

<AMOS: BACK TO 'THE START'>

When we think of Jewish religion of the Old Testament, we may think of the role of the temple and the sacrifice system to deal with sin. Last week, we saw that the basic requirement of God's people was "to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice." (Gen 18:19) One of the challenges of Amos' message is that we can't compartmentalize our lives into two boxes, i.e.: the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. Our faith must impact the way we live and the way we treat people. If our Monday-Friday lives are not honouring to God, then we should not expect God to accept our worship.

GETTING STARTED: Christianity Today recently published an excerpt from a new book called *Tending Soul, Mind and Body*. The authors highlight that we need to be holistic in the way we view and look after ourselves, including getting help when we are hurt. That also impacts how we see and care for others.

"Many forms of evangelical spirituality fail to foster integration. We prioritize doctrinal instruction and moral development, but we neglect psychological healing. We emphasize the cultivation of character, but we overlook our psychological compulsions, fixations, and emotional reactivity. ...

"We see signs of dis-integrated Christians all around us. **Why is it that "good" Christians don't always make very good human beings?** They're faithful to their families, they're consistent in church attendance, they cut their grass and pay their taxes, and they read their Bibles and pray for the nations. Yet they can also be rigid, self-righteous, xenophobic, racist, sexist, controlling, narrow-minded, emotionally repressed, sexually dysfunctional, bitter, impulsive, and angry. ...

"(In his 1988 book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard) saw in evangelical Christianity a failure to do justice to the true nature of the human personality, to take seriously that we are not just souls inhabiting bodies or minds connected to brains. No, we are embodied, incarnate creatures. Or to put it bluntly, we don't have bodies - we are bodies. Our minds and souls are far better integrated than most forms of evangelical spirituality would lead you to believe."¹

- ? There are a number of attitudes and attributes mentioned here. How do these attitudes work against us being people who live out righteousness and justice?

- ? In Gen 1:27, we are told that all human beings – regardless of any differences - are made in the image of God. What happens when we stop viewing people in that light and start seeing them as commodities or a means to our own financial gain?

READ: AMOS 4:4-5; 5:18-27

"This section is divided into three paragraphs: 5:18–20 addresses the sad state of Israel's deceptive theology concerning the Day of the Lord, 5:21–24 undermines the people's false hopes in their unacceptable worship, and 5:25–27 predicts their exile because some Israelites worship false gods. These sections question the people's basic beliefs about their relationship to God."²

In traditional translations, Amos 5:18 is translated "Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!" We might say: "be careful what you wish for". With the words "Woe to you ...", Amos expressed lament, sorrow and distress for Israel but others see that Amos was also announcing a curse.³ The people yearned and longed for this day. The people thought that the "Day of the Lord" would bring God's judgement on their enemies and that Israel was guaranteed to be victorious. Instead, Amos highlighted that the northern Kingdom of Israel would be recipients of God's judgement.

- ? What do you understand by the term "the Day of the LORD"? In what way is it a demonstration of the justice of God? What other Bible verses come to mind when you hear this?

- ? In Amos 5:18-20, there are a number of images. Israel would soon be invaded by the Assyrian army and the comfortable lives of the Israelites would be shattered. Reflect on these verses and these images for a few minutes. What do you think is meant by comparing light and dark? What is meant by fleeing from a lion, only to be met by a bear? What would be the reason for going into a house? How emotions would the people experience when the armies arrived?

- ? Do you ever compare yourself to others and the 'bad' things that they do? What difference does it make, when we understand "the Day of the LORD" as being when we, personally, are subject to God's judgement?

¹ Wilson, Todd. (27 Jul 2019) *How Can So Many Pastors Be Godly and Dysfunctional?* Christianity Today Weekly.

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https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2019/spring/integrated-pastor.html?utm_source=ctweekly.html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=21700307&utm_content=662944294&utm_campaign=email

² Smith, G. V. (2001). *Hosea, Amos, Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p322-323.

³ Hubbard, D. A. (1989). *Joel and Amos: an Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 25). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p187.

"Westermann holds that the prophetic woes are curses that have been adapted to the legal (cultic) practices of Israel."

The story of P.T. Barnum was depicted in the 2017 movie, *The Greatest Showman*. One reviewer noted: “the Barnum & Bailey Circus is misrepresented as a place you went to watch people sing and dance to big dramatic numbers. In case you forgot, it wasn’t that kind of place. It was a place you went to make fun of “freaks” and watch mistreated animals from other countries perform bad tricks - all while crossing your fingers and hoping today wouldn’t be the day the building caught fire.”⁴

In Amos 4:4-5, we see the people heading to Bethel and Gilgal, to bring sacrifices and offerings “for so you love to do”. In Amos 5:21-24, God told the people that their worship and offerings were abominable and obnoxious to him. The words “I cannot stand” literally means “cannot savour the odour of”. i.e. it stinks.

- ? Read Amos 5:21-24 (below) and song lyrics from “Instead of a Show” (Jon Foreman) which are based on these verses. Reflect on these words for a few minutes. Does anything in these words, resonate with you, challenge you or convict you? Do you ever feel like worship is more like a performance or ‘show’? Do you ever feel that your worship is ‘fake’?

“I hate all your show and pretence - the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won’t even notice all your choice peace offerings. Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living.” (Amos 5:21-24, NLT)

I hate all your show; Away with your noisy worship; Away with your noisy hymns; I stop up my ears when you’re singing ‘em; I hate all your show; Your eyes are closed when you’re praying; You sing right along with the band; You shine up your shoes for services; There’s blood on your hands; You turned your back on the homeless; And the ones that don’t fit in your plan; Quit playing religion games; There’s blood on your hands. Instead let there be a flood of justice; An endless procession of righteous living, living; Instead let there be a flood of justice; Instead of a show. (Jon Foreman)⁵

In Amos 5:24, we read “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”. The picture is of a river, that is both abundant and consistent. The river does not stop. This message is:

“in a context where most streams were seasonal, abounding with life-giving water in the rainy seasons and bone-dry through the long, hot summer. The similes also served to show how utterly essential justice and righteousness were to Israel’s life and faith. A society in covenant with Yahweh could no more live without them than without an adequate and steady water supply.”⁶

- ? We live in a state where many country towns now have severe water restrictions and not only have to truck in water and feed for livestock, but also drinking water.⁷ What would happen in our country if justice and righteousness ‘dried up’? What changes would need to happen for justice and righteousness to be as abundant and consistent as a river?

When commentators read Amos 5:26-27, they raise questions, because it seems to refer to idolatry being practiced during the 40 years in the wilderness, before the people entered the promised land. One commentator said that they didn’t offer sacrifices at that time and that the deities mentioned, are astral deities worshipped in Mesopotamia. They think Amos is most likely linking their current idolatry and unjust behaviour with the “disobedience of God’s people far back into their history.”⁸

REFLECT, SHARE & PRAY: Read the following words from James 1. What does he say are essential for religion to be genuine? How are we supposed to respond to God’s word? In what area of your life is God currently challenging you to obedience? What are you going to do about that?

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you. (James 1:19-27 NLT)

⁴ <https://themuse.ijezebel.com/heres-a-detailed-plot-description-of-the-greatest-showm-1821531692>

⁵ Jon Foreman - "Instead Of A Show" – YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UihssQZoUd4> <https://genius.com/Jon-foreman-instead-of-a-show-lyrics>

⁶ Hubbard, D. A. (1989). *Joel and Amos: an Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 25). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p193-194.

⁷ Barbour, L. (23 July 2019) *Country towns close to reaching ‘day zero’, as water supplies dry up in the drought.* ABC News Online.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-07-14/day-zero-approaching-as-towns-run-out-of-water/11271430>

⁸ McComiskey, T. E., & Longman, T., III. (2008). *Amos*. In D. E. Garland (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel–Malachi (Revised Edition)* (Vol. 8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p402.