

“Hypocrisy, Idolatry, and the God of Truth”

Rev. Hobie Wood

Series: *Minor Prophets*

Bible Text: Amos 5:18-27

Preached on: June 7, 2026

Christ Presbyterian Church

Physical Address: 801 Roper Dr. Clarkesville, GA 30523

Website: www.cpcclarkesville.org

Online Sermons: www.cpcclarkesville.org/sermons

If you have a Bible, you can be making your way to the Old Testament book of Amos. We're in chapter 5, verses 18 through 27. If you're just joining us, if this is your first Sunday here, we are this summer taking one representative passage from each of the minor prophets just to try to get a sense of what is the main point that these smaller prophetic books that they're trying to make. By the way, that's what minor means, not unimportant, but smaller, not gigantic like Isaiah and Ezekiel and such. So today we're in Amos, and actually if you want more on Amos, we preached through the whole book back in 2016, and somehow they're still on our website, shockingly to me. But today we're looking at Amos 5, 18 through 27, where Amos the prophet is speaking to Israel at the height of their prosperity and at the height of their rebellion. So this is God's word, and God's word is for us.

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?

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.

25 “Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

26 You shall take up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyun your star-god—your images that you made for yourselves,

27 and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,” says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Would you pray with me?

Our Father, we are not accustomed to hearing the sharp words of the Old Testament prophets, and yet hear them we must, and so please give us the help of God the Spirit so that we can understand what we're reading, not just with our brains, but would you apply it to our hearts, our wills? Make us repentant people, we ask in Christ's name, amen.

I'm reading a novel at the moment by Amor Towles, you might know that name. This particular story features, at one point there's a young boy who's traveling with his older brother, and they are stowaways in a boxcar on a train, and there's a moment where the older brother has to go try to find food somewhere in another boxcar, and so the young boy's left by himself, and you read about this figure that slides into the boxcar with this young boy, and his name is Preacher John, and he talks about the Lord, and he acts like a preacher, and he has all the signs of, oh, this is a good guy, except you the reader just know something ain't right, this is a snake. And sure enough, I mean he, within a page or two, he proves to be just another vagabond who has adopted this religious pose, and just before he harms the young boy and steals his money, he gets thrown from the train in a moment of justice-oriented relief to you the reader by another character.

I was reading that this week and thought, it's just too easy, isn't it? It's too easy to have a hypocritical preacher as a character in your book. It's a well-worn trope. One of my children was telling me about the new Willy Wonka movie, where there's a priest who is so addicted to chocolate that he gets lured into working for the bad guys because he just, they're feeding him with chocolate, that's how they're paying him. It can take anything.

It's easy to write the story because it's observable in the world. Hypocrisy is the number one reason why a non-Christian would say they want nothing to do with Jesus. That's always the case. It'd be great if hypocrisy was just outside the church, but it's inside the church, too. Of course, there's plenty of it outside the church. You've got the actor or musician who professes one thing, and then their life falls apart. The politician who, appears to be this moral person taking a stand, and yet then what about this other thing that was true of their lives? People are just an absolute mess of inconsistency and a lack of integrity.

Why is it so ordinary and still shocking to see someone profess one thing and then live the exact opposite way? More basic, why is it so hard for me and you to be people of integrity, where when we say yes, it's yes, and when we say no, it's no, and we're just consistent? Why is that so difficult?

How refreshing is it when you meet someone and you spend enough time with them that you realize, generally speaking, they're pretty consistent. Their yes is yes, and their no is no. It's an old problem. It's here in Amos. In this book, you and I are called to repent and become like our Lord, whose actions and words always match when ours so often don't match at all. That's what we're going to look at. We're going to look at ourselves first. When our actions and words and even beliefs don't match, then we're going to spend a minute looking at the Lord whose actions and words always match. That's what we're doing. If you like outlines, there you go.

Let's talk about ourselves first because it's easier to do.

We know a few things about Amos. He's a shepherd from the city of Tekoa, different spelling than our Tekoa, a gatherer of figs we learn later. He's a farmer, not a professional, not of nobility, not one who spent time in the school of the prophets, simple farmer that God called to speak his words. Actually, Amos says the prophetic formula, which is, thus says the Lord, he says it per capita more times than any other prophet in the Old Testament.

And so Amos, the Judean southern kingdom simple prophet, speaks against the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of a guy named Jeroboam the second. And Jeroboam the second reigned at the height of Israel's economic prosperity. And Amos shows up and starts essentially saying this whole thing is going to burn to the ground. It would be like a person with an eighth-grade education from a flyover rural town going to Wall Street when all of the economics professors and professionals are there with the president to celebrate an historic bull market. Things are going so well. And this uneducated simpleton shows up and says, you're all going to die and your whole empire is going down and it's a lot sooner than you think. How would that be met? With ridicule and mockery.

