

THE GOD OF JUSTICE



**Studies in the Old Testament
Minor Prophet of Amos...**

A series by David Legge

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The God Of Justice - Chapter 1

"The Accused"

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Well, good evening to you all. It's a delight to be back with you in Portrush Presbyterian Church for the CPA Summer Bible Week. I have fond memories of being here, I think it was six years ago, and sharing ministry with the Rev Tom Shaw who is here tonight - and it's a delight again to be here sharing ministry with the Rev Noel Darragh. I really appreciated the study of God's word this morning, and I'm looking forward to the rest of the week - it's not often preachers get the opportunity to sit under other men's ministry, and it's something that I'm really looking forward to the rest of the week.

I'm here with you to preach the word of God each night this week, and I want to take as a series in the evenings a study of the book of Amos. So I have asked you to turn to it, I know what happens when you pick a wee minor prophet - everybody starts to panic! Don't be afraid, by the way, to look at the contents of your Bible, I do it often - but if you're embarrassed to do that, find Ezekiel and Daniel, and then go three books after Daniel and you'll get the prophet Amos. So that's what you're all doing now, isn't it?!

Now I have to bring to you the message that I believe God would have me preach. I was down here for a holiday about three weeks ago, and God, I believe, very heavily impressed upon my heart to bring to you an exposition on the prophet Amos. Now there will be some gospel application here, but mainly I have to say the message is applicable to believers. I've entitled this series: 'The God of Justice' - and tonight we are in chapters 1 and 2. We'll not read them all, but we'll read the first four verses of chapter 1, and then from verse 4 to the end of chapter 2.

So Amos chapter 1, and I'm reading from the New King James Version: *"The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. And he said: 'The LORD roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers'. Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of BenHadad".* Then, if you were to read down the rest of chapter 1, you would see in verse 6 that the prophet of God repeats another judgement upon another nation: *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment",* and Gaza was really the Philistines. Then you go down to verse 9, and you will see another proclamation of judgement: *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment".* Then verse 11, another nation: *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three*

transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment". Verse 13, another nation: "Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment'".

Chapter 2 and verse 1: *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment'". Then in verse 4, the prophet, inspired by God, turns to a seventh nation - the nation of Judah, the southern kingdom: "Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed. But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem'. Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name. They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god. Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was as strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. Also it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. I raised up some of your sons as prophets, and some of your young men as Nazirites. Is it not so, O you children of Israel?' says the LORD. 'But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, 'Do not prophesy!'. Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down. Therefore flight shall perish from the swift, the strong shall not strengthen his power, nor shall the mighty deliver himself; he shall not stand who handles the bow, the swift of foot shall not escape, nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself. The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day', says the LORD".*

Let us pray for a moment please, and as we pray together do ask the Lord, if you're in touch with God, that He might speak to us - and if you're not as close to the Lord as you'd like to be, why not draw near to the Lord now and ask Him to come and speak into your life. We need God, don't we? We really need God - a sermon won't do, we need the Holy Spirit of God to come and to minister to all our hearts. So let us unite together in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You that it is sharper than a two-edged sword. It is able to divide the very soul and spirit, bone and marrow, it is the discerners of men's hearts. Lord, we cry before it: 'Woe is me, for I am undone!'. Lord we pray that the Holy Spirit will come. O God, without the Holy Spirit, we're useless, we're wasting space and time - but, O God, if You come tonight and take Your word and apply it to our hearts, what a difference it will make to each of us as individuals and to this congregation. Lord, what great potential is here tonight - and yet it all would be for nothing, Lord, if You don't come and show up in this place and minister to our hearts. O God who is holy, and God who is just, God of grace, come and meet with us - and meet with me, Lord, now I pray - in Jesus' name, Amen.

I want you to come with me on a journey. The nation we are travelling to is the nation of Israel which, of course, at this point in time in Scripture is a divided kingdom. The northern part, the ten tribes, are in the north, the kingdom of Israel; and Judah and Benjamin is in the south, and because Judah is the larger tribe the south is called 'Judah'. We are going to the northern kingdom of Israel, and the city in particular that we're journeying to is Bethel. 'The House of God' is what 'Bethel' means - it has an illustrious history in Scripture, but at this moment in time there is the Palace of Jeroboam II and his private religious chapel, and there resides his private priest, Amaziah. That's where we're going. The time is about 25 years before the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to the nation of the north, the Assyrians - we heard a bit about that this morning. It's 25 years before that awful event where the Jews of the northern kingdom were taken into captivity - but at this moment in time, 25 years before that, the nation of Israel finds itself in peace. There is great prosperity, in fact we could go as far as to say that people are living in luxury. Added to that, if that wasn't enough, there is a renewed interest in religion - we might say a revival of religion of sorts.

As we journey there, the religious service is about to start. It's in the King's Chapel, Amaziah stands to his feet in charge - he's about to begin the program, we would say - and all of a sudden that holy, sacred moment is disturbed by a commotion outside of that religious building. This is what you hear: 'Woe to those who are at ease in Zion!'. A voice is crying from outside, and as we run outside to see what's going on, there is a man and he cries further: 'God is going to send judgement on this wicked nation of Israel!'. As you rush out to see what's going on, you find there what you didn't expect, perhaps, to see: an uninvited rustic hillbilly preacher who is actually a farmer, a herdsman, a sheep breeder from Tekoa, which is about 11 miles from the holy city of Jerusalem.

This man's name is Amos. His name actually means 'burden'. He is not a professional prophet, he's not the son of a prophet, he didn't attend a prophetic school. In fact, if you turn with me to chapter 7, we did this on Saturday evening but for the benefit of those who weren't at that introductory night, we see that Amos says himself, chapter 7 and verse 14: 'I was no prophet, nor was I the son of a prophet; but I was a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel''. He's just a farmer, but he was God's man, who God called, with God's message - and, you know, that's how God often works. He chooses ordinary people, often who find themselves in common jobs, and He chooses those ordinary people to do extraordinary things in His kingdom and for His glory.

We could look at many other great giants from Scripture who were exactly the same, even farmers. Moses, you remember, was out with the flock of sheep in the Midianite desert when God appeared to him in the burning bush and called him to be the deliverer of the people of Israel in bondage in Egypt. David was out feeding the flock and tending it when he was called to be the King of Israel - and it's still God's way! What an encouragement that is! We read in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 1:

'God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty'. Now I don't know who you are tonight, and I don't know how insignificant you feel yourself to be, I don't know what your everyday job or occupation is, if you have one - but God can do something with your life if you will place your life in His hands, if you will listen for His voice, if you will hear His call, if you will be obedient. It's not about what you can offer God, it's about what the great God of heaven can do with your willingness.

Amos isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, yet he is God's man. He has come to Bethel to preach the message of God, which is: 'Judgement is coming to Israel'. Now we might pause here for a moment and ask the question: why was judgement coming to Israel? Did I not say they were very wealthy? And they were, and in those days they construed that wealth equated God's blessing - and that often was the case in the Old Testament covenant. But the children of Israel did not realise that God was blessing them in spite of their sin. Their wealth was actually in spite of their iniquity and transgression against God. Did I not say earlier that there was a revival of sorts in religion? Yes, I did, but what Amos teaches us is that the religion was superficial, the religion was shallow - we could say it was hypocritical. The reason why Amos had come at God's behest to preach judgement against what we would say was an economically and ecclesiastically successful state, was because their faith did not affect their lives.

They were making money, and making much religious fervour and noise, and yet they were not worshipping God in spirit and according to truth. In fact, making money had become more important to them than worshipping God. If you look at chapter 8 for a moment, and verse 5, we see that clearly emphasised. Chapter 8 and verse 5: 'They say, 'When will the new moon be past'', the religious feast, "that we may sell grain? And the sabbath, that we may trade wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel large?'. You see, God's people were getting rich, and with that wealth came complacency and carnality. The rich were getting richer, they were exploiting the poor; and the poor of the land had none to defend them. Injustice was flourishing, and so the prophet of God, Amos, was sent to preach a revelation of the God of justice.

The supreme tragedy for Israel was that the sins of Israel were the same as the sins of the nations. Let me repeat that: the sins of Israel were the same as the sins of the nations roundabout. If we could imagine being brought by Amos into God's courtroom, the God of justice, what you're going to hear tonight in the message is 'The Accused'. God is showing who the accused is in His courtroom. First of all Amos starts his message by looking around at the nations roundabout Israel and Judah, and announcing judgement on six of them. But before he does that, and we look at it, look at his introduction in verse 2. He says: 'The LORD', Jehovah, 'roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem', and he depicts, he reveals God like a lion roaring in His wrath. In fact, in chapter 3 verse 8 you get that image again: 'A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?'. Have you ever imagined God like a lion roaring in His wrath?

Do you know something? God is roaring today. He is roaring against the Western world that lives in relative peace, the Western world that is up to its neck in capitalism and is wealthy and prosperous, the Western world that is living in luxury. God is roaring at a wealthy people, and much of that people has enough religion to drown themselves! God is roaring at a people in the West, even who take the name of Christ, who have wealth, and who have religion, but neither affects their lives to make any difference in the communities in which they live - a people for whom making money has become more important than worshipping God! The God of justice is roaring, can you hear Him? He is roaring to get the attention of the nations of our modern world, just like He did the nations roundabout Israel in Amos' day - but no one is listening! Maybe that's why you can't hear Him tonight.

It says here in verse 2: 'He utters His voice from Jerusalem' - that's very significant. Where was Amos? He was up north in Israel, he was at Bethel. Jerusalem was down in the south in Judah. What Amos was saying was: though Israel is the Northern Kingdom, they had established their own way of religion, their own religious centres of worship in Dan and Bethel and Gilgal, they had devised their own approach to God, but the prophet of God was reminding these people that God has not changed. They may have changed location, they may have changed their inclinations as to how they felt they should worship God, but God had not changed - He was still roaring from Jerusalem! What a message for the world in which we live. I believe God would be reminding the nations roundabout this world of ours that all roads do not lead to God. There is great pressure for us today in the 21st-century to accept that teaching. We live in a pluralistic, politically correct society - but God roars today, still from Jerusalem, and this holy God that we've been hearing about in the mornings, this God of justice, He is still a jealous God who will have no other gods before Him. That's the first commandment, and you know that's New Testament teaching - 2 Timothy 2:5: 'For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus'.

