

# Amos: True Worship - Amos 5:1-17

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[ 0 : 00 ] We'll turn with me to Amos chapter 5. We're going to read our text this morning and then we'll dive into what the Lord has for us. Amos chapter 5, we're going to read all the way from verse 1 to 17 in one go.

It says how it was meant to be received. And so that's how we're going to do it this morning. We're going to read the whole section and we'll kind of dissect it as we go through.

So let's read Amos chapter 5, which is 1 all the way to 17. Please follow with me and your Bibles are up on the screen. This is the word of the Lord. Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel.

Fallen no more to rise as the Virgin Israel, forsaken on her land, with none to raise her up. For thus says the Lord God, the city that went out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel.

For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, seek me and live. But do not seek Bethel and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba.

[ 1 : 13 ] For Gilgal shall surely go into exile and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the Lord and live. Lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph and it devour with none to quench it for Bethel.

O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth. He who made the Pilates an Orion and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day and tonight, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth.

The Lord is his name, who makes destruction flash forth against the strong, so that destruction becomes upon the fortress. They hate him or approve in the gate and they abhor him who speaks the truth.

Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell on them.

You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. 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.

[ 2 : 21 ] Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time. Seek good and not evil. That you may live.

And so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you as you have said. Hate evil and love good and the selves of justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Therefore death says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord. In all the squares there shall be wailing and in all the streets they shall say, Alas, Alas. They shall call the farmers to mourning and to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation.

And in all vineyards there shall be wailing. For I will pass through your midst, says the Lord. Now Amos is a book filled with some tremendous prophecies.

And as we've seen already throughout this series, the point of Amos' entire message is to call a people who have wandered from truth back into right living and into right worship.

[ 3 : 35 ] And up until this point we've seen four chapters of Amos speaking to the nations, speaking to Israel. And now there's a subtle turn in the strategy employed by Amos.

And it's a fascinating one. Look with me in verse one. Here it says this, Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation. O house of Israel.

The prophet has turned into the songwriter. The farmer, country preacher, takes up a song and sings a lament of sorrow over the coming fall of Israel.

Now he uses this word lamentation in a lament biblically is a musical expression of sorts that conveys sadness over loss.

Something bad has happened. Someone has died. There's a lament that goes with this. And I think of a lament in this sense, I think of Tolkien's world, I think of La Thorian and you have Gandalf, the great wizard who dies and the company is left without their leader, their wise leader.

[ 4 : 47 ] And they go into the forest and the elves sing a song of lamentation. It's similar here. That's what a lamentation is in the Bible.

But here's what's fascinating. Typically, a lamentation is sung after loss.

Yet Israel has not been conquered by Assyria. Yet Israel stands in a time of peace and prosperity in the land.

They have all they could need, which we'll see in a minute. Hewnstone, houses, mansions, money. Again, no war. And here's what Amos says.

I take up a lamentation. Look with me in verse two. Fallen, no more to rise is the Virgin Israel.

[ 5 : 44 ] Forsaken on her land with none to raise her up. Two key verbs here, fallen and forsaken. And what I want us to see is this. These verbs are in what's called the perfect tense.

The perfect tense denotes action that has been completed already. Some weighty stuff.

Here's what Amos is essentially saying to Israel. The events of judgment that are coming to this nation are as good as having already happened.

Amos speaks in such a way that says, well, it's time for the song of lament. Because the nation is evil and wicked and will not turn and God will have his justice.

It is time to lament. And he speaks to a crowd that's watching him and hearing him in real time. That in every sense is most likely looking around saying, we've already fallen.

[ 6 : 50 ] Look at our houses. Look at our places of worship. Look at all the things that we have. And yet you speak as though we are conquered and we are judged.

I think of a Christmas carol by Charles Dickens. Ebenezer Scrooge visits a number of different spirits, but there's a spirit called the spirit of Christmas yet to come.

And he takes Scrooge to a grave side and there's an empty grave in this graveyard. And he looks around and he says, what are we doing? What's this grave for?

What does the spirit do? And he points to the gravestone and it says, what? Ebenezer Scrooge. This is what Amos is doing. He's taking Israel to the grave side and saying, look inside.

This is your grave. And look at the tombstone. God's judgment is coming and in some senses has already happened. It's a weighty way to start out this lamentation.

[ 7 : 52 ] And here's the reality that Amos is declaring the finality of God's judgment on sin, Israel's sin, before their very eyes.

And if you look at verse two, he uses an image of a virgin. He says this, the virgin Israel has fallen down on the ground and will not stand again.

