

Amos 5:21-24

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- [0 : 00] and sharing that life and the implications of that life. We've looked at the content of the gospel. We've looked at the nature of the gospel life.
- And today we're looking at yet another gospel commitment, and particularly our commitment as the people of God to justice and righteousness.
- I want to read a passage of scripture. You'll find it on page 768, Amos 5, verses 21 through 24.
- Amos 5, verses 21 through 24. Listen, as I read this passage in your hearing this afternoon.
- I hate, I despise your feast, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
- [1 : 10] Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. And the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.
- Take away from me the noise of your songs. To the melody of your harps, I will not listen. But notice the tone changes.
- Pray with me, would you please.
- Lord, we praise you for this stunning passage, this indictment. But also it speaks of deliverance, the way out.
- I pray on this afternoon that you would open the eyes of our hearts, but open our ears so that we might hear. But also, Lord, as we would look to apply the truth that is before us on this afternoon, we pray these things.
- [2 : 28] In Christ's name, amen. In a matter of days, school will begin again in Chicagoland. How many of you remember your kindergarten experience?
- For some of us, it has been decades more than others, huh? My kindergarten year was that golden year of 1953.
- Somewhere in my early education experience, whether it was kindergarten or somewhere a little bit after that, I memorized the following words.
- And perhaps some of you did the same thing. Today, I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible with what?
- Liberty and justice for all. Those were the words that we recited daily in school.
- [3 : 46] Daily. The irony of it for me was that while I attended an all-black Douglas elementary school, but in the 50s, the ritual of what we said in school did not match the reality of what we were living in life.
- Justice. That is, access to the rights and the privileges of citizenship, at least in this context, was not my lot.
- Nor was it the lot of millions of those who had African descent like myself. Douglas elementary school was about a mile and a half from where we live.

But Lowell elementary school was within a couple of blocks from where we live. But it was not until my third grade year that I began attending what was then a largely white Lowell elementary school.

It was post the 1954 Supreme Court decision, Topeka versus the Board of Education, that banned segregation in public schools, that I began attending Lowell elementary school.

[5 : 02] If you lived in the South during that particular era, particularly in Montgomery, Alabama, things were even worse than in the Midwest where I live.

If you were an African American and you took public transportation, you could expect something like the following. You get on the bus. You pay the fare.

But then there was a section reserved for African Americans, but it was at the back of the bus. Rather than walking through the section where white sat, you would get off of the bus, go around to the side door after you paid your fare, enter the side door, and then go back to where the African Americans sat.

And it was not unheard of in that day that while some were making their journey from the front door to the side door, some of the bus drivers would even drive off, leaving some there without a ride.

Southern blacks in America in that day weren't the only ones who felt the weight. In the early 60s, I worked at a cafe right up the street from me.

[6 : 29] I lived at 941 Split Log Avenue. At the corner of 10th and Split Log, there was a cafe known as 10th Street Cafe. The owners, Rudy and Marie Draskovich, they paid us \$5 a week, a whopping \$5 a week, to wash dishes there, plus all the food that we could eat.

They paid Mary Scott, who was the black cook at that particular cafe, they paid her to serve the white constituency and to cook up those nice meals.

I remember the steam table there and pounding out pork tenderloins and cutting up lettuce for tacos. So you could see it was more than a dishwashing job, if you will.

But if the people in my neighborhood wanted to get food from the 10th Street Cafe, guess what they had to do? Number one, they couldn't come in and eat.

They had to come to the back door, order their food, and then take it with them. Huh? The decade between 1955 and 1965 in America was huge for civil rights in our country.

[7 : 56] Of course, you're aware that the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as the predominant spokesperson for civil rights in our country.

Like the prophets of old, Dr. King made some people uncomfortable. And that is what ministry that exposes wrongs, injustices, the underbellies of society, it makes people uncomfortable.

And several 8th century prophets, to include the one that we look at today, challenged the backslidden condition of the people of God. One of them was Amos.

