JUSTICE

Part 7 of The Savior King. Amos 5:1-15.

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. October 25, 2026.

Dismiss the Middle School

STUDY GUIDE

As you came in this morning, you should have received a bulletin. Inside, you'll find a simple study guide you can use in a few different ways: to follow along with today's teaching, to reflect on during your personal devotions this week, or to spark conversation in your small group.

More resources are available online. The link is in your study guide.

Let's get started on today's teaching …

GOD HAS A VISION AND A VOICE

God has a vision for the world. To make that vision reality, God created a new nation, Israel, made a covenant with them, committed to being their God, and gave them land, laws, and religion. He called them his people and told them to fill their land with justice. They failed.

A truly just world will not emerge until Jesus returns and his Kingdom comes. The Bible tells us that when Christ appears:

> *Isaiah 9:7 (CSB) He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever.*

Justice gets a bad rap these days because political agendas have hijacked and redefined it.

But God's idea of justice is what Jesus said: ***Love God, love people*** (Matthew 22:35-40). And that's a beautiful way to live.

God's vision is a world filled with justice, where our relationships with God and people are in perfect order.

Sadly, God's vision is yet to materialize. We're living in a disordered world. People reject and replace God. They treat each other terribly. Injustice reigns.

And God has something to say about it. He's not pleased. He's angry (Romans 1:18ff.). But he's hopeful. For example: God's voice rings from the Minor Prophets as they call for a just world. God speaks clearly for all to hear.

Today's Old Testament highlight comes from Amos, one of the Minor Prophets. We'll read it in a moment, but first we need some background.

THE MINOR PROPHETS

Amos is one of the twelve Minor Prophets. They're not minor because they are less important; it's because they are shorter than Isaiah or Jeremiah.

The Minor Prophets focus on justice issues: God's covenant nation Israel failed to love God or people. The minor prophets speak against idolatry, empty worship, as well as corrupt leadership and exploitation of the poor and weak.

The prophets speak for God, delivering judgment along with offers of mercy and restoration.

AMOS

Amos lived about ten miles south of Jerusalem, when Israel was divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. His prophecy is directed to the northern tribes.

Amos owned large flocks of sheep. He was a well-off rancher, not a preacher

We don't know how or why the Lord appointed him to prophesy, but we do know Israel was in a spiritually dark time. God had a message for his wayward people.

READ verses 1-15.

WHAT GOD THINKS ABOUT JUSTICE: AMOS 5:1-15

What does God think about justice, and what does he want us to do about it?

1. GOD THINKS: UNJUST NATIONS ARE DOOMED - verses 1-3

Verses 1-3 are a funeral for Israel before it dies.

Amos sings a lament as he predicts the demise of the northern tribes. Assyrian armies would eventually destroy them.

> *1 Listen to this message that I am singing for you, a lament, house of Israel:*
>
> *2 She has fallen; Virgin Israel will never rise again. She lies abandoned on her land with no one to raise her up. 3 For the Lord GOD says: The city that marches out a thousand strong will have only a hundred left, and the one that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left in the house of Israel.*

Unjust nations may go on for some time, but they can never hide from God. Eventually his hammer falls. Injustice never prevails.

Unjust nations are doomed.

2. GOD THINKS: RELIGION CANNOT COVER INJUSTICE - vv. 4-5

Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba were places of worship, but the worshippers were only going through the motions. Their hearts were far from God. They performed the rituals as insurance in case their idol gods failed. They did not seek the Lord.

> *4 For the LORD says to the house of Israel:*
>
> *Seek me and live! 5 Do not seek Bethel or go to Gilgal or journey to Beer-sheba, for Gilgal will certainly go into exile, and Bethel will come to nothing.*

God's message: If you're hurting people and ignoring me, your religion cannot save you.

Verses 8-9 highlight God's power to execute judgment. He is the eternal Creator of the universe - the LORD, Yahweh - in contrast to their powerless, lifeless, carved idols:

> *The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns darkness into dawn and darkens day into night, who summons the water of the sea and pours it out over the surface of the earth — the LORD (I AM, self-existent, eternal) is his name. 9 He brings destruction on the strong, and it falls on the fortress.*

God sees. God knows. And he has the power to act. His judgments may be delayed, but they're never late.

Then, in the third section of chapter 5 …

3. GOD THINKS: PEOPLE DESERVE JUSTICE - verses 10-13

In this paragraph, the Lord lists his charges against his people.

> *10 They hate the one who convicts the guilty at the city gate (law courts), and they despise the one who speaks with integrity. 11 Therefore, because you trample on the poor and exact a grain tax from him (the rich took the harvest from the poor farmers), you will never live in the houses of cut stone you have built; you will never drink the wine from the lush vineyards you have planted.*
>
> *12 For I know your crimes are many and your sins innumerable. They oppress the righteous, take a bribe, and deprive the poor of justice at the city gates.*
>
> *13 Therefore, those who have insight will keep silent at such a time, for the days are evil.*

They corrupted the courts, lived by lies, and oppressed the vulnerable. God's vision of a just world was ripped to shreds by his own covenant people.

