

DESIRE GOD ABOVE ALL AMOS 5:6-7, 10-15
20TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUN OCT 11, '15

⁶ Seek the LORD and live,
lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,
and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel,
⁷ O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth!
¹⁰ They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth.
¹¹ Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him,
you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.
¹² For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.
¹³ Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time.
¹⁴ Seek good, and not evil, that you may live;
and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said.
¹⁵ Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

In England is a church for atheists.

When many who claim to be Christian don't go to church,
why would an atheist?

Was started by some who used to believe in God, now don't,
but miss going to beautiful place, hearing beautiful music
social interaction, connecting with good people,
being encouraged to think and do good things.

It fits with atheists claim that one can be good person,
have a good life, world is just fine without God.
that being moral doesn't need to be motivated by
promise of blessing from God or fear of punishment
but just by knowing what is good for others is good for all
and therefore is good for you in long run.

So atheist church is like support group for people
who want to be good but just don't want God,
but what they ignore is what those in support groups
for things like chemical dependency know,
that just knowing good & wanting to do it is not enough,
that you need outside help to actually do it.

So, why is it that we who do claim to believe go to worship
and why do we do kinds of things we do in worship?
It is not just that we desire good but that we desire God
and we recognize God as the source of all that is good.

WE DO WHAT WE CAN TO GET WHAT IS GOOD.
THERE IS NO TRUE GOOD WITHOUT THE TRUE GOD.
WE HAVE GOOD BECAUSE GOD IS GOOD TO US.

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in such a time, for it is an evil time.

If the prudent keep silent in such an evil time,
why is prophet Amos being so outspoken?

Amos speaks at time of divided kingdom, northern kingdom
of Israel had broken off from Judah in south.

Amos was from south but prophesied in the north.

So why does he say these things? Because God sent him to
and because no one would know these things otherwise.

This was at time of greatest prosperity & power for Israel.

Life was good and people see themselves as good.

But Amos comes and says, no, you're not.

People he speaks to like and want good things.

living in nice houses, having good things to eat & drink,

all at a good price

having friends who think well of them,

prosperous businesses where things go smoothly,

government that protects their interests,

freedom to do as they like, peaceful neighborhoods.

These are good things. We desire these things.

Political candidates these days know people want

good jobs, low prices, government that works.

People work hard to get these things

& expect leaders to do what it takes to get these things.

But Amos comes & says society that looks so good on outside
is rotten and decaying on the inside.

People get good things they want by doing what is not good.

Government works by actually bending its own rules
and perverting true justice.

Those in power, claiming to promote what is good,
use their positions to benefit themselves.

Business runs smoothly by being greased with bribes
& the powerful take advantage of those not corrupt.

Good economy and cheap goods are at expense of poor
who work for low wages & pay unfair taxes.

People insist on stubbornly doing just as they please
but things seem peaceful because they hate those who
expose problems or protest wrong & make them shut up.

So those who know what is good for them keep mouth shut
and go along to get along.

Can we claim that none of this is true today?

We like to think of selves good people enjoying a good life
but don't notice of how systems making life good for us
tend to make life difficult for disadvantaged in world.
how cheap food & clothing comes at expense of
low wages & poor conditions for those who produce it.
how cheap and abundant energy comes at expense of
bad environment for those living where it is produced.
how demanding our rights can trample rights of others.
how our privileged position can make us feel & act
differently for those who didn't start where we did.

We desire good things, but what is it we are to desire most?

Young man in gospel reading desired to be good.

He tried hard to keep the commandments.

He desired the kingdom of heaven.

But in the end he desired his possessions more.

Our problem is a spiritual problem

We need to desire not just the good things God can give us
to use for our purposes

but to desire things God gives us to use for his purposes.

Amos warns that the good gifts of God,

even justice, righteousness and peace,

cannot endure when people desire the gifts but not God.

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lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,
and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel,
¹⁴ Seek good, and not evil, that you may live;
and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said.

