

Amos 5:18-6:14

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Each year, my wife and I get to visit the classrooms of our kids. And it's great. We get to meet the teachers, see the space the kids learn in.

Now imagine if I walked into, say, my boys' elementary school, and I looked around at all the artwork on the walls, and I said, wow, these pictures are terrible.

Like, honestly, I can't even work out what they're supposed to be. This is like hurting my eyes, looking at this stuff. Imagine that.

I mean, it's hard to get your head around someone saying something that harsh, isn't it? Or imagine this. Imagine if you're an employee, and you manage to sneak a look at your confidential performance evaluation, and one of the following things is written about you, and apparently these were taken from real performance evaluations.

Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig. This young lady has delusions of adequacy.

[1 : 16] He sets low personal standards and consistently fails to achieve them, works well under constant supervision, and cornered like a rat in a trap.

This man is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot. Imagine that. Imagine that. Or this.

This is a true story. I once wrote a review of a lecturer. You know, you get to do performance evaluations. I once wrote a review of a lecturer for a class I took at a university I attended. It's a true story. A very short review.

I wrote, they taught us the wrong things, and they taught those wrong things badly. Folks, I've just given you some examples of some fairly unexpected evaluations.

They're surprising, aren't they? And they're harsh. Now, the most unexpected and the harshest. Imagine if God said, I hate your church.

[2 : 14] Imagine that. I hate your church. That would be quite a thing, wouldn't it? Imagine you're in the middle of morning prayer, and you take up the offering, and the minister, Chris here, he's about to pray for the offering, and then a great booming voice comes from heaven, and it says, Keep your money.

I don't want it. Your attitudes are the worst. Imagine the choir is about to get up and sing behind me, and you hear the great booming voice again. And just as the choir director raises his hands to begin, God speaks, and he says, No, no, no, no.

I'm not interested. Let me remind you of verses 21 to 24 in our passage. This is the Lord speaking. I hate, I despise your feasts.

I take no delight in your assemblies. Even though you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. And the peace offerings of your fatted 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. Imagine that.

[3 : 25] It's shocking, isn't it? Like, it is shocking. What is going on here? That God would say something like this.

First, can I remind you, this is not just an angry rant. Somebody just losing their temper. No, this is God roaring like a lion.

Because he's looking at his people, and he sees religious pretense and hypocrisy. And he roars because he loves, and he doesn't want us to live like that.

If you're visiting us this morning, let's just go very big picture for a moment, because you've jumped into the middle of a series. We're working our way through the book of Amos.

Amos was an Old Testament prophet. It was written about 700 years before Christ. It's about a guy called Amos. He's a shepherd. He's living in the southern kingdom.

[4 : 24] God calls him up to the northern kingdom, to Israel, to speak to his people. To speak to his people, who are in a great place materially, but a terrible place spiritually.

And Amos makes a series of speeches. And in our section, the Lord speaks to Amos, and he says, you guys have become proud, and indifferent, and complacent.

And it's not like they've stopped going to church. No, they put on really expensive and elaborate services. The issue is nothing changes in them as a result.

They walk in proud, indifferent, complacent, and they walk out proud, indifferent, complacent. This is why God says, after I will not listen to your hymns, he says in verse 24, let justice roll, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

What does that mean? It means despite being really good at their sort of religious practices, there's no life flowing out of them. They don't leave their churches with a greater desire to live justly or more sacrificially.

[5 : 36] Their religion made no difference in their life. And we need to be clear here. It's not that God hates religious services. Not at all.

He hates hypocrisy. He hates pretense. And these folks claimed to believe one thing by participating in these services, but in practice, they just live for themselves.

They just wanted a comfortable life. Okay, so that's big picture. Let's dig into it with a little bit more detail here.

Let's get a bit more specific. Do you remember a few chapters ago that great line on Amos when Amos said, you cows of Bashan?

You guys remember that line? Love that line. That was Amos calling out lazy, I don't know what you call it, drunk, overbearing, upper-class woman of Samaria.

[6 : 33] And at the time, I said, just wait. He's not picking on woman here. He's gonna get stuck into the men shortly. Well, here he gets stuck into the men. Chapter six, verse one. Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria.

So these men think they're doing really well. They live in a rich country. They go to a rich church. They're personally very prosperous. Life is easy. So they feel pretty secure.

What could go wrong? They're feeling so good. And their greatest arrogance is they feel so secure that they think, if God visited us today, if God visited me today, he would be pretty impressed, I think.

Because I'm killing it. I'm absolutely, in every area of life, I am killing it. Let's look at verse eight, because this is exactly what God addresses here. Verse, sorry, verse 18.

Verse 18. Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is the day that God will come and judge the world. Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord.

[7 : 34] Because for those folks, it says here, it is darkness, not light. As if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him. Amos is saying, you think if God came to see you folks in Israel, that he would, he'd be really impressed?

It wouldn't. He wouldn't be impressed. It's like for you youth that are here today, it's like being really excited about your final assembly at school, your prize-giving assembly, and you think you're going to get a special award.

Actually, you're going to get expelled instead. So these folks, they have this really wrong-headed sense of confidence, a completely false sense of security. They think they're totally good with God and they're not.

Because they have placed their security in the fact that life is good and not the fact that God is good. And that's one of their big problems. And they have lots of problems, so let's start rattling them off here. Let's look at another problem they have.

Verses 4 to 6, it's a picture of how these people leave. The scripture will be behind me here. This is how they spend their days. They spend their days on ivory beds, eating fine meats, listening to vacuous music, pampering themselves, perfume, essential oils, drinking wine, not by the glass, not by the bottle, but by the bowl.

