

Prayer

Glory be to You, Living Lord, for wherever we look, we see the evidence of life's vitality; and the world You have created overflows with energy, potency and vivacity. Forgive us for dwelling on the difficulties and troubles of life, and inspire us by the glorious wonder of Creation and the amazing potential of each day. May we respond with vigour to all you have given us in the created world, and use it for Your glory: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Church Ministry

Pray for ministers and church leaders who face decisions about how long to remain in post, and whether to move on. These can be the most difficult and sensitive of decisions.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the joy of sharing meals together
- Pray about the divisive subject of genetically modified crops
- Pray for Israel and its surrounding nations – pray for peace

Meditation

(a reflection based on Romans 5:1-5)

Peace, brother, sister, and all fellow Christians;
May peace be yours, by faith and the Spirit.

Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Which opens the way to the grace we've been given.

Peace in which we share a hope in the glory of God,
And also makes sense of our sufferings in Christ.

Peace, because our suffering produces endurance,
Endurance, good character, and character, hope.

Peace, for God's hope cannot ever disappoint us
As His love has already been poured out on us.

Peace which comes when we have all been blessed,
And the Spirit takes over to give us new life!

Bible Study - Amos 5:10-17

¹⁰ 'They hate the man at the gate who decides for what is just, and they loathe the man who speaks the truth. ¹¹ Therefore because you have trampled down the poor and taken taxes of grain from them, you will not live in your houses of cut stone even though you have built them, and you will not drink the wine of the pleasant vineyards you have planted. ¹² For I know about your many crimes, and the great number of your sins. You oppress those who are just, you accept bribes and prevent the needy from getting justice in the gate. ¹³ So the prudent man keeps quiet at 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, just as you say He is. ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good, and maintain justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to what is left of Joseph.'

¹⁶ Therefore this is what the LORD says, the God of hosts, the Lord: 'In every town square there will be wailing; and in every street they will cry in anguish. They will summon the farmers to weep and the professional mourners to wail; ¹⁷ in every vineyard there will be wailing, for I will pass right through you, says the LORD.'

Review

At the beginning of chapter five, Amos began a prophecy that is like a song of lamentation over 'fallen Israel', and this continues in today's reading. It is a remarkable prophecy, which bewails the state of Israel as a nation and speaks with an air of doom and gloom as if Israel had already been defeated in war because of her sins against God. This was Amos' way of using dramatic language to tell the people of Israel that they were indeed being judged by God, and He had already decided that they would be defeated in war; this punishment was God's will. In the previous passage (5:1-9), Amos described the devastation of war (5:3,6), he appealed to Israel to draw back from wrong doing (5:4,5) and mourned the lack of justice that had been 'turned into bitterness' (5:7). In the second half of the lamentation, these three themes return and intertwine, to reinforce the prophetic message.

The structure of this prophecy is 'chiastic'; this is because it states a sequence of themes and then returns to explain them again in reverse order. We do not use this form of poetry or speaking today, but it was common in ancient times, and those who study the Bible will come across many examples of it.

In our passage today, Amos began by outlining the injustices that had become commonplace in Israel. From ancient times, justice in an Israelite city was decided by the elders who gathered at the city gates to do business, decide disputes and settle family and community affairs (as found in the story of Ruth – Ruth 4:1-12). With devastating force, Amos described the corruption of the legal system 'in the gate'. Truth was nowhere to be found (5:10,12), greed and bribery were commonplace (5:12) and the result was that those who needed justice and could not pay for it could not get it (5:12), moreover, good people kept quiet knowing that there was little they could do without compromising themselves (5:13). This picture of justice is astonishingly familiar, and it is true of many nations even today. This is bound to be the case where, as in ancient Israel, people have deviated from the godly principles upon which they were founded. Rather, they have abused the freedoms and liberties within the heritage of their nation and manipulated them to their own advantage.

God always punishes such evil, especially where His own people behaved in this way. Here, Amos describes the judgement of the rich who have abused justice. Only they were able to afford houses built from cut or hewn stone, but God said they would no longer live in their grand homes or drink from their own vineyards (see 5:11). Their idyllic life would be lost through the devastation of war (5:16,17). Nevertheless, the Lord has always waited for His people to change their ways, to realise that they are under judgement and call out to Him for help. This is why He says, 'Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you say He is. Hate evil, love good, and maintain justice ...' (5:14,15). This is a powerful and memorable prophecy. Today, it is challenging to Christian people who do their best to love God and worship Him, but have seen injustice and ungodliness even within the fellowship of God's people. It is also most powerful as a challenge to society as a whole, and to those who corrupt our world for their own advantage; none can escape God's justice.

At the end of his prophecy, Amos reminded his hearers of how God judged both His people and the nation of Egypt within a famous episode of their own history (5:16,17). The Lord had 'passed over' Israel on the night they were released from slavery in Egypt, and Amos said that he would now 'pass through' His people again with judgement, and there would be disaster, just as there was for the people of Egypt (they lost their firstborn as recorded in Exodus 12:29,30).

We may not like the idea of God acting in judgement today, but we cannot afford to avoid the truth. If we appreciate a God of love who saves His people, then we must accept that such love is just and acts against all evil and injustice in the world; so the challenge we face is to present the Gospel of God's love, but not forget that He is mortally just. Amos certainly knew about God's love, but he had to explain His moral justice to the very people who should have known it, but had forgotten it. We must therefore read His message with care.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss how much of the Gospel you can find in this text. How much more do we need from the New Testament?
2. What do you believe to be the worst forms of corruption to plague your own society, and to what extent are they a violation of your nation's godly heritage?
3. Why would God use war to judge people in the past, and does He do the same today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I find this passage of scripture deeply challenging. I am shocked every time I read something in the newspapers or hear on the news that justice is available to the rich and not to the poor; and I thought that England was a just society! Unfortunately, justice must be purchased, in one way or the other, and some people are adept at buying the justice they want. I am ashamed that this happens within my own country and I often pray that God will re-work it! God will certainly judge the many people who abuse it.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Listen to the news one day over this week and note how many instances you come across of greed, selfishness and corruption that have adversely affected society and the world. People who act in this way might believe that what they do will not affect others too badly, but how wrong they are; consider what can be done about what you have read.*
- *Pray for God's people to rise up against injustice and to speak out against what is wrong within this world, using ever means possible, the internet and every other form of communication..*

Final Prayer

For every minute of this day when we have forgotten to live according to Your call, O God, forgive us. And by Your grace, remind us through others when we fall short of the principles of Christian discipleship; death to self and new life through Christ. Through Him who has lived and died, and lives again; Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN
