

Idle Songs
Amos 5:21-24, 6:4-8

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As we continue our journey through the minor prophets of the Old Testament, today we're focusing on Amos, a shepherd and arborist, who was called to be a prophet.

Amos mainly preached to the people of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, about their wickedness, but he also was told to take that message to the Southern Kingdom, too.

He prophesied against neighboring nations such as Syria, the Philistines, and Moab due to their sins, delivering messages of judgment.

Amos often goes unnoticed and unpreached because it's not a popular book. Why? There are several reasons.

First, to preach Amos is to preach justice. Amos' pronouncement of judgment on the nations surrounding Israel and Judah illustrated God's displeasure with injustice in the world.

God doesn't like societies that don't care for the helpless, societies that take advantage of people.

To those who often wonder, "*Where's God in all the pain and suffering in the world?*" Amos made it clear: God sees, and He will judge!

Second, to preach Amos is to preach about repentance and forgiveness. God wanted all to see Him and His forgiveness.

Then, to preach Amos is to warn comfortable sinners about the coming judgment. This is seen when he declared the coming judgment of God to Israel's comfortable and wealthy people.

Amos sought to rouse them to repentance since Israel had grown too relaxed in their wealth and their sin.

Finally, Amos preached on the Davidic Covenant, a topic which is prominent throughout the Scriptures.

It was God's promise that a descendant of David would reign over the people of God. We know this ultimately comes true in the Person of Jesus Christ.

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Now, there are various themes in these nine chapters, but there's one theme that stands out... worship. Amos's message, centering on worship, is found primarily in two passages.

Amos 5:21-24, "I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. 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 6:4-6, "You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph."

What we must understand is that there was a big difference between the way the Israelites saw worship and the way God saw it.

The Israelites saw their worship tied to what they were doing, which makes sense because worship involves action.

These passages focus on four actions that God found offensive: feasts and gatherings, offering sacrifices, singing songs and playing instruments and preparation to look good while doing the rest.

Amos started with feasting since it was a way to celebrate God and praise Him for His blessings and to remember things God has done.

We see this in Exodus 5, 13, 23, where He promised His people deliverance from bondage, consecrated the first born and created festivals to celebrate His provisions.

In Leviticus 23 we see more festivals God commanded; Numbers 28-29 tells of more celebrations and God commanded and Deuteronomy 16 continues with even more. All these festivals were to celebrate God and His provision.

Now, these times of remembrance weren't done individually, but as a gathering of everyone. These festivals were acts of worship. When you feast, you gather together and worship.

One of the biggest feasts was Passover. The Feast of Passover was held to remember what God had done among them and to say thank you.

Exodus 12:26-27, *"And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'" Then the people bowed down and worshiped."*

All feasts were meant for them to focus on God. This is why Amos talked about worship and the sacrifices which were required since these sacrifices were important when worshiping God.

In fact, the whole book of Leviticus is dedicated to explaining these sacrifices and explaining all about the priests who would do them.

Amos was trying to get the people to understand that the biggest parts of worship was focusing on God in their offerings.

Then Amos directed the attention of the Israelites to their offerings. Basically, there were five different offerings the people of God used to worship, and each meant something different:

- Burnt offerings meant to show thanks and devotion to God and for unintentional sins
- Grain and drink offerings showed thanksgiving for God's favor
- Peace and free will offerings emphasized fellowship and connection with God
- Sin offerings were made for atonement for sins
- Trespass offerings were made for atonement for sins against others

Giving God an offering is something that has always been a part of worship even before Moses wrote down all the rules, regulations and requirements given to him by God.

This is why God expressed disapproval for their offerings in verse 21, *"Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them."*

And then, because of God's anger with them, Amos tells the people that God didn't want to hear their unrepentant music. He didn't want to hear their songs or their instruments.

Amos 5:23, *"Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps."* Amos 6:5, *"You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments."*

This was serious because songs and instruments were a big part of worship for the Israelites. Look at the Book of Psalm, it's a collection of 150 worship songs used in connecting with God.

Besides the Psalms, there are many examples of songs in the Bible being written when people were thankful to God or wanted to remember what God did.

In fact, 1 Chronicles 25 tells us that King David organized musicians so that instruments and singing would always be present at worship in the tabernacle and then later in the temple.

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Lastly, Amos focused on God's disapproval of the Israelites preparation for worship. The people had become obsessed with wanting to look good while they did worshipful things.

As I read earlier in Amos 6:6, we see that in the midst of talking about songs and instruments, Amos mentions that the people were lying on *"beds of ivory,"* drinking *"wine from bowls"* and anointing *"themselves with the finest oils."*

The inclusion of this shows more about the heart of the people than anything else.

