

## An Uncomfortable Conversation Amos 5

This year we have committed to read through the Bible in Chronological order. The story of the Bible, God's involvement with people, is being laid out before us. **The thread that holds much of it together is a covenant**, or promise, made between God and Abraham and his relatives moving forward. The **good times, or times of blessing**, are based upon these people keeping their end of the covenant. The **bad times are when they aren't**. They are to obey what Moses has passed down to them and they are to be exclusively God's special people. They must not follow **any other gods, philosophies, or paths**. It is **complete allegiance to God**. Today's story takes us to the book of Amos, who God has told to have a **difficult conversation with some of his people** who are behaving badly. This video from The Bible Project should help us get the lay of the land.

**Video cut #1: Beginning to 104** So, now we know about Amos, the prophet. Here's some more about the section of Amos that our reading comes from.

For those who do not know that nation of **Israel has had a major split**. Ten of the twelve tribes have left and moved their capital from Jerusalem to Samaria. This nation is called Israel, or the **northern kingdom**. What is left centers around Jerusalem and Solomon's temple. God made a **promise to King David that a king from his family** would always sit on the throne of God's people in Jerusalem. **The main tribe is Judah**, which is what they call this nation. Here's a little bit more from **The Bible Project, skipping to the section of Amos** that contains our scripture passage for today. **Video cut #2: 2:29-5:29** **Chapter 5 is written like a funeral dirge for a family member or friend**. In this case it is for a nation. **The confusing part is that it seems very premature**. Jeroboam is on the throne and has won battles, taken land, and accumulated massive wealth. **It's telling a person who feels great that they have cancer**.

**The prophet is literally, "the mouthpiece of God."** As I said last week when we talked about prophetic voice, a prophet is **mainly interested in now, not the future**. He is speaking God's message; his primary role is not to predict the future. **In this case he does**. The message is to disobedient wicked nation **who knows better, but does worse**.

**There is the funeral depressing part, but there is also a part that begs the listener to pursue God** and experience real life as God intended for his special people. There is a message about what they are doing wrong, **what the punishment**

or consequences for that wrong are, but also with a call to return to the God of Abraham.

The lament, the mourning, the funeral dirge, is strong because this is going to happen. There is no way Jeroboam and those wealthy, unjust, people who are chasing after other gods, are going to repent. This is set in motion.

If this is all set, then who is he calling to return to God? These people are not to be fooled by the fact that the temples were built and look like they are about worshiping God. (video...Jeroboam built two temples to replace the one in Jerusalem) This is for the people who still have ears to hear God. They have remained faithful to Yahweh. With what is coming, they need to lean into what God is saying.

Let's dive into Amos, chapter 5. Listen, you people of Israel! Listen to this funeral song I am singing: <sup>2</sup> "The virgin Israel has fallen, never to rise again! She lies abandoned on the ground, with no one to help her up." <sup>3</sup> The Sovereign Lord says: "When a city sends a thousand men to battle, only a hundred will return. When a town sends a hundred, only ten will come back alive." <sup>4</sup> Now this is what the Lord says to the family of Israel: "Come back to me and live! <sup>5</sup> Don't worship at the pagan altars at Bethel; don't go to the shrines at Gilgal or Beersheba. For the people of Gilgal will be dragged off into exile, and the people of Bethel will be reduced to nothing." <sup>6</sup> Come back to the Lord and live! Otherwise, he will roar through Israel like a fire, devouring you completely. Your gods in Bethel won't be able to quench the flames. Amos 5:1-6

Here you see the lament for the death of Israel as they know it. And then "Come back to the Lord and live."

To understand these uncomfortable words we must be willing to join Amos, to Lament suffering and death even when deserving.

That's tough because I love it when someone gets what they have coming. That's human nature. It's particularly sweet when you tell someone what was going to happen if they didn't straighten up. Something in this upside-down world is put right side up when the bad people with their bad behavior get what they deserve.

That makes it almost impossible to mourn or feel bad for them. When someone is found guilty of murder in a court of law, part of the room is celebrating a sense of vindication while the other half is crying because all is lost.

That brings us back to this word lament. Lament means to express one's deep grief about something. Or to express regret or disappointment over something considered unsatisfactory. "This is not how it is supposed to be!"

**This is a cautionary tale. "Don't do this..."** But it's also true that the prophet is lamenting what Israel's sin, and the sin of its leaders, is doing to the people. **Picturing the outcome of what should be God's special peoples is terrible for Amos.** No one wants to picture this.

This is why I put that **last phrase** in your notes, **"even when deserving."** Amos is mourning, **sad, horrified, and disappointed** over what is happening, even when they had it coming. **They did plenty to earn being conquered and carried off like slaves by the Assyrian army.**

1. They ran **roughshod over the covenant** to be God's special people. They were **not faithful or loyal.**
2. They **worshiped other gods**, just in case. That's a big one.
3. **The king married wives who worship these gods**, some who **sacrificed children and employed prostitutes** at their temple.
4. **They took advantage of their fellow Hebrews** to make themselves richer. They even **made them slaves and corrupted the courts** to keep them enslaved.

