

Title: “Temperature Time”

Chris Ryan

Amos 5:21-24

11/12/2023

Service Readings: Amos 5:18-24; 1 Th. 4:13-18; Matt. 25:1-13

Amos warns the Northern kingdom of Israel that God is displeased with their lukewarm devotion and worship of Him. They have become so relaxed that they have even turned to idol worship! This reading prompts us to take our own temperature.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Have you ever heard the saying, “this is not my circus and these are not my monkeys?” I can only imagine that a thought similar to this must have passed through the mind of Amos at some point, for he lived in the southern kingdom of Judah when God called him to travel up north and deliver a message to that kingdom. Not that his homeland was significantly more obedient to God, but for whatever reason, the message was addressed to Israel and Amos was called to be the postman. And so Amos went. Now, our next logical question is this: what was going on up there that God needed to speak? Well, not much, and that was the problem! The state of the nation was experiencing a time of peacefulness with its neighbors. Their land was not being challenged and so they could turn their attention to other things, like the economy. And that seemed very strong. Wealth, prosperity, and the like were enjoyed by many of its citizens. However, it was not all positive, for the government that was at peace with its neighbors was also a government that was corrupt and seemed to exist only to serve itself. And the wealthy? They were increasing their financial fortunes but doing so at the expense of those they could exploit and take advantage of. But.... none of that seemed to be the core reason for God’s message.

So what was the problem, and why was Amos sent with a message? Well, it’s because they had become lukewarm in their devotion to God. They seemed to take for granted the blessings that God was bestowing on them. They had looked around, saw that there was peace and prosperity, and focused their attention on those things instead of him. Moreover, they were even turning to idols! Is it any wonder then that God was becoming angry? And so he called Amos to go up there and speak into the lives of these people.

And I can only imagine that as he traveled from his home into the land ruled by Israel, he must have muttered to himself that this was not his circus and these were not his monkeys! But, God wanted him to go, and so he went and delivered his message.

Would they listen? Sure doesn’t seem like it because no more than 25 years later, the northern kingdoms were conquered by Assyria and never heard from again. But that’s a different lesson. This morning we’ll stick to the period of time of or passage. Our passage starts this way:

¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why would you have the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, and not light,

¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion,

and a bear met him,

or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,

and a serpent bit him.
²⁰ Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

The day of the Lord will come, and when it does no one will escape. All will be judged. And for those condemned it will be a day of darkness, a day of condemnation and of death. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and all the rest. But the message doesn't end there. It continues and focuses specifically on their worship.

²¹ "I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.
²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

They were checking off the boxes, so to speak, when it came to their worship. Offerings were made out of obligation instead of thanksgiving. You can see where this is going; I don't need to belabor the point. And poor Amos; called to deliver this difficult message to these people!

So, what can we learn from all this? Of course there are the obvious lessons that glow like a Vegas sign. But more interesting, I think, is the undercurrent. It is not stated, and it is easy to miss, but it is there.... And it is worth our focus.

Are you ready for it? Alright. Here goes:

Here we have a people that have begun to turn away from God. They have become lukewarm in their worship and have begun to take him for granted. They are living in a period of peace and prosperity but instead of offering thanksgiving to God they are doing all they can to further enhance their wealth and treasures. Instead of serving others, they are serving themselves. Instead of sharing what God has given them, they are keeping it for themselves. All this we know. All this is the *overcurrent*. The *undercurrent* is Amos. Yes. The person God sent to deliver a message to these people who have begun to turn away from him. Let me say it again: God sent Amos. Into the messy world of these sinful people, he raised up a prophet with a wake-up call to these people. How easy would have been to turn his back on them like they had done to him? How convenient would it have been to just allow the world to swallow them up? But he didn't. He sent someone into this messy situation with a message anchored in love, a message of warning about where they were heading. This is the love of God – a God who will pursue his creation even in spite of their rejection of him. *This* is the undercurrent that I want to focus on this morning. The pursuit of God to save his people.

Now all this happened over 700 years before God sent the ultimate savior, and who he sent would come with much more than a message. He would come with his own body and blood. The only son of God would enter into the messiness of his creation and dwell. But the people would turn away from him, ignore and even reject him. They would not accept his message and would instead eventually turn him over to Rome to be executed. But, *through this....* and I want to emphasize this point, not *in spite of this rejection*, but *through this rejection*, God chose to pursue and save his creation. *Through* the world's rejection of his son, *through* his murder, he *became* the sacrifice that would atone for the sins of all. Can there be any greater example of love? Can there be any greater example than Jesus of how much God will sacrifice to pursue us?

And he continues to do exactly this, today. Through the blood and body of Jesus he offers us forgiveness of our sins. He makes a way for us to turn back to him in repentance every time we turn away. And so this morning I invite you to consider your own temperature. Are you like the people that Amos was sent to speak to? Are you lukewarm in your understanding and appreciation of what God has done for you? Or worse, are you feeling that maybe God has stopped pursuing you, that you have turned too far from him, or been gone too long that maybe he is no longer searching for you? If so, then I have a message for you. Whether you are lukewarm or afraid that you have been forgotten, the message is the same: God is still in love with you and he still pursues you, in spite of how you might, or might not be pursuing him. He has no regrets about sending his son to die for you and he continues to offer you his grace and his mercy. And so this morning I encourage you to open your hearts to hear this message. Call out to him in prayer to wake you from your slumber, to reignite the flame of faith in your heart.

And then rest in the confidence that regardless of how you feel about him, he will never stop loving you. And he will never stop pursuing you.

Please pray with me.

Lord God,

Your pursuit of us sent your son to the cross. Lord may we be always mindful and always respond with thanksgiving and gratitude. We pray that you continue to pursue us, that you continue to send the Holy Spirit into our hearts, and that we never become lukewarm towards you.

Amen.