That's Amos' world and that's his context. Preach judgment during prosperity when judgment seems far away. We know that they weren't thinking about judgment from our passage. Look at verse 18. Amos says that they *desire the day of the Lord*, the day when God shows up, a day when God would come and check things out. They desire that. Why? Because they assume it's a day of light, a day of brightness and blessing. Their presumption is that God is for us and if he shows up, it is going to go great because we are killing it in every way. They're very religious. Look at what they're doing in verses 21-23.

They're observing the feasts, three national feasts that Israel was supposed to observe according to God's law. They're observing them.

They're having solemn assemblies. They're meeting together.

They are offering burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings. They're supposed to offer all those things.

They're singing. They're playing music.

This is a religious people. It's a prosperous people, dotting their religious I's, crossing their religious T's. So, what's the problem? And we know there is a problem because God tells them *the day of the Lord will be darkness and not light*. It'll be like running away from a lion only to run head first into a bear. It'll be like finally getting inside your house and leaning up against the wall to catch your breath and a snake comes out of the wall and bites you on the hand. That's what the day of the Lord is going to be like for them.

Why does God tell them that he hates their feasts and he despises them? That is strong language. He says he's not going to take delight in their assemblies. He's not going to accept their offerings. He's not going to look at their worship. He calls their singing, He calls it noise, commotion. And he says, I'm not even going to listen to it.

Why does he hate their worship? Two reasons that we see in this text and the rest of the book. It's hypocrisy and idolatry. It's the usual suspects. It's no surprise.

Hypocrisy and idolatry.

They're hypocrites because they do all this religion and they profess the name of Yahweh, but they are not just or righteous. Neither. And God has spoken to them through the book about this. In chapter two, he told them, you sell each other into slavery for a pair of sandals. They were not allowed to sell each other into slavery. No Israelite was supposed to be a slave. So that's strike number one. And they're doing it so they can get more stuff, a pair of shoes. He says they are trampling the poor and turning away the suffering. So it sure seems like they're very prosperous and money really is the king among these people. They're sexually immoral in some ways that clearly violate God's law. It says they're getting drunk in God's house. That's never a good idea, generally speaking, I would say. Don't get drunk in God's house. They're making these holy group of men called Nazarites drink wine. The Nazarites had two or three laws. Don't cut your hair, don't drink wine, and don't touch a dead body. And they are forcing their Nazarites to violate their vows and drink wine.

They're just doing whatever they want. But they're doing enough religion to make it feel like, we're good. God's on our side. We're doing fine. Amos at one point calls them cows of Bashan. It's very descriptive. He's essentially saying you are a fat prosperous cow who keeps getting fatter by oppressing the poor, crushing the needy, and spending your day in a hedonistic paralysis. Now that'll get after you. There's no justice. There's no right doing. They're just looking to themselves. And it'd be great if that was the worst part, but it's not the worst part.

They're also idolaters. Look at 25 through 27. Whatever sacrifices they're offering, which they didn't have to do to make God happy with them, he tells them when you were in the wilderness, you didn't even offer sacrifices. And I still made a covenant with you and loved you and protected you and guided you. Whatever sacrifices they are making, their real worship is to Sikkuth and Kiyun, images that they've made for themselves. The scholars say that these are gods of the surrounding nations, star gods, actually. Steven, in his sermon in the Book of Acts, quotes this passage and he says they were worshipping the host of heaven rather than the maker of heaven. That's the nature of idolatry, is to worship something that is creaturely rather than the creator himself.

Idolatry is loving or trusting something besides the living God to take care of you.

And that's clearly what they're doing. Enough Yahweh religion to keep him happy and get him off our back, but let's hedge our bets by worshiping the surrounding gods and making sure we can get something from them. And then if we do all of that and keep these plates spinning, we can do whatever we want. That's hypocrisy. That's idolatry. That's a great way to make the Lord say when I show up it will be darkness and not light.

Actions, words and beliefs not lining up. And the Lord sends a farmer to tell them to repent.

If you sat down this afternoon and read through Amos, and you could do it, it's a short book, you could do it in one sitting, what you would come away with is, man, there's some intense words in here. He hates their worship. He tells them exactly how evil they are, and he doesn't spare anyone's feelings.

Why is that strong language?

Well, to you I ask, why do you sometimes use strong language when you're trying to get someone to pay attention and to focus?

Why do you look someone in the eye and tell them exactly what they need to hear sometimes? And you might say it in stronger words than you would normally use.

Sometimes it feels like that's the only way to get through. Sometimes a person has to hear it in a way that they might not normally hear it.

