

**“Let Justice Roll”  
(Amos 5:4-27)  
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**Introduction:**

**NIV Amos 5:4-27** <sup>4</sup> This is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live; <sup>5</sup> do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing."

<sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. <sup>7</sup> You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground <sup>8</sup> (he who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns blackness into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land-- the LORD is his name-- <sup>9</sup> he flashes destruction on the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin), <sup>10</sup> you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. <sup>11</sup> You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. <sup>12</sup> For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. <sup>13</sup> Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil.

<sup>14</sup> Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. <sup>15</sup> Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. <sup>16</sup> Therefore this is what the Lord, the LORD God Almighty, says: "There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail. <sup>17</sup> There will be wailing in all the vineyards, for I will pass through your midst," says the LORD. <sup>18</sup> Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. <sup>19</sup> It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. <sup>20</sup> Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light-- pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? <sup>21</sup> "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. <sup>22</sup> Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. <sup>23</sup> Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! <sup>25</sup> "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? <sup>26</sup> You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god--which you made for yourselves. <sup>27</sup> Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty.

**Background to Amos**

Amos was a prophet that lived near the end of Israel, the Northern Kingdom's reign. He was God's prophet just before they were exiled as God meted out his judgment. He was a contemporary of Hosea and so he was carrying out his ministry during the reigns of Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah in Judah. The focus of his message was primarily to Israel, but Judah wasn't excluded from it either. He didn't come from a lineage of prophets, he was a shepherd and one day God plucked him out to be his messenger.

And as we learned when we looked at the prophet Hosea a few weeks back, that during this time, things were good. The country was experiencing tremendous prosperity. The kingdom was expanding geo-politically as the boundary lines that the people had during the reign of King David were being slowly restored. But this prosperity got them into many vices and spiritual and moral problems. The rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer and no one was doing anything about it. They didn't deal with idolatry as idol worship was still going on in God's holy places. They had essentially forgotten about God and thought they were immune to God's judgment.

And in the midst of these problems comes God's servant Amos and he has a message of 'turn or burn'. And so the book of Amos begins with a series of judgments on Israel's neighbors. Damascus, Tyre, Edom, and Moab. And so you could imagine what the Israelites were thinking. "That's right, we're the chosen people and God's going to really let those other nations have it." God promises judgment on these neighbors who are guilty of great injustices and of course they weren't worshippers of Yahweh. And I'm sure the Israelites are feeling pretty good about themselves at this point.

But then the next judgment comes against their brothers to the south, Judah. Listen to what Amos writes.

Amos 2:4-5 <sup>4</sup> This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed, <sup>5</sup> I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem."

I think the Israelites were probably thinking, "Whoa, that's a bit too close for comfort, but heck, better them than us."

And I think we often get into that trap. We could easily think, hey as long as the tsunamis and earthquakes, the terrorist bomb threat, and all that other stuff happens over there, then good for us and too bad for them.

Well Amos then drops the bomb on overconfident Israel.

Amos 2:6-8 <sup>6</sup> This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. <sup>7</sup> They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. <sup>8</sup> They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.

And the rest of the book becomes a message of judgment for them. And Amos begins to list vice after vice, sin after sin that the Israelites were guilty of. Here's a semi-comprehensive list.

- Israel sells the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals 2.6
- Trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth 2.7
- Turn aside the way of the afflicted 2.7
- Man and father use same woman 2.7
- They drink in the house of God 2.8
- Make the Nazirites drink wine 2.12

- Commanded prophets not to prophesy 2.12 – no news is good news
- They store up violence and robbery in their strongholds 3.10
- They're guilty of excessive opulence. Winter house, summer house, houses of ivory 3.15. They have no idea when enough is enough.
- Even their women oppress the poor 4.1
- Even their women are into drinking excessively 4.1
- They boast about their offerings. 4.4-5
- Turn justice into bitterness 5.7
- Cast down the righteousness to the earth 5.7
- They hate those who fight for justice and those who tell the truth 5.10
- Trample on the poor and force them to give you grain 5.11
- Afflict the righteous 5.12
- Take bribes 5.12
- Deprive the poor of justice in the courts 5.12
- They loved evil and hated good 5.15
- Spiritually arrogant and overconfident 5.18
- Empty religious services 5.21

Amos 5:21-23 21 "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. 22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. 23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

- Idolatry 5.26
- Complacency 6.1
- Pride 6.8
- Trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land 8.4
- Hope holidays would end so they can get back to making money (greed) 8.5
- Dishonest business practices. skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, 8.5

And because of this multitude of sins, God begins to issue his judgment. Everything that God had expected his chosen people to be and to do, they had failed. They were to be holy, but they failed. They were to be a light to the nations, but they failed. They were to be monotheists, but they became idolaters. They were supposed to reflect and carry out God's justice, but instead were guilty of perpetuating injustice. They failed miserably in all they were supposed to be and do as the people of God.

