

THE WORSHIP GOD REJECTS

Text: Amos 5:1–24

Big Idea | God rejects worship that is disconnected from justice.

***Joel to dress in all black, as if for a funeral. Flowers appear on the preaching table. Scripture on the screen: Dark stage. "Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again."*

A FUNERAL BEFORE DEATH | vv. 1-2

"Hear this word, Israel, this lament I take up concerning you: Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to raise her up."

****Create special slide: like a funeral cover photo, but instead of a person, it's a picture of LLCF, "Light & Life" "1954- _____"**

Welcome to Light and Life Christian Fellowship. And welcome — to our funeral.

(pause —)

Light and Life Christian Fellowship. Born: 1954.

Beloved community. Faithful witness. A people who gathered in this place week after week, decade after decade, to sing and pray and bring their offerings to God.

She lived a good life. But toward the end —

(slowly, quietly)

She stopped hearing the poor.

She learned to sing louder on Sunday than she served on Monday.

And she confused the presence of God with the performance of worship.

(long pause)

And so — she died.

(beat)

Now — before you get uncomfortable — I need to tell you something.

This is not Light & Life's funeral —not yet.

This is the Prophet Amos — standing in front of a nation that is still very much alive, still worshipping, still singing, still bringing their offerings — and pronouncing a funeral over them.

Not because the story is over. But because he loves them enough to sing the funeral song before it becomes necessary.

Because somewhere inside this dark passage — three times, in case anyone misses it — God whispers the same thing:

V.4 This is what the Lord says to Israel: “Seek me and live;

That is why we are here tonight. Not to die. But to seek the Lord and live.

Tonight, we will be reading the verses topically, not in order, so just follow along with me as you find Amos 5. But before we move forward, let’s ground ourselves in the definition that I gave us in week one about justice according to Amos:

JUSTICE, according to Amos, is **treating people the way God requires—especially the vulnerable—so that no one is exploited, ignored, or pushed aside.**

POINT 1 GOD REJECTS EMPTY WORSHIP | vv. Amos 5:21–23

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

*22 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.*

*23 Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.*

Was this hard to hear? God saying I hate. I despise.

We have domesticated God so thoroughly that we forget — love, real love, is not neutral. It is not polite. A God who cannot hate cannot truly love, because hatred and love are the same fire burning in opposite directions.

This is not a judge reading a verdict. This is a father.

And any parent who has watched their child being destroyed by something knows — you don’t stop loving. You love harder. And that love, turned toward the thing that is killing your child, looks exactly like what God is expressing here.

I hate what is destroying you.

I despise what you have let replace me.

Not because I am done with you — but because I am not.

And then — this is where it gets truly shocking — he tells us what he hates. And it is not what we expect. He lists things that look like faithful church attendance! He hates things that look like fellowship and generosity. He hates all the things that look good.

Reminder: The people Amos is addressing are not pagans. They are not atheists. They are the religious insiders — the ones who show up, sing the songs, bring the offerings, and observe the feasts. Religiously devout people.

So why does God reject their worship? Not because they are doing it wrong liturgically. He is rejecting it because it is disconnected from how they are living the other six days of the week.

Outside the sanctuary — in the courts, in the markets, at the city gate where the poor came looking for justice — the same people who were lifting their hands on the Sabbath were crushing the needy on Monday.

Bribes were being taken. The grain of the poor was being taxed. The one who stood up for justice in court was being shouted down by the congregation. And then Sunday came around again and they were back in their seats, singing, “To worship you I liiiiveeee”...

The worship was real. The injustice was also real. And God says — I cannot receive one while the other is happening.

This is not a passage about musical style or liturgical form. It is about integrity — the gap between what we sing on Sunday and what we do on Monday. The question is not whether your worship is loud enough — it is whether it is honest enough.

A generation after Amos, God says the same thing through Isaiah. Different prophet. Different decade. Same diagnosis.

Isaiah 1:11 — "What are your multiplied sacrifices to me? I have had enough of burnt offerings... I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats."

Same words. Same people. Same problem.

Which tells us something important — this is not a one-time corrective aimed at one particularly corrupt generation. This is a pattern. A recurring disease in the body of God's people. It showed up in Amos' Israel. It showed up in Isaiah's Israel. It showed up in the medieval church. It showed up in the pre-Civil War American church, where slaveholders took communion on Sunday and returned to the plantation on Monday.