But then secondly, this virgin that has fallen on the ground is forsaken, left alone, and there's no one to help her up.

Another sobering image from the prophet, essentially conveying that Israel is like a virgin, meaning the virgin has so much potential in life.

There's even a purity that is there, but the virgin has fallen, has no offspring, and the future for this virgin is absolute hopelessness.

[ 8 : 56 ] I think we need to take a minute just to soak this in and understand what's happening. Do we understand the weight of sin?

What God says about sin in His Word is very severe. He does not tolerate it. He does not placate.

Sin is weighty. And for us individually, we as Christians, those that have been redeemed by the grace of the cross, through Jesus Christ and His blood, His sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, us, I want us to see as we read this, the history of our own testimony, that we too were struck down and hopeless without any possible way of escape, but that through the gospel we have been lifted up, and God has spared us judgment.

But secondly, I think we need to understand the weight of sinfulness for the fallen world around us.

There is a world around us that is dead and dying, and just like Israel in this moment, there is a grave that is there ready to be filled.

And we all know people in our lives where the grave is ready, and they are all but buried in it.

[10:24] I think of the words of Ephesians in which Paul uses similar past tense language, and he says, we were dead in our trespasses in a sense.

We were dead, we were in a state where there's nothing that could possibly happen, but by the miracle of the gospel and by the miracle of God's word to redeem and to regenerate those who are dead, we have hope.

And here's what Amos is pointing to for Israel. Because of your wickedness and because of your lack of repentance, you will not rise.

Which is why in verse three, we see this, for thus says the Lord God, the city that went out a thousand shall have a hundred left. And that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel, essentially predicting and preparing the nation of Israel for what is to come, meaning this.

The judgment that is to come, the Assyrians will come, even though they're not mentioned here. The Syrians will come by God's sovereign hand and they will conquer Israel in such a way that all of the power and armies that Israel believed they had to fight a war will be reduced to a tenth.

[11:43] And then when that tenth is reduced, what will happen? That tenth will be reduced to a tenth. And in verse three, there's an indictment on one of the main idols of Israel at this time.

And it is a false sense of security. We have wealth. We have peace. But if the peace ever were to go away, we have an army.

We can fight. We got this. And here's what Amos does. He points out the fact that God knows their idol.

God knows that they trust in their own selves to protect themselves. And so God attacks that very idol. The very army that you think will save you and protect you from even my judgment will be reduced down to nothing.

The demise of Israel is such that when they are attacked, their armies will be depleted and their idol will be cut down.

[12:56] As we remember Israel, the northern kingdom was at the zenith of peace and prosperity. Their 401Ks were padded. Their mortgages paid off. Their interest rates low.

Look at Amen on that one. Their cul-de-sac is safe and clean. The kids can ride and no fear of danger. Their lifestyles were carefree.

Their chief idol at this time was security. We're good. But there's nothing that can bring us true assurance of security, except God.

We all strive to feel secure in this life. Every night I walk down the stairs and I lock my front door. Why? Makes me feel secure.

I save money and put it aside and savings for a rainy day. Why? Makes me feel secure. I attend church weekly, tithe generously and serve enthusiastically.

[14:00] Why? Oftentimes, if I'm honest, because it makes me feel more secure about my standing in heaven. We do so much to ensure that we are safe and secure by our own power.

And every one of those things is not bad enough themselves, obviously, but what is bad is our inability to rest instead in the eternal security that God offers by His power and providence alone. And when this comes to us through the cross of Jesus Christ, that may whatever may happen to me in this life, I know that my God holds me.

One of the greatest images in the entire Bible on the security that believers have in Christ is in John 10. Listen to what Jesus says. He says, My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Remember when I was a kid?

[15:03] We used to take these big long trips down to California in this big 15 passenger Ford van. I come from a family of nine, so 15 even was a little cramped. And I remember one time my dad passed back a bunch of candy and I grabbed the sour patch kids and I grabbed a handful out and then we had to give it back and we all ate it.

And I remember holding them in my hand watching. Is anyone going to steal? This is what you do when you're in a family of nine, you get defensive. And I'm looking around and I look back and my oldest brother grabs my hand, rips it open and the sour patch kids go flying.

And all six of my other siblings scrambled and ate them up before I could get them back. This is a strange illustration, but it works in some ways.

Here's why. My ability to hold secure sour patch kids from my warring siblings was zero percent. And yet Jesus speaks in such a way that we see the hand of God and we see all those that hear the shepherd's voice and come to him in faith and they come in the God's hand and he holds the strong grip and there is nothing that could ever remotely pry one finger remotely loose.

[16:25] That is the security of God that we have through the gospel. And Israel had forgotten.

