these verses, and each time, he doubles down and says it will be darkness, not light. This carries the idea death, destruction, horror, with no hope of escape.

Amos gives a graphic picture of just how hopeless it will be to escape from judgment on that day. I like how straightforward the NET translation puts vs. 19, “Disaster will be inescapable, as if a man ran from a lion only to meet a bear, then escaped into a house, leaned his hand against the wall, and was bitten by a poisonous snake.” The point is, that the judgment of God is inescapable and it’s inevitable. There will be nowhere for people to run to escape from God’s judgment.

Now this message would have been shocking for the people of Israel. Why? Because they were the people of God. The day of the Lord was going to be a day in which God came and exacted judgment on his enemies! “So what do you mean that the day of the Lord is going to be darkness for us?” “We’re God’s people!” We worship God on his feast days. We offer sacrifices. We sing songs of praise to him. We are his people and God would never judge us.

You see, the Israelites thought that because they were Israelites, they would be ok. But God saw right through their outward religious works and saw right into their hearts. They were living in sin. They were of the seed of Abraham, yes, but they were not of the faith of Abraham which Paul talks a lot about in Romans 4. They had violated the laws God had given them on how to worship him and how to treat others and, by doing so, had violated

the covenant they had made with God. And so, as promised, God was going to bring his judgment down on Israel as described for us in these first few verses, and then in the next few verses, God gives them the reason why, God hates their empty worship starting in vs. 21.

Notice the complete and total disdain and disgust God has for the worship of the Israelites. He uses the words “hates,” he “despises.” That’s incredibly strong language. Think about this, God hates the worship that these people are offering. It’s not that God might prefer something else, but he can tolerate it. No, God hates this kind of worship. It’s repulsive, and it’s disgusting to him. And this would have been incredibly shocking, given that all of these things that are mentioned here are actually commands by God in the Mosaic Law.

God himself had instituted various feast days that his people were commanded to observe. There was the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths). These were times that God had set apart for his people to assemble together and honor and worship the Lord apart from the weekly rhythm of the Sabbath. But it says that, during this time period in Northern Israel, God hated these feasts because of what they had become. Just an outward appearance.

God, also, had instituted the sacrificial system. These sacrifices were meant to express things like sorrow over sin, fellowship with God, and thankfulness and rejoicing for God’s provision. Three different kinds of sacrifices are mentioned here: Burnt offerings, grain offerings, fattened peace offerings. And you know what? God had grown to hate these too. He was not going to accept or regard them.

How about their singing? Singing to God has always been a way of expressing worship and praise to God. But notice what God calls it in vs. 23, “noise.” “Take it away!” God says, “I will not listen to any of it.” Why? Why did God hate and despise their sacred assemblies, their sacrifices, and their songs? Because of the way that they were living their lives and treating those around them in between these outward acts of worship. They were failing to keep the covenant of God which commanded them to love God supremely and to love others as themselves.

Worship is more than simply performing outward actions. It’s more than just singing, than giving your offerings and coming to church. To worship something means that I give it the highest place of honor and devotion in my life. That which I worship is more important than anything or anybody else. So why does the way that I treat other people matter? Because the way you treat those around you actually reveals whether you worship God or whether you worship yourself.

When we snap at our spouse or kids, or when we get angry at that customer service representative, when we yell at someone in traffic, what we are revealing is that life is all about me. I am revealing that the people around me should serve me. And when they don’t serve me, I’ll either snap at them, or complain or gossip about them, or I’ll get pouty and moody because I am not being served like I think I should. Now these are obviously smaller examples that revealing a bigger problem within the heart.

And brothers and sisters, when we live our lives in a way where God is not the primary focus of our heart which is reflected in how we treat others, God is not pleased with our worship of him on Sundays. Do you realize that it is entirely possible for us to come

here and gather together as a church, to sing our songs, to have our worship time, to listen to a sermon and then for God to take no delight in it? Do you realize that?

The truth is that when people who claim to be Christians come together and offer acts of worship to God, and then go home and live Monday through Saturday in self-centered idolatry and treating others in a way that displeases God, God is disgusted with such worship. Brothers and sisters, how tragic it would be for that to be what God thinks of our worship? We need to hear this word from the Lord this morning: God is not pleased with our outward acts of worship when they are not accompanied by righteousness and love in our relationships with others.

And so we've seen Amos' warning to Israel of God's coming day of judgment and God's hate of their empty worship, but in midst of all this, we see a glimmer of hope in vs. 24 as we see God's desire for the righteous. Here is the good news of our message! There has been a lot of warning and rebuke in the message of Amos so far, but here is the exciting news for us. God tells us not just what's wrong, but he tells us what to do in response to his warning. Here is what God desires from his people: "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

What does God desire? First, He desires justice. This word is a calling for treating all people with dignity and fairness, and seeking to right wrongs and care for the vulnerable. And true justice grounds itself in God himself. Deuteronomy 10:17-18 says, "The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing."

Justice is treating others with grace and fairness. God treats people with compassion and fairness and God deals with the sin of each person without partiality. God is completely just and he desires the same from his people.

And secondly, God desires righteousness. Righteousness is defined as, "living in right relationship with God, other people, and all creation." We act with righteousness when we live justly, honestly, and faithfully according to God's instruction. It's treating other people in accordance with God's Word. God had told the people of Israel how they were to treat people in their society. They were to love their neighbor as themselves. They were to take every opportunity to show grace and kindness to those around them, just like they would want to be treated.

Brothers and sisters, these attributes, justice and righteousness, are a reflection of the character of God Himself. And we find these on greatest display at the cross. For at the cross, God displayed perfect justice and righteousness. He takes sin so seriously, that he laid all sin, over all time, on his Son, Jesus, who then bore the wrath of God. No one is ever going to get away with sin when it comes to God. Again, as Pastor Bruce shared with us last week, God's keeps an account of all our deeds and being perfectly just he must deal with all that sin. And yet, God in his righteousness and love, chose to make a way for sinners to be forgiven by offering up his only Son, Jesus, that whosoever believes in him, who's name is written in lambs book of life, will not perish, will not face God's wrath and judgment for their sin, but will have eternal life based solely on righteousness of Christ. God perfectly demonstrated his justice and righteousness for us and he desires for his people to do the same.

The question is, how can we do that? The short answer is, we can't? Apart from a right relationship with God through faith in what Christ has done on the cross and the power which we receive through the indwelling Spirit that is true only for the believer, it is impossible to live a life that is pleasing to God. How much more then, for those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus, should we seek to live lives that reflect God's place of supremacy in our lives and not simply just go through the motions with outward appearances of religion.

God desires today for his people to practice justice and righteousness and to let it flow like a river through our lives and our relationships not just on Sundays, but every day. God desires justice and righteousness to flow through our church and touch every aspect of our life in this community.

So, the question we all have to ask ourselves is this, Is God really the center of my life? Does the way I treat others reflect that? Or am I just consumed with my own selfish needs and wants? Are we a people who come here and offer outward acts of worship but whose lives and relationships reveal that we are actually just self-worshippers. Do we come in here for our worship services and do all the "right things," only to leave here and live in relational unrighteousness the rest of the week? Brothers and sisters, God hates such worship. May we seek God and return to a right relationship with him, one that puts him first in our lives above everything else and then, from that, flows a right relationship with others where, with God's help, we might reflect God's justice and righteousness to a lost and dying world. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for communion.