

Worship at Play and Church

*Then the Lord said,
"Behold, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass by them; (Amos 7:8)*

Big Idea:

In these five visions, Amos demonstrates that the Israelites had refused to live worshipfully in three areas: their vocations, their avocations, and in church. Why were they unfaithful in all these areas? Because they had neglected to listen to God's Word in each area. The ultimate judgment for such neglect is when God removes the Word and gives rebels what they want (8:11-12). The only hope is to return to Christ who is the "plumb line" and delighted to do the "work" his Father gave him, who "lived" among us, and who "sings" in our worship.

I. Worship at Play (Amos 7:4-6; 8:7-10, 14)

Everything outside of our vocation is typically referred to as our avocation. It is life in-between corporate worship and work. That portion of life is threatened in the second vision of fire that devours land and water, that is, everything essential for human beings to flourish. The Israelites were guilty not just of corrupting public worship and business fraud but of neglecting to live gratefully or worshipfully during the in-between times of life. Christians in the past help us with an outline for how to pray. In their morning prayers, they gave thanks for safekeeping through the night, for the creation of the world, and for the work that lay ahead of them. In the evening, they would express gratitude for God's help through the day, for meals, and ask God's mercies for the night as well as reflect on the day and ask God to keep them faithful until death.

II. Worship at Church (Amos 7:7-9; 8:3, 5)

The final area of judgment has to do with the Israelites perversion of worship. While it is true that they had created a new form of religion that affirmed their indulgent lifestyle, it is also true that they observed the major feasts and all the sacrifices. However those acts were perfunctory. God is a person and just as any person is offended by a gift or a conversation or an act of service which is done without any feeling just to check something off of a "to do" list, God is equally repulsed by heartless worship. In fact God reminds his people that he was still with them in the desert when it was impossible to provide sacrifices. The wilderness wandering was a 40 year object lesson proving that God guides and blesses his people despite their inability to do anything for him.

We are after the same thing in corporate worship. In order to recapture our hearts God gathers us in structured worship to channel us into gratitude. It is impossible to maintain a heart that is soft for the Lord in daily life without very regular corporate worship. This requires at least three things:

- 1) Persistence: As with anything else in life, without regularity, one is unlikely to see transformation. We commit ourselves to that which is most important to us.

- 2) Preparation: Again, we often get out of something that which we put into it. That is not to say that God is limited by our preparation; he's not. However, we are much more likely to engage wholeheartedly in worship if we have spent at least a few minutes preparing our hearts the night before or the morning of.
- 3) Personal: Every movement of our worship service has significant meaning. Every section represents what Christ has done for us in the gospel. Every segue provides an opportunity for you to participate physically in worship so as to train your heart to respond appropriately to grace.

Discussion Questions:

1. What regular rhythms can you adopt into your week to help you live worshipfully in every area of life?
2. Which of the 3 ways of helping to engage wholeheartedly in worship resonated most with you and how might you be able to put it into practice?