The God that promised them a land to be a people, to bless them. The God that delivered them up out of exile.

The God that split the Red Sea. The God that provided manna and the wilderness. The God who has always demonstrated covenant faithful, the God of the Hesed love to the people that He has promised forever.

He has never, ever once lost His grip on His people. And yet the people are so easy to trust in the material things of the world.

They had forgotten their security in life and in death. They had forgotten that their security, their true security, was the God of the covenant, the God of Hesed loyal love.

[17:32] But now we have verse five, which is a breath of fresh air for us. I'm sure for Amos. Seek me and live.

If there is nothing else that any of us here or learn this morning, it should be these four words, seek me and live.

Israel is commanded to seek the Lord Himself. Not the false assurances and securities of temporal things, but instead to turn fully in every way, mind, heart, soul, strength, and turn and see and embrace God.

And here's what God does. He says this, do not seek. There's a proactive, there's a pro command, seek. And there's a negative command, don't seek. And the don't seek, He says this, don't seek.

Bethel, do I enter into Gilgau or cross over to Beersheba? And this is fascinating. What in the world do these three cities have to do with the context of the command to seek God?

[18:48] Well, for Israel, some of the temporal things that they found security in and some of the ways that they reveled in their idolatry in was through cities.

And there's three cities that they'd come to trust in and that they'd begun to forsake the Lord in. Three cities, Bethel, Gilgau, and Beersheba.

Bethel was the place where God met Jacob. It's a place of immense prominence and the story and narrative of God's people in the Old Testament.

This is where God promised Himself to Jacob, showed Himself as God, Yahweh. The people would look and say, Bethel, the place where our Father Jacob met with God.

Gilgau, the place where Israel's spiritual reproach was rolled away in the days of Joshua by the work of the Lord. And Beersheba, a place connected to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in various places.

[19:57] The point is Bethel, Gilgau, and Beersheba are places where God has moved powerfully in the past. And now the contrast ought to stun us.

God says, don't seek a place. Don't enter and do not cross over into these cities.

The reason is twofold. One, because each one of these beloved sites of worship and reverence to Yahweh at this time had been converted into temples and shrines of external religion and pagan worship.

So God says, run from those places, come to me and worship me. But the second reason why He says this is because these are places that the Israelites were looking to for security instead of God Himself.

So here's what God says, seek me and live and don't seek. Do not enter, do not cross over. What are the idols that we return to in order to feel secure?

[21:11] Substances sometimes can tempt us that we gain security through things like alcohol or food. We gain security through affirmation from others.

Living that other people would affirm us, now I feel secure in who I am. Possessions, bank accounts, religious piety, like I stated earlier is one of mine.

I often take false sense of security in the fact that I'm active in a church. I'm attending, I'm serving, I'm doing all these great things, I'm tithing. I feel really good about myself and I think I bought myself some safeguard in the eternal life.

The reality is God would say to any of us in our idols that we seek for comfort and security. He would say, do not seek, do not enter, do not cross over. Those two will be destroyed.

Look with me what he says in verse, the end of verse 5. Gilgal, socially going to exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Even the place of immense prominence and promise by God to one of his forefathers in Jacob.

[ 22 : 20 ] Even this special place, he says, it's going to come to nothing. What matters is me. What matters is worship of the true God, not reverence of a place but me.

So he says again in verse 6, he bookends, seek me, seek the Lord and live. So what does it mean to seek the Lord and live? Well, the word seek when referring to God or Yahweh means to turn to Him in full trust and confidence.

That is to truly seek God with a whole heart. We turn from sin. We agree with God about what sin is and how we have missed the mark and we place full trust in God as creator, savior, and sustainer. To seek God, to turn fully from my ways of sin and to turn fully to Him in complete trust of who He is, what He will do, what He has done.

And seeking God is the pathway to all good things. But what we do in our flesh instead often is we seek good things as it end unto themselves like Israel did.

[ 23 : 34 ] When we do this, we receive nothing good and instead only death. Any pursuit that we commit ourselves to that is detached from God is devoid of any true lasting life.

This is why God says to Israel, notice, seek me and live. There's an order in these two commands. God is first and the benefit for seeking God is second. This is the entire summation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

He speaks truth, principles. He speaks the kingdom of God. And here's what Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount with. He wraps all of these beautiful sayings and teachings and even imperatives.

Here's what he wraps it up with. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

[ 24 : 33 ] There is nothing in this world that could even remotely replace God Himself.

To choose God is to choose life. To choose life first and God second is actually to choose death. I hope we can see the redemptive message of the gospel bleeding out in the pages so far. You notice in verse one, Israel's fate is declared hopeless and dead.

