

SEEK GOD

AMOS 5:1-15

(Prepared by Gene Thompson)

If you put on a football uniform, can you play in the Super Bowl next Sunday? If you put on surgical scrubs, could you perform an operation? The answer to both questions is “no,” of course. Why?

External appearances can't make up for internal reality!

1. What is a cicada?

2. Have you ever seen an empty cicada shell clinging to a tree?

It gives the outward appearance of a locust but there is nothing inside. A lot of people are like cicada shells, they try to project an outward appearance of spirituality when, in fact, they are just empty shells going through the motions of religion without a real vibrant faith. A church can even become an empty shell.

3. Is God impressed when we just go through the motions of religious rituals—even if we are constantly doing so?

Neither empty religious activity or self-focused worship measures up to spiritual faithfulness in God's eyes.

Amos was dealing with a very similar situation—the people were going to their “worship centers” but their worship was hollow and they had little or no regard for God or the things of God!

Today we will examine some substitutions we must be careful not to make.

PRELUDE! Read Amos 5:1-3

Just suppose you put on your Sunday best and went to church feeling good and ready to worship, but the preacher preached your funeral service! This is a funeral dirge or lament.

In his third recorded sermon, Amos called for the people of Israel to seek God. He announced a coming judgment on those who distorted justice. Amos identified the Lord as the sovereign Creator who brings judgment to all, even the strong.

THE CHOICE! Read Amos 5:4-9

1. Were the Israelites a religious people? (They were very religious, but their problem was they did not go to their worship centers to seek God and worship Him.)

2. What do you think the people were seeking at these worship centers? (An experience, blessings, to legitimize sinful lifestyles, relive past experiences, just to be seen, etc.)

Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba were all historic worship centers for the Israelites, but these historic sanctuaries had become shrines of idolatry.

3. What did Amos challenge them to do so they could live? (Seek God!)

4. What was the benefit if they would earnestly seek God? (Life.)

The indication in verse 6 is that if they would seek Him, He would spare them from the divine judgment He was getting ready to bring upon them.

5. What is the difference between seeking God and going to church? (It isn't an outward action it is an issue of the heart. Do we really have a thirst for God or not?)

“It's not religion that produces a just society, but personal relationship with the living God.”—Larry Richards.

6. What is he telling the people in verse 7? (They have perverted justice and made it bitter and trampling righteousness into the ground.)

7. How did Amos describe Yahweh in verses 8 and 9?

8. How does focusing on God's rule over all things created impact a person's worship? (It puts things in God's perspective!)
9. What are some substitutes that people seek instead of God, and how do those substitutes fall short of true worship? (Church attendance. Giving to the church. Worship nature. Etc. No matter what you do or how much you do it you will be left empty and unfulfilled in your heart.)

God desires worship on His terms from lives that are fully surrendered to Him!

Amos delivered an indictment against the people of Israel, calling out their perversion of justice and oppression of others. As a result, the people would not enjoy their gains because of their mistreatment of others.

THE REALITY! Read Amos 5:10-13

Not only did the Israelites have a worship problem, they had a character problem. Israel had numerous sins, but Amos specifically listed three.

1. What specific sins did Amos point out? (Hate to convict the guilty; despise a person of integrity; trample the poor; oppress the righteous; take bribes; and deprive the poor of justice.)
2. Why might a person believe that God would overlook the mistreatment of the poor and unethical gain because of that mistreatment? (They were giving a tithe off of all they got, surely God would like that. Some earnestly believe they were better than the poor!)
3. Why is it easy to remain silent in the midst of injustices around us? (Don't want to get involved. We say, "It's really none of my business. I might suffer if I speak out.")

Far from oppressing the Israelites, God was exacting justice against them.

THE SOLUTION! Read Amos 5:14-15

1. What solution did Amos propose to the people?
 2. How do we go about seeking the Lord? (Our search begins with an act of the will. We must earnestly seek the Lord by setting our minds to do so. This involves humility, sincerity and purpose of heart.)
- God isn't hiding, He wants to be found. We will find Him when we search for Him with all of our heart.
3. Why are loving good and upholding justice indicators that a person is seeking God? (It is an outward expression of the heart's inward longing for God.)
 4. Is God's grace guaranteed? (To a point. The problem is we can't continue to reject His offer of salvation by grace because we don't know when our last chance will come. You only come to God when He is calling you. One day He may stop calling.)

Read Isa. 55:6

Amos called on the Israelites to seek God by changing both their worship and their character. One impacts the other.

CHALLENGE!

Amos' message today affirmed that the Israelites were living a hypocritical life toward God. Remember the cicada shell? Any time we substitute external appearances for inner reality, we eventually crack and disintegrate, just like the locust shell.

Pray that God will reveal any hollow areas in your heart that He is ready to fill.

May our prayer be as David Edwards and Regi Stone wrote:

**"In dry and barren land, our fields have turned to sand.
Before You now we stand, Lord, come and heal this land.**

**The wells of our supply are broken and run dry.
With desperate hearts we cry, Lord, open up the sky.
Let Your holy rain fall down.
Wash and cleanse within, without.
Water our soul's thirsty ground.
Let Your holy rain fall down."**