

**“The Day of the Lord”**  
**Amos 5:18-27**

**February 14, 2016**

**SCRIPTURE INTRO:**

This winter we’re studying the little book of Amos.

Amos is not a book of the Bible that we read very much.

That may be because it’s like a bucket of cold water or a slap in the face.

It’s the Lord’s indictment of the church—not the world—the church.

The message of Amos is not intended to comfort us at first—

but to sober us, even to frighten us.

But if you open yourself to Amos’ message,

and accept it as God’s inspired word,

and if you let it have its way with you,

then there is profound comfort and security to be found.

**INTRO:** Happy Valentines Day.

Let's start with an imaginary Valentines Day story Amos style.

Imagine a married couple, and the husband has gone all out for Valentines Day—flowers, card, chocolates, jewelry—the whole shebang.

They're having dinner at a fancy restaurant, waiter has just poured champagne.

And he says to his wife: "You aren't saying much. Don't you like your gifts?"

She says: "Something's not right."

"What do you mean?" He asks.

She gestures at the flowers, the jewelry, the elegant place setting and she says:

"What is all this? I don't even know what this is. I don't know what it means."

He says: "What do you mean you don't know what it means? It means I love you."

She says: "Does it?"

Then he really begins to protest:

"How can you say that? You're the love of my life! You mean the world to me!

I worship the ground you walk on! Look at all I give you and provide for you!"

He gets more and more indignant, protesting his love, insisting that she believe him and affirm that these gifts are expressions of his undying love."

Then she holds up her hand to stop him and she tells him that she knows.

She knows there is another woman. She knows he's being unfaithful.

He sits there for a minute and then he says:

"But what about these great gifts? You can't argue with these gifts.

You have to admit these prove that I do, in fact, love you.

And she says: "I hate, I despise your Valentines Day card."

"I cannot stand your flowers and jewelry."

"I will not listen to your protestations of love."

"Away with all of this."

That's an ugly picture, one you'd rather not imagine on Valentines Day.

But that's the spirit of this passage.

The Israelites were bringing the Lord all the elements of their religious worship.

Feasts, assemblies, burnt offerings, grain offerings, choice fellowship offerings, excellent music, powerful singing.

Worship centers in Israel were packed and the worship experience was dynamic.

They were pouring their time and money and emotional energy into worship. They loved worship and it made them feel good about themselves and God.

But the Lord said: I hate it all. I despise it.

Your offerings, your feasts, your assemblies—I can't stand any of them.

Your singing is like noise to me. Away with it.

If you've been following our study of Amos, you know why.

It's because the Israelites loved their money, pleasures, luxuries instead of God.

They thought they loved the Lord, they claimed they loved the Lord—

they certainly enjoyed going to worship services.

But the Lord says over and over that their willingness to use and abuse people in the pursuit of money and pleasure is proof they don't really love him at all

## Chapter 2

This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.

## Chapter 4

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, “Bring us some drinks!”

## Chapter 5

You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain.

That's why the Lord says:

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!

If worship is not an expression of the heart, the faith, the love, and the obedience of the worshipper—then God hates it. I think we all get that.

We understand why the wife didn't want her husband's gifts.

We understand why God wouldn't want ours if living in blatant disobedience.

That's Amos' main point in this passage.

But there's another point about worship Amos makes in passage that's more subtle.

And this is what I want us to focus on.

Not only should our worship be an expression of faithful hearts and lives—

worship ought to produce that fruit of righteousness and obedience in us.

That's what I want us to ponder.

What does this passage show us about the kind of worship that moves our

hearts toward God and produces in us the fruit of obedience and righteousness?  
Two points: 1. An essential element of life-changing worship  
2. A famous biblical example applied to us

Credit where credit is due: Dr. Robert Rayburn, Faith Pres Tacoma, sermon

### **MP#1 An essential element of life-changing worship**

If you surveyed the American church scene, you could easily find example after example of bizarre, unbiblical worship practices.

I was watching a TV preacher one evening a while back.

He was teaching the prosperity Gospel, telling how God wanted to make his children rich, and at the conclusion of his sermon, he started walking up and down the aisles throwing dollar bills into the crowd.

The praise team started jamming and everybody went crazy.

There is plenty of showmanship and entertainment-oriented nonsense like that.

But the thing I find so interesting about Amos

is that he barely criticizes Israel for their unbiblical worship practices.

He acknowledges that it is a problem. He mentions Bethel and Gilgal.

Those were worship sites established as an alternative to Jerusalem.

That was clearly in violation of the law of God which said Jerusalem only.

We know from other Old Testament books that worship in at these alternative worship sites had a veneer of biblical practice and terminology but paganism.