And if we are honest — it shows up here.

Not because we are uniquely wicked. But because we are human. And humans have an extraordinary capacity to keep the religious forms alive long after the Spirit has quietly left the building.

We need to examine our own lives and the culture within the church to see where are we embracing empty worship?

God is not done speaking. And what he says next is not what you expect from a God who just said I hate and I despise.

POINT 2 GOD SEES WHAT WORSHIP IS COVERING | vv. Amos 5:10–13

*10 There are those who hate the one who **upholds justice in court** and detest the one **who tells the truth.***

11 You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain.

Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them;

though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine.

12 For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins.

There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

13 Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil.

The problem is not JUST that injustice is happening. It gets worse! The problem is that the religious community has become hostile to the people trying to stop it.

Verse 10: “They hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth.”

The city gate was where legal decisions were made. In other words, the people speaking truth and defending the vulnerable were not being celebrated — they were being silenced.

Verse 11: “They levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain.”

This is not passive neglect. It is active exploitation dressed in religious respectability. The wealthy are building luxurious homes by crushing the vulnerable beneath them.

And what makes this passage so unsettling is that worship had not disappeared while all of this was happening.

Songs were still being sung. New albums are being released, worship concerts are being sold out...

Festivals were still being held.

God's name was still being invoked publicly.

Which means entire communities can convince themselves they are righteous simply because religious language surrounds them.

And slowly, a dangerous assumption settles in: **"If God's name is attached to us, then God must be pleased with us."**

But Amos destroys that illusion.

Because Israel had all the symbols: the sacrifices, the festivals, the identity as God's people.

And yet God says, "I hate, I despise your worship." Why?

Because God has never confused public religious performance with covenant faithfulness.

Verse 12: "For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins."

God sees the ledger they think is hidden.

He sees the bribes.

He sees the corruption.

He sees the vulnerable pushed aside while worship music fills the sanctuary.

And then Amos says something chilling in verse 13: "The prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil."

This is not God approving silence. Amos is describing a culture where moral cowardice has settled over the community. Everyone can see what is happening, but nobody wants to say anything because silence has become safer than truth.

That is the terrifying possibility Amos is confronting: **that people can participate in worship while becoming numb to the people God cares about.**

Listen to me and heed this warning: religion has a frightening ability to soothe the conscience without transforming the character.

We begin mistaking participation for obedience, attendance for repentance, emotion for surrender. And eventually worship stops being a place where we encounter God and becomes a place where we hide from Him while looking godly to those watching.

That is why Amos keeps dragging Israel back to the courts, the poor, the vulnerable, the oppressed. Because the real spiritual condition of Israel was not being revealed at the altar. It was being revealed at the city gate.

How they treated people told the truth about their worship.

POINT 3 — GOD STILL INVITES | Amos 5:4, 6, 14

Three times in this chapter, God says some version of the same invitation:

“Seek me and live.”

Verse 4.

Verse 6.

Verse 14.

Amos is standing in the middle of a funeral song, yet the door of repentance is still open! The prophet who announced judgement is also pleading for life. Amos does not want to be right about the funeral.

And that tension reveals something important about the heart of God. God’s warning are not cruelty. They are mercy spoken loudly enough to wake us up before destruction becomes final.

“Seek me and live”. Notice what God does *not* say. He does not say: “Seek Bethel and live.” “Seek religious activity and live.” “Seek better worship songs and live.” No — He says: “Seek me.”

This distinction matters because Israel had confused the presence of religious activity with the presence of God Himself.

They still had worship gatherings.

They still had sacred places.

They still had songs, sacrifices, festivals, and rituals.

But they have lost the relationship underneath it all. This is the distinction that unlocks the entire chapter: God is not anti-worship. He is anti-performance. He is not rejecting

singing, gathering, offerings, or prayer. He is rejecting those things being used as substitutes for actually knowing Him and being transformed by that relationship.

Because biblical worship was never meant to terminate at the altar. It was meant to flow outward into justice, mercy, righteousness, and love of neighbor.

Then Amos brings the invitation into even sharper focus in verse 14: "Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is."

That last phrase is both devastating and hopeful: "just as you say he is."

