

Amos: Too Late
Sermon 4-29-18
By Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Amos 5:21-24

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

Message:

In December of 2013, President Obama attended the memorial service for Nelson Mandela. And the news story wasn't about Nelson Mandela or President Obama. It was about the sign language interpreter. Many were outraged that this interpreter was a fake. He didn't know how to sign for the deaf and hearing impaired. In the video you're about to watch, watch how the woman to the left signs correctly what is being said while the so called interpreter on stage does the same "sign language" symbols over and over again. (Play Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJlttIL2PSs&t=2s>) If you're someone who's deaf or hearing impaired, wouldn't you be outraged that they put a fake sign language interpreter on stage? It would have been better if they didn't have a sign language interpreter at all. But instead they tried to fake it for such an important event. He was putting on a show, but no one got anything out of it. It meant nothing.

Similarly, when we look at our passage, God is essentially saying that your worship is a show and it doesn't mean anything to me. Why? Because it's too late. This is all for show and means nothing. "²¹I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps." Now remember, that at this point in time, Jesus had not come to earth and had not sacrificed Himself on the cross for our sins. So the way the Israelites had to make things right with God was by offering sacrifices. Sacrificing their best livestock. Sacrificing the first fruits of their farming yields. This is how they kept a right relationship with God. And God is telling them that He will not accept them. You

may not think much of it, but imagine how devastating this would be to these people. These are the only ways they know how to make things right with God. God is accusing them of many sins. He's laying out the judgment. He's threatening the punishment. And yet the people have no way to make things right because God will not accept their worship. And the last verse alludes to the "Why?" "24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream." Because justice has not been served, righteousness cannot flow. Amos is very poetic in delivering this message. Worship is no longer going to make things right with God. Because the worship they offer is in vain. It's not genuine. The spirit of it is off. It's similar to someone saying, "I punched my ticket to heaven when I said the sinners prayer." So they walked through the right motions. Technically speaking, they did the right stuff, but it wasn't genuine. It was about their vanity. It was about their selfish desires. It wasn't about seeking right relationship with God. Watch and listen to this video by Jon Foreman of the band, Switchfoot, titled, "Instead of a Show." (Play Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UihssQZoUd4>)

Some of you have come to church every Sunday for most of your life. You've attended just about every activity that the church offers. In a sense, you've been faithful to the church and it's ministries. But one of the things we can easily get caught in, is that by doing all this activity and all the right things, that we believe that it is pleasing to God. But the thing is it's not the activity itself that is an act of faithfulness. The activity or our worship services itself doesn't have the stuff that will make your relationship with God right. Only Jesus can do that. The most pleasing thing to God is a heart that is genuinely seeking after Him. Faithfulness is not necessarily coming to worship every Sunday. But faith cannot exist without worship. If your faith in Jesus is alive and real, it entails actions of genuine worship. Not empty and vain worship. This is one of the indictments against the Israelite people. They worship, but it's abusive worship. To channel a little bit of Paul here in Romans 6, Paul talks about how some of us may think that we should keep on sinning so that we can keep receiving grace. So, since we know that we will be forgiven, we can keep sinning all we want as long as we ask for forgiveness in the end. This is an abuse of God's grace. In fact, it's not a genuine and loving relationship with our God. And since the relationship is not genuine, then the worship can't be genuine. Indicators of this disingenuous relationship reveals itself in the actions of the people. Or the lack thereof.

You see, just living, according to Amos, isn't just about genuine worship. For we can all genuinely worship God with Sunday morning worship and sing praises to Him. But let's just say, for a minute, that the faithful life with God was just about worshipping God. That it's all about us and our well-being through singing praises to God. Or as some people say, "I want to get something out of

worship.” It’s all about the individual and what I can selfishly attain for me. This kind of worship is cultic worship. Cultic is a system of religious reverence and devotion directed toward a particular figure or object. So we are devoted to worshipping God. Worship without action is cultic. If our faith does not move beyond the worship experience, it is nothing more than cultic. And this is one of the Lord’s chief complaints against the Israelites through Amos. They worship and sacrifice like crazy, in a sense they’re devoted, but they abuse their relationship with God by not living out their relationship in their every day lives. If they are truly repentant and want to live in right relationship, their actions would change in their daily living. God isn’t just looking for words of confession, He is looking for a confessional life. God isn’t just looking for words of faithfulness, but actions of faithfulness. God isn’t just looking for words of loving the poor, but actions of serving and loving the poor. The argument could be made that if we are not seeking justice for the “least of these” in our society, then we are not following the greatest commandments. Because if we love the Lord our God, we will love ALL of His people, not just some. That’s why the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor. Because the love of neighbor stems from our intimate relationship with God. So if we worship fervently, but don’t love or have compassion for our neighbor, something is missing in our worship. We have vain worship. We have selfish worship. Worship for personal gain.