For example, at Bethel there was a golden calf that the people used in worship.

They claimed this golden calf represented Yahweh, just aid to worship him.

They would have resented being called idolater or pagans. We worship the Lord!

We also know that at times there were even more explicit Canaanite practices incorporated into their worship such as the addition of a female deity who was worshipped alongside Yahweh and even ritual prostitution.

But isn't it interesting that when Amos mentions all their elements of worship—  
feasts, burnt offerings, grain offerings, fellowship offerings, songs—

he doesn't critique each one and show how they aren't biblically correct?

He doesn't show, for example, how their sacrifices were not done in accordance with the instructions in the book of Leviticus.

He doesn't say that you need to change this or that element of worship.

Instead, he focuses all his criticism on one theological point.

He identifies this as the fundamental problem with Israelite worship—

and as the key to correcting it.  
So what is it? What's this theological key?

It's in verses 18-20. Let's read those again.

Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD?

That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light—pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

The essential element for life-changing worship is a lively, realistic, sober view of the day of the Lord. That's what was missing from Israelite worship. That's what we have to affirm and cultivate.

So what's the day of the Lord? I think you know.

It's a day, a specific time, when the Lord himself intervenes in human affairs.

When Amos and other prophets speak of this day they emphasize the personal appearance and personal activity of the Lord.

Isaiah calls it the day of the Lord's vengeance, day of the Lord's burning anger. Often in the prophets, the Lord speaks of that day in the first person.

“The day I punish Israel.” “The day I cleanse you.” “The day I visit them.” It's the Lord's personal intervention that makes this coming day so cataclysmic and so definitive.

The day of the Lord is the day of judgment.

Judgment and punishment of sin is a constant feature of in all the prophets. It's called “the day of doom” by Ezekiel.

Isaiah calls it “the day of reckoning” and “the day of vengeance.”

The day of the Lord brings deliverance and salvation for God's true, faithful people. There's that famous day of the Lord passage in Joel.

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

Everywhere in these day of the Lord passages we find this double expectation—punishment for the wicked but deliverance for God's faithful people.

The day of the Lord is foreshadowed by the disasters and deliverances of history.

That's exactly what Amos does later in this book. He describes the coming destruction of Israel by the Assyrian empire in terms that reflect the final judgment and the deliverance of a remnant as the final salvation.

The other Old Testament prophets did the same thing.

They see present events as precursors of the ultimate, cosmic day of the Lord.

All this explains why the language of the day of the Lord is carried over into the New Testament and is used to refer to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

We read one of those passages earlier from 2 Peter.

The Lord Jesus will come in judgment and deliverance on the appointed day.

This is the last word of the Bible: Behold, I am coming soon.

The day of the Lord is the next big event in history.

A lively, realistic, sober view of the day of the Lord is an essential element of life-changing worship that produces the fruit of obedience and righteousness.

You will never love and truly worship a God you do not also fear.

You have no great reason to love God if he has not delivered you from something terrible and given you something wonderful.

There is such a thing as salvation.

And that salvation is given to those who truly believe that his wrath threatens and who also truly believe that his grace delivers.

This was what was missing from Israelite worship.

They did not have a lively, realistic, and sober view of the day of the Lord.

It was not a reality that permeated their worship and thinking.

They had certainly heard of it.

But they approached it in a shallow, trivial way. It did not grip them.

They did not think God would really judge anybody—certainly not them.

So they had no real understanding of their need for God's mercy and grace.

Consequently, their worship practices simply became way to feel good about themselves and scratch their spiritual itch.

You can see why Amos didn't get bogged down criticizing this or that unbiblical element of their worship service.

Unless you get this right, none of that other stuff is going to change.

But if you do get this right, then lots of the details will take care of themselves.

Our offerings and feasts and music and singing will reflect this great reality.

and every Lord's day will make us reckon with the end of time

and the judgment day of God.

So that's the teaching, now let's look at how it works in practice.

And what's really wonderful is that there is an example in the Bible itself.

So let's consider . . .

## **MP#2 A famous biblical example applied to us**

It's Psalm 73. Do you remember that Psalm?

Written by a man named Asaph who was a musician and song leader in Temple.

He wrote several Psalms, but this is his most famous.

It's about a crisis of faith that he experienced.

You can read it this afternoon, but let me give you the highlights.

It starts out this way:

“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.”

but as for me, my feet had almost slipped, I almost lost my foothold”

So how did he almost slip? That's the question.

Asaph doesn't give us the specifics, but he suffered a loss of some kind.

A loss of financial security, or health, or a loss of respect and affirmation.

It might have been a sudden loss of these things, or it might have just been

a long-term deficit of them that wore on him.