Well, Amos begins each of his indictments in this manner. If you look at it, you see it in verse 3 of chapter 1 and all the rest of the judgements against these nations, he says: 'For three transgressions, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment'. Now that's a strange expression, 'for three transgressions, and for four', and it's really what we call an idiom, an expression of language that doesn't equate exactly. So what Amos is not saying is that these nations each committed three or four transgressions literally, it's a term that is used for an indefinite number of transgressions that had finally come to an end. In fact, the Bible teaches that before God the nations have a cup of wrath, and that wrath comes to overflowing and then God executes judgement. We praise God that He is long-suffering, but this expression teaches us that even His patience comes to an end. You see, to try God's patience is to tempt the Lord, and when we try God's patience and tempt the Lord we're inviting judgement. I hope there is no one here tonight, maybe someone who has wandered in, come with a friend and you're not a Christian, and you've heard the gospel many many times, or maybe you're in a backslidden state, and you're trying the patience of God, you're tempting God. Do you know what you're doing? You're inviting His judgement. It's as if you're saying, like the wee fellow on the football pitch: 'Come on! Come on and get

me!'.

So God, through Amos, pronounces, first of all to Syria, judgement in verses 3 to 5 of chapter 1, and He accuses them of awful cruelty in war. It's implied by this expression 'they used iron instruments'. Then He speaks to Gaza in verses 6 to 8, Philistia, the Philistines, and He condemns them for the sin of slavery. Then He speaks in verses 9 to 10 to Tyrus, which is the Phoenicians, and He judges them for the cruelty of slavery. Then He speaks to Israel's old enemy, Edom, in verses 11 and 12, and accuses them of not showing pity but maintaining a constant hatred. Then He speaks in verses 13 to 15 to the nation of Ammon, who is judged for bitter cruelty and selfish greed. Then in chapter 2 verses 1 to 3 He speaks to Moab, and He judges them for cruelty against Edom. Now this is very interesting, because He has already judged Edom for their cruelty, but we would say, 'Two rights don't make a wrong' - and what a lesson there is in this! Edom were guilty of cruelty, but that did not legitimise crimes against them. You see, what Amos is communicating here is: God is a God of justice. He is just, He is impartial, He must judge iniquity. Then He comes to Judah in verses 4 and 5, and He judges them for rejecting God's law.

Now before we look at His pronouncement to Israel, let's learn a few principles here from what we've already looked at. First of all we need to learn about the God of justice, that He takes note of what is going on in the nations of this world. Before pronouncing judgement on Judah and Israel, Amos pronounces judgement on six Gentile nations. Now, please remember, God did not give His law - you might say the 'Ten Commandments', the first five books of the Bible - He didn't give them to Gentile nations. He gave them to His covenant people, Israel - and yet He still expected the nations of the world to be accountable for their sins against humanity. We might be forgiven in thinking that in the Old Testament God was only interested in Israel and Judah, and that's the case to a large extent - in verse 4 of chapter 2 He indicts Judah for disregarding His law, in chapter 2 verses 9 to 12 He indicts Israel for disregarding His love of them, His covenant love - but God is the God of all flesh! Even these Gentile nations roundabout Israel and Judah, God was indicting them for their sin and their breaking of His law - because, though they didn't have the two tables of stone with the Ten Commandments, God had written the requirements and the expectations of His law upon their hearts.

Turn with me to Romans chapter 2, so that you can see this with your own eyes. Romans chapter 2 and verse 11, Paul there writes in Romans 2:11, what an opening statement in keeping with our theme: 'For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)'. You see, people around us who are unconverted, who don't know God, who aren't God's people, they know instinctively not just how to do bad, but they also know how to do good. They do the bad more often than the good, but

they know, with the conscience that God has given them and the law written on the inner man - and therefore all the nations of the world need to sit up and know that God takes note of all that is done, of all that is committed, both nationally and, my friend tonight, individually. If you're in this congregation you need to know that God takes note of how you have broken His law.

Nationally that's an awesome message for the countries and kingdoms of our world, for the nations that are poor on human rights like China, that our nation and Western nations are cosying up to. Other totalitarian states, nations guilty of ethnic cleansing, and genocide, and state-sponsored terrorism. States that are guilty of war crimes upon soldiers, forces and civilians. Nations that culturally have a caste system, or have endemic or institutionalised racism, or sectarianism, or discrimination, or general abuse of political power. Or even in our type of free society, so-called, the murder of the innocents in abortion and the mass destruction of human embryos - the just God of heaven takes note! It has not bypassed Him. What is the case nationally is the case individually. My friend, you have got a conscience, and that conscience intuitively tells you what is wrong and warns you about wrong and immoral personal behaviour - and if you disregard it, God takes note and you will answer to God one day! What a lesson this is for us in our modern society, that this God of justice takes note of what goes on in nations, and what goes on in homes, and in lives.

A second lesson is that this God of justice holds nations accountable. He's not turning a blind eye. Kings, presidents, prime ministers, military generals, politicians, chancellors are all accountable to the God of heaven. We read in the book of Genesis that Abraham could not enter into the Promised Land at that point because the iniquity of the Amorites was not full yet - that cup of wrath that was being stored up for that Gentile race was not full. God holds nations accountable to this very day, and I wonder, and I ask you the question: what is the limit of iniquity for our nation? What is the quota for our United Kingdom or for this island of Ireland, the quota of sin before God will come in judgement? Or could I even ask this question: has the judgement started already? I believe it has.

A third lesson is that this God of justice judges nations when it pleases Him. You see, each time He brings an indictment to the accused nations here, He repeats this statement - look down at it, you'll see it in verse 3 of chapter 1 and right throughout: 'I will not turn away its punishment, I will send fire' - I will not turn away its punishment, I will send fire. Do you know, our God is a consuming fire - and that is a New Testament text, by the way. Yes, praise God for the Gospel, and as New Testament believers in the new covenant, partakers of it, we celebrate God's grace. We are evangelical Bible believers, we celebrate the cross, we celebrate the shed blood, we celebrate redemption and justification through that efficacious sacrifice that our sins are put beyond return for us - as far as the East is from the West, buried in the sea of God's forgetfulness. That's what we celebrate and we sing, and He rose again the third day to justify us and all whosoever will freely believe - but God's justice and holiness is still intact! God has not ceased to be just, and when He revealed Himself to Moses, you remember in Exodus 34, this is how He revealed His person: 'The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God,

merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" - but listen to this - "by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation". This is Moses' reaction to that of revelation: 'So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped'.

I don't know whether you're aware, but modern evangelicalism today has seen a revival of what we once knew as universalism. That is, that all will be saved in the end because God is too loving, God is too forgiving - and what that is, though we celebrate the grace of God, His forgiveness, and if you're not converted you can know by simple faith that wonderful transformation of grace tonight - but such a view that says everyone eventually will be saved is an imbalanced, unbiblical view of this God. God is just. If Amos teaches anything, it is that. But do you know what the sobering fact is for us as a nation tonight? Our nation is guilty of many of the crimes that these nations were guilty of. I wonder if I was to ask you what our list of national sins were, what they would be for you? Greed - you only have to cite the bankers for that one. Excess in every sense, food, drink, drugs. The exploitation of the vulnerable. Sexual permissiveness on every hand, and sexual perversity celebrated. We could go on and on, but we don't have time.

Now up to verse 5 of chapter 2 the focus was on six Gentile nations, and then the nation of Judah, the southern kingdom. It must have pleased the Israelites in Bethel that Amos was condemning filthy Gentiles and the southerners of Judah, but then he changed his tune and he turned on the northerners of Israel. He began to preach that the sins of Israel were the same as the sins of the nations and the sins of Judah, and his eighth judgement is reserved for Israel. Look at verse 6: 'Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment'. Our God is a just God. Now wait for this, Christian, sit at the edge of your seat: our God, when He finds the same sins wilfully present in His people, He judges them. They were shocked, maybe as you're shocked tonight, to hear such a message. In fact, I would go further to say, on the basis of this book and other prophets, that God is in fact more severe on His own people, Israel and Judah, because of their privileged position. Privilege brings responsibility! They were in covenant to God, the Gentile nations weren't. The law of God was the basis of that marriage in covenant, and yet in one way or another Israel had broken every one of the Ten Commandments and disregarded God's law. There is a principle here: God is coming to them in judgement, and if God judges the lost, the nations around, for injustices and broken commands, their sins; what will He do with those who claim to know Him?

Oh my friend, what a message Amos brings to the church. With every privilege there is responsibility. Jesus said: 'To whom much is given, much will be required'. Where there is responsibility, there will also be accountability. My friend, lest you think that I'm stuck somewhere in the wrong dispensation in the Old Testament, this is New Testament teaching. For when you come to Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, and you see the things that they were up to - oh yes, they were saints of God, they were in relationship, in covenant with God in Christ Jesus - yet they were committing sins,

sins of sexual immorality, Paul says, that were not even named among Gentile unbelievers! Yet they were tolerated, the sins were tolerated in the church - but look for God's judgement, listen: 'Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world'.

Do you see it? Is it true that there is little difference in many quarters today between the church and the world? Can I tell you better than that? At times the church, and those who name the name of Christ, are worse! That's the way it was in Amos' day, and I am fearful that that is the way it is rapidly becoming in our day. In verses 6 through to 16 the prophet names the sins of Israel, let's look at them quickly. One, the first is found in verse 6, the latter part of it, and the start of verse 7: 'because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor'. They are accused of bribery and greed. I don't know most of you people here, but could it be said of Christians today that their business dealings are straight up? That the taxman is paid up and not diddled? That we keep our word in our transactions? Are our business ethics superior to that of those around us? As an employer, how do you treat your employee? As an employee, how do you treat your boss? God's people in Amos' day, there was no difference between them and the world - is that where we're heading?

Not only were they accused of bribery and greed, but we see in verse 7, the latter part: 'they pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl'. They were guilty of adultery and sexual sin, fathers and sons were visiting the same prostitutes. Surely the sexual ethics of the church and professing believers is to be higher than that of the world? You would expect fathers to be better in the examples to their sons than this! We heard this morning from a serving police officer, and it was reported on the BBC just in June past, that last year in Northern Ireland men spent half a million pounds a week on prostitutes. We heard this morning that there are at least 88 brothels in Northern Ireland, which means that there is more demand for prostitution in Northern Ireland than any other nation state in Europe! And you're sitting there maybe saying: 'But Christians...!?' - wait till I tell you: Christians, at least professing ones. 'No!', you say, 'That can't be!'. Well, even if they're not visiting those type of establishments, Internet pornography is at epidemic proportions. It is the secret sin of the evangelical church, and we're afraid to name it. It's rife, and 57% of pastors in the United States testify that porn addiction is the most sexually damaging issue in their congregation! If you've got a problem here tonight with that, I sympathise with you greatly, but you need to get help, and you need to repent, and you need to renounce it - and none of us are 6 feet above contradiction, any of us could fall in any of these areas, but the church needs to be cleansed! God's people have got to the stage where we're no different than the world! Are our sexual ethics any different? Well, I preached in an evangelical church not that long ago - it would have been considered conservative, maybe even fundamentalist of a kind - and I preached on Romans chapter 1 about God's view on homosexuality, and

I got a phone call from one of the elders after the series of meetings. He was astounded himself to tell me that some of the young people came to him after that series and said to the elders that they didn't realise that the Bible had anything to say about homosexuality - that was in Newtownards.