In his book on the mind of prophets, Dr. Charles Feinberg, he speaks about the day that Amos lived in. And this is what he had to say. One of the great, it was one of great wealth, luxury, arrogance, and carnal security, oppression of the poor, moral decay, and check this out, folks, and formal worship.

The moral declension and spiritual degradation of the people, he says, were appalling. End of quote. It was because of those kinds of things in Amos day that we hear and read about the roar of the lion.

[9 : 30] Look at chapter 1 and verse 2. Of course, David and I preached through this book several years ago. But just by way of refresher for some of you, and perhaps new things for others of you, listen, look at verse 2.

And he said, the Lord, this is what the prophet Amos said, the Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem.

The pastors of the shepherds mourn and the top of Carmel withers. Notice the impact of God's voice, of God's word in that day.

It took the foundations of society. Huh? According to the early chapters in the book of Amos, there are several things that stirred the very heart of God and caused him to roar.

The roar of the lion, the lion, it signifies the rulership of a particular territory. And of course, because the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, he has universal universal and international jurisdiction.

[10 : 43] Huh? First thing we look at, and I'm just overviewing now, if there were violations of common decency, you see that in chapter 1, verse 3, to chapter 2, verse 3.

The God of all the nations, he indicted the ancient Near Eastern nations for failing to treat neighboring nations with dignity.

They were over the top, and if you will look at those verses, you will see that they were over the top in their mistreatment of the nations.

And as I look at our world, might waterboarding have fit the category of alleged misconduct?

Or the treatment by the former Chicago police commander of those who are under his jurisdiction, and bringing them? Might those things have fit in over the top kind of treatment on a human horizontal level?

[11 : 50] But not only were there violations of common decency, they were violations of covenant decency. And you see that in chapter 2, verses 4 through 16.

And here, the very people, the Lord was in special relationship. Judah and Israel were themselves guilty of dishonoring God and dishonoring people, and because of that, the lion roared.

Look at chapter 5 with me. Amos' sermons to the people of his day continue through chapter 6, chapter 1 through 6. You get the sermons or the oracles.

Chapter 7 through 9, you get the visions. But in essence, they were saying the same thing. In chapter 5, what he does, he takes up a lamentation, a song of mourning over the people of God because theirs was a very, very sad situation.

Look at chapter 5 in verse 10. God's people had resisted the truth. They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth.

[13 : 04] They resisted the truth. Look at verse 11. They disregarded and oppressed the poor. Therefore, verse 11, because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you will not dwell in them.

You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. They disregarded and oppressed the poor. the poor. But then look at verse 12.

There was a culture of corruption. For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins. You who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe and turn aside the needy in the gate.

Huh? That was the day that Amos lived in. The Lord pleaded with his people again and again. But while they engaged in unrighteous conduct, their ritual continued.

Huh? Their Sunday morning worship or Saturday morning worship and various feasts and everything. It was business as usual in the worship arena even while externally or on the outside they were not living under the jurisdiction of the Almighty.

[14 : 25] But where, listen to this friends because where there is ritual without righteousness one can expect rejection.

Where there is ritual without righteousness one can really expect rejection. The Lord rejects as inadequate worship systems and worship acts that are not rooted in righteousness.

righteousness. You ever had an artificial flower? Oh, they look pretty don't they? But have you ever just taken an artificial flower and sort of sniffed it?

Nothing there. Nothing there. And such systems like artificial flowers may have the appearance of a rose but the fragrance of the rose is not there.

They're like buildings that appear to have a solid structure but examination further examination reveals faulty foundations! And eventually such buildings are condemned.

[15 : 37] The language of verses 21 through 23 is quite significant. I mean can you imagine God? He said the religious gatherings in verse 21 are rejected.

God is saying I hate and I despise that's the language of the almighty. Feasting times these times of celebration and fasting times the times of consecration both were condemned as empty ritual in verse 21.

Notice in verse 22 the religious offerings were rejected. Three offerings come into view. The burnt offering that went up to God in smoke that represented the consecration of the atonement for sin rejected.