[8 : 56] I didn't even know that was an option. Here's your bowl. Here's your bowl of wine, sir. I remember back in New Zealand going to a bar with a friend of mine.

I'm not much of a drinker, but he's a big boy. He didn't mind a drink. And he goes in there and he says, he says to the bar staff, he says, what is the, he was very thirsty, what is the largest vestibule, he was trying to make it sound sophisticated, what is the largest vestibule you can legally serve me

a drink in?

Well, apparently it's a bowl. It's a bowl. Imagine that. So this is how they spend their time, ivory beds, fine meats, smelling nice, drinking bowls of wine. Now, what's the problem here?

Is it that God hates success? Is it that God hates wealth? Is it that God hates music? No. The problem is what that success did to them. God doesn't say, I hate that you're rich or prosperous. He says in verse 8, I hate that you're proud because of how you're living. Verse 8, I abhor the pride of Jacob. God doesn't say, I hate that you have nice things.

[10:08] No, he says you're so comfortable, you've stopped caring about the really important things. And it gives us a few examples. Verse 3, Oh you who put far away the day of disaster.

They're so busy focusing on comfort, trivializing their lives away, they just push aside any unpleasant thoughts. Thoughts like, we are answerable to God for all of our decisions.

There's no room for thoughts like that. There's no room for ideas like that because they're too focused on their own comfort. Now when you're really focused on that, when you stop thinking about the fact that you're accountable to God, you can actually go really wacky, spiritually.

If you look at verse 26 of chapter 5, it should be up behind me here, the Israelites who were saved by God, who were blessed by God, who prospered by God, are starting to throw a bit of star worship into their services.

Another example of what their life of comfort had done to them, how it had taken them off course spiritually, is found in verse 12. Verse 12, you have turned justice into poison. When life is good, when life is really good, you don't really want to think about those whose life is not so good.

[11:27] It's just unpleasant. I mean, who cares about justice when you're winning at life? This is what had happened to them. The great shock of the passage is this, is that God says, I'm going to take all those comforts away from you.

In verse 11, God says, your great houses that you spend your days in lounging in will be destroyed. Verse 11, for behold, the Lord commands, the great house shall be struck down into fragments and the little houses into bits.

And again, it's not that God hates your nice home. I just redid my living room, painted the walls, I've got new plants, I've got a beautiful new mid-century couch, it looks amazing, huge, big, beautiful rose gold.

It looks incredible. God doesn't hate nice homes, but he hates what nice homes can do to our hearts. They can make us inwardly focused and just a bit too impressed with ourselves.

Okay, how do I summarize all this? God has been incredibly good to Israel, but that success had led to a worldliness that was killing their faith.

[12:43] They had become complacent and proud and uncaring and their religious practices were pretentious and hypocritical. They didn't have the inward faith to cope with their outward success.

Say that again. They didn't have the inward faith to cope with their outward success. If you do well in life, you need that inward Holy Spirit conviction that this is all temporary and it doesn't define you. They didn't have that and it poisoned their souls. It seems like they had no idea the poison had taken hold. I mean, they were just thinking, oh, I wish God would come because we're in great shape.

You know, one of the most dangerous situations that a church can be in is when a church is in crisis and doesn't know it's in crisis and it doesn't know it's in crisis because the offerings are good and the church is full and your church can have drifted, gone really wacky, can spiritually have drifted and the people haven't noticed.

That's the worst situation a church can be in and that was the problem with Israel. So God roars like a lion at their complacency, at their self-centeredness, at their lack of concern for others, at their idolatry, at their religious hypocrisy and promises to visit them.

[14:14] In verse 14, in the form of another country's army. For behold, I'll raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, declares the Lord, the God of hosts.

God of hosts, that means God of armies. It's not a happy term for God. And again, this is not God losing his temper. This is a God who wants his people back.

This is a God who is lovingly and relentlessly pursuing his people. This is a God who is not heartless. God loves them but they are hurting themselves spiritually and they are dishonoring him. So God says, woe to you. And every parent knows this. Every parent knows what it is to warn and love at the same time.

And this is what's happening here in Amos 5 and 6. I want to do two things very quickly before finishing. Two things. I know Amos has been a hard book to hear.

[15 : 20] It has been a hard book to study. First, I want to remind you that this, that these teachings are not out of step with Jesus. Perhaps later on in the week you would look at Luke 6.

Jesus echoing Amos with a series of woe to you statements. Jesus saying, woe to you who are rich and full and satisfied and trivializing your life away.

It's the same message. Or perhaps Matthew 23 when Jesus says, woe to you hypocrites and he's speaking specifically to the very religious who are people full of pride. Amos and Jesus, they're on the same page.

Secondly, I want to ask, is Amos 5 and 6 a mirror that we need to hold up and look into? Is it a mirror we need to hold up and look into?

It's a hard question. It's the right question to ask after this though. I think any of us with an ounce of self-awareness will know, you know, we are all hypocrites to some degree.

[16 : 24] So we shouldn't walk in here pretending we have it all together. No, we come here grateful that God has provided Jesus through our forgiveness and the Holy Spirit to help us be more consistent in our daily life.

But today, let's ask the question, is God specifically speaking to you, specifically speaking to me, perhaps about pride, perhaps about complacency, perhaps about a life that is just pretty much focused on our own comforts?

Is he calling you away from something that is spiritually poisoning you because he is so, so committed to you?