I was talking to a friend years ago now, I was talking about a struggle in my own life, and I expected this to be a conversation where he would offer comfort, mercy, a listening ear, and just be real, hey man, that's a bummer, so sorry. And instead, he said, well, your real problem here is that you're breaking God's commandment, and until you repent and call it what it is, you're never going to grow. And I was just, whoa, this changes our relationship, I think. Cold bucket of true water on my head. I've never forgotten it. It was exactly what I needed to hear. It was sharp, and it was effective.

You've had people do that to you, and it was just what you needed to hear. You can't repent unless you see what you need to repent of or from, and I know I'm ending a sentence with a preposition, yes.

You can't repent unless you see what you need to repent of.

Remember Steve's comment last week during the worship service? I thought this was so insightful that when we come to God in confession, we're not telling him something that he doesn't know, and when we tell him, it's going to change our relationship. Rather, our relationship is already affected, and until we come to him and tell him what he already knows, there's no hope of going forward in our relationship.

What might you need to tell God that he already knows?

Is there some place in your life where your words and your actions and your beliefs are just not matching? What are those areas where your profession of faith and your actions, words, thoughts, all of this is undermining this? It's not corresponding.

In other words, where is there hypocrisy in your life? There's the out and out rogue hypocrite that we see in literature and in real life where there's no real sense of religion, but all of us struggle with hypocrisy.

I went to the gym this past week for the first time in a while, we'll leave it at that, and the gym had mirrors, and there was a point where not out of vanity, I knew better than that, but I looked to my left to make sure that my form was right, and I had the thought, is that what I look like? I looked over expecting to see 20-year-old Hobie, and I saw a 43-year-old Hobie, and I thought, man, time has not been kind to me. The hard answer was, yep, that's what you look like. You can go one of two ways with that. You can kind of slide into the pit of despair, which I may have done for a second or two, or you can let it keep going and turn, and then you can realize, oh, now I know what I need to do. Now I know what I need to work on. Now I know what needs some attention. Whether I do it or not is a different discussion, but at least I know.

Where does the mirror of God's word expose what you actually look like?

What you actually say?

You would have to look at God's word and say, oh, man, I really do say these things that are not good, casual, harmful.

Where does the mirror show you, oh, I really think those thoughts, and they're dark. Where does the mirror show you actions that betray your faith?

Where does the mirror show you, oh, no, there is external religion that makes me look better than what my heart actually is?

Where might the mirror show you false gods that I profess to love Jesus, but if I'm honest, what I really, really love is my work, and I can't even turn it off for one day?

Where might the mirror show you that, yeah, I profess to love Jesus, but I'm really in covenant with money, and it's evident by the amount of anxiety that I feel when I think about it.

Your schedule, keeping control, other gods of this age. Let the mirror show you what you really look like so that you can actually know from what you need to repent and turn and turn back to the Lord and become like him. That is the goal, is to become like him, to become a consistent person, to be a person with some integrity. But if we need to see ourselves in order to do that, we really do have to see God. We have to see what he is like, and we have to see that what he says and what he does always, always match. So, let's talk about that.

Let's talk about the Lord himself.

Second point, Amos says the Lord promises that the day will be a day of darkness and gloom, so is that the case? If that's what the prophecy is, is that what happens? And if you remember from last week, we talked about the day of the Lord, and there is this end of time revelation, consummation day of the Lord when people are crying for the mountains to fall on them because they don't want to face the justice of God. Yes, that's coming.

But we also talked about how the day of the Lord has these miniature intrusions, these little shots across the bow that warn people.

The beginning of this book of Amos says that it was two years before the earthquake. Implication is that everybody who reads this in years to come will know what the earthquake is. Zechariah, centuries later, talks about the earthquake. So that's something. Last week we were in Joel and we saw a locust plague that destroyed their crops. If you just read around the time period of the minor prophets, there are earthquakes, locust plagues, invading armies, other sorts of sicknesses, destruction of cattle, many intrusions of the day of the Lord.

In this book alone, God promises you're not going to have any more winter houses or summer houses or houses built with ivory, and you're going to be led away with hooks by your captors like a fish. You're going to have famine and a great phrase, cleanness of teeth, which we think is a good thing, and hygienically it is. But in an ancient world, if you have cleanness of teeth, that means you're not eating because you don't have any food. It's a judgment. Famine, no rain, it got bad.

The day of the Lord, even the miniature versions, would be darkness for these people. God wants their hearts. He wants their repentance. He wants them to acknowledge their failures and worship Him exclusively. He wants, verse 24, He wants *justice to roll like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*. He wants them to live consistently, that if they know the living God, they will live just and righteous lives. They'll live like they're known by God and loved by God. What will flow from them is stuff that is good for the community of faith and the world.