The third thing He indicts them for in verse 8, the start of it, is: 'They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge', selfishness. This is alluding to a law in Deuteronomy where, if a garment was given as a pledge that you were going to pay your bills, that garment had to be given to you before night time because it might be your only garment to keep warm with, like a blanket. But in Amos' day they were keeping those garments, inflicting misery on the poor - selfishness! People were living for themselves at the expense of others. Now that is being reflected in the church in our lack of giving, particularly to mission work, and our lack of going to the far-flung corners of the world to take the banner of Christ. Selfishness.

The fourth thing He indicts them for in verses 9 and 10 is ingratitude, where He says: 'I'm the one who drove out the Amorites before you, I gave you the Promised Land, I took you out of Egypt and delivered you - and yet you're so ungrateful for it'. Is there a lack of gratitude in the church today, shallow praise in prayer and remembering of the Lord's death till He comes? Look further, fifthly, verse 12, there was drunkenness among God's people: 'You gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, 'Do not prophesy!'. They were forcing Nazarites, who had taken a vow to touch no strong drink, forcing them to drink. Can I tell you: you only need to talk to some of the police officers here tonight to understand what a problem alcoholism is in our society, and how it is behind so many crimes. But wait till I tell you something: it's becoming a real problem in the church. As social drinking becomes more acceptable, this is becoming more of a bondage and an avenue out for troubled Christians.

They were guilty of bribery and greed, adultery and sexual sin, selfishness, ingratitude, drunkenness - something else: they were guilty of rejecting God's revelation. Verse 12: 'You command the prophets saying, 'Do not prophesy!'. Is it any wonder the people's values were all mixed up, because they questioned God's revelation - they told the prophets to shut up! 'We don't want to hear that!'. George Barna in 1981 took a poll, you've heard of the Barna Polls, it was entitled 'What Americans Believe'. They surveyed 1000 Americans, and 825 of them claimed to be Christians. He uncovered some disturbing facts about their view on absolute truth. He found that 28% of those interviewed strongly agree with this statement, listen: 'There is no such a thing as absolute truth' - 28% agreed with that, no such a thing as absolute truth. Another 38% said they agreed - 28% strongly agreed, 38% agreed - that in total makes 66% in all. Most surprisingly, 23% of those people claimed to be born-again Christians, and they strongly agreed that there is no such a thing as absolute truth! Have we a problem rejecting God's revelation? I say we do.

It ought to be no surprise that Barna reported that only 58% of Christian adults claim to read something from the Bible each week. This is a very serious thing. We're hearing this week of some good things that are happening in our nation, and we

praise God for it, in the higher echelons of the police force. But can I tell you: on a weekly basis Gideon Bibles are being removed from hospitals in our nation, in our land, even in our own towns, mine included. The revelation of God is being rejected - and wait till I tell you something: that is disastrous for a nation! As an individual, if you reject God's revelation you'll be lost forever - but there are consequences of judgement for a nation that rejects God's revelation. Have you heard of 'biblical higher criticism'? It questions the authenticity of the history of the Bible as the Bible presents it. It had its rise in Germany from the mid-18th century to the early 20th century. It's incredible when you think that it was from the land of Reformation, the land that translated the Bible into the language of the people, the land of Luther, the land that rediscovered these great truths of the Gospel - from that land came a questioning of God's revelation. I heard Derek Prince on a recording say this, remarkably: 'Also from that land that rejected God's revelation came two of the greatest monsters the human race has ever seen, Karl Marx and Adolf Hitler'.

There are consequences for a nation when they reject God's revelation. Amos cries, Amos whose name means 'burden', he cries: 'I am pressed under this burden of sin'. My friend tonight, are we burdened, are we burdened about the presence of these very sins in our nation? Perhaps in our businesses, in our professions, whatever they may be, our careers? In our churches? In our homes? Maybe even cherished in our hearts? Oh, do you hear the message of Amos? 'God is roaring!'. I hope this week, as I preach to you from this prophet, that you will hear the roar of God who is crying: 'There is no longer any difference between My people in the world'. Or is the problem that we are deafened because our ears are plugged, like the Israelites, by affluence, by aimlessness, by apathy, by even our religious services? We think all is well, and like Amaziah and Jeroboam at that Chapel, they're wondering what this boy is talking about.

Amos was God's man under God's burden with God's message, and it is my prayer that this week - for our nation, and for our homes, and for our individual lives - all of you, all of us will get under the burden of God.

Let us all pray please, and just before I close this meeting in prayer I'm conscious that God's roar might have come to you where you are in this meeting, in your circumstances, in your sins perhaps. Maybe you're even one who calls yourself a child of God, but you know there are things in your life that may be worse than those whom you know who are unbelievers. There is grace if you will repent, confess your sins, and renounce those things you have been involved in, and come to the foot of the cross afresh - there is cleansing in the precious blood to cover all your sin, but you must repent. This God is a God of justice. Believers in the meeting, will you come on this journey with me this week, under the burden of God for our land, for our churches?

Father, how we need You, how we yearn for You to come suddenly into Your Temple, to come and possess and inhabit Your church again, and to fill the lives of Your believing people so that we will be that shining light Israel failed, Lord, and we have failed so often. If we do not put our light under a bushel, we allow our lights to be

extinguished with the sins of this world. O Lord, we pray that You will teach us this week to distinguish between that which is holy and that which is unclean - O God, not for legalistic reasons, but Lord for love of You! For You beseech us, by the mercies of God, to present our bodies living sacrifices because of what Jesus has done, that we might give our all to Him, unreserved and unrestrained, without any regrets. Lord, meet with us this week. Take us now with Your blessing, and bring us back again in the morning to hear Your voice. In Jesus' mighty name we pray, Amen

The God Of Justice - Chapter 2

"The First Charge: Aimlessness"

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Good evening to you all again, it's wonderful to be here, and to see so many gathered in the congregation tonight to hear the word of God. Thank you for coming, we do trust together that we will know the blessing of God as we have already been knowing these mornings and last evening. We're turning in our Bibles to the prophet Amos, if you have a copy of the word of God do turn with me there - it's three books after Daniel, so if you can find Ezekiel and then Daniel, you'll find Amos. We are in chapter 3 tonight, last evening we looked at chapters 1 and 2.

Amos chapter 3, we've taken as our title 'The God of Justice', and last night, if you weren't here, we looked at 'The Accused' - who God was accusing in the nations, and Judah and Israel, for their sin. Tonight we're looking at what I have called the first charge against Israel, and that is of 'Aimlessness'. Verse 1, and we're only reading chapter 3: *"Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities'. Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing? Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it? Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all? If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it? Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy? 'Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say: 'Assemble on the mountains of Samaria; see great tumults in her midst, and the oppressed within her. For they do not know to do right', says the LORD, 'Who store up violence and robbery in their palaces". Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'An adversary shall be all around the land; he shall sap your strength from you, and your palaces shall be plundered'. Thus says the LORD: 'As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, So shall the children of Israel be taken out who dwell in Samaria; in the corner of a bed and on the edge of a couch! Hear and testify against the house of Jacob', says the Lord GOD, the God of hosts, 'That in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions, I will also visit destruction on the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house; the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end', says the LORD". Amen.*

Let us pray together, and as I said last evening and will do each night, if you're in touch with God I invite you to come with me now as we unite in prayer, and let there

ascend to God now a real supplication that He might speak to us. I hope you want to meet with God - I know, standing here in the pulpit, I need to meet with God, and I hope you need to meet with God and feel your need of that, and are seeking and searching after Him and His voice tonight. If you're not, search your heart right now. You're maybe not a Christian, you're not born-again, or you're not right with God as a Christian. Well, come now, and say: 'Lord, speak to me'. Father, we thank You that You are the God who is, and is not silent. You are the God who speaks, You have something to say to us and to this generation in which we live. Oh God, we thank you for that promise that he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Lord, we seek You tonight; Lord, we seek Your face; Lord, we cry to You tonight to meet with us. Come Almighty to deliver, descend to us we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. Lord, meet every need. We were hearing this morning about Isaiah who confessed: 'Woe is me!', and when he confessed his need You met him immediately at the point of his need. Lord, meet my need, meet all our needs. Lord, we need You, we need Your grace, we need Your mercy, we need Your power, we need the outpouring of Your Spirit. So, in the name of our Lord Jesus, crucified and risen and exalted, we pray for the Holy Spirit to come and minister the truth of God. Help me, O God, I pray in the mighty name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Having announced judgement upon six Gentile nations in chapter 1 and the first three verses of chapter 2, Amos the prophet turns his attention to God's people. He starts with Judah from verse 4 on of chapter 2, and then he turns to Israel and he explains why judgement is coming upon them. They expected, of course, that God should judge the Gentiles, but they were shocked when God's prophet turned to them and seemed to be all the more scorching in his checking of their transgression and iniquity. You will remember, if you were here last night, that the Northern Kingdom of Israel - the nation was divided into two kingdoms, ten tribes to the north, two to the south, the north Israel, the south Judah - the Northern Kingdom of Israel that Amos is preaching to was enjoying relative peace, prosperity, and even a pseudo-religious revival of sorts. Things were going well, and people were attending their religious services. You need to be thankful for that, don't you - and when they came to the religious services, they were bringing with them generous offerings and gifts. To all intents and purposes, to the naked eye, everything seemed to be going well in the North - but here's a lesson that you will learn tonight, and right throughout this series: things are not always as they seem. Do you know that? True prophets of God do not look at the outward appearance only, true prophets of God look as God looks, they behold the heart. Cosmetically, as far as Israel was concerned, it was the best of times; but spiritually, as the prophet could see, and as God could see, it was the worst of times.