Elsewhere in the Bible we see that people were to wash themselves and be prepared to worship the Lord, but Amos is talking about a different type of preparation.

Many of the items that Amos mentions: song, music and worship are mentioned in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and many other passages in the Bible.

The people were supposed to do these things as part of their practice of showing God how much He was worth to them. That's what "worship" means.

The people of God were to show God how much He was worth by feasts and gathering at certain times, offering sacrifices, singing songs and playing instruments, and preparation. And yet, there was an issue!

Listen to how displeased God was with His people:

5:21: *"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me."*

5:22a: *"Even though you offer Me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them"*

5:22b: *"Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them."*

5:23a: *"Away with the noise of your songs!"*

5:23b: *"I will not listen to the music of your harps."*

6:7a: *"Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile."*

6:7b: *"Your feasting and lounging will end."*

6:8: *"I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses."*

6:8: *"I will deliver up the city and everything in it."*

God's angry with His people for how they treated Him. He no longer appreciated their offerings.

He didn't want to hear them sing or play instruments to Him. He didn't like the way they approached Him in worship.

He was fed up and wouldn't tolerate their sinfulness any longer. He states in these verses that He was going to hand them over to their enemies where they'd be taken into exile.

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Another issue God had was with their worship. The way the Israelites saw worship and the way God saw it was very different.

The people of God were worshipping, but when God saw the actions of their feasting, gathering, sacrifices, singing songs, playing instruments and their preparation, He noticed an absence.

God noticed that they lacked three very important ingredients. First, the people lacked justice.

Injustice, unfairness and the oppression of the poor was rampant among the people of God.

They should've known better. We need only look at the story of the Exodus where God's people were crying out to Him in their slavery.

He heard their cries and redeemed them from their physical, social, and spiritual oppression. In Exodus we see how God wanted His people to reflect Him.

After the exodus, God brought them together as His people in the Promised Land. He called them to be a people that represented His mercy, justice, and character; not only to each other, but to the nations around them.

But they failed, and that failure impacted their hearts and their standing before God.

That lack of justice and mercy impacted their worship. Loving injustice and not caring about the poor or the downtrodden separates people who love God from God.

Second, in Amos 5:24, Amos let them know they lacked righteousness. Righteousness is right living, following God's Law, living in truthfulness, and being ethical.

God saw none of that with His people. They acted opposite of His Law. They didn't live in truthfulness. They were unethical.

Just like the lack of justice, the lack of righteousness separates us from God, and we can't tell God how much He's worth if we are separated from Him.

Third, in Amos 6:8, Amos lets them know they lacked humility. God wants us to be humble before Him. Humbleness is a key part of worship. Humbleness is an essential ingredient in our relationships with God.

The Bible tells us that God opposes those who aren't humble. We need to understand that God responds when we humble ourselves before Him.

So basically, God's people were acting in all the right ways for worship, but in reality, they weren't worshipping God at all.

Worship is not just actions. Worship involves focus and devotion to God, not only in our actions, but in our hearts.

Motivation mattered because there were empty actions happening. The people lacked justice, righteousness, and humbleness.

One way to summarize what's happening is to look to the words of Jesus about another group of people who had the same issue. In Matthew 15, Jesus says uses Amos' words to chide the Pharisees and scribes.

Matthew 15:7-9, *“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”*”

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Conclusion

So, what does any of this have to do with us? As Amos has shown, both actions and motivation are important when we relate to God in worship.

What’s your motivation for coming to church..., to worship? I could list several reasons as to why we should attend worship services on a regular basis, but Amos would want me to share only one: “God’s worth it.”

The music, people, style of preaching, activities and wanting to look good don’t matter. Our motivation for worship must be that God Almighty is worth our time, energy and focus.

What’s your motivation for giving offerings? I could list several reasons as to why we should give tithes and offerings on a regular basis, but Amos would want me to share only one: “He is worth it.”

God doesn’t want empty sacrifices motivated by force or habit or empty loyalty.

Yes, Grace Fellowship will still take your money if it’s given wrongly, but we should want to give out of the abundance of our love for God.

What’s your motivation for singing worship songs? Do you focus on the words that are sung no matter the style of music?

I could list several reasons as to why we should worship the Lord with song on a regular basis, but Amos would want me to share only one: "He is worth it."

So..., do we prepare our hearts for worship?

I could list several reasons as to why we should prepare ourselves for worship on a regular basis, but Amos would want me to share only one: "He is worth it."

We can prepare ourselves through prayer. We can prepare ourselves by setting aside any activities that get in the way.

We can prepare by setting alarms or getting our clothes ready the night before. Amos said to the People of God in Amos 5...

Amos 5:21-24, "I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. 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."

Let's not let those words apply to us.