Ephesians again, Ephesians two says, you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world. But then in verse four of Ephesians two, he says, but God being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us.

Even when we were dead, notice this in our trespasses made us alive. There's a state of deadness that Ames is condemning in Israel.

[ 25 : 31 ] But he says this, but in that deadness in that grave that's empty with the name written that's ready for execution. There is a pathway on this side where Lord says, but seek me and live.

There is life that can come from even a dead state. This is the gospel. We were dead in our trespasses and sin, but He made us alive together with Christ.

Just as Israel is called to repent of their sin, to turn to God, to turn to Him in full trust. So too, the gospel says we are dead in our sins, headed for destruction.

And yet in that judgment, in that indictment, the Lord's merciful, the Lord is gracious and He provides a way of salvation through His Son.

So we see that even though they're declared hopeless and dead, God offers life to those who seek Him through repentance and faith. And in some sense, the entire biblical message from Genesis to Revelation can be summed up in those four words.

[ 26 : 39 ] Seek me and live. But notice verse 6 to 13.

It says this, seek the Lord and live as He break out in fire in the house of Joseph. And it devour and none to quench it for Bethel. O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth.

He who made the Pilatees an Orion and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkness in the day of the night, who calls the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth. The Lord is His name who makes destruction flash forth against the strong that destruction comes upon the fortress.

Amos is still teaching the gospel to us. But this time, the truth comes by way of those who do not repent.

Seek the Lord and live, lest, scary word, He break out like fire in the house of Joseph.

[ 27 : 57 ] The truth of the gospel is beautiful, life-giving, gracious, merciful, so uplifting. There's also news in the gospel that we need to understand.

And it's this that God brings judgment on those who live wickedly. And in this time and in this day and in this age, He speaks through Amos to say to Israel, there's a fire that's going to come because you lack justice.

You lack truthful living and you lack true worship. He says, you turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth.

And the one that controls the darkness, controls the daytime, the images, he's going to pour out all judgment in a night of darkness on that sin.

Look at verse 9, he who makes destruction flash forth against the strong so that destruction comes upon the fortress. Strong and fortress, two terms, no doubt contextualized to Israel.

[ 29 : 14 ] Amos did his research. They had buildings and houses and fortresses and mansions.

Talks about Hewne Stone in verse 11. They have houses of Hewne Stone, big, mighty, powerful houses, a beautiful city that's got everything you could want.

And here's the judgment. He makes destruction flash forth against those who think they're strong. That's the indictment. That when we trust in the false sense of security, we believe that we're stronger than we actually are.

And God wants his people to realize and know, your only strength comes in me. Which is why in the entire book of Joshua, the entire ethos of the book is, be strong and courageous.

For what reason? Lord, your God is with you. He is the strength of Israel as they journey and conquer the entire land. And here we see that faith in God has been removed.

So he brings judgment on the wicked. And the sins of the idolatrous people in this day and age that Amos is preaching to are the following. Verse 7, they turn justice to Wormwood.

[ 30 : 34 ] In other words, they have unjust living in principles. Verse 10, it says this, they hate him or reproves him the gate and they abhor him and speaks truth.

One of the sins of Israel this time was suppression of truth because it's uncomfortable because it calls us to have to act and change. This is like ancient day cancel culture, but 10 times worse.

The gate was a mirror, excuse me, the gate was as much of an image of where legal matters in ancient day Israel took place. The gate is where conduct was seen, observed, judged, deals are made, legal agreements.

Think of the book of Ruth at the gate is the passing of the sandal for the rights to redeem Ruth. And at that gate, there were apparently people who were speaking truth against the culture and against the sins.

And here's what they were doing. He says this, they hate him who reproves. They abhor him.

[ 31 : 37 ] Next, they were taxing the poor. Verse 11, they were indulging pleasures through exploitative gain. In verse 11, they're right on the cusp of him saying that you have trampled on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him.

It says immediately and you've built houses. There's a connection. There's like a rope between these two things. You take the money and you build with the money.

And then next, they bribed judges and rulers. Verse 12, this is a piece of wisdom that Amos shares with them that they maybe didn't know, but he speaks on behalf of God and God says, I know how many of transgressions and how great your sins are.

You who afflict the righteous and who take a bribe, buying off people and judges and rulers that they might get what they need and want.

And then finally again, rejecting the poor in verse 12. You turn aside the needy at the gate. All of these things are not just random occurrences of sin, but instead what these are is they are symptoms of a greater problem which is rejecting God and seeking after their own comforts.

