

Discipleship Group Weekly Resources

Week 4

Passage: Amos 4

Big Thought:

It is interesting to consider why we worship and how our practice often deviates from our intentions. At several moments in the life of Israel God makes it clear he isn't interested in the community's worship because its members are worshipping only as an expression of their own self-indulgence. Their attitude resembles the way we go to worship sometimes – in hopes that we'll enjoy it and feel good – feel a spiritual lift.

Amos invites the people to come to Bethel or Gilgal ironically here. These cities were the locations of sanctuaries that the people used to seek God's blessing during festivals. Amos seems genuine in his urge for people to come and worship, but unfortunately because of the state of things in Israel, the community's worship makes their sin worse. And the more they worship, the worse it gets. Amos is using sarcasm here to make a point. You can almost hear his sarcastic tone as he calls Israel to be super-committed in worship – "Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin some more" (v. 4a).

Amos makes it clear that God has been trying to get Israel's attention, but with no luck. When they come to worship, they never actually turn to God. Even when they had worship after some really bad things had happened to them, there wasn't a turning to God. Instead, it was worship solely for the purpose of feeling better and asking for God's blessing. Even when God is the one bringing the chaos and hardship to get their attention in hopes that the community turns to him, they don't even consider it!

It's almost as if the people of God believe they are in such right standing with God – following Him flawlessly – that when they come to worship it is just to request more blessing or comfort or check a religious box. There's no heart change or growth in relationship with God happening. Just a form of going through the motions intended to make the community feel better and encouraged. One commentator sums it up this way, "Religion had become a matter of gatherings, sumptuous feasts, sacrifices and singing, nothing more. The soul had gone out of it. There was no communion with the Holy One, one a commotion at the holy place" (Interpretation commentary, Hosea-Micah, Authored: James Limburg, 1998, pg. 105). God desires relationship with His people, but they have turned from Him so much so that He is just trying to get their attention to remind them of His love and goodness.

Amos issues a strong warning to Israel and a call to repentance that comes in chapter 5. But the question for us becomes, in what ways do we worship like the nation of Israel? How are we missing God's calling out? Are we turning our face towards him looking for guidance and strength and forgiveness? Or do we gather only as an odd form of group therapy in hopes that we get some encouragement? Definitely worth considering...

3 Questions:

1. In what ways does our worship look like Israel's?
2. What are some ways we could intentionally seek to hear God and respond to Him in our moments of corporate worship?
3. Can you identify a specific situation in your life that God may be using to get your attention?