

## Let Justice and Righteousness Flow

23<sup>rd</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 11/08/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Amos 5:18-24 Pastor Keith Besel

v.24, The LORD says, **“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ One of the greatest temptations, not only for those who consider themselves to be unbelievers but also for those of us who proudly claim our place within the family of God, is to think that we are the ones who actually determine and define the truth about God and His existence; to think that God is just fine with us worshipping God and living as His people according to our own terms rather than His.

→ This is of course, the predominate and growing mindset in our world’s culture today. It is the attitude of extreme arrogance; the idea that we are indestructible. We hear and think it regarding the Covid pandemic when people think only of themselves: “I’m not afraid of getting it” or “We’re all going to get it anyway, so bring it on”.

→ We’ve seen it and we’ve been a part of it in the recent election cycle where politicians and their fans on both sides have placed all of their hope for the future of this country; for the future of their happiness and “survival” on one man/woman; on the passing or defeating of a particular ballot issue. And then what? We point at, and label the “other side” as being “evil” or “clueless” or “anti-god”; or we just call him/her/them some assortment of derogatory names.

✘ Let’s be honest, this self-determining and controlling kind of arrogance is so often the way it is for us in our relationship with God as well. We come up with standards in our faith life that we can achieve and we delude ourselves into thinking that we’re achieving God’s standard instead of just trying to make ourselves happy and comfortable.

→ But you see, God’s standard is nothing short of perfect obedience to His holy Law. In Matthew 5:48 Jesus tells us the standard, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”.

### **I. The Day of the LORD Means Judgement**

✘ This was part of Israel’s problem in our Old Testament Reading for today. They were smug and arrogant; thinking that they were actually achieving a great standard of godliness. They looked forward to the Day of the LORD because they assumed it would be a good thing for them.

→ They were so busy looking at the people and nations around them with a judgmental eye; so confident that God would come and destroy all Israel’s enemies because after all “they are so much worse than us”. And us Israelites? Well, we are His “good and faithful people who deserve His protection because of how good we’ve been”.

→ But here’s the problem, Israel’s standards were self-made. They took God’s 10 Commandments and created a total of 613 Commandments that people had to follow to be acceptable to God. And yes, they were failing miserably – failing to meet God’s real standard of sincerity and truth and faithfulness to Him in all things. So Amos asks in verse 18, “Why would you have the day of the Lord?” Instead of honoring those people, Amos warns that the Day of the LORD will bring judgment upon them from God instead.

✘ In verses 21-23 God says to them, “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. 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. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.”

→ Can you imagine the people’s response? “What? These aren’t our feasts; these aren’t our offerings God. You gave them to Moses and Aaron who gave them to us! If you hate them, why are we wasting all of our time doing them?” Ahh...there it is: “Why are we wasting all our time doing them?” The problem was not with the worship itself. The problem was with the hearts of those worshipers.

→ As Proverbs 21:27 says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination”. Just doing worship is not what pleases God. It’s doing it with the right, joy-filled attitude in a believer’s heart, mind and soul! What God established for eternal blessing, forgiveness, life, and salvation, the people had turned into just another chore on the to-do list to try and “please God”.

✘ But you see, God had established the Old Testament worship not so the people could please Him by their work, but so that He could make them pleasing to Him through His work!

→ And these people weren’t even worshiping as God had given them to do through Moses and Aaron anyway. Instead of worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem as God directed them to do, they worshiped at the shrines that they had established at Bethel and Dan and elsewhere.

→ And on top of that, Amos tells them that their hearts weren’t with the LORD even as they did it their way. Why? because they mixed in rituals from pagan deities, labeling them as “new ideas; new ways to make it more interesting and ‘relevant’”.

→ And just as you should expect, their false religion showed itself in the rest of their lives; in their priorities and decisions and overall way of life. There’s an old but true saying, “Right worship leads to right living, while corrupt worship leads to corrupt living”.

## II. What does the coming of the LORD mean for us?

✘ Well guess what folks; all these years later we are not immune to Israel’s sin. Jesus has come and He has established His standards for New Testament worship as well. He has defined for us where it is that He will come to us with His blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation. He says that He comes in His perfect Word of truth; in Holy Baptism; in Holy Absolution; and in Holy Communion. Lutherans have summed these gifts up in the phrase, “Word and Sacrament”.

→ But still, too many people think they can access God apart from His established means of grace. And so, they think they can commune with Him on the golf course or on the lake or in the mountains or in the recliner with the TV on. Or they think that a better connection with God happens when they focus on the things that they do in worship; by stirring up more excitement with a flashier presentation or some kind of entertainment instead of the “same old Scripture readings and same old sacraments and same old pronouncements of forgiveness through Christ and His work on the cross”.