In chapter 3 right through to chapter 6 Amos preaches three sermons. I've called them three charges, and he introduces each of them with this cry - verse 1 of chapter 3: 'Hear this word', verse 1 of chapter 4 'Hear this word', verse 1 of chapter 5 'Hear this word'. He wants them to hear the word of God, and the challenge for the people of Israel in his day and the challenge for us in our day is: will we look at things the way they seem to be, or will we hear this word, the word of God? Will we see things

the way God sees them to be in our land, in the church, in our homes, in our families, in our own individual lives? Will we observe things the way they seem to be, or will we listen to God? You see, all might appear to be well, but the great issue is: how does God see it? Amos, whose name we saw means 'burdened', he was burdened because he did not unquestioningly accept the popular opinion on the status quo of the conditions that prevailed economically, politically, and religiously - but his ear was toward God, and because of that he was troubled with the very burden of God.

So his first message is what we're going to look at tonight in chapter 3, and effectively it is a justification from the prophet of why he is preaching judgement upon the people of God. You see, Israel were protesting, they were saying something like this: 'How can our God, our covenant God Jehovah, send judgement upon us? We are His chosen people!'. Of course, we know from Deuteronomy chapter 7 that that is the case, God very tenderly says to them there: 'The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt'. But you see, though they were chosen by God, that was the very reason why God was judging them. They protested: 'We're Your elect people!', and God is saying to them, 'Well, that's why I'm judging you'.

So the first point, if you like, of this sermon of his, or his charge to them, in a justification of why he is preaching judgement, is this: 'I am preaching judgement to you because of your election'. 'You are God's people', in verses 1 and 2 he says that, 'I brought you up out of the land of Egypt', verse 2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities'. You see, the Lord had delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, and called them to be a special people, a holy people, a witness to the nations roundabout, and that was the very reason for their judgement - not an excuse to get out of it. Can I say that the same applies to the church of Jesus Christ today? Now, of course there is a great debate on election, and I'll not ask you to put your hand up if you're a Calvinist - but they usually shoot their hands up anyway! - or if you're an Arminian... and you're wondering 'Well, what are you?'. Well, I've probably been both, and sometimes at the same time - that'll really confuse you tonight! I have my beliefs about these great doctrines as they are, because they're biblical doctrines in the word of God, but most of the discussion that goes on about election and predestination is absolutely profitless. They are precious doctrines, but a lot of the debate causes more hot air and heat than light. But whatever your views on these great doctrines, I think I'm safe in saying that all camps are in agreement that biblical election always has a purpose in view. However God's people are elected, it's always with a purpose. Israel was elected by God to be the national witness to Jehovah to all the Gentile nations roundabout, and in the same way the church has been elected in Christ to be, as Jesus says, the light of the world - Matthew chapter 5: 'You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven'.

You see, election is always for a purpose. The Lord Jesus said this Himself in John 15:16 to the Apostles: 'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you'. Paul the apostle again, in that great chapter of Ephesians 1, where he touches upon predestination and election, says: 'Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy', there's the purpose, 'and without blame before Him in love'. Do you see it? Election is for a purpose, and we saw last night that where there is privilege - and there is a great privilege in being part of God's community - there is also responsibility. If you're a person tonight that celebrates the biblical doctrine of election, however you understand it, do you also understand the grave responsibility that there is in being a witness to Christ in this day and generation? Because with privilege comes responsibility, and with responsibility there is accountability. You are accountable for being a part of the church. 'I don't know why you preach about the sins of Christians', a church member said to the pastor after a service, 'After all', they said, 'the sins of Christians are different from the sins of unsaved people'. The minister replied like this: 'Yes, they are different, they're worse!'. They are, because of our election. That's why Amos was justified in bringing a message of judgement to Israel and Judah, because of their election - God had saved them at a very great price, and yet it wasn't as great a price as it cost to save you, child of God, the blood of Jesus!

It's serious, that's why Christians sinning is a serious matter, that's why endemic sin in the church is a serious matter - because, as Peter said in 1 Peter 4:17, judgement must begin at the house of God. That's what you find in Amos and many of the other minor and major prophets: God coming to visit His people with a message of judgement - why? Because higher standards are required and expected of those who belong to God. So he cites first of all their election as a justification of this strong message, but secondly Israel personalises their protest. That's often what happens, you see, they start attacking the preacher. They were in effect saying: 'What right has this common herdsman, this farmer, shepherd, to denounce us and to warn us of judgement? Who does he think he is? He's not even a professional prophet, his father wasn't a prophet, and he never went to a prophetic seminary'. So Amos cites God's commission of him as a prophet as the justification of him bringing this message of judgement. We see it in verse 3: 'Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?'. You see, Amos and God were walking together because they were agreed.

Look at verse 4: 'Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?'. Then verse 8: 'A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?'. We saw last night from chapter 1 and verse 2 that God was roaring like a lion to Israel and Judah. This was God's message, He's roaring in His wrath! And Amos was in agreement with God on everything, because he was walking with God. In fact what God was doing, in verse 5 we read, He was setting a trap for sinners: 'Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it?'. Israel would be overcome, as we know, by that Northern Empire of the Assyrians; and the southern kingdom of Judah would be

overcome and taken into exile into Babylon, another great empire. All Amos was doing was, as he says here in verse 6, he was blowing a trumpet to warn the people that this God of justice was coming to His people to judge them, the judgement was going to start at God's house!

Now here's the reason why God's people had to be warned by the prophet: they had to be warned because they were not walking with God. They were not walking with God, and therefore the consequence was that they were not hearing from God, because they were not in agreement with God like the prophet was. God had shared His secrets with Amos so that he might preach it, blow it like a trumpet and warn them. Now, there are many great lessons here that I don't have time to go into tonight, some of which are important regarding the gift of the prophet, both in the Old and the New Testament, and how God, when He's going to reveal something, He reveals to His prophets first that they might warn people. It's amazing - but here God shares with His intimate, His confidant Amos, the secrets of His heart. I'll tell you this: I don't know much, but I know this much, that we need a prophetic edge in our pulpits today. We need, effectively, a prophetic voice, men who will speak to the times because they have heard directly from God - that's what Amos was, he was a nobody as far as the theological boffins were concerned, he wasn't an ecclesiastic, but he was a farmer who God had met. Because he was walking with God, and was in agreement with God, he heard from God and he heralded forth the message that he heard - and that's always the way it is.

In Proverbs 29 and verse 18 the Authorised Version reads: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish'. Sometimes I think we miss the point of that translation that we have become so familiar with. Here's what it actually means: 'Where there is no revelation', that type of vision, 'the people cast off restraint'. When there is no one to tell us what God is saying, the people do what they like - God's people! In fact, you have an amazing illustration of this in 1 Samuel during the period of the Judges. You remember that there is this great epitaph over that epoch: 'Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, there was no King in Israel'. Eli the priest was blind, what a metaphor of God's people in those days - blind through their sins. Eli's sons, the Bible says, corrupted themselves and did not know the Lord. Do you know what God had to do? He had to speak to a child, Samuel. No one was walking with God or agreeing with God, and we read in 1 Samuel 3 and verse 1: 'Then the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no open vision', or there was no 'widespread vision' - and because there was no open revelation, the people cast off restraint. Do you see this?

God revealed His heart to Amos because, though he was a nobody in the eyes of most people, he was in touch with God. Now, education is good, and I thank God for the thimbleful that I have. Experience is great, and many of you have much more than I. Gifting is a tremendous thing from the hand of a gracious God, and biblical knowledge is essential when it comes to preaching - but none of those things will make a Holy Ghost prophet! Psalm 25 verse 14 says: 'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant'. Do you understand? You've got to walk with God. It was Murray M'Cheyne, that great Scots Presbyterian, who said: 'It is not

great talents God blesses, so much as great likeness to Jesus' - I like that. Do you know that you become like those you spend time with, those you walk with? Only a man walking with God could hear from God in order to speak for God and say: 'Hear this word! Hear this word! Hear this word!'.

Can I ask you a question: who is speaking for God today? I don't want you to misunderstand me, because there are plenty of speakers about - but you can teach a parrot to speak, in fact God made a donkey to speak! There are sermons for every occasion freely available to preach verbatim, you can download them off the Internet - but where are the prophets for God, walking with God, agreeing with God, speaking for God because they have heard from God? We have a shortage, I believe, of men and women speaking for God - because few people are truly walking with God! Just before the outbreak of the revival in the Hebrides, Duncan Campbell was met at the pier of Lewis by a minister and two of his office bearers. Just as he stepped off the boat an old elder came over to him and faced him with these words: 'Mr Campbell, can I ask you this question: are you walking with God?'. Duncan Campbell said: 'Oh, here were men who meant business, men who were afraid that a strange hand would touch the Ark'.

Can I ask you tonight, Christian: are you walking with God? 'What does it mean', you say, 'to walk with God?'. Well, I haven't got time to go into all that it might mean - there are many sermons, this could be a series! We are told to 'walk in the light as He is in the light', confess our sins, that's part of what it is to walk with God - keep short accounts. We're told to 'walk circumspectly', that means walk wisely, carefully, not as fools. There are many things that could tell us how to walk with God, but I want to stick to the text tonight, chapter 3 and verse 3, Amos says: 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?'. To walk with God is to be in agreement with God, and if you want to receive God's burden - and maybe you don't, because it's a very painful and very inconvenient thing to receive from God at times - but if you want to get in touch with God, like Amos, for God's people and for our land; if you would look beyond the superficial, the way things seem to be, and see things the way God beholds them - that's what vision means, to see things the way they really are - and if you would speak to God for this generation, and I'm not just talking about preachers because all of us are meant to be gossiping the gospel, all of us, as we heard this morning, are meant to be speaking for Jesus Christ; and if we want to make an impact on this day and generation in which we live we've got to walk with God - and that means agreeing with God!

Maybe you're not fully understanding what I'm getting at tonight. I remember years ago I had the privilege of entertaining the late Dr Rex Mathie in my home, he was preaching in our pulpit. I had time to talk intimately with him, and one of the questions that was searching my heart at that time was what, in essence, the fullness of the Holy Spirit was. I asked him: 'What would you say the fullness of the Holy Spirit is? Whatever that initial experience might be, maintaining it in your daily everyday life?'. He said: 'David, I believe the fullness of the Holy Spirit is the other side of the coin of the Lordship of Jesus Christ', and here's how he put it to me, 'David, when you and Jesus aren't arguing about anything you will be full of the Holy Spirit'. Can two

walk together except they be agreed? I wonder here tonight are you and Jesus arguing about something? Can two walk together except they be agreed?