But instead of joyful obedience, they give Him obligatory noise, an obligatory sacrifice, an obligatory assembly to get God off their backs. God says that He will do what He promised. Verse 27, *I'll send you into exile beyond Damascus*.

He doesn't say things to hear Himself speak.

He promised them in the book of Deuteronomy, if you leave me, if you worship other gods, if you turn away from me and you don't repent and you become hard hearted, I will send you out of this land into another, into exile. It's what He promises here. And in just a few years, when the Assyrian army came to town, they would be successful, not just because they were strong, which they were, and mighty, which they were. They would be strong because Yahweh, whose name is the God of hosts, God of angelic armies, would actually be working against His own covenant people because they deserted Him, and He said that He would send them into exile, and He does what He says.

And into exile they went. Some repented. There's always a remnant. So what about, were there any promises to them? There's a lot of judgment so far, let's be honest, right? Is there any mercy in this book? Not in our passage, obviously. If you get to the end of the book, He begins to say that there's a day coming when He'll raise up the booth of David that's fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in days of old, and Edomites will come in and be ruled by the Davidic king, and the nations will be ruled by the Davidic king, and mountains are going to drip with sweet wine, and fortunes will be restored, and the people will never be uprooted again. And if you read the history of Israel, that did not happen to the northern kingdom of Israel. They never came back like they were. Even the southern kingdom of Judah never came back in its glory like it was, though they were restored.

These promises are looking forward, further out. It's a vision of something that's coming for the nations. When there is a Davidic king on the throne, we don't have to wonder who that is. It's Jesus. He's the Davidic king. He's sitting on the throne now. He'll be sitting on the throne forever.

If you're someone who repents and believes, even if it's just a few, God makes good on His covenant promises for His people. He does what He says, and it's mercy. It's mercy for those who will turn to Him.

We tend to think that people are really bad, or they're really good. I've quoted him before here, but the Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn was imprisoned in a Soviet gulag for eight years because he opposed Stalin, which is good to oppose Stalin. And he reflected on this, and he's talked about how he's tempted to think, these prison guards are all evil, and we who are imprisoned are all good. And then he ends up with this great line that says, but the line between good and evil runs through every human heart. Which means that for me and you, the takeaway is this. Don't think about those evil people out there. Think about that evil person in here. Not, those hypocrites are so bad. Those idolaters are so evil. No.

*Where's the hypocrisy in me? Where's the idolatry in me?
That's the question to be asking.*

We're going to have to take God at His word, judgment and mercy. For some of you, if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, you need to take God at His word when He promises judgment. He's not messing around. That's not an empty promise. It's not vacuous. He'll do what He says. He sent Israel into exile, and He'll come to judge the living and the dead. And it's a good day to turn from your rebellion and to turn to Jesus and to be saved from the wrath to come. Jesus came for sinners. His life for ours. And when we come to faith, here's what you're saying. You're not saying, I now vow to be a good moral person who finally makes it into heaven. It's actually kind of the opposite. If you come to Jesus, what you're saying is, I've tried to live based on my own consistency and faithfulness. And it didn't work. So I'm going to have to rely on the consistency and faithfulness of somebody else. And that's Jesus. He always got it right. He never paid lip service to God. His worship was perfect. His obedience was perfect. He took exile on behalf of His people. It's a good day to believe. We'd love to talk to you more about that.

If you are in Christ, rejoice that God is consistent where you're not. And rejoice in the perfections of Jesus. Lament your imperfections, but don't despair. If He saved you, He'll take it all the way to the end. And the end for you looks like mountains dripping with sweet wine. It looks like being rooted and never uprooted again. It looks like everything being made new and made right. And no more inconsistencies. No more lack of integrity. No more sins that shock you about yourself. No more of that. That's your future. But it won't be based on your ability. It'll be based on the Lord Jesus who is consistent for you.

It's a hard book, but it confronts us with what's wrong with us. And it just reminds us that we can pretend and play religious when our hearts are far from God. We can rely on idols to deliver us rather than God Himself.

Look in the mirror. See what's true so that you can know how to repent and to turn to Him for mercy, and to see His faithfulness and His goodness and consistency.

Trust Him and become like Him.

Brothers and sisters, as those who belong to the just and righteous one, in your life and mine, let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
Would you pray with me?

Lord, would you help us? Increase our faith. Help us to see Jesus and His perfections better than we did yesterday. Help us to trust Him in ways we haven't yet. Help us to rely on Him and become like Him. Give us the grace to see ourselves as you see us and not to despair and to run from you as if we could ever hide. We can't hide. There's no place to hide. Help us to see ourselves as we really are and run to you by faith in your Son whom you sent to rescue and deliver us. And having run to Him, would you let us find salvation and hope and everything for which we were made and even what we long for? New heavens and new earth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Portion of scripture read before sermon—Revelation 21:1-8