**Amos is mourning, lamenting, calling out to God over the people who had it coming.** They were reaping what they sowed, their chickens were coming home to roost...

**Do we lament or mourn when the bad people get what they deserve, and they suffer?** We should. I told you this would be an uncomfortable conversation. **But wait a second, did I get what I deserve for my sin?** This verse is for us, not just for the sinners who are causing America to go downhill.

**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesian 6:23**

**We can't just mourn or lament what makes our lives more dangerous or more difficult. That's self-serving.** A Christ follower in another country once said, **"Don't pray for the persecution to stop, because it is causing the message of Christ to go forward. Pray that we will be faithful."**

**Amos' heart broke for the thing that broke the heart of God.** And that was suffering that was to come, **the bitter harvest they were to reap** for the ones Yahweh loved. If the church could do this which is the essence of Jesus' command to **"love your enemies"** this could really change things. If the church could do this, it would **change how people looking in at us view us and view Jesus.**

**Do we mourn and lament when a person is in a same sex relationship, is HIV positive, or do we celebrate that as a win because it proves what the Bible says?** Told you this would be uncomfortable. This is what Amos brings.

Do we mourn only for the aborted baby and not for the one born into generational poverty, celebrating this kid's prison sentence.

Do you mourn that broken kid with childhood trauma, learning disabilities, who changes his name to Betty and dresses like a 75 year old grandma.

**What Amos is not saying is to accept wrong as right. He is modeling how to speak the truth about sin and still have a soft heart for those broken by their own sin.**

**What about Jesus? He's our example** of how to live and love others. You know the guy who told us to love our enemies. Here's what he said... <sup>37</sup> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me. <sup>38</sup> And now, look, your house is abandoned and desolate. Matthew 23:37-38

**Lament is the painful disappointment of lost potential. Seeing what it could have been, but will never be.** This is where the intense sadness comes from. This uncomfortable conversation **pushes for a decision: There's a choice to be made, now.**

**There's no time to waste,** because punishment is coming. **It can't be avoided,** but those who make the right choice can get through it.

**The command to choose God and choose life is old** and shows up in what Moses left for the people to follow. <sup>19</sup> "Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! <sup>20</sup> You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This<sup>[a]</sup> is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the Lord, you will live long in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Deut. 30:19-20

But I thought you said that this punishment was coming. **It sounds like it's too late to repent. So, what is the choice about?** This choice is not an easy one, nor does it bring the end of all suffering. **The ones that choose God will be caught up in this mess too.** God has not promised them life, it's not going to be easy, but he has promised them a life with him.

Let's jump ahead to verse **14 and 15.** This is the most quoted part of chapter 5. **Do what is good and run from evil so that you may live! Then the Lord God of Heaven's Armies will be your helper, just as you have claimed.** <sup>15</sup> Hate evil and love what is good; turn your courts into true halls of justice. Perhaps even yet

the Lord God of Heaven's Armies will have mercy on the remnant of his people. Amos 5:14-15

Here we see two new ideas, "justice" and "the remnant." I think we know what justice means, but remnant maybe not, but this idea runs through the whole Bible.

God always keeps a remnant. What is remnant?

A small remaining quantity of something. • a piece of cloth or carpeting left when the greater part has been used or sold. • a surviving trace: a **remnant of the past**. I think I knew this word even before hearing it in the Bible, because my mom liked these two things:

1. Sewing.
2. Getting a deal.

In the fabric store, that sometimes I would get **dragged into**, there would be a table or section that was designated for remnants. These were the rolls or "bolts" of fabric that only had a little left that were marked down. **There wasn't enough for a whole dress or shirt, but too much to pitch**. My mom could get pieces of more expensive fabric for much less, but she had to be creative. She knew that she could put this with something else and make it into something useful.

In the case of Israel, the larger part wasn't cut off to make a tablecloth. It was destroyed, leaving a few small pieces with the edges singed by fire, but still useful, but for what? There will be pieces left over after the larger garment is destroyed. This is the near future for the nation of Israel that Amos is talking about.

Maybe this will help from the Apostle Paul. <sup>8</sup> Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. <sup>9</sup> Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. <sup>10</sup> That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:8-10

That was so much fun, let's do another from Corinthians. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 1 Corinthians 1:27

"But I don't want to be a remnant, I want to be the powerful majority. And I like people who tell me they can do that for me. I don't want to be weak and powerless, I want to be powerful."