C.T. Studd on one occasion was on furlough, and he decided to go to the Keswick Convention. F.B. Meyer happened to be the speaker on that occasion, and in one of the sessions C.T. Studd was asked to come to the platform impromptu and give a 15 minute report on his work in Africa. He did that, and there was an amazing thing happened in that meeting: God came down. A sense of God's Spirit filled the place, and there was a brokenness on the congregation, and people began to weep as he related to them his experience of serving the Lord on that great continent. When he got down from the pulpit, F.B. Meyer, well, he didn't really know what to do. He could hardly preach. After the meeting Meyer came and sought out Studd, and he just said these three words to him: 'What is it?'. He was meaning: 'What happened? How did you do that?' - but of course it wasn't him, it was God. This is what C.T. Studd said to F.B. Meyer, a great expositor and preacher of the word of God, he couldn't have been anything else to be at Keswick Convention, and C.T. Studd, that broken missionary, said: 'Have you given all of the keys of your life to Jesus Christ?'. Do you know what that means? Like the keys of your house, to every room, have you given every compartment, every secret place to Jesus Christ, that He might fill it?

Meyer realised that he had never done that, and so that evening, after the convention, he went alone with God and he began to give the keys over to Him. He gave the key of family, he gave the key of possessions, he give the key of his future and his health, and he tried to do in Hebrews 12 what we're called to do: to lay aside every sin, and the weight that weighs us down, keeping us from running the race - but there was one key in F.B. Meyer's life that was a real problem in giving over. Do you know what it was? It was his popularity as a preacher, it was his reputation as an expositor of the word of God - he couldn't give it up! He heard God's Spirit speak to him in that moment, in that crisis, and God said: 'Everything or nothing! Partial obedience is disobedience'. Like Jacob, he wrestled with God, and he broke through and he gave up his reputation and God came and met him!

Can I ask you tonight: have you given all the keys of your life to the Lord? That's what it means to walk with God, to be in agreement with Him, not to be arguing with Him about anything. C.T. Studd and F.B. Meyer became great friends after that event, and they just called one another 'C.T.' and 'F.B.'. C.T. later came on furlough to another Keswick Convention where F.B. Meyer again was the speaker, and they shared a tent with one another. Early in the morning F.B. was woken up by C.T. on his knees with a candle lit and an open Bible, and he was weeping. F.B. Meyer said to him: 'What is wrong, brother? What are you doing?', and the tears came streaming down his cheeks, and he said, 'The Lord spoke to me this morning when I woke, and He said 'If you love Me, keep My Commandments', and there are so many that I have not obeyed!' - that was C.T. Studd! The reason for God's blessing on his life was that he walked with God, which meant he was in agreement with God.

They were questioning Amos as the prophet of God, his message of judgement, and he told them: 'It is justified because of your election, God expects more of you, but it

is justified because of my commission as a prophet. I am walking with God, and I am in agreement with God, that's why I have heard from God - but you are not'. Effectively what he was saying was, blowing this trumpet of judgement: there are consequences when you reject God's commissioned prophets, when His prophets cry, 'Hear this word!', and you don't listen. In verse 3 right through to verse 8, we read it, the prophet effectively was saying: 'Judgement is not descending without a reason' - and if you look at these illustrations, they are all about effect and cause. He asks seven cause and effect questions which are showing these people that the judgement that is coming is directly related to their iniquity and their backsliding, and because essentially they have disregarded the word of God.

Why should Amos preach a message of judgement? They were God's elect people, he was God's commissioned prophet, but something else: the world's reaction roundabout Israel was a reason why judgement was coming. Look at verses 9 and 10: 'Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say: 'Assemble on the mountains of Samaria; see great tumults in her midst, and the oppressed within her. For they do not know to do right', says the LORD, 'Who store up violence and robbery in their palaces'. What Amos was doing in verse 9, if you look at, is: he was summoning the Gentile nations roundabout, Ashdod is Philistia, the Philistines, and you know where Egypt is, and he is summoning them to witness against the Northern Kingdom whose capital was Samaria, mentioned there at the end of verse 9, he's calling them to witness against Samaria because Israel's sin was so great that it even appalled the Gentile pagan idolaters! Was God justified in bringing judgement on Israel? Yes, not just because of their election and because of the prophet's commission, but because of the world's reaction: what a travesty it is when the world catches Christians and the church in sin!

David's adultery with Bathsheba gave, the Bible says, great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. I mentioned last evening the church at Corinth - oh, they're called saints of God in chapter 1, and they are a very charismatic church, they are gifted more than any church was, it would appear, at that time. Yet they were getting drunk around the Lord's Table, they were taking one another to court and washing their dirty linen in public, we read in 1 Corinthians 5:1: 'It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles; that a man has his father's wife!' - incest and fornication. Do you see what was happening here within the church? What an indictment, that the world could look on and say: 'What are these Christians playing at? Look what they're getting up to!'. You tell me tonight, you tell me that that's not what the world has been saying in this last year alone! What an awful indictment can be found in verse 10, one translation puts the beginning of the verse like this: 'They do not know how to do right'. Imagine such a statement of God's people: they do not know how to do right!

Their greed, their idols, they had perverted in every way imaginable, they were addicted to affluence and all sorts of sin. They were like the rich farmer that we so aptly apply to unconverted people: 'I will tear down my barns and build greater ones', and God said, 'You fool! For this night your soul will be required of you, and then

whose shall those things be which you have provided?'. If you're here tonight and you're not saved, you need to sit up - and I know I'm preaching primarily to Christians, but this is all applicable to you: judgement day is coming! You will give an account to God, and God, though He is a loving God, and He sent the blessed Saviour, the Lamb of God to Calvary, and He suffered in your place and bore your shame and took your hell and your wrath to forgive you - if you will not repent and believe the gospel, you will have that wrath visited upon you for all eternity! Yet the church is guilty, like Laodicea who had to answer to God, this sovereign God, in Jesus Christ - that Judge-Priest who we see in the opening chapters of the book with flaming eyes of fire, x-ray eyes, with feet of brass, judgement feet - and He's walking as a Judge-Priest in the midst of the candlestick lampstands representing those seven churches of Asia, and what is He doing? He's assessing them, He's weighing them, and He is saying this: 'Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the church' - like Amos, 'Hear this word!'. God is roaring like a lion - do you hear Him? Laodicea said: 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing', and Jesus said, 'You do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked'.

God will judge those, Amos teaches, who use violence and injustice to gain possessions and power, verse 10. In verse 11 we read that Israel would fall to an enemy, and of course that happened in 722 BC when the Assyrians came. They might be resting on their ivory beds in their expensive mansions, their summer houses and their winter houses would be stripped from them, and they would be led off as prisoners of war. The wealthy would have no houses at all, though they had many; and their man-made religious security in Bethel, where they had set up their own religious denomination, if you like, it would be obliterated. Imagine what is happening here - it's tantamount to what Isaiah said in Isaiah 63:10, listen: 'They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He', God, 'turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them'. There would be little left of Israel, verse 12 shows us: 'As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be taken out who dwell in Samaria'. Remember who the lion is here, it is God - and in the book of Exodus the law laid down that if a shepherd lost an animal, he had to pay for that animal. The only way he could get out of paying for it was to prove that it had been killed by a wild beast, and he did that by bringing home some of the parts that were not devoured - so he would have had to get from the teeth of the lion an arm or an ear or something like that. Amos is saying: 'God is roaring against His people as a lion, and the nation will not repent, they will not listen - and soon there would be none left but a remnant'.

Now I'm going to make a statement - and you don't have to agree with it, but I believe it's true. From human perspective - mark now, from human perspective - the church is only ever one generation away from extinction. From human perspective the church is only ever, in any locality or geographical location, one generation away from extinction. Someone has said: 'The church that marries the spirit of the age will be a widow in the next'. If she will not hear God's voice, if she will not walk with God, if she will not agree with God, it is probable that she, in that geographical location, is heading for extinction. I know Jesus said: 'I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' - but let me tell you this: the churches of Asia Minor that

Jesus spoke to, many of them were extinct in several years' time because they didn't repent. God is building His church, there is revival in China and many other parts of the world, God is doing it - but I have a burden tonight for here, I have a burden for Ireland and for the United Kingdom. Friends, if the churches don't repent there is judgement!

C.H. Spurgeon said about worldliness in the church, listen, I'm almost finished: 'I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present time has so little influence over the world' - that was in Spurgeon's day - 'it is because the world has so much influence over the church'. He further said: 'Put your finger on any prosperous period in church history, and I will find a little marginal note reading thus: 'In this age men could readily see where the church began and where the world ended'. Never were there good times when the church and the world were joined in marriage with one another. The more the church is distinct from the world in her acts and in her actions, the more true is her testimony for Christ, and the more potent is her witness against sin'. Addressing a National Seminar in the Southern Baptist denomination, George Gallup, who takes Gallup polls, spoke to the leaders of that church and said: 'We find there is very little difference in ethical behaviour between churchgoers and those who are not actively religious. The levels of lying, cheating and stealing are remarkably similar in both groups. Eight out of ten Americans consider themselves Christians', Gallup said, 'yet only about half of them could identify the person who gave the Sermon on the Mount, and fewer still could recall five of the Ten Commandments. Only 2 in 10 said they would be willing to suffer for their faith'. Donald Gray Barnhouse, a great preacher of bygone days, said this: 'Some years ago musicians noted that errand boys in a certain part of London all whistled out of tune as they went about their work. It was talked about, and someone suggested that it was because the bells of Westminster Abbey were slightly out of tune. Something had gone wrong with the chimes and they were discordant, and the boys did not know there was anything wrong with the peals, and quite unconsciously they had copied their pitch'.

The church that marries the spirit of the age will be a widow in the next. Are you walking with God? Are you in agreement with God? Are you hearing from God? Are you speaking for God? Let us pray. As we have looked at the aimlessness of God's people who were wayward, going in no direction because they were not walking with Him, in these closing moments analyse your heart. If you were asked the question Duncan Campbell was asked, how would you answer? Oh my friends, what are you arguing with Jesus about? Who here tonight will settle the matter? Maybe there is an unsaved person who will not repent of a particular sin because you love it - will you repent of it tonight and realise that Jesus will give you the power over it? But you must change your mind and allow Him to come in and change your heart. Backslidden believer, maybe it's something in your life that you're wedded to, and it's got a stronghold now, a foothold in your life - will you come tonight, while the Spirit of God is here, and dealing with people, and say: 'God help me, I can't help myself! But Lord I will walk with You, I reach out my hand' - as Bill sang earlier - 'I reach out my hand, take it and walk with me'. But wait till I tell you: all of us, all of us need to repent daily, we need to die daily, we need to take up our cross and follow daily.

