

Introduction: There is an old saying, ‘The more things change, the more they stay the same’. This is true because even though people continue to discover more about the universe, and create more and more new things, the human heart, and the desires of the heart, do not change. *** We are all born with a degree of self-centeredness – some more than others. Have you ever noticed when a small child learns the word ‘mine!’ that she will clutch her doll, or any favorite toy, tightly in order to protect it from other people? She will protect it from anyone she feels may take away what is hers, and hers alone. My parents told me that almost as soon as I learned to talk, I wore out this simple statement, ‘All by myself!’ *** It is self-centeredness, more than anything else, that separates us from The God who created us, loves us, and sent His Son to fulfill all prophecy that told of The Savior who would save people from themselves and reconcile them to Him by making Him the center of their lives. *** Today’s passage from the prophet Amos was written one hundred fifty years before the time of Josiah, the last godly and righteous king of Judah. When he heard the books of Moses read out loud he exclaimed, ‘Great is Yahweh’s anger ... [because] ... we have not obeyed the words of this book’. He sent to the prophetess Huldah who responded: Yahweh will bring disaster because you all have forsaken Him ... by the idols your hands have made (2 Kings 22:13-17). ** Jeremiah spoke about righteous leadership when Judah’s captivity was imminent. He said to Josiah’s son: You built your palace by unrighteousness ... [and] ... your upper room by injustice ... (Jeremiah 22:11-17). *** Both Amos and Jesus tell us how we can be changed by God’s grace and mercy. Let’s see what God has said to us so we can be grateful to Him this Thanksgiving season.

I. The call of the herdsman-prophet and his message. (*Amos 1:1-2; 5:14-15*)

A. Amos is given a vision of God’s Word. (*Amos 1:1-2*)

1. The words of Amos of the herdsmen of Tekoa which he perceived about Israel in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. (*Verse 1*)

Names and date: Amos means ‘burden’, Tekoa: ‘stockade’, Uzziah: ‘my strength – Yahweh’, Jeroboam: the people will contend, Joash: ‘Yahweh’s fire offering’. The date was about 760 BC, some forty years before the northern tribes of Israel were deported.

Herdsmen: Tekoa had been fortified by Solomon’s son, Rehoboam: enlarged people (2 Chronicles 11:5-12). So, Amos’ vocation was not a typical shepherd in open pasture land. He was more of a trader and entrepreneur dealing in animals near a fortified city.

2. Then he said: Yahweh from Zion (‘parched place’) roars / from Jerusalem (‘teaching of peace’) he gives His voice / the pastures of the shepherds mourn / and the head of Carmel withers. (*Verse 2*)

Drought: Amos was called in the midst of a drought that even affected the ‘garden land’ (Carmel).

B. The people of ‘Yahweh of the Armies’ must change their evil ways and He is gracious to His remnant. (*Amos 5:14-15*)

1. You all must seek good and not evil in order that you all will live / and it will be Yahweh, The God of the Armies, (is) with you all / according to what you all have said. (*Verse 14*)

Condition: All people are commanded to seek the good they can get only from God; and, not the evil that is in the evil one, the world under his control, and even our own self-centeredness.

Promises: People who fulfill the command will live with the ‘God of the Armies’ ever with them – the greatest promise in God’s Word.

Claim: People always claim God is on their side, but this is not always so. The great idolatry and wickedness of the people of Israel had separated them from God. But, by seeking His goodness above all, He would make their claim a reality.

2. You all must hate evil, and you all must love good, and you all must establish justice in the gate; perhaps Yahweh, The God of the Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (‘Yahweh has added’). (*Verse 15*)

Conditions: Here all people must hate evil and love good, and establish God’s justice in their city.

Hope: If they do this, they will have reason to hope the ‘God of the Armies’ will be mercifully gracious with the remnant of the northern tribes, led by Joseph’s two sons Manasseh (‘causing to forget’) and Ephraim (‘twice fruitful’).

The Savior brings justice with life-giving mercy

II. Yahweh’s command-promise and His Savior’s merciful fulfillment. (*Amos 5:21-24; John 7:37-38*)

A. Yahweh hates the Israelites’ pretentiousness, He commands them to stop, and He tells them justice will flow. (*Amos 5:21-27*)

1. I have hated and I have despised your feasts, and I will take no delight in your restrained assemblies. (*Verse 21*)

Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles: The three annual festivals all God’s people were required to attend were Passover in the spring, Pentecost in early summer and Tabernacles in the fall. But God is telling them that even their fasting and self-denial were an offense to Him because their hearts were not fully seeking Him.