But God thinks people deserve justice: safety at home, a fair hearing in court, the truth prevailing, and protection from powerful bullies.

4. GOD THINKS: UNJUST NATIONS CAN CHANGE - vv. 14-15

The Lord urges his people to restore justice and return to their covenant with him. Then, he would protect and bless them.

> *14 Pursue good and not evil so that you may live, and the LORD, the God of Armies,* ***will be with you*** *as you have claimed. 15 Hate evil and love good; establish justice at the city gate. Perhaps the LORD, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

Sadly, they ignored God; nothing changed, and the Assyrian armies invaded in 722 BC and destroyed them.

CONCLUSIONS

What can we conclude from Amos 5? Two things:

- Justice matters. It matters to God, and it should matter to us.
- We know how to live justly because Amos 5 tells us. And that's what I'd like us to explore for our remaining time this morning.

HOW TO LIVE JUSTLY

Living justly has two parts: 1) hate evil, and 2) love good - see verses 14-15.

These are strong words. Neutrality is not an option. Passivity is not on the table. God wants us to feel deeply about good and evil.

- Loving good means to choose it and delight in it.[1]
- Hating evil means to have a strong aversion to it.

God wants us to care deeply about justice, deeply enough to do something about it.

Generally speaking, we can approach justice on two levels: personal justice and communal justice.

- **Personal justice** concerns how individuals hate evil and love good. An easy way to think about personal justice is to ask what kind of reputation we have. Are we known for telling the truth and treating people right? Are we helping to make God's vision of a just world a reality by the way we live?
- **Communal justice** concerns how communities - cities, states, federal authorities - hate evil and love good. This concerns our institutions, schools, the legal system, governments, and so on.

We don't have time to go into this in depth. So, let's take a quick look at a framework for thinking about how we can hate evil and love good.

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[1] New American Commentary on Amos 5.

It's an ancient framework we call the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). It's divided into two sections: Section one deals with loving God, and Section two deals with loving people.

The second section of the Ten Commandments contains six laws for loving people.

> *Exodus 20:12-17 (CSB Strong's) Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*
>
> *13 Do not murder.*
>
> *14 Do not commit adultery.*
>
> *15 Do not steal.*
>
> *16 Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.*
>
> *17 Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

This is how I would summarize them:

- Respect family.
- Respect life.
- Respect marriage.
- Respect property.
- Respect truth.
- Respect contentment.

That's a great framework for a just individual to live by, and a just society to aim at through its laws and institutions.

DOUBLE DOWN ON JUSTICE

There is so much more to say about justice. I'd love to talk about it. Please talk to me.

If you're interested in learning more about God's laws for loving people, I recommend the insights in To Be a Christian: A Catechism (pages 91ff).[2] It's available online for free. I included the link in your study guide.

As authentic Jesus-followers, we're not just going through the motions of religion while our hearts are far from God. And so, we take God's vision for a just world seriously.

The Bible reminds us that:

- Faith without works is useless (James 2:15-17).
- God saved us for good works (Ephesians 2:10).
- The mark of a Christian is love (John 13:35).
- Christianity is more than religion or ritual; it is "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

The Bible invites us to …

> *Ephesians 5:1-2 (CSB) … be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, 2 and walk in love, **as Christ also loved us** and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.*

Will you commit to live justly? Decide today to love God and love people.

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[2] [2] https://anglicanchurch.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/To-Be-a-Christian.pdf

WHEN WE FAIL THE JUSTICE TEST

The Bible tells us that we have a big problem. We've all failed the justice test. Even people with the best of intentions, even spiritual people.

That's God's verdict:

> *Romans 3:10-11, 18 (CSB) There is no one righteous, not even one* (We could translate the word "righteous" as "just." It's the same Greek word group)*. 11 There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God… 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

So, the Bible says that no one is just.

And we cannot have a relationship with God unless we are fully, flawlessly, and perfectly righteous or just. Remember Amos 5? God judges injustice

It's a problem we cannot solve. We cannot balance the scales.

But God has solved the problem for us, not by urging us to start over and try harder to live a just life. Because we'd only fail again and again.

God offers us righteousness, or a just standing with him, as a gift. He offers to credit it to our account, so to speak, as if we were perfectly just, always loving God and people perfectly. Listen to this version of Romans 4:

> *Romans 4:24-25 (NLT) God will also count us as righteous (or just) if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.*

I invite you to receive God's gift today. It's free to you and me, but it cost God his Son. Jesus died in our place and rose again to make us just in God's sight.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Use any or all of the following questions to guide your group's conversation about Sunday's sermon.