Father, I pray tonight that You will do something, something supernatural, something significant and lasting in my heart, in all our hearts, in our homes, in our land. Oh God, we hear You roaring, God of justice, let us be close enough to listen. Amen.

The God Of Justice - Chapter 3

"The Second Charge: Affluence"

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Good evening to you all, it's wonderful to be back again tonight. It's hard to believe that we're halfway through the week already - but we've been having good times together in the mornings and in the evenings around God's word, and in His presence. I know I'm enjoying the ministry, particularly in the morning, and we praise God for it. It's good to be together and spend this leisurely time, so to speak, around God's word. I'm enjoying being with all the police officers as well, and hearing what is going on in the life of our police force. I have to say I really do feel that police officers make good conveners for meetings - I don't know whether you've noticed that or not, but as I travel around you get good conveners and bad conveners, but police officers get right to the point! That's what I've noticed, have you noticed that? They get the announcements out of the way, they say what they have to say, and then get down - and preachers love that, it gives them more time! But it's been wonderful to be here.

I want you to turn with me to Amos, where we're studying these evenings, Amos - and tonight we're looking at chapter 4. We've taken the heading 'The God of Justice', and on Monday evening we looked at chapters 1 and 2 and we look at 'The Accused', the God of justice was accusing six Gentile nations around the nation of Israel, and also the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. Last night we looked at chapter 3, where this God of justice brought His first charge against the nation of Israel, and He charged them for their sins against His Commandments. We're going to see the second charge tonight, which is the charge of 'Affluence', affluence.

We're reading in chapter 4, and we will read just verse 15 of chapter 3 please, of the previous chapter, for that is relevant to what we're going to say tonight. Chapter 3 then and verse 15, God says: *"I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house; the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end", says the LORD. Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring wine, let us drink!'. The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness: 'Behold, the days shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. You will go out through broken walls, each one straight ahead of her, and you will be cast into Harmon', says the LORD. 'Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, proclaim and announce the freewill offerings; for this you love, you children of Israel!' says the Lord GOD. 'Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. And lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me', says the LORD. 'I also withheld rain from you, when*

there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me', says the LORD. 'I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them; yet you have not returned to Me', says the LORD. 'I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; your young men I killed with a sword, along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; yet you have not returned to Me', says the LORD. 'I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; yet you have not returned to Me', says the LORD. 'Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!'. For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth; the LORD God of hosts is His name".

Let us pray, and as I've invited you on previous nights, I would ask you do pray with me now that God may speak, that He may speak to those who may be gathered here who have never trusted Christ as their Lord and Saviour; and that He may speak to all of us, because we all need to hear from God. If you're here and you don't need to hear from Him, well, you're the biggest person in need of prayer here tonight. We all need to hear from the Almighty, so let us unite our hearts together in meaningful prayer as we ask God for His help, and for His presence.

Father in heaven, we come in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and is alive and is at Your right hand interceding for us, a Prince and a Saviour. We ask in His mighty, all-victorious name that You will meet with us tonight by the power of the Holy Spirit. Lord, we thank You for the meditation this morning, and that little phrase spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Your God will come to you'. We long, Lord, that tonight our God would come to us. Lord, we remind You of the words and promise of our Lord Jesus when He said: 'If any man love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him; and we will come to him and make our abode with him'. Lord, come to us tonight and meet the needs of everyone here this evening, and may we get a vision of this God of justice who is also a God of grace. Lord, I'm going to pray that tonight the fear of God would grip us. Amen.

Imagine walking into your place of worship on Sunday morning as usual, and the visiting preacher is from the countryside, the backwoods in fact, and he gets up to preach and his opening lines are these: 'You elders and deacons wives are fat cows!' - can you imagine that? Now if you didn't choke on your toffee, or whatever you chew in the pew, I imagine you'd be thinking immediately that it's obvious that this man has never read Dale Carnegie's book 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' - and also, if he attended Bible seminary, he played truant during the sermon class, or like most people he probably fell asleep! What I'm absolutely certain of is that the pulpit vacancy committee would not be sending out feelers to see if this country cousin would be open to a call. But what this tells us is that God's ways are not our ways,

and His thoughts are not our thoughts, because effectively what Amos the prophet said to Israel - remember, God's congregation, God's people - was, verse 1, 'Hear this word, you cows of Bashan'. As we read in the context, we see at the end of verse 1: 'Who say to your husbands, 'Bring wine, let us drink!''.

He was talking to the leaders of the nation's wives, and effectively calling them 'fat cows' - imagine it! But you see, Amos wasn't concerned with courting popularity, neither was he interested in gaining fans or tickling the hearer's ears. He hadn't been to prophet school, neither had he been given fatherly advice on the introduction of the sermon, because his father wasn't a prophet either. He certainly wasn't interested in a call or a position to feather his own nest. Amos, as we've seen already, was God's man - and this was the point, why God sent this farmer sheep-breeder to preach His word: He wanted a man uncontaminated by the conventional. Do you understand what I mean? He didn't want a clone off a conveyor belt. He wanted a man untainted by ecclesiastical accepted wisdom. He just wanted a message boy, if you like, a man to take His message and preach it the way He had spoken it - so He chose a farmer. A farmer who, as we saw last night, walked close enough with God to hear God's voice, and to share the divine burden that God had for His people who were so heavily submerged in iniquity.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not encouraging vulgarity in the pulpit, and this was far from vulgarity for vulgarity's sake because Amos was a farmer. He used this image not because some of these women needed to subscribe to Weight Watchers, or they look like bovines, but because their sins were fattening them up for the slaughter. This was the farmer's imagery, they were being fattened up themselves for the kill - because this God of justice was not going to put up with it any longer. So this second message, this charge - we saw last night that the charge of God to the people of Israel was aimlessness, can two walk together except they be agreed? Tonight we're looking at this second charge, affluence, but God's prophet is bringing the accusation; and he's bringing, in fact, three specific sins why Israel was grieving the Lord, and why they were destroying the nation. The first sin we find in verses 1 to 3, it is luxury. God's people have the wrong values, or we could put it the other way round: they valued the wrong things. Their second sin was hypocrisy, we see it in verses 4 and 5: they had, as we saw, a religious revival. If you like, the churches were full, the offerings were high and heavy - and yet God saw it and said it was a sham, it was superficial, skin deep, hypocritical. Their third sin was stubbornness, we see it in verses 6 to 13, where they obstinately refused to listen to God's warning.

He starts this chapter the way he started in chapter 3, 'Hear this word!'; he starts again in chapter 5, 'Hear this word!'. Amos is blowing the trumpet to warn them, but they are obstinately, stubbornly not listening. So let's deal with each of these points of Amos as he gives this charge of affluence to the people of Israel. The first is luxury, verses 1 to 3. As I've said, these wives whom he calls 'cows of Bashan' were wives of the wealthy leaders of Israel. You see, their husbands had gotten rich by robbing the poor of money and of land. So we might call these women 'society women', you know, they lounged around all day, reaping the rewards of ill-gotten gain, drinking wine, and in fact telling their husbands what to do - no comment on that! But their sin was

luxury - you maybe never thought of that as a sin, but you know the English word 'luxury' comes from a Latin word that simply means 'excessive'. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying here tonight, it's not a sin to be wealthy. There are great characters in the word of God who were rich, like Abraham, a very wealthy farmer; and David the King who had great wealth - but the point was: these wealthy men used their wealth for the glory of God. The problem comes when luxury is a superabundance of money, of time, of resources, and we use those things exclusively on ourselves - or, to put it another way, we expend them purely on aimless leisure and selfish pleasure.

Do you know that in the eyes of most of the world we in the West are rich? Now I know some of you are pensioners, and I know some of you would like to be earning more of a wage, maybe some of you are unemployed and you would not consider yourself to be wealthy. But what we consider here in the West as essentials for living are considered in most of the rest of the world as luxuries. Let me give you a couple of examples: thermostatic controlled heating is a luxury. Air conditioning, though you don't need it in Portrush, is a luxury. Refrigeration, cars, adequate medical care, telephones and abundantly available electricity and fossil fuels - these are all things that the rest of the world considers luxurious, and we enjoy a superabundance of them. So that means, tonight, Christian, you are rich - maybe not in Western terms, but in global terms. Now the question that hangs before us tonight in the light of the prophet Amos is: how are we using our relative riches for the glory of God? That was Amos' message - his second charge to them was one of affluence. They were guilty of the sin of luxury, expending their wealth on selfishness.

Now the problem is not owning possessions, we all do. The problem comes when possessions own you, and I believe this is particularly a sin of Christians. You say: 'Oh, why is that?'. Well, when you're born-again and you're converted, you're automatically freed from some very expensive vices. What happens is, because maybe you're not spending money on booze and cigarettes, the bookies, and going to various other places - I'm not saying that's everything that it means to be a Christian, far from it - but inevitably you stop doing some of the things that you used to do, not because necessarily that's the rules, but because you no longer need to; you're satisfied with Jesus, you've got the Holy Spirit living within you, those things don't do it for you any more! Because of that you have a few extra pounds in your pocket, and you accrue more money. Because you accrue more money, you inevitably rise on the social ladder even a little, and you can become very quickly out of touch with grassroots society, with the poor, with the working man and woman. Even, perish the thought, because of Christ's deliverance of sin in our lives, possessions that we can now buy with this accrued wealth, they can become idols, things we possess can begin to possess us. The net result is that we get out of touch with God. This is what happened to Israel - because of their luxury they had now failed to hear the voice of God. As we heard last night they were no longer walking with God, they were not in agreement with God.

Francis Schaeffer called it 'The god of personal peace and affluence'. The Lord Jesus talked about it in His parable of parables, or parable on parables - you know the

parable of the sower and the seed, and the different soils, and there were four soils? I believe that's a parable not just for unconverted people, but it's a parable about how everyone hears the word of God and their reaction to it. One of the soils that the seed came to was thorny, thistle encrusted soil, and those thorns choked the seed of the word of God. Here was the Lord Jesus' comment on that allegory: 'These thorns', He said, 'are the worries of this world, the pleasures of life, the seductiveness of wealth, and the passionate desires for material things. They creep in and choke out the word, making it unfruitful'. Now could it be tonight, whoever you are, that your heart is so crowded by other things that God's voice is being choked? G. Campbell Morgan said many years ago: 'Persecution is only Satan's second-best weapon, the first is materialism'. You see, materialism by stealth, like the thorns and the weeds, grows up secretly and quietly and then chokes us. Someone has said: 'Whatever culture we are in, we are always being subtly coerced into spending our money or time on what is not of Christ'. A pastor in China who experienced great persecution for his faith, he said this: 'Consumerism could be more of an effective killer of Christianity than communism ever was'! He had been locked up for his faith, he could show in his body the wounds that he suffered for Jesus Christ, and yet he realised the subtle deadliness of materialism and consumerism in his society - more deadly than a despot!