✘ But folks, apart from God’s determined Means of Grace – His Word, which is pure and simple but so very rich and His Sacraments which use ordinary things like water and bread and wine but give us eternal life; apart from these things there is no right worship. Not because I say it is so, but because God has put it together His way.

✘ So friends, it is appropriate that you and I who are here in worship today; here where He promises to come to us in His Means of Grace, honestly and humbly consider whether or not we too are prone to Israel’s sin?

→ Yes, you’ve come – that’s a good start. But where’s your mind at? Are there thoughts lurking around that think, “let’s get this over with so I can get on with my real life; so I can get back to the football game or lunch or even a nap”?

- Have you ever worked to concoct excuses to avoid this time with God, thinking something like, “God doesn’t really expect me to be here every Sunday. I mean, if I have to miss church to get to the stadium in time for the football game once in a while or so that I can get a few extra hours in at work or get my chores out of the way at home so that I can relax, God’s not going to hold that against me”. Or how about this one that I’ve heard more often than I can count, “God wants me to spend time with family, so He’s not going to be upset if I skip church to go to the kids’ wrestling match or volleyball or softball tournament or just to have some quiet family time at home, right? Never mind that there is no better family activity possible than when a family spends time receiving God’s gifts together in Worship and growing in their faith among fellow believers.
- And for those of you who are in Church Sunday after Sunday...and on Wednesdays too? What’s your focus? Do you not want some sort of medal; some sort of praise for just doing what God expects and desires of all of His people?
- ⊗ You see, in all of these cases, the Divine Service becomes something to check off your to-do list. What God has put in place and given to us for eternal blessing, forgiveness, life, and salvation, we have turned into just another obligation to weigh us down; one worship among many where we work to please God. But just as it was with the Israelites, so it is with us. God established His Means of Grace; God gave His Church as the place to administer them, not so that you can please Him by your work, but so that He can make you pleasing to Him through His work.
  - So the saying is still just as true today as it ever was – right worship leads to right living, while corrupt worship leads to corrupt living. Yet we watch what we watch on the television; we look at what we look at on our computer screen; we gossip about our sister/brother; we don’t help and support our neighbor in his/her physical need. Neither do we support the ministry of Christ’s church with our firstfruits, but only as an afterthought and with whatever might be left over after we’ve met our own desires first.
- ⊗ And so Amos’ words in verses 18-20 still sting today, “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, 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. Is not the Day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” Throughout Scripture the LORD is seen as a lion. And God is saying that – try as you might to run away from or avoid or excuse your way out of God’s presence – you can’t do it! And the deserving judgement for our constant sin and unfaithfulness must be handed out; because the Day of the LORD is coming, like it or not.

### III. God’s justice rolling down and flowing over Jesus.

- ⊗ That’s why the LORD refuses to leave His people; you and me in our sin with no hope. After He calls His people to repentance in verse 23; to remove all “the noise” of our sinful and corrupt ways of worship, the LORD says in verse 24, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”.
  - Yes, God has a plan for justice and the punishment of sin AND for His love and grace to flow like an ever-flowing stream upon His people. That plan is fulfilled in the One whom Revelation 5:5 identifies as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” who “has conquered”. There’s no need to flee from this Lion because He has taken our sin and its just punishment upon Himself. And on the tree of the cross He crushed the head of the serpent; the one who overcame mankind by a tree in the Garden of Eden.
  - On Good Friday, the darkness of Judgment Day fell upon the earth. But the One who spoke light into a dark creation saying, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3) once again overcame the

darkness of sin for all mankind. Jesus is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome (Jn. 1:5). He absorbs all of the judgment that Amos warns us of on His Day; the Day of the LORD. And He is Himself the “ever-flowing stream” of God’s righteousness and grace.

✘ In His gift of Word connected to water in Baptism God pours His grace upon us and we receive the gift of repentance and faith. So Christians, use Christ’s gifts. Repent of your false worship and your countless attempts at both fleeing from God and His clear guidance and truth, and trying to make yourself acceptable to Him by what you do.

→ And instead rejoice that justice has rolled down like waters, and righteousness has flowed like an ever-flowing stream upon you through Jesus and His gifts. In John 4:10, 14, Jesus said that He is the source of “living water” saying, “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”.

→ Yes, rejoice that the body and blood that Jesus gave and shed on the cross to pay for your sin is now the very same body and blood offered here in His Church as He says each time in Holy Communion, “Take, eat; this is My body. ... Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mat. 26:26-28).

✘ Yes, Romans 5:17, 21 is clear: Jesus is “our righteousness” not because of our accomplishments but because He has given us His “perfect nature” free and clear so that now when the Father looks at you and me, He sees His Son Jesus. He sees Jesus’ righteousness wrapped around us and He pours out His love and grace in a stream that lasts forever before His throne.

→ Yes, the Day of the LORD is coming. And for us who are in Jesus, it will be a glorious day! A day filled with the light of Jesus; a day overflowing with His grace upon us all. Amen.