2. Even though you all will offer to Me burnt offerings and grain offerings I will not accept (them); and, the peace offering of your well-fed cattle, I will not look upon (it). (*Verse 22*)

All sacrifices: Their relationship with their Covenant God is so broken that He will not accept any of their sacrifices. There is nothing we can offer of ourselves that is good enough for The God of justice.

3. You all must take away from Me the noise of your songs and (to) the melody of your stringed instruments, I will not listen. (*Verse 23*)

Worship music: God is looking for hearts that are fully seeking Him. Songs of worship sung from hearts that are only going through the motions are regarded by Him as pretentious and unacceptable.

4. It will be rolled down like the waters – justice, and righteousness like stream ever-flowing. (*Verse 24*)

Gracious promises: ‘Yahweh of the Armies’ speaks of a future time when both justice and righteousness will freely flow to His people. The key promise is expressed as ‘let justice roll down like waters’ in the RSV translation.

Just Justice: God is the only One who is truly just, but He can let His justice flow to His people so they turn from their self-centeredness to seek Him as the center of their lives with all their hearts. May we repent of shallow pretentiousness to receive God's promises of righteousness and justice.

The just God declares justice will flow

Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Civil Rights Memorial Center in Montgomery, AL has 'until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream' inscribed at the entrance (www.splcenter.org/civil-rights-memorial).

This was in his 'I Have a Dream' speech August 28, 1963.

John Perkins: I recommend that if you do not know John M. Perkins of Jackson, MS, you get to know him through his autobiography 'Let Justice Roll Down' and his final book 'One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love' published in 2018. There is also a DVD documentary: Passion for Justice.

He is an American hero who has lived his life in God's flowing justice for all.

The just God declares justice will flow

B. The Savior commands all who thirst to come to Him to drink by faith and receive life. (*John 7:37-38; Isaiah 55*)

1. But in the last day of the great feast, Jesus having stood, He cried out: (*Verse 37a*)

Feast of Tabernacles: This was the last annual Feast of Tabernacles (*John 7:14; Leviticus 23:33-44*).

2. If any man may be thirsting, he must be coming to Me and he must be drinking. (*Verse 37b*)

Isaiah: Jesus refers to the first verse of Isaiah 55. Jewish boys over the age of thirteen were taught by their rabbi to consider the entire chapter after this opening verse which they would have memorized for their Bar Mitzvah ('son of the commandment') ceremony. Here is a summary of the chapter:

i. Yahweh calls His thirsty people to receive His gift of bread and refreshing water. (*Verses 1-2*)

Gift: It's free to us, but it cost Jesus everything.

ii. They are to hear that the Davidic Messiah will make a covenant with all the nations. (*Verses 3-5*)

iii. They must seek Yahweh while forsaking evil to receive His mercy. (*Verses 6-7*)

Application: We must understand the deadly dangerous consequences of our self-centeredness that opposes the life-giving God-centeredness that comes in the justice of The Savior who took our punishment to extend mercy to us. Will we receive him?

The Savior brings justice with life-giving mercy

iv. The thoughts of The Three-IN-One covenant God are higher than our thoughts; and, they are expressed in His purposeful Word. (*Verses 8-11*)

v. And in the end all who receive His gift in the Messiah-Savior will join with all God's creation in joyful song. (*Verses 12-13*)

Joyful song: Not just 'going through the motions'.

3. The one who continually believes in Me, just as Scripture has said: They will flow from his belly, rivers of living water. (*Verse 38*)

Living water: God called Himself the fountain of 'living water' twice in Jeremiah's prophecy:

Sins: First, 'My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water' (*Jeremiah 2:13*)

Application: Let us heed Jeremiah's words through Jesus to receive His rivers of living water by faith IN His faithfulness.

Hope: Second, '...the hope of Israel, All who forsake Thee will be put to shame. Those who turn away on earth will be written down, Because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the LORD. Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; Save me and I will be saved, For Thou art my praise' (*Jeremiah (17:13-14)*)

Cross: Jesus took the just punishment we deserve because we all 'fall short of God's glory'. In this way God's Justice was satisfied IN Jesus on The Cross! He now justifies all by faith IN His faithfulness (*Romans 3:23-26*)

Application: May we be filled with gratitude and thanksgiving for Jesus THE Savior through whom God's promise to let justice flow comes to us.

The just God declares justice will flow

Conclusion: God hates all pretentiousness, and tells His people they must change. He promises them that, by His grace, justice will someday flow. Jesus amplifies the words of the prophets by commanding all people to come to Him by faith to both drink and receive life.

The just God declares justice will flow