In the words of Lee Tian, a famous Shanghai pastor, 'Consumerism makes you think you don't have to suffer to follow Jesus. It makes you think you can have lots of things and Christ as well. In reality you just end up with lots of things, and most of the time you don't even realise Christ has gone'. What an epitaph for Western Christendom: you end up with lots of things, and most of the time you don't even realise Christ has gone. Can I ask you tonight, Christian: has a tangible sense of the presence of God in your life disappeared because of wealth, because of luxury? Maybe you're here tonight and you're not a believer, and you're not really interested because you've got food on the table, clothes on your back, good horsepower under the sole of your foot, you've a roof over your head and a nice one at that, and you feel you've no need for God. My friend, let me challenge you tonight: that could be the very device of the devil to deafen you to the word of the living God coming to you tonight, so that you cannot hear. It's choking the word and the voice of God, and it will essentially damn your soul.

Have you ever asked the question: why we in the West are as wealthy as we are in a global sense? Have you ever contemplated why the church in the West is so rich? Is it for living high off the hog? Are we God's favourites? No, I don't think so. Not very long ago I ordered a book free off the Internet, and it just popped up one day when I was on a Christian website, and it was free - so, I mean, you just get a book if its free, don't you? I ordered it, and it was entitled 'Revolution in World Missions' by K.P. Yohannan. Now, if you're a leader of the church of Jesus Christ here tonight, let me encourage you to get that book - and it is free - get it! Because in that book K.P. Yohannan, an Asian, sets out the vision that he has for missionary work into the next millennium. His idea is, and I believe it's born of God, that God has allowed the West to be rich, the church in the West to be rich, in order to finance Asia in particular, and that window of the world that still has to hear the gospel in their hundreds of thousands. His vision is, not necessarily as in bygone eras, that Westerners went to

the mission field and westernised those countries, but rather that they should finance mission in those countries by indigenous nationals taking the Gospel to their own people. Do you know why? Because they are queuing up to do the work, but they haven't got the resources! Do you know that? They are volunteering by their thousands, but they haven't got the monies. His vision is to tell this story in the West, and to motivate Christians - maybe you can't go, or won't go - but certainly to give, and know that there are those lining up. I read in that story, it would break your heart in that book to read of evangelists who can't feed their children. I read one heartbreaking story of an evangelist who went to a tribal community in a remote area to tell them of Jesus and His love, and they were an illiterate people, they could not read or write. So he couldn't give them tracts, he couldn't give them a Bible or any form of literature, so he thought he would show them slides - but he had a problem, he hadn't got a slide projector. Do you know what that evangelist did? He went to the hospital every week, and he sold his blood that he might buy a projector to tell illiterate people about Jesus.

Can I ask you, Christian tonight, what would you give so that others might live? Does this touch us? God mightn't call you to go - maybe He does - make sure He has called you to stay; but if He hasn't called you to go, is He asking you, as a Westerner, to simplify your life in order to know God better because it's crushing and choking the word of God and His voice in your experience, or is He asking you to live more simply that others might simply live? That's not just a challenge to individual Christians, it's a challenge to Christian churches: how do you spend your wealth? Office bearers, ministers, pastors, deacons, how are you spending your wealth? Can I tell you: I know some conscientious Christians who don't give into their churches because they don't trust them to spend the money aright - they waste it! Listen to what Paul says in 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 17, listen: 'Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life'. Is that not what the Lord Jesus Christ taught when He said: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth cannot corrupt and where thieves cannot break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' - where is your heart tonight? Where is your heart?

Listen, I believe this: here in the West, in the church, if we don't use the wealth that we have for the kingdom of Christ, we might lose it! All you have to do is look around you at credit crisis, national debt in the Eurozone, in the United States, crashing financial global markets - and it's quite possible that we, as the wealthy, might become the poor in a matter of decades, if God should choose! This God of justice, this God of the nations who takes note of everything that is going on! Verse 2: 'The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness: 'Behold, the days shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks'. You see, fattened beef would be led away by the butcher, isn't that right? The Assyrians, who were going to bring Israel into captivity, they had a practice: they would put hooks in

the noses of their captives, or in the lower lips of their prisoners, and they would attach a rope to them and they would lead them away like animals - either to captivity or to death. What this is telling us is just what Jesus taught us, what Paul taught us: do not trust in uncertain riches, but invest them in the kingdom of Christ!

Amos brought the charge to them of their affluence, and not only did they commit the sin of luxury, they committed the sin of hypocrisy in verses 4 and 5. Amos is being ironic here, he says: 'Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgressions' - and really what he's saying is, 'Carry on your religious services, but it's all a waste of time!'. Now, as I've said, there was a revival of interest in religion, but it was all a sham - for later in chapter 5 and verse 5 he actually commands them not to go to Bethel, and not to go to Gilgal, these significant places in Israelite history that have now become shrines to pagan gods! The Lord saw their hearts, they were all flocking to their places of worship, they were entering into the particular, we might say, 'sacraments' of their religious practices. They were into the rituals, they brought great wealth as offerings, but God is being sarcastic almost with them: 'Keep on going, because I'm not noticing it, because it doesn't mean anything to Me!'. That's serious, isn't it? I mean, if Amos was speaking to us, he might say: 'Go ahead you, go and do your daily readings every morning, go and go down your shopping list of prayer requests - go on, go and do it! Go to your meetings every night of the week, and flock to your conventions, and give your tithes, but it's all a waste of time!'. You say: 'How could it be a waste of time? Are those not good things to do?' - of course they're good things to do, but they were a waste of time because God does not look on the outward appearance, He looks at the heart! In verse 5 we see that He says: 'Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven' - that was something that was forbidden to do, and leaven in the word of God is a picture of sin. What Amos is saying is: 'You're engaged in all this religious activity, but it's hypocritical because you've got wealth as your idol and there is sin in your life!'.

Oh, we've seen this God of ours as a God of justice. You see, God doesn't want sacrifices of animals, God wants obedient hearts - that's what He longs for! That's what is the heartbeat passion of His being: obedient souls. Do you remember the story in 1 Samuel 15, where Saul, the King of Israel, was commanded to slay all the Amalekites? Instead of obeying God he spared Agag, the King of the Amalekites, and some of the best sheep and oxen to sacrifice, he said, unto the Lord. What was the response of Samuel the prophet? He said: 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king'. You might be here tonight and you're religious, and there is a particular church or a particular denomination or religious persuasion, and that's where you hang your hat. You say their prayers, and you do it their way, and you give in every now and again to make sure the clergyman will bury you when your time comes. You turn up at Christmas, and maybe even on Easter Sunday to sing the wonderful joyous hymns - but you know deep down in your heart tonight that it's all a farce, it's a sham, there is no depth to it, it's hypocrisy. Don't you kid yourself, my friend here tonight - I'm just

being honest with you before the word of God, I can't do anything else. Don't you think that that pleases God! The only thing that pleases God is a broken and a contrite heart for sin, and a trust in the only sacrifice for sin - and that is the slain Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, the spotless, sinless, substitute Saviour.

God wants obedience. Even their singing didn't please Him. Now that's no surprise when you hear it sometimes - but in chapter 5 in verse 23 He said: 'Take away from Me the noise of your songs'. I'll tell you: there was great orchestral praise, this was not just a ramshackle get-together around the piano! This was exuberant, very, very, very highbrow praise to God - but to Him it was only a noise! They honoured Him with their mouth, but their heart was not right before Him. They were steeped in religion, they were making their pilgrimages to Bethel and Gilgal, they loved to go to meetings - oh, Ulster is full of this! Even today, 'Go to the meetings', but there was no heart repentance, there was no restitution, putting things right brother to brother, sister to sister. There was no brokenness because of the church, or the land. There was no true seeking after God, it was all external religion - hypocrisy.

Now how do you know if that's what you've got or not? Well, here's a threefold test of your Christian activity tonight: one, does it bring you nearer to God? Does all that you do on a weekly basis in church bring you nearer to God? Two, does it make you more like Jesus Christ? Three, does it enable you to reach out to others, or do you become more selfish and more insular? Now, can I say something, and I'm going to make a very bold statement here tonight: if your activity as a Christian does not qualify in all of those three counts, quit it! I'm not saying quit being a Christian, I'm saying quit hypocrisy! The best thing that all of us could do, preacher included, on a regular daily basis is to get before the old rugged cross, blood stained with blood so divine, and get broken on a daily basis because of sin - and when broken and emptied, to get filled with the Holy Ghost! That's what we need, and I'll tell you: a lot of the superfluous activity in evangelical churches and the rest is nothing but hypocrisy. We've more resources today than ever - conferences, conventions, books, sure you hardly need a library any more, you go on the Internet and you have everything you could ever want - but I ask the question of you tonight: are we any better for it, or are we worse? Here in the West now I'm talking. Almost every year we hear through the evangelical community of a so-called 'revival'. Now I believe in revival, and I believe there is revival in parts of the world this very evening - but I'll tell you, here is the test of true revival: it is not revival if people don't become more holy, it is not revival if their holiness does not change the community in which they live. All that that is before God is worthless religion and sham, whatever label is upon it!

That's what God said in Isaiah, if I can remind you of it - turn with me to Isaiah chapter 1, we were there the other morning. Verse 11, or just listen as I read it to you, Isaiah 1 verse 11, God says this: 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?' says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies; I cannot endure iniquity and the

sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands', listen to this, 'I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow'.

God charged them with luxury, then He charged them with hypocrisy, and finally He charged them with stubbornness. God sent warnings to them in verses 6 to 11, but they would not listen - and here's how He sent the warnings: He sent drought, He sent famine, you read the passage. He sent diseases, He sent a plague of locusts, He sent war, He took the best of their young men to die in war - and we should sit up and listen to that! There were local catastrophes, and yet we read five times in this chapter these chilling words: 'Yet you have not returned to Me!'. Now listen friends tonight: if the goodness of God does not lead you to repentance - and some of you here tonight, maybe you're not even a Christian, and God has been good to you. It has not been all sunshine and roses, I know, but nobody's life is - but God has been good to you, and yet you're not repentant tonight. Could it be that God has to come the way He came to Israel, and bring all these catastrophes into your life? Maybe you're experiencing this at this very moment: you're suffering hard times, you're wondering why. Maybe you're even pointing the finger at God, and shaking the fist at God - but could it be that God, and I say it reverently, with a heart that beats and breaks for your soul: God cries, 'But you have not returned to Me, you have not returned to Me!'.