Read Amos 5:1-15.

Icebreaker

When you hear the word "justice, " what's the first picture or news headline that pops into your head — and where do you think that picture came from?

Observation

In Amos 5:4-5, God tells the people to stop traveling to the famous worship spots (Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba) and instead says, "Seek me and live." What does God say will happen to those places, and what is he telling the people to do instead?

Read Amos 5:10-12 out loud together. What specific actions does God accuse his people of, and who does each one hurt?

Discussion

Amos opens the chapter by singing a funeral song over a nation that is still alive and, on the surface, doing fine. Why use funeral language — what is God seeing that the people themselves couldn't see? What does this say about God's vision for a just world?

In verse 15, after urging the people to "hate evil and love good," Amos says "Perhaps the LORD will be gracious." Why "perhaps"? What does that small word tell us about the proper posture of people who have offended God?

Application

The sermon said personal justice shows up in our reputation — being known for telling the truth and treating people right. If your coworkers, or your kids, described your reputation honestly this week,

The sermon summed up the second half of the Ten Commandments as: respect family, respect life, respect marriage, respect property, respect truth, respect contentment. It's easy to see that our culture has jumped over these guardrails. What are some practical steps we could take to bring our culture closer to God's vision for justice in these areas?

Extra Notes etc.

When we reject God, people suffer. The powerful and ruthless rise without fear of accountability or judgment, and a reign of terror begins.

> *Vladimir Lenin, the Marxist who led the 1917 Communist Revolution in Russia, justified the Red Terror campaign against his opponents. He reportedly said:*
>
> *"Not a single problem of the class struggle has ever been solved in history except by violence. When violence is exercised by the working people, by the mass of exploited against the exploiters—then we are for it! … no mercy for the enemies of socialism"*[3]

Now, outspoken atheists are not the only villains here. There are plenty of religious people who use religion as a cover-up for evil.

Jim Crow and slavery were supported by cultural Christians who lacked a living faith in the Savior and a reverent fear of God.

Some parts of the Islamic world justify terrorism. Why? Because they worship a false god, either themselves or a demon.

One reason for the rise of Western civilization was the spread of the Christian faith and individuals and nations adopting biblical standards of justice.

One reason Western civilization is losing its way is the decline of the Christian faith, the rejection of God, and the loss of confidence in biblical standards of justice.

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[3] https://www.thoughtco.com/lenin-quotes-4779266

ONE FINAL WORD ON JUSTICE

Here's one final word on justice: It won't happen fully in this age.

That doesn't mean that we ignore justice issues. It means that we have realistic expectations. We'll do all we can in the power of his Spirit to love and God people.

On the one hand, we can do so much good in the world, but on the other hand, bad stuff will still happen, and people will behave badly.

A truly just world will not emerge until Jesus returns and his Kingdom comes. The Bible tells us that when Christ appears:

> *Isaiah 9:7 (CSB) He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever.*

Let's live justly, loving God and people, and let's live prayerfully, "Come soon, Lord Jesus. Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth."

> *"Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives… Those ties protect people from life's discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes."*

Long before Harvard researchers began their study, God knew what would produce happiness. He said, ***"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him"*** (Genesis 2:18 CSB).

The man and woman flourished in their relationship with each other and with the Lord God who visited them in the original Garden Paradise.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Much later, the Lord gave Israel the Ten Commandments, not to burden them with stifling rules, but to map out a path to happiness. Jesus summarized its contents:

> *Matthew 22:35-40 (CSB) And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: 36 "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest? " 37 He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and most important command. 39 The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."*

God's idea of a great life is: Love God + love people = happiness.

Do you know what the Bible calls this simple formula for living? **Justice**. That might surprise you. Most of us think justice is the courts. But the Bible teaches that justice, at its core, means loving God and people: doing right by them, doing no harm, and doing the most good.

Justice is on God's top ten list. Jesus said that loving God and people sums up God's Law and the message of the prophets.

So how does the Lord feel about injustice? The answer is in Amos 5. We'll read it in a moment, but first we need some background.

1. LOVE GOD

Justice begins with loving God. This isn't about feelings or romance. It's about giving God his rightful place. The Ten Commandments tell us how:

> *Exodus 20:3 (CSB) Do not have other gods besides me.*

The Anglican Catechism, To Be A Christian,[4] explains what this means:

> *It means that there should be nothing in my life more important than God and obeying his will. I should worship him only and love, revere, and trust him above all else (page 94).*

A just life begins with a loving, reverent fear of the one true God. We need to be dethroned, and we need to admit that we are not God. Then, the pride, greed, lies, hatred, and ambition that lead to injustice will end.

The second part of living justly is …

[4] https://anglicanchurch.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/To-Be-a-Christian.pdf