The grain offering which accompanied other offerings or stood alone as an offering as a gift to the Lord was rejected. The peace offering that was given to the Lord and of the other eaten by the worshippers symbolizing their fellowship with one another they were rejected.

Though their offerings were present they were rejected because of what was missing from their lives. Look at verse 23 the religious songs likewise are rejected music that's what's in view they sounded so good in the sanctuary on earth but it was a mere noise in the heavens missing ingredients.

[17 : 12] A few days ago Shirley picked some zucchini from her community garden. You would have thought that she was just coming from the promised land and that she had zucchinis she had giant zucchinis you know Dorothy Patel was glad that she came to pick those zucchinis and as it goes with my wife when she gets food or goods in the house she wants to get to baking so she decided that she was going to bake some zucchini bread if you've ever had my wife's zucchini bread it is a delight to have well she put the flour and the sugar and all the ingredients in there raisins and pineapple and when she took the bread out of the oven something was wrong it did not rise to the usual beauty she forgot to put the baking soda in the bread and guess what happened that zucchini bread that I normally chow down on with milk

I mean it's good just about with any liquid but it's really good with milk it went to the trash about all four loaves because of a missing ingredient and because there was an essential missing ingredient in the life of Israel of the worship of Israel their worship amounted to worship abuse that's what it was the missing ingredients in the community life of Israel were the things that were very near and dear to the heart of God and these missing ingredients are identified for us in verse 24 justice justice and righteousness scripture helps us to see that justice and righteousness are core attributes of God's character and they are actually foundation stones or another image is that they are pillars in the kingdom of our God listen to some of these scriptures that really help us to embrace that kind of idea you don't have write them down because they're they're great psalm 84 89 and 14 listen to what he says righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne loving kindness and truth go before that you hear that there righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne listen to psalm 33 and 5 speaking of God he loves righteousness and justice the earth is full of the loving kindness of the

Lord again notice the direction the orientation of God's heart he loves righteousness and justice listen to Deuteronomy 32 and 4 the rock his rock his work is perfect for all his ways are just a God of faithfulness and without injustice righteous and upright is he and here's the one that's perhaps more familiar Isaiah 9 and 7 there will be no end to the increase of his government or peace on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish and uphold it check it out with justice and righteousness from then on and forever the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this primary critical essential features of the character of God the nature of God but also of his kingdom rule but check this out friends not only are these features of God's rule he demands the same of those who are called by his name proverbs 21 and 3 to do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord rather than sacrifice

Jeremiah 22 and 3 thus says the Lord do justice and righteousness and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger the orphan or the widow and do not shed blood in this place people who were missing justice and righteousness in Amos' day were ripe for the word that we see in chapter 5 verse 18 notice what it says woe to you who desire the day of the Lord they're ripe for God's rebuke look at chapter 6 in verse 1 woe to those who are at ease in Zion to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria and look at chapter 6 in verse 4 woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the song who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent themselves music instruments of music they were ripe for the woe of God in that day but so were they in Jesus' day turn over quickly to Matthew chapter 23

I want to show you something here Jesus in a sense dons the posture of a prophet here and he speaks against the religious leaders of his day and notice the language seven times in Matthew chapter 23 he uses the word woe 13 verse 13 15 16 23 25 27 29 and particularly notice verse 23 woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you cleaned the outside of the cup and the plate but inside you are full of greed and self indulgence huh look at what he says there notice also verse again I didn't read 23 did I I read 25 but look at 23 woe to you scribes Pharisees hypocrites and this is it for you paid tithe of mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law check of what the weightier matters are justice and mercy and faithfulness these you also have done without neglecting the others right there