Israel was already claiming God's presence. They already believed themselves to be God's people. They were already using the language.

And God says:

- I want that to actually be true.
- I do not want your worship to be pretend.
- I do not want your gatherings to be hollow.
- I do not want your songs disconnected from your lives.
- Seek good.
- Turn toward what reflects my heart.
- Let your worship become honest again.
- Because the funeral announcement is not the final word in Amos.

The final word is the invitation. God announces death so that someone might still choose life.

That is the heart of God in this chapter: not a cold prosecutor eager to condemn, but a grieving Father warning His children before it is too late.

He has already written the eulogy —and He is still hoping He never has to read it.

POINT 4 — GOD DESCRIBES WHAT REAL WORSHIP PRODUCES | Amos 5:24

When Martin Luther King Jr. stood before hundreds of thousands at the March on Washington, he reached back into the words of Amos and declared, "**No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.**" He quoted Amos because he understood something deeply biblical: real worship does not stay trapped inside a sanctuary. When people truly encounter God, His righteousness begins to flow outward into the way they treat neighbors, strangers, the vulnerable, and even enemies.

That is the image Amos gives us in verse 24...

“Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.”

Have you ever stood before the power and might of a waterfall? I remember standing near Snoqualmie Falls in Washington and being overwhelmed by the force of the water. Before you even see the falls, you hear them. The ground almost feels alive beneath you. Millions of gallons of water crashing downward with a power you could never stop, redirect, or contain.

And that’s the image Amos gives us here. God is not looking for occasional acts of goodness squeezed out of his people, or symbolic moments of compassion. He says, “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.” In other words, when people truly encounter God, righteousness should not trickle out of them occasionally—it should pour out of them with force, consistency, and life-giving power.

A river—constant, moving, impossible to contain. A never-failing stream that reshapes everything it touches. Rivers carve landscapes. They bring life where there was dryness. They cannot remain hidden or stagnant.

And in the Hebrew prophets, justice and righteousness are deeply connected realities. **Justice** is about right relationships with people—refusing exploitation, oppression, corruption, and indifference. **Righteousness** is about right relationship with God—living aligned with His character and ways. Amos refuses to separate the two. A person cannot claim intimacy with God while simultaneously crushing people made in God’s image.

This verse becomes the positive vision underneath all of God’s earlier rebukes. God is not just condemning empty religion; He is revealing the kind of community He desires. He wants a people whose worship gathering and daily living flow together like the same river. A people whose songs sound believable because their lives reflect the God they sing about.

That is what real worship produces. Not merely emotion. Not just spiritual experiences. Not polished services or religious performance. Real worship produces a transformed people through whom justice and righteousness begin to flow into the world around them.

If justice is not flowing, worship is not reaching!!

CONCLUSION — THE GOD WHO GRIEVES BEFORE HE JUDGES

At the beginning of this chapter, Amos walked onto the stage dressed for a funeral. He sang a dirge over Israel as though the nation were already dead. And yet, in the very same chapter, God says three different times, “*Seek me and live.*”

Both realities exist together because this is the heart of God. He is grieved by what His people are becoming, and He is still inviting them back. The funeral song and the invitation coexist because that is what love sounds like when it watches someone destroy themselves. God is not cold toward His people in Amos 5. He is heartbroken.

And that leaves us with the real question of the chapter. Not whether our worship is impressive enough, emotional enough, or polished enough, but whether it is honest enough. Whether what happens in this room on Sunday is actually connected to the way we live on Monday.

Is justice flowing from this community? Are the vulnerable being noticed? Are the poor being seen? Are people encountering the mercy, righteousness, and compassion of God through the lives of His people? Is the gap between our singing and our living getting smaller...or wider?

Because Amos says real worship does not stop at the altar. It flows outward like a river. When righteousness begins moving through a people like a never-failing stream, you know the worship is reaching God because it is transforming the people offering it.

But if there is no justice, no mercy, no righteousness flowing outward—then all that remains is noise. And the tragedy of Amos 5 is that a people can keep singing long after they have stopped listening.

So hear the invitation of God today:

Seek me and live.

Not perform for me. Not impress me. Seek me. Return to me. Walk with me. Let your worship reach your life.

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT

“Where has my worship not reached my life?”

“Who am I ignoring that God sees?”