Who was it who could have been powerful but chose to be weak? The name is on the tip of my tongue. I think it started with a J. Yes, that would be Jesus. That's why it was so easy to think that the sky was falling after so many people fled the church after COVID. It's harder to throw your weight around when you don't have any weight.

God can make something of the remnant. He doesn't need the whole piece of fabric. The remnant still must continue to seek God and choose God and life. Can you handle being a remnant? Or do you need to see the whole garment to be saved to trust God?

Can you handle being powerless, speaking into the culture, not from the center, but from the margins. Maybe it looks to you like God doesn't know what he is doing, as the American Church seems to shrink in size and influence in the culture.

To be this remnant we must choose to remain faithful, seeking after God.

Let's jump back into the story at verse 21. "I hate all your show and pretense—the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. <sup>22</sup> I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings. <sup>23</sup> Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps. <sup>24</sup> Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living. Amos 5:21-24

It is very clear to Amos that their worship in their temples are not just wrong because they have mixed other gods into it. It is worthless, even when done right, because of the way they treat people. God doesn't want to hear it unless they...Hate what is evil and then pursue justice.

It's easy to hate evil, but stop there. We hate it and voice how we feel, but stop short of entering the situation that often fuels the evil.

Pointing out the injustice of the wealthy would not have been a popular stance to take at this point in Israel's history. Greed seems to be working at least for part of the population.

They are to be an example to other nations whose gods have no moral compass.

We didn't read this part earlier, but look at verses 10 and 11. How you hate honest judges! How you despise people who tell the truth! <sup>11</sup> You trample the poor, stealing their grain through taxes and unfair rent. Amos 5:10-11

This is a specific way that the wealthy and powerful are taking advantage of the poor and powerless. They are manipulating the courts to their advantage. They are taking food out of the mouths of those less fortunate and

they are gouging them on their rents. Because they don't own property they have to rent, they have no recourse but to pay what is charged.

And don't forget those despicable practices like killing children and shrine prostitutes.

Can we talk about things like this without labels, without categorizing someone as us or them?

No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, (Justice) to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

Jesus satisfied God's justice for us.

This is not the social gospel or, as we call it, the gospel of the left...this is not just about doing good things and now God will like you.

The remnant must be involved in putting things right as God directs. Bringing signs of the kingdom.

At Cultivate here's who we see regularly; criminals, cognitively impaired, physically challenged, economically disadvantaged...relational poverty. We can't overhaul the systems, but we can do this. And remember, the prophet never waits for those in power to change first. He calls God's people to change first. overhaul

So do we have this puny remnant to hang on to?

Rely on God's promises to...

- Remain with us.

The remnant with the singed edges, that is small and seems powerless, cannot survive without this. They will be incorporated into whatever the culture is driving towards. These brave few and us today must be ever conscious that he is with us, even when it seems as if we are outnumbered and about to be devoured. If we start to get nervous, we will make bad decisions, decisions based upon our own strength and not based on complete trust in God.

- Be merciful and forgiving. Even when we were complicit with the culture.

This is where we stay humble. Yes, in some ways we have been complicit with the culture. We have been a part of the problem. This helps us have some pity on the lost. But it also helps us remain grateful by understanding that we were once enemies of God. We were once on the outside looking in. We were that part about to get swooped up into the mob. And yet Jesus died for us, and God forgave us. We didn't have to take the punishment we deserved.

**It's easy to become defensive** when there is an uncomfortable discussion like the one Amos is having with us. **Let's instead do something, even if it's small.** **Steps of Obedience for the remnant.**

1. **Reaffirm your allegiance to Jesus.**

The remnant is what remains of the larger thing because it has remained with God.  
**<sup>4</sup> Now this is what the Lord says to the family of Israel: "Come back to me and live!  
<sup>5</sup> Don't worship at the pagan altars at Bethel; don't go to the shrines at Gilgal or Beersheba. For the people of Gilgal will be dragged off into exile, and the people of Bethel will be reduced to nothing." <sup>6</sup> Come back to the Lord and live! Amos 5:4-6**

I remember hearing **someone talking about marriage**. He said that if you wake up each morning and choose your spouse again, then other choices won't be an issue. **Wake up every morning and choose Jesus.**

**Maybe the Holy Spirit has been whispering** to you that you really **haven't chosen life**. You've been **playing the field, keeping your options open**. If that is you, then today is the day. **It's time to repent...believe...and start following him**. I'm asking you to **count the cost** before joining the remnant.

1. **Where do you see injustice that you need to bring Jesus.**
  - Volunteer at cultivate.
  - Sponsor a child in Uganda, or better, come to Uganda to meet a child.
  - Listen to someone's story of injustice, even if it makes you feel uncomfortable.
  - Listen to someone's story of experiencing racism without becoming defensive.
  - Go to jail with Bill Laclair. Bill will be preaching next week.

**Join a prayer of lament on behalf of the suffering.**