[24 : 27] Jesus woe there huh the lion roars when righteousness and justice are ignored huh well you say well Pastor J you've been throwing around you've been tossing around those terms righteousness and justice can you help us out a little bit with what you exactly mean by that huh well the two words could be used to express one idea a figure of speech known as hindidies one in two huh another analogy would be like it's like a coin righteousness and justice one coin but two sides of one coin together they can be viewed as a tree that includes both the root and the fruit just treatment being the fruit of what is right and fair in principle so righteousness is sort of like the principle and justice is the practice of righteousness justice is rooted in righteousness and truly brothers and sisters justice whether it is true in the broader society or not it must be true among us amongst

God's people there should be truly justice for all even for the weak even for the powerless the widow and the orphan and these are the kind of people that society seems to have a love hate kind a relationship one person described it as these people can be like the punching boys of society we pick on them we don't give them what they deserve and what's right and what's true the Lord's concern for what was right and fair was also seen in the marketplace matters in the life of Israel a just balance and scales belong to the Lord all the weights of the bag are his concern even in the marketplace here in Hyde Park area south side of Chicago downtown Chicago wherever business is conducted from the

Lord's vantage point she'd be done with fairness and with equity in the Old Testament the God who rescued Israel those who were rescued by him were to reflect his very character those related to a righteous and just God were expected to be reflections of him models of righteousness in every dimension of life and brothers and sisters so it is today being committed to Christ by reason of his saving us and rescuing us means being committed to those things that are near and dear to his heart there's hardly anything more near and dear than righteousness and justice we don't do righteous deeds in order to be righteous that's a standing that's been granted to us by God through Christ however those of us who are related to

God our deeds personally and socially should confirm that we are the children of the God of all the earth who does what is right look back at Amos chapter 5 and verse 24 what a great picture we have here according to verse 24 and let me just read it again but let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream rather than feasting and fasting and offerings and songs none of which were wrong within themselves the Lord wanted among his people heartfelt righteousness let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream is the way the Lord expressed his desire for his people through the prophet and advocates of justice have used this particular scripture and rightly so to help advance the causes of the marginalized and the deprived in society they've uttered these words for years and the

Lord wants those who are in relationship with him to stand up for what is right to put it in Spike Lee terms to do the right things so how is it that we can cultivate a culture of justice what can we do to make the picture of Amos 5:24 our reality in Amos this day the streams of righteousness and justice had dried up it was like the faucet had been turned off the hose had been crimped there was a dam upstream and righteousness and justice were not getting to those who really needed it like arteries that are full of plaque that restrict the flow of blood the nation of Israel was suffering from coronary failure the cleansing refreshing waters that bless individuals and communities and nations had ceased to flow in the nation and no wonder that was a time for the mourning of the prophet that we see in chapter five in the midst of

[30 : 25] God's people these foundational qualities are not simply to be present but they are to be like a Chicago fire hydrant that may be running somewhere in the city on the day that gushes water mighty visibly present flood like overflowing and abundant that's the picture of God's desire for his people and such is to be the norm among us and if righteousness and justice are found anywhere in society it should be in the midst of the people of God near and dear to our heart because they are near and dear to the very heart of God a pastor woman pastor some years ago had featured in Christianity Today a message I'm not Christianity Today but their preaching series a message named Heidi

Husted and Heidi used a word play on the word justice and she asked several questions that are appropriate she says this will we be stewards of God's justice are stewards of just us will we use our time and energy and money and influence for God's purposes or just us will we allow God to channel his resources through us or simply stop with us those are good questions I paraphrased some of what she said but really the whole idea of what I gleaned from her is this play on words and I think it helps us to really see are we simply about us or about