When we take a closer look, their sins generally fell into two categories. 1. **Idolatry**. 2. **Injustice**. And these two will always go hand in hand. Without God there can be no morality. Morality becomes arbitrary without God. Wrongs can become rights without God. So once we lose our worship and devotion to God, injustice is not far behind, and then the collapse of a people, a nation will soon follow.

When you and I think of idolatry we think of a far off place full of statues of the Buddha. We think of ancient history where people were sacrificing their children to the fertility or harvest gods. And so Christians assume that idolatry is really not about them...because we're Christians, because we worship God.

Here's what idolatry might look like for us today.

*All of us have been to Niagara Falls, numerous times. Whenever someone visits the Toronto area for the first time, one of the things we have to do is show them Niagara Falls, right. So we're all very familiar with the Falls.*

*Now I think idolatry is something like this. Imagine a person goes to the Falls for the very first time and comes back and shares with you their experience, full of excitement and they speak to you about this and that and the roar and the mist and all of that. And you respond, 'eh, it's just water', which is actually what someone said to me once. I think that's idolatry.*

*I think idolatry is going to the Falls for the 100<sup>th</sup> time, whether it's on your own or with some new friends and you don't park the car, you don't get out, you don't walk up to the edge, you don't look at all the water crashing over and say, "Wow!" That's idolatry.*

*I think idolatry is going to the Falls and your going to stay at the Hilton or whichever grand hotel and you don't dish out the extra 50 to get a Falls-view suite. I think that's idolatry.*

*I think idolatry is going to the Falls and ignoring the Falls altogether, and instead you spend your whole time in the casino or some Spiderman thing, or you take your kids to Ripleys, but you don't go and see the Falls.*

*I think idolatry is going to the Falls and when someone says, "Hey, you gotta try this. It's truly breathtaking. Get up early at sunrise and take a quiet walk to the Falls. No one will be around and the view will just blow you away. And you say, "Nahhh, I think I'll sleep in." which is what I've done.*

*I think idolatry is going to the falls with a newbie, who sees it for the very first time. He's never seen anything like it. And he just wants to lean up against the railing and take it all in for the next hour or so and all you're thinking is, "come on, we gotta get to the buffet"*

*When you and I treat God in a manner that is not worthy or God or belittles God, or cheapens God, or misrepresents God; when we make God out to be less than what he truly is, that's idolatry. When you fashion our own idols in our hearts which will always be pale in comparison to the grandeur of God, then we've committed idolatry.*

That's why J.I. Packer says in his famous book "Knowing God" that even to have a painting of Christ or a crucifix on the wall is idolatry, for God said you have no image of me. He is spirit and his people will worship in spirit and in truth, no with images. Folks, we too must be careful there is not a hint of idolatry in our lives.

**And there were the sins of injustice.** And it took on different forms.

They were the perpetrators of injustice.

They were indifferent to injustice.

They didn't act against injustice.

I think the greatest problem among Christians are the last two. We are indifferent and we don't act against injustice. *When we were in Cambodia we visited several NGOs. We visited an amazing orphanage called place of rescue that takes in children whose parents died of AIDS.*

*What an amazing place. So much so that you could say that for the kids well being, it may even be better that they are orphans and go to Place of Rescue than to have both parents and live in poverty. That's how incredible this place is. That's what it means to take a stand against injustice and move in Christ's love and compassion.*

*We also visited the Cambodia branch of International Justice Mission who are primarily into rescuing children from the brothels and putting the perpetrators behind bars. They're quite secretive. There's no sign on their building. And they're very very effective with an over 90% conviction rate. When we visited we met two ladies there. One was a full time staff, an American whose dedicated her life to this mission, to rescue children from this terrible situation. And another woman, a Korean American lawyer, who was getting tired of the rat race, decided to take a sabbatical and serve with IJM for six months.*

And this is what God calls his people to—to be advocates for those who have no voice. But to do nothing when we see injustices being done or worse, if we ourselves are the perpetrators of injustice then God will in fact judge us.

God uses several illustrations to describe his judgment.

1. a plumb line – a line that is hung with a weight at the bottom to see if a wall or post is perfectly straight.
2. a basket of ripe fruit – meaning Israel is ripe for judgment.
3. Famine – not of food, but of the word of the Lord
4. Sieve or sifting grain – to separate the grain for rocks and pebbles.

And the judgment of God was looming. It had reached its breaking point. The last straw was placed on the camel's back. And in 722 Israel fell.

2 Kings 17:6-12 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. 7 All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods 8 and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. 9 The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right. From watchtower to fortified city they built themselves high places in all their towns. 10 They set up sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. 11 At every high place they burned incense, as the nations whom the LORD had driven out before them had done. They did wicked things that provoked the LORD to anger. 12 They worshiped idols, though the LORD had said, "You shall not do this."

How do we stay the hand of God's judgment? How do we, as Christ's church and God's people avoid his judgment? One word. Repent.

### **Our Response in Repentance**

1. Seek the Lord and Live. Make God our priority, our center, our focus. Life can only be found when we are within the source of all life. Remove all idols.
2. Let justice roll like a river. Become a people who puts an end to injustice and begins to advocate for justice.