[ 32 : 51 ] And so we see in verse 14 and 15, seek good and not evil that you may live. So the Lord, the God of hosts will be with you as you have said. Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate.

It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. And what I love about this is the command to seek good and not evil follows the original command by God to seek

me and live.

It's almost like God is speaking and teaching Israel that first you need to know me and second I will show you how to live truthfully.

And this is the order of the Bible. That God acts on behalf of his people and he invites them into relationship and through grace and grace alone we receive that relationship.

We know God, the Father, were redeemed, regenerated, restored in life. And now because of this new reality, I made a new creation. I'm filled with this spirit. I am given his word and now for the first time, I'm able to follow actively in obedience to the God that has saved me.

[ 33 : 54 ] Not because I'm a good person, not because I now know what's right and I got this, but because God Himself tutors me in righteousness through His Spirit.

This is the way of the gospel that we respond to salvation. We don't initiate it. So here's what God says.

Hey, seek me, seek me and you'll live and then seek good and not evil. That you may live. There seems to be a condition on this covenant because that's what a covenant is.

That God will be faithful. He will be your God. I will be your love. I will protect you, guide you, strengthen you, deliver you. And here's your obligation.

Serve me, worship me, follow me. That's the covenant obligation. And as they seek God and know Him, what happens?

[ 34 : 47 ] They start living righteously. At least they would if they repent. And so He says, I will be with you in verse 14. Hate evil, love good, establish justice.

The only way to hate evil is to know that God is against the evil. The only way to love good is to know that God is good.

And the only way to establish justice is to see and observe God's justice. There is no way to fulfill 15 without first seeking God.

And then finally, verse 16 and 17. God will right all wrongs on the day of the Lord's coming.

Therefore, the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord.

In all the squares there will be wailing. And in the streets, they shall say, Alas, Alas. They shall call the farmers to mourning and wailing to those who are skilled in lamentation. And in all vineyards there shall be wailing.

[ 35 : 43 ] For I will pass through your midst, says the Lord. Even though it's Scott's section for next week.

Verse 18 says this, Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord. Why would you have the day of the Lord?

Do we plead for God's justice and mercy to come when we ourselves are the cause of injustice and a lack of mercy?

All this to say, to seek God is to live. Not just eternally, but also on this earth.

Day by day, step by step. Just because we are breathing, living, moving, does not mean that we truly are living according to God's standards.

[ 36 : 43 ] To Israel, His heart was that they would turn. Repent of idol worship, repent of false security, trust in God for security.

Worship Him in fullness of heart that leads to a change in the ways in which they lived. To take care of the poor, to administer justice, to care for others.

So for us, if we feel like we don't have life today, I don't have life today, I don't feel dead inside.

I want to point you to the gospel. The only true life that he was going to ever have is to know God.

If you don't have life today, recognize that God is merciful. He is the God of all life. He gave you the very life you carry within your body right now by breathing into your lungs, His breath of life.

[ 37 : 56 ] In the garden, life begins because of God. And in the world, life continues because of God. And someday forever in eternity, life will forever be because of His presence.

He offers eternal life freely for all who have accepted. Come before God, the giver of life now. Turn away from idols that offer nothing but disappointment and death and trust in Christ alone for salvation.

He came that we might have life, is what he said. This church is full of born again believers, regenerated into newness of life by the grace of God. Who can lead you to this fountain of life only found in Jesus.

I'm speaking now to any person in this room who's never experienced newness of life that only comes through the gospel.

I plead with you, out of love and out of a lament even of the effects of sin that were in my life and I know are in your life.

[ 39 : 05 ] Turn, consider life a new way. Seek God and live.

Lord, we pray that for all of us there is clear, swift and ready application God.

Or for those of us, all of us that have manufactured idols, Lord, that be looked to to give us security, false security.

God, help us to see the flaws in those idols. Help us to see the inadequacy of anything to truly fulfill us and give us security.

Lord, I pray that just as Amos lamented over sin, that we would lament over sin.

[ 40 : 03 ] Draw our hearts back to you, oh God. And for any person here, Lord, I ask that you would stir in their heart now. Would you remove the heart of stone and replace it with the heart of flesh that only comes and beats according to your life?

God, may the power of the gospel be enough for this church. And may it be enough for any person in this room right now that might be considering following after Jesus and receiving that life.

We love you, Lord, so much. Thank you for your grace and your mercy with us, a people who constantly turn away from you so readily.

Give us the grace to hear and give us the love in our hearts to respond to who you are and what you've done through your powerful acts of salvation, even the gospel.

Amen, pray, amen.