God's justice huh what must we do to be more oriented in that direction since these things are not optional let me give you a few things again yeah we need to do we do need to see ourselves as recipients of God's righteousness we are saved people we receive righteousness as a gift a right standing with God but we must not confuse our right standing with God with our responsibility for God and for God's glory for God's programs and for God's projects in this world can't confuse them we cannot stop simply with the right standing with God scripture in here speaks powerfully about doing justice righteousness and righteousness must be seen as a gift but also as a responsibility we must see ourselves also as reflectors of God's righteousness it should be reflected in our right living before men the first applications of the righteous standards of God is to our lives by their fruit you will know them but then we must see ourselves as agents of God's righteousness and this includes both covenantal decency as well as common decency covenantal decency both within our families because oftentimes we're not meeting out what is right even in the context of family we're not to ignore those who are closest to us after applying the principles of righteousness and justice personally those closest to us should feel this kind of orientation this direction in our lives husbands should do what is right as it concerns their wives and vice versa in our family relationship we must be on guard even there for oppression and lopsidedness leading to unfairness and even favoritism doing what's right in the context of family abuse verbal and otherwise are unfair and unjust and should have no place in the home and where there are violations the rights of the victims even in the home must be considered punishment and discipline must not be harsh harsh where there is wounding there needs to be healing we must do what is right by those who are closest to us but then amongst believing family there is a covenantal dimension among those that we do life with in the family of faith and even here justice and righteousness need to flow among us members in the family of God must be treated every one of them like family members there should be perennial streams of justice and righteousness in our faith community all should be welcomed here all should be treated as family that's the way family should behave the so-called the least among us must not be neglected there's no such thing in the kingdom of God as a second class citizen oh but then there's the broader society the flow of justice and righteousness must not stop among those with whom we have most in common common decency must be on our agenda as well as covenantal decency we are to do justice among our own but our great God needs agents in society

beyond our families and beyond our believing families he needs agents in this world righteousness and justice must not be log jammed among us we must live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world and be agents of the same here goes with our job description it goes with our gospel commitments friends we cannot be selective in who gets it not so many not so among God's people the church should be a haven of justice and fairness where righteousness and justice prevail constantly freely spilling over into society and touching even society's structures we are God's mouthpieces we are his hands we bring justice and righteousness to bear wherever we are think about it in the place that you work in your neighborhood we are to mirror the righteousness of our king

I had an incident a few weeks ago that really took my sensitivities to the next level particularly as it concerns the homeless some of you perhaps have seen this this was the first time I experienced this I'd been at Walgreen at the corner where our office is at 55th and Lake Park and as I crossed the street I saw a man he certainly had the appearance of a homeless person but I saw him in the trash he took a plastic container it looked like one of those mellow yellow kind of drink things but it he was turning it up just for what was in the bottom it had really been empty but there were a few drops left in the bottle and that was his drink and I saw him as he combed through the trash again looking for any kind of remnant of something to satisfy his hunger and again you know sometimes when we do when we see something like that one of the things that we do is we turn our heads

[39 : 01] I reached in my pocket to see what I had and I think I may have just come from the credit union and believe it or not I didn't have any small bills but I reached in went back across the street and said you don't have to do that I said here go get yourself something to eat even where we live there are those who need to experience our commitment to justice and doing what is right and I know there are scores of issues out there and we cannot address all of them but we can do something we can't do everything but we can do something can't we huh there are legitimate projects friends with our names on them personally and corporately perspectives of justice that are beyond the ones that we normally own huh there are the ones that we normally embrace the same

God that is concerned about the rights of the unborn is also concerned about the rights of the living and their deprivation so yes we must accept the theological legal declaration of righteousness we it must be applied personally and we must be used of God to spread it communally and in our families and the family of God but also God's righteousness needs expression in society at large and guess what friends and I'm about to close in doing so we bring the kingdom of God near and to bear in this world order people get glimpses of God's kingdom to those of us who have been embraced by the king himself and have given ourselves to be his agents in this world our world is in desperate need of seeing the demonstration or seeing the God of righteousness and justice in living color for those who have been recipients of his righteousness and are reflectors of his righteousness and are committed to being agents of his righteousness what am I saying on this afternoon our gospel commitments include a commitment to righteousness and justice and the lion roars when justice and righteousness are ignored won't you pray with me this afternoon lord we bless you and ask your help lord it's easier to preach a message like this and to hear a message like this than to apply a message like this give us wisdom for all of the above and may we be your agents in this world for your glory and for your honor is our prayer in christ's name amen won't you stand hear the call of the kingdom