

Unacceptable Worship

Amos 5:21-27

In John 4:23, Jesus says that God seeks people who will worship Him. And yet not all worship pleases God. The prophet Amos tells us that there is a kind of worship that is unacceptable; that God actually rejects! Amos ministered during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah (783-742 BC), and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (786-746 BC). This was a time of political and military height for these nations. Peace reigned and their economies were booming. And they did “worship” God. And yet, God found their worship to be unacceptable. May we hear the message of Amos and turn away from unacceptable worship!

Read Amos 5:21-27

1. What is God’s view of Israel’s worship? What do you see in the context?
2. What does Amos indicate that the Lord desires from his people in this passage that would make their worship acceptable?
3. Read Micah 6:6-8; Jeremiah 22:3; Ezekiel 45:9; Matthew 23:23. What do these add to our understanding of what God desires from his people?
4. What does it mean to “let justice roll down like waters” and “righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (v. 24)?

In his commentary on Amos, David Hubbard says:

Justice and righteousness in the Old Testament carry us beyond strict adherence to law, as central as law is (cf. Amos 2:4, 6–8). Both terms have to do with covenantal responsibilities and are close to being synonymous, especially when they are paired (cf. Gen. 18:19; Prov. 1:3; 2:9) . . . Both words centre in action on behalf of the poor, the underrepresented and the oppressed, as our immediate context in Amos (vv. 10–12, 15) suggests. ‘The justice of Yahweh is not of the type of the blindfolded maiden holding a balance in her hand, the justice of Yahweh extends one arm to the wretch stretched out on the ground whilst the other pushes away the one who causes the misfortunes.’

5. What might it mean in our day to practice justice by extending “one arm to the wretch stretched out on the ground whilst the other pushes away the one who causes misfortunes?”

6. Who are the “poor, the underrepresented and the oppressed” for whom we ought to seek justice? Practically, what can we do?

7. What is the main take away for you from Luther’s sermon and this passage in Amos? What aspects of justice-seeking do you sense God might want you to pursue?