

What Does the Lord Require of us? Amos 5 & Micah 6

Its Sunday morning in the Sudan,
in China, in Iraq, in Cuba, and in South Central LA.
As the sun rises, millions of Christians awaken
to the grim awareness that they are about to face
another exhausting week – a week filled with fear,
hatred, violence, hunger, and pain.

Some dress themselves quickly and make
their way across town to attend a worship service.
They glance around cautiously from time to time,
wondering if anyone is watching.
They delight in gathering together with other believers,
but know full well that they may pay dearly for doing so.

Others arise at dawn,
assemble their poorly fed children inside shabby homes,
and those who have them read secretly from a well
worn bible that remained hidden during the week.
They pray desperately for their daily bread and for
the courage to carry on.
Still others wake up to the darkness of their prison cells.
Prayer is on their lips as they look forward to further
interrogation, torture, and perhaps execution.
Sunday morning in the Sudan, China, and south central.

Meanwhile, on this same Sunday morning,
all over America a different scene unfolds.
From a glass cathedral down the road,
to a Pentecostal tabernacle in the Deep South.
From a high-tech mega church in Chicago,
to a quaint little white church
here at the corner of Baldwin and Lemon
worshippers at ease in upholstered pews,
receive the Good News.
The message is spoken in encouraging words,
through dramatic presentations, well crafted sermons,
and tearful testimonials.
The message is conveyed in beautiful songs with words
projected over wonderful scenery.

Worship. Worship around the globe
is the honor and the praise and the glory we bring to God.
Worship is the love we lavish on him.

Today I wonder.

As I read these texts from the prophets, I wonder.

How does God feel about the worship we bring today
here in Arcadia and in North America.

How does God feel about this stark difference between
worship here and there in the Sudan, or in China, or
in Iraq this morning.

How does God feel

about the other stark differences between people.

The inequalities, the injustices, the incompatibilities.

In the days of the prophet Amos,

when these stark differences between people existed,

when some people were building million dollar mansions,

lounging in their lush gardens,

drinking wine and discussing theology;

and others were down and out; dressed in rags,

living in cardboard boxes; sleeping under overpasses.

When the poor were being trampled upon and bribes and
kickbacks were lubricating the economy.

God said to his people: Amos 5:21

I hate, I despise your religious feasts;

I cannot stand your worship assemblies.

Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain

offerings, according to the traditions and the

regulations of the bible, I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,

I will have no regard for them.

Away with the noise of your songs!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

Rather

let justice roll on like a river.

Let righteousness flow like a never ending stream!

Let justice roll on like a river.

Righteousness flow like a never ending stream!

Three times, no four times, in that great chapter of Amos 5

God says to the people, to his people:

Seek me and live. Seek good and not evil;

Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts.

Then the Lord God almighty will be with you just
as you say he is.

In Micah 6 we find a similar situation.

God is sick & tired. God upset, riled up about how
people treat each other.
That they lie and cheat, that the rich keep getting richer
and the poor poorer.
That bottom line is always about money and power.
That the poor get left behind,
that the sick are left to care for themselves.

God is riled up because people, his people
no longer seek him, they no longer act like his children.
And so God files charges against them
at the DA's office of the world.
God has a case against his people.
He charges them with breach of contract.
It seems they no longer know what it means that
he is their God and they are his people.

After the preliminary hearings have proved that God's case
is well founded and there is enough evidence,
God presents the actual case.
With creation, and the scientific tools of the crime lab,
and natural wisdom, and the universal ideas of justice
as his jury
God makes his opening statements,
his opening legal moves against his people.

Don't you remember who I am? God says to his people.
Don't you remember what I've done for you?
You'd be 6 feet under by now if it wasn't for me.
Your family would be extinct centuries ago.
I saved you from slavery.
I rescued you from your enemies.
I was with you in trouble and gave my word to guide you.
I even sent you my son, Jesus,
to convey my love and my mercy to you, my heart.
I went to the cross for you.
Everything I did, I did for you.
Everything I did was so you would know me, and
enjoy me.
Everything I did for you was so that you would really
get close to me and know my very heart and soul.
Do you remember who I am?

And secondly God says,
When I went to cross for you,
when I humbled myself and paid for all your sin,

and gave you life, and healed you, comforted you;
what did I ask in return?
What did I require of you?

Did I ask you for big checks in hands
when you kneeed down before me?
Did I ask you to sacrifice a thousand rams, or
ten thousand rivers of oil?
Did I ask you to sacrifice you children, your jobs?
Did I ask you to come to church every Sunday for a couple
of hours sings songs and listen to sermons?
Did I ask you to build fancy buildings and
keep everything neat a tidy?
What does that mean to love God with all your heart,
with all your mind, with all your strength,
and with all you soul?
What does that mean? What do I require of you my people?

And that brings God to the third legal move
in his case against his people.
My dear children, God says to his people.
Since the beginning I have told and showed you and
modeled it for you what is good.
I have told what I require of you
if I'm going to be your God, and
you are going be my people.
And its simply this:
To act justly, and to love mercy and
to walk humbly with me.
All I ask is that you walk close to me and with me in life
and live justice and love mercy.
Just as I act justly and love mercy and
humbled myself for you.

And don't think
that I'm just a cuddly old teddy bear up in sky
who loves and forgives everyone who shows up in
church and sings the old songs.
Don't think I'm just an old grey haired grandmother who
doesn't really mean what I say and gives candy to the
grand children no matter what they do.

Me dragging you into court hopefully will sober you up.
Me dragging you into court hopefully will shock you
out your state of denial and
help you realize you are not as innocent as you think.

You are guilty. And don't think that your lies, and
your wealth, and your power are
going to help you wiggle out of this.
Don't think your anger and your violence, and
your injustice, and inequities, and your insensibilities
will go unpunished.

Without living justice, and without loving mercy,
with out walking humbly with me as your God,
you will certainly end up ruined and destroyed and
the laughing stock of the world.

So let me get to my final point, my closing argument, says
God to his people, to the jury, and to the judge.

Repent.

Make a complete U turn in your way of thinking and acting.

Become aware of the beam in your own eyes
that distorts your way of looking at life.

For not everyone who says to me Lord Lord,
will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Many people think they are prophesying in my name and
doing ministry and church work in my name and
worshipping in my name.

But you know what: I do not know them,
they are not my children.

So when you come to the altar.

When you come to church to offer you worship and
here in this place of worship and
you are reminded that some brother or sister has
something against you.

If there some injustice or
some harsh judgments about people being right or wrong.

I say leave your gift of worship here in front of the altar
and first go and be reconciled to your brother or sister,
even if they live in Africa, or china,
or Cuba, or South Central.

First live justice and love mercy,
First act justly and show mercy,
then come and offer your humble gift at
the altar of my presence.

Jesus said in Matthew 5

Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are those who feel over whelmed about the

injustices and the lack of mercy and the suffering and the sin and the self righteousness and the inconsistencies between worship here and there.

Blessed are those who mourn and grieve over this.
They will be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers for they are the true children of God.

The heart of worship is not
singing songs or listening to sermons on a Sunday morning.

Its seeking God, its seeking his goodness his grace,
its hating evil and injustice and loving good.

Its living justice, loving mercy, and
walking humbly with your God 24/7.