Something bad happened to Asaph and it shook his faith in God.

I nearly lost my foothold because . . .

“I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

It wasn't just the loss that threw Asaph into this crisis,

it really started when he looked around at other people, unbelievers.

He looked at people who didn't care about God and were living for themselves,

And what did he see?

He saw people who were prosperous, they had plenty of money,

they had no financial worries, they were enjoying the finer things of life.

Their businesses were flourishing. Everything they touched turned to money.

And he envied them. He coveted their prosperity.

Not only that, they were healthy.

“They have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong.

They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.”

Wealth and health went together in those days just like it does in ours.

These were people who could afford the best doctors,  
who could spend days in leisure and then get a massage to work out all that stress.

And there was another thing that really bothered Asaph.

That was how these people were admired and followed.

Their success made them popular.

“Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.”

People were just lapping up everything these people did and said.

Here I am, a believer, serving in the church, working as a music minister,  
and my people don't treat me like that. They don't admire me and appreciate me.

Asaph still had a clear enough mind to see the true character of these people.

Saw they were proud, arrogant, callous, scoffers, threatening, malicious—

but that increased his inner conflict because instead of all of these destructive  
character traits knocking them down, they were prospering! He sums it up:

“This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.”

So there was a loss of financial security or health or affirmation,

or a long-term lack of those things that wore him down.

And then there was envy and discontentment with his life.

This is not the life I want. This is not the life I deserve.

Those things came together to push Asaph to a very low point spiritually.

Here's how he expressed it:

“Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain I have washed my hands in innocence.

All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

What's the point of being a Christian if those who are not Christians get  
the blessings I want and I get troubles instead.

It actually seems like I'm being punished for trying to be good.

He tried to figure it out but he couldn't:

“When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me  
till I entered the sanctuary of God;

He was still in spiritual turmoil. But he went to church.

He had to go to church. It was his job.

He was a song leader. 1 Chronicles tells he was also a percussionist.

That's how it was with Asaph. He had to go. So he went to worship.

And when he was there, something happened:

Then I understood the final destiny (of the wicked).

In other words, he came to worship and the reality

of the day of the Lord was once again impressed upon his soul.

The Lord will intervene in history to judge the wicked and deliver his people.

And from this point on, Asaph begins to rise out of his funk.

This was not new teaching. Asaph knew this.

It had just lost its influence on him during his crisis.

His envy and discontentment and self-pity had covered it up.

But he came to church and in that worship service and it all came back to him—

the day of the Lord, heaven and hell, God's wrath and God's mercy and grace.

And these great realities overwhelmed his doubts.

He saw how his envy of the wicked was so short sighted,

because they are destined for destruction on the day of the Lord.

So what is they have money and health and the admiration of people?

Their future will undo everything they ever lived for.

Their lack of faith in God will eventually cause them to lose all they have.

They are on slippery ground. They will be cast down to ruin.

Completely destroyed, swept away with terrors. Despised as a fantasy.

It's not at all that he was glad people are going to hell—

it's that his view of eternity and God's final judgment had been restored.

He knew again that as a believer, his future is bright with hope and joy.

As a side note, we don't know how long it took for this to sink into Asaph's heart and bring him back—it might have taken weeks or months.

It might have meant continuing to go to church when he didn't want to.

This is a poem so everything is compressed and he presents it like a bolt of lightning.

But it might not have happened that way. Could have been more gradual.

And more to the point, we aren't told how the day of the Lord was re-introduced—through the singing of a hymn, a prayer, a Scripture reading, or a sermon.

That doesn't matter. The point is that there was a lively, realistic, sober view of the day of the Lord in the Temple worship at that time.

What if he had gone to a worship service where they didn't have any of that

judgment stuff, no day of the Lord, no talk about God's wrath and mercy—

we want to make people feel good! Positive thinking. Prosperity. Whatever.

There are plenty of worship services like that, in Amos' day and in ours.

What happens is, there's no power to change, no power to grow in holiness and righteousness and obedience, because it's not about God.

But Asaph did reckon with the day of the Lord, and it produced in him the fruit of righteousness and obedience because it set him free to deal with the living God, it opened the door to the throne room of the God of grace and mercy. That's what Amos so desperately wanted for worship in his day.

And that's what we should always want for ours too.

How are we going to face the struggles of life in a fallen world—disappointments, illnesses, unrealized dreams and expectations and the deaths of people we love—how are we going to face those things together as a body? And in the midst of those, how are we going to grow in holiness?

It's going to take worship that pushes our minds and hearts to face the next big event on God's calendar—the day of the Lord Jesus.

And to reckon with him, and to say: Amen. Come quickly.