Bethel, where Amos speaks this message,
was place of worship for generation after generation.
This is where Jacob, when running away from home,
saw angels going up and down to heaven,
so he named it Bethel, meaning house of God.
When Rehoboam led north in breaking away from Judah,
he wanted to keep people from going to capital, Jerusalem,
for worship & so going back to king in Jerusalem,
so he set up alternate worship just north of border in Bethel
where people went through the motions of worship.
He sought independence and prosperity
at expense of true worship of God.
As, Amos notes, he still claimed God was with them
but although it was called Bethel, house of God,
the real God wasn't home.
Today too, people may come to see churches as places
to find things they are seeking.
Some come asking for money, thinking of churches
as places where there will be kind, generous people.
Some may seek other financial help, like programs
that teach good ways to manage money,
or other programs or counseling to help with
family relationships or fears and worries or grief.
some may come for fellowship, a place to find friends
and the church can be a place to find all these things.
But ultimately, help in all these areas comes not just
from learning God's guidelines for doing these things
but from learning to know God himself.
As Jesus says to young man in gospel reading:
no one is good but God alone.
Like young man, many want to go to heaven, which is good,
but why, looking forward to being friends or family?
or desiring to be with God, which is what heaven is.
Without God, nothing else good can endure or even matters.
Amos warns hearers the nice houses, vineyards, etc.
they worked hard for will not last.

True worship and right living starts with recognizing
that everything good comes from God.
But also with understanding why.

WE HAVE GOOD BECAUSE GOD IS GOOD TO US.

¹⁵ Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

As I said, Amos is speaking to the nation that is called Israel
because, in split with Judah, the 10 northern tribes broke off
which was majority of Israel, and they kept the name.

Two of the largest tribes were descendants of Joseph
There is another reason for Amos to refer to Joseph.

Remember how Joseph was abandoned in pit by brothers
who had no pity on him?

Amos uses term remnant of Joseph to refer to those in Israel
who were the lowly and oppressed, abandoned leftovers,
mistreated by their self-seeking fellow Israelites.

But God cared about them and would be gracious,
As God was gracious and had mercy on Joseph, who ended up
as ruler of Egypt when brothers came during famine.

He realized God was in control all along and let this happen
to him as way to help his family, who had rejected him.

This is how and why God helps us too: by being gracious
to those who are lowly and needy.

Jesus, despised and abandoned by his brother Israelites,
died but was raised up again and now rules all things
in order to accomplish God's plan to save all of us.

He is the one who, (like in v. 10) speaks truth about our sins
and reproveth, calling all of us to repentance.

He is the one (like in v. 7) who in place of justice,
experienced wormwood and gall in our place
but instead of casting righteousness down to the ground
sends down his righteousness to the whole earth.

by taking away our sins with his forgiveness.

Although (v. 12) he knows our many sins,
he chooses to keep silent about the evil
when we are judged and declares us innocent.

He (unlike v. 11) has built for us a heavenly home
that will last and where we can live forever
when what we desire most of all is God himself.

Although we are tempted to desire getting what is good
for selves at the expense of others,
everything that is truly good comes at the expense of God.
If we are to desire and seek good, we must seek God.
because God will indeed have mercy.
As Epistle points out, desiring God means having faith
and confidence in him.

WE DO WHAT WE CAN TO GET WHAT IS GOOD.
but even though we desire things that are good
we need to watch out that, like Israel,
the things we do to get them are not good.
THERE IS NO TRUE GOOD WITHOUT THE TRUE GOD.
so there is no way to hold on to what is good
without desiring and holding on to God himself.
WE HAVE GOOD BECAUSE GOD IS GOOD TO US.
Christian life and worship is not about doing things
that will cause God to give us what we want,
but about receiving what God wants to give us
by his own free grace
and then using all he gives us in the ways he desires.
all because of what he has done for us through Jesus