

Return to Me

Study Questions | 02.11.24

Brett McBride | Amos 4



Consider

Discuss: Define “Happiness.” We are bombarded with the idea and the pursuit of happiness through media, advertising, novels, self-help books and podcasts, ideologies and philosophies thrust upon us by social media... Brett calls it “the gospel of Happiness.” Why does the world hold up ‘happiness’ as the ultimate state to attain? Where do you hear it most? Are you aware that you are hearing it? How have you experienced ‘happiness’ in your life?

Let’s Examine

Setting the stage: Amos 4

- **Discuss:** Read v. 1. The chapter starts with a description of the women. What differences and similarities are there to 2:6-8? What does Amos 3:15 add to our picture of the people and their lifestyle? How would these people describe ‘happiness’ based on their behaviour and priorities in these verses?
- **Discuss:** There is a pattern in this chapter. How many times is “yet you did not return to me” repeated. If repetition in the Bible means “THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO HEAR!!”, what is God trying to say to the people? List all of the warnings which God sent to them using this phrase.
- **Discuss:** What examples are there in this chapter of hearts that have hardened toward the true worship of God? Brett says that Amos is crying out “**Stop going through the motions! Your worship is a contradiction!**” Where do you see that in the warnings God give them?
- **Discuss:** in v.12, things change. The word “therefore” (or “SO” in some translations) signifies a change in direction of God’s actions. What is God saying is coming? What is the connection between the ‘threat’ of v 12 and the words of v.13?
- **Discuss:** Brett mentioned that the Israelites wanted a “**Gospel of affirmation – not a Gospel of transformation.**” How is that true based on what you have seen in the passage? What is the foundation of each of those ‘gospel’s? Will either of these lead to true happiness? Why/why not?

Church history: a very brief summary The Reformation and the Renaissance

The Mystics were trying to pursue fresh spirituality as they were surrounded by a Christian Church which didn’t look much like the Jesus who started it and who is the foundation of it! **Mysticism was a response to the dry sacramental aspects that were prominent in the Church and the simply scholastic approach to life** (Brett) What do you know about them? Despite the fact that some of the ideas and practices they believed were not the best, what are some very important gifts they gave us?

- **Discuss:** *Their prayer movement for the Church, ... reveals to us that we are to prioritize experiencing Christ in a transformed prayer life – and then participation with Him in whatever He*

reveals – versus just going through the motions of Churchianity (Brett). How does this relate to what the Israelites were doing in Amos 4? How does it relate to you?

Reformers/Dissenters: Before Martin Luther, there were many dissenting voices against the powers and pervasive practices of the church. Some mentioned were: Bartolomé de las Casas, John Wycliffe, Jan Huss. Can you explain how they were dissenting? What happened to them?

- **Discuss:** Can you explain what contribution Martin Luther made to the Reformation? (VERY briefly!)
- **Discuss:** What are the 5 ‘alone’ statements which were the foundation of the Reformation? How was that different than the stance of the existing church?
- **Discuss:** Although this was a gift to us as believers in Jesus, the reformation unleashed incredible violence, division, and political and social uncertainty? Can you explain this?
- **Discuss:** Can you explain how a division in the church has actually led to a church that isn’t just divided but splintered? How many church divisions and denominations can you list!?

The Renaissance: An age of great wealth, intellectual prowess, pride in human accomplishments, great leaps in artistic expression, looking to Greek and Roman philosophers and scholars... ***But much of this period of decadence was built off the backs of oppression and made the Catholic Church resistant to the reforms happening in North and Western Europe. Like in Amos – people were more interested in the summer house or the winter house being inlaid with ivory than they were in heeding the calls of the Reformation!*** (Brett)

- **Discuss:** Discuss how the cultural and political reality ‘south of the Alps’ would be similar to Amos 2:6-8, 3:15, 4:1. How would this have looked like a ‘gospel of affirmation’ rather than a Gospel of Transformation?

Let’s Apply

Group Discussion: God says multiple times in Amos 4 “return to me”. He says this to people who were doing many things to worship him – sacrifices, tithes, other sacrifices, offerings – BUT those forms of worship were tainted, selfish, disobedient, for show, etc.. They were done with the appearance of pleasing God, but were lazy, selfish, disobedient...and the list goes on. Their priorities were all wrong. **Discuss:** Is this manifest in the church today? How can we help each other to have a true heart of worship which manifests in meaningful expressions?

Personal Reflection: Are there any ways that you need to “Return to God” with your heart of worship? As you read the list above of what the Israelites were doing during the time of Amos, is there any self evaluation you need to do regarding your worship, sacrifices, tithes, offerings, heart, motivations. Etc.? Sit quietly with God and allow him to reveal something to you. Discuss with Him how you can bring about change.

Let’s Pray

- **Spend time praising God:** For his constant pursuit of his Church to Return to him – including us!
- **Confess** (silently or out loud) when you have pursued the gospel of happiness.
- **Ask the Holy Spirit** to empower each person in your group to know in what ways they need to ‘return to God’
- **Continue to pray** for the church around the world; That we will grow ever unified into the One Body which God created us to be so that we can be a shining light of Godly transformation to the world!