Now, let’s say we go to the opposite extreme. Let’s say that what we do all the time is serve the Lord. We may not even attend worship. We may not worship God at all in our prayers and our spiritual disciplines. But we love the poor. We are gentle and kind to those around us. We fight for justice in political action on capital hill. We do all the right actions. If only worshipping God is cultic, then only serving people is closer to a secular humanist. And can easily fall into the trap of thinking that all of their service actions and all of their goodwill will earn them affection and favor with God. That through their service they will have made things right in the world and within their heart. They don’t need God. Their morality can be achieved without God. The secular humanist has to feel justified. The distortion of the secular humanist is the belief that they can make this world right by their own might and action. That they have the willpower to make this world a better place. This idealism can be easily dashed though, when someone is malevolent and just wants to throw a wrench in their goodwill for personal gain. Or the secular humanist starts out with goodwill without need for recognition or “thanks,” but over time it turns inward looking for praise and recognition for their good works. It’s not about God, but about the self. Service without worship becomes vain service. Selfish, feel good, service. It loses its rootedness in the only one that makes our service possible, Jesus Christ.

If you haven't picked up on it by now, the Lord's issue is not with worship in and of itself. It's with the worshippers. With their abuse of worship and their abuse of grace, they've broken the covenant with God. Not just once, but many times over. One of the interesting phenomenon's of our social media world is that our show can be that everything is perfect in our lives when everything's not. I'm sure those of you who have an online social presence have had this experience. You see a friend post pictures and messages of deep love for their spouse as a public display of affection. To show their spouse how much they care for them. Pictures of smiles together and wonderful adventures. Lovely pictures with their children and being together with the family. The impression is that everything is great! It's the perfect life! And then out of left field, they post that they are seeking a divorce. And your reaction is, "Where did that come from?" They never posted their difficulties in marriage. They never gave any impression that they were struggling. For all you knew, everything was perfect. This is a disingenuous display of the self online. It's fake. And although we can be fooled by this disingenuous display, God is not faked by our disingenuous worship and actions.

Now, for the Israelites, God seems to indicate that the time for making things right has passed. It's too late. At this juncture, no sacrifice and no actions are going to make things right with God. All that's left is the punishment for their sin. While God seems to indicate that there is no hope in sight for the Israelites, is there hope for us? Those of us who have worshipped disingenuously. Those of us who have gone through the motions but not actually believed. Those of us who may have abused grace. Those of us who say that we love God, but fail to love our neighbor. Is there hope for us? And the short answer is, yes. But only if we can learn from these words of the Lord. If we can see how we don't want to be so far gone, like the Israelites, that God brings His punishment upon us. But we can't do it alone. We can't serve the poor, without worshipping the Lord. We can't seek justice, without genuinely worshipping the Lord. We can't just confess our sins to the Lord, without living the confessional life with those around us. That when the time comes to forgive, we forgive those who have wronged us. We can seek justice by advocating on Capital Hill, if you believe that is your calling, but know that our government will never be perfect. America will never be perfect. You can't legislate love. You can't legislate compassion. Those things can only come from genuine worship and relationship with our Lord, Jesus Christ.

So if it's not too late, Providence Church, I pray that our worship would be genuine. That when we say we love the Lord, that it doesn't stop at the end of this worship service, but that it carries on into our actions as we go out into the world. And I pray that our service would not merely be of the secular humanist flavor, but that it would stem from our loving relationship with God. That as we love neighbor, it's not about me or you, but it's about the living and loving God. And

that by God dwelling in our hearts and minds, that "...justice [would] roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream." Our God is great and mighty. Our God is loving and compassionate. But God hates inauthentic worship. God hates it when we are just going through the motions. God wants all of who we are. God wants our hearts. That our actions wouldn't stop here on Sunday mornings. But that it would carry into the work place. That we would share the love and hope of Jesus Christ. That even though the Israelites were beyond redemption, we can hope and know that with Jesus Christ on our side and in our hearts, that this world is not beyond redemption. God is in the work of reconciling all things. God wants to see His name lifted high and praised. God wants to see all of creation join together in praising His name. That when He is glorified, we can all experience the goodness of God on this earth. Providence Church, it's not too late to get on our knees and pray for God's mercy and forgiveness. Providence Church, it's not too late to change our actions. It's not too late to change our attitudes and hearts to truly worship the living God that we have in Jesus Christ. Praise be to Him for reconciling all things. That even in the midst of our brokenness, Jesus Christ can make us whole and call us to greater and mightier adventures. Praise be to God that Jesus is the King of all Kings. And the Lord of all Lords. That we can know the majesty of the Kingdom and the love of our Lord through His son Jesus Christ. Praise be to God! Amen.