

WHY AND EFFECTS

Amos is not a book for light summer reading, especially this passage.

This text presents Amos' vituperative outburst against social injustices of his time, in the 8th century BCE. ~~~~~

The Bible is clear about the necessity of doing justice--God's justice. This means the powerful helping the weak and less powerful / of leveling the playing field. This is God's way, and all people need to know that it is God's way.

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The message begins with the illustration of the basket of beautiful summer fruit. Suggesting, all appears bountiful and lavish, but such luxury and affluence is Not what God is seeing. God sees the whole picture.

*Our lives seem pretty comfortable, but I wonder what God is seeing?*

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Scholars state that the occasion is likely the "Feast of the Tabernacles", which is a big celebration for the harvest and the beginning of the new year. In those days, the new year began in the fall. It was a New Year's Eve party.

Speeches would typically add to the festivities with proclamation of hope and optimism. Yet surprisingly, Amos preached that the good times are over, and that it's too late to repent to avoid consequences.

The consequences of greed, hoarding and exploitation will happen.

He calls it God's judgment,.....which is God withdrawing God self..... and allowing the results of **their** bad behaviour to play out.

God pulling away..... that is an uneasy thought.

Verses 4 through 6 are the charges: citations of their destructive and abusive society. ~~~~~

They trampled on the needy. They crushed the poor and kept them down. The affluent/ the comfortable likely gave aid to the poor and downtrodden as they sang out "All lives matter".

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In addition, they didn't honor the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was more than just a time of rest. The Sabbath meant restoration / jubilee / a restart for all.

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Then Amos notes God's response and the usual consequences of abetting an unjust system.

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When a society is out of balance--when the rich get richer and the poor poorer, then before long..... things will get ugly and nasty for everyone! People become afraid, then angry.... guns are bought,... and used.... and governments drop bombs and march to war.

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This indictment is "personal" for me.

Notice in verse 10, included in the judgment, along with songs of lamentation, is the penalty of "baldness on every head."

So,.....take heed,..... I'm [] like the canary in the coal mine.

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As I mentioned before, this is not a call to repentance..... because it's too late. The damage has been done.

BUT, It's **not** too late to change. **It is too** late to avoid the results.

For example:

It's prudent to throw water on a burning house. Water can halt the destruction, yet the water will NOT restore what is already burnt.

We can **not** undue past destruction, but we can do more than just ease the pain.

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We are an informed congregation. We know about income disparity--that the rich are getting richer, as the poor get poorer.

We know that people with darker skin are not treated as fairly as others. We know that the indigenous do not have the same opportunities that we do, and their standard of living is much lower.

We know about racial profiling. We know that the justice system is harsher on the disenfranchised minorities.

We know all this, and we have compassion; we are concerned for the oppressed. Our heart bleeds for victims of violence and injustices.

Moreover, we **are** helping those in need, such as Syrian refugees,.... YET we must also change the system. We need to stop what is causing so many refugees.

Our "why" response must also deal with the abuses and injustices.

We must confront and end systemic evil.

Our actions must be compassionate, life giving and relevant for justice.

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A lesson from Martha's house taken from the Luke text:

Mary is Martha's sister, and Mary is a student of Jesus. The idiom "to sit at feet" means to study under someone. This is unusual because in those day, Rabbis did not teach women, but Jesus did. He changed the rules.

Meanwhile, as Jesus was teaching, Martha had become quite perturbed because she was stuck doing all the hosting obligations.

Martha felt that Mary was taking advantage of her, and so she asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her with the serving instead of listening to Jesus. Perhaps, Mary was defending the status quo?

However, Jesus remarked that Martha was wrong, and that she was trying to do too much. He was saying that Mary was doing exactly what she needs to be doing.

Martha had her own "noble" agenda, and it is admirable to be a good host, but.....she was missing out on the teachings from Jesus. This was an opportunity for her.

Martha had good intentions; her "why" was sound, yet her busyness/ her preoccupation prevented her from being "with" Jesus.

I wonder if we are sometimes too busy doing noble things, that we miss the big picture or that we get stuck in old patterns?

We pass out fruit from our basket, yet fail to address the reasons that so many have empty baskets in the first place.

Europe is flooded with refugees,....it no wonder that they struggle to address the base cause. They're too busy putting out fires that they won't or can't deal with the injustices.

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We must confront and end systemic evil.

To be sure, confronting the world's problem is daunting.

Indeed,.....but I think this task begins in our world, in our country, in our domain.

This includes working to end the doctrine of discovery that has devalued and constrained the indigenous.

We can embrace pride parades, and we most definitely need to support "Black Lives Matter."

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There is some confusion over this. Some are saying and singing, "All lives matter", and that is not only missing the point, it is arrogant.

Greed, selfishness, injustices put people down. It is God's way to lift them up.

Black lives matter is a means of showing that their fruit basket is empty or has only rotten fruit in it. It's a way of saying, "Lift up the Black people."

Lift up those who are weak.

Lift up the exploited and the abused.

Lift up those who have been put down.

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But,.....there is a catch.

We must surrender some of our power and status in order to lift the downtrodden up.

We must disengage from the system that puts some people down.

We, the powerful, must lower ourselves in order to help the weak.

There is a reason our basket is full while others are not.

They system strongly favours us. We made it.

This means we need to be proactive about changing the legal and police system, and there could be some risk to this.

We must examine our retirement funds, and make sure they are just investments. Some of the biggest ones are invested in unjust ventures just because the monetary return is high. In other words, they are taking fruit from others.

Our banking system rewards those who have money, and penalizes the poor. We must protest this and do with less.

And, we should demand our government increase taxation on we the affluent and on the large corporations who are paying their CEOs millions of dollars.

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Our culture is keeping people down with low pay and fewer and fewer "good" entry level jobs. So, don't use those automatic check outs,... Ask companies to hire people with just wages. That's just one example. Be creative. Look for ways to change the system.

Also, our military system preys on the weak and poor, and we must expose this.

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I once was convinced that it made sense to "use" invested money to help the poor. It seemed logical that affluent institutions or individuals were best equipped to help the needy, such as Bill Gates. However, I now know that those methods are patronizing, arrogant and are keeping the marginalized in the margins.

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Overall, we must not only help the poor and downtrodden with fruit from our basket, but we must also work hard to change the system so that all are able to equally and fairly benefit.

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Justice begins in our own homes, in our churches and neighbourhood, and in our own country.

The world changes when we change, and the message from Amos is warning us that we need to change. We need to change because injustice will boil over and explodeor ... run down innocent people in Nice, France.

And,...we need to change.....because God may be withdrawing from us.....because we have baskets full of fruit and others don't.

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Think about it. Why would God give priority to our prayers when so many others are hurting, hungry, victims of violence and in despair.

Let us pray that we can do with less in order to change our unjust system. Maybe God will hear that prayer.

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We lift people up by lowering ourselves.

God came to each of us through Jesus.... God lowered self to the level of humanity so that we could be lifted up.

There is hope for us.....hope for our country and the world, but people, especially those laid low, need to experience the love of God through Christ.

This is our calling.....this is OUR Hope!