Are you a backslider that turned your back upon God, and God has brought discipline into your life? What has He sent your way to bring you to Him? If His goodness won't do it, maybe the chastising of His rod in justice will do it - but it's all for the one goal, whether it's goodness or it's wrath, it's all to bring restoration, it's all to bring redemption and bring you to Jesus. What has God been doing in your life? Do you understand that it's not to drive you away from God, but it's to bring you to Him? Let me ask: what has God been doing to our nation? Don't tell me it's not God. He wants to bring our people back to Himself, but we could write over it tonight: 'They have not returned unto Me', says the Lord. Stubbornness!

Here's the parting shot: Amos says God is now finished with natural calamities, and with local catastrophes. 'Israel, He's not going to do that any longer, here's what He's going to do' - look at verse 12 - 'Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God!'. God wouldn't send any calamity any longer, but God would come Himself: 'Israel, prepare to meet your God!'. Now, that is not an evangelistic text - it can be used in such a fashion and applied, and so if you're here tonight you need to be prepared to meet God. You may be prepared for your summer holidays, you might have the policy all paid up, you could be prepared for what you're going to do tomorrow on the golf course - but if you're not prepared to meet your God, you're not prepared, and you could meet your God tomorrow... today! Prepare to meet your God! But this is to God's people, have you ever heard this text preached on this way? This is the way it's meant to be preached on: God's people,

you need to prepare to meet your God!

In Romans 14 we read: 'For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ'. Second Corinthians 5: 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad'. First Corinthians 3: 'If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire'. These three texts are to believing Christians, to people in the church! It's an event called the 'Bema', it's a judgement seat, and the One sitting on it - Jesus said: 'The Father judges no man, but has given all judgement to the Son', it is gentle Jesus, meek and mild sitting on this throne of judgement, my friend, and I believe I'm honest before God tonight in this pulpit: there is very little terrifies me more than that day! And I'm born-again and saved. Prepare to meet your God. They had encountered God's disciplines, perhaps like you are tonight, but the next step was to meet God Himself. He was coming personally.

I know I've been preaching on the God of justice, and there's a lot of judgement - I can't help that, I just preach on the word, I'm the messenger - but listen tonight: there is grace, there is grace greater than all your sin and misdemeanour. There is a fountain open at Calvary for uncleanness to all who will, by repentance and faith, plunge beneath - they will be as pure as the driven snow, because on Calvary's tree the spotless Son of God was judged that you might never be judged. That's why God takes sin so seriously, because it cost His Son everything. As Paul said to the Corinthians: if you judged yourselves, you would not be judged. If you would uncover your sin, Calvary would cover it - but Calvary will not cover what you will not uncover!

All of you, I ask you tonight: are you prepared to meet God? Are you prepared to meet your God? We can sing all the songs we like: 'When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing' - and it will be, but there is something in between that, there's a judgement seat and the believer must be prepared. Unbeliever, there's a Great White Throne, and the book shall be opened, and whoever is not found in the book of life is cast into the lake of fire - that's God's word. But believer, I come to you tonight, for my heart is for you just this moment: are you prepared?

Chopin, that great musician, in one of his early concerts, one of the first concerts he ever performed, made a litany of mistakes - but after he played his concerto, the whole audience rose to their feet but one old man sitting in the corner on the front seat. He just sat as he was, he didn't move. That elderly gentleman was Verdi, Chopin's master and mentor. When the whole building rose and stood to their feet in adoration and praise, he remained sitting down - why? Because he knew where the mistakes were. There is a poem with which I finish that never ceases to grip me, it's about the judgement seat of Christ. It goes like this:

'He would have me rich,
But I stand there poor,
Stripped of all but His grace,
And memory will run like a haunted thing,

Down the years that I cannot retrace,
And my penitent heart will nigh break,
With tears that I cannot shed,
And I'll cover my face with my empty hands,
And I'll bow my uncrowned head'.

Israel valued the valueless, their sin was affluence - is it yours? For if it is, or hypocrisy, or stubbornness, you are certainly not prepared to meet your God. Let us pray.

We're going to sing a hymn in just a moment, but I'm conscious of a heavy sense of the Holy Spirit, and it is paramount that you engage with God in this moment. If you hear His voice, harden not your heart. Maybe the Holy Spirit has broken through some of the arid, infertile, dry ground of affluence, and wealth, and love of other things that you haven't realised was such a problem. He has shown you tonight it is, and you've heard His voice - oh dear friend, what is God telling you to do? Surely it is to repent? Surely all of us could do something? I'm not going to be personal tonight, but sometimes people - I'm just saying this because it just speaks to where sometimes folk are at - my wife doesn't work, because she needs to be at home at the moment with the children. We look to God for our need, and sometimes Christians come up and say to my wife: 'What do you do?'. She says: 'I'm at home with the children'. 'Oh, that's good, that's great, I wish we could do that' - I'm not saying what you should or shouldn't do, but what I am saying is this: a lot of folk, Christian folk, are living above their means, and if they lived with a little bit less they would have an awful lot more to give to God.

Friend tonight, what are you going to do? Unsaved person here tonight, God has touched your heart. I know I'm preaching primarily to Christians, but God has touched you - you know you're going to stand before God, and all those secret things are going to be uncovered. You need to get under the blood tonight, you need to be washed, you need to repent, you need to come to the cross and say: 'Lord, save me, cleanse me' - otherwise you'll answer for those things. Deal with God, will you? Let this not be a wasted night, a wasted message: deal with God. Tomorrow night we will look at the third charge of God to Israel, 'Apathy'. Friday night, 'The Sentence', the judgement.

Father, Your word has gone forth. We can do very little at all, but we certainly can do no more now - but Lord, we pray tonight that You will move with the burden of God the Spirit, upon souls here tonight - saved and lost - and that You will quicken them to see as You see, that they may give their all to Jesus who gave His all for them. May Your presence remain with us now. Amen.

The God Of Justice - Chapter 4

"The Third Charge: Apathy"

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by David Legge

Good evening, wonderful to be here again tonight to preach the word of God and to join in fellowship with one another around His truth. We're turning again tonight - if it's your first time, we're in the book of Amos, which is three books away past the book of Daniel, the prophecy of Daniel - a little book of nine chapters that we're seeking to work through these nights. Not primarily preaching the Gospel, although the Gospel application is through the message, but primarily bringing the word of God to all - and much of it has been applicable to those of us who would consider ourselves Christians, because this is a prophecy that comes to God's ancient people, Israel. Tonight we're looking at chapters 5 and 6. Now, if you were here on Monday night we looked at 'The Accused', that was six Gentile nations that God was pronouncing judgement upon, and then the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel - and that made it up to eight. God was judging His own people because their sins were the same sins, and indeed worse than the nations roundabout.

Then on Tuesday night we looked at God's first charge to Israel, and that was the sin of 'Aimlessness' - can two walk together except they be agreed? Then last night we looked at God's second charge, which was 'Affluence', and how they were valuing the valueless. Tonight we're looking at the third charge, which is 'Apathy', and how the God of justice - and that's the theme we've taken throughout the week - the God of justice brings this third charge of apathy to God's people, Israel. We'll not read both chapters in total, but a number of verses from each.

Chapter 5 then, and reading from verses 1 to 9 first of all: *"Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel: the virgin of Israel has fallen; she will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land; there is no one to raise her up. For thus says the Lord GOD: 'The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel'. For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: 'Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the LORD and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no one to quench it in Bethel; you who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth!'. He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; the LORD is His name. He rains ruin upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress".*

We'll look down now, please, to verse 14: *"Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good;*

establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph". Down to verse 18: "Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it? 'I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savour your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream".

Then into chapter 6 verse 1: *"Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria, notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes!",* verse 3, *"Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near; who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, and those who recline at banquets shall be removed"* - and we'll end our reading there at verse 7 of chapter 6.

Unite with me in prayer, and I've requested each night, please, that you do pray with me - don't leave me up here on my own, whatever you do! I need you to pray for me and pray with me, and pray for one another, that God may speak. There might be unconverted people in the gathering, and we want God's Spirit to come, bring conviction of sin, of righteousness, and judgement to come, and witness Jesus to their mind and heart as the only Saviour. We want the Holy Spirit to do the same work for us, for we all need it, and we all need God to draw near, to speak to our hearts - we want to hear what He has to say. So do come and unite with me in prayer to that end, that we will have a meeting with the Almighty tonight.

Father, we thank You for even the stillness that is in this gathering already as we have worshipped, and as we have read Your word. Oh God, we seek to meet with You. Lord, we thank You for friends, and our brothers and sisters here, we thank You for the strangers that may have gathered in. Lord, we thank You for fellowship that we can enjoy - but, Lord, we long to meet with our God. We long that the Holy Spirit should come in mighty power and unction, that we might hear with our ears not a man but God. Lord, we need You tonight, we need You to speak, we need for You to rend the heavens and come down - that the mountains that are in our lives, the obstacles, whatever they may be, they melt at Your presence. Those things that appear insurmountable, Lord, that they would just dissolve before Your presence. Oh God, come, whatever our need is, come and meet it - oh God, we cry in Jesus' name, the crucified, but freshly slain Lamb, risen from the dead and interceding for us, in His name we cry to You, Father, help us by the Spirit of God now. For Christ's sake, Amen.

Now though Amos, we saw, was not a typical prophet in that he was not an attender to any prophetic school, neither was he in the lineage of prophets - his father wasn't a prophet - he was typical of a prophet in this much: that he spoke for God, that's what prophets do, but also what was typical of him being a prophet was that though he spoke for God, and though he has, as we have seen, a very judgemental message from this God of justice who was bringing wrath upon His own people for their misdemeanours, just like all the other prophets Amos' heart broke for the people that he was speaking to. That's characteristic of many a prophet - they spoke for God, but their heart broke for the people. They were sort of pulled between the two: they were loyal to God, but they were from among the people and they loved them. As the great prophet Jeremiah, and indeed the greatest prophet of them all, the Lord Jesus Christ, Amos wept.

What you have before you tonight in chapter 5 and chapter 6 is really a lament, a funeral lamentation as the prophet of God weeps over the state of God's people - just like Jeremiah, who said in chapter 9 of his prophecy: 'Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!'. You remember our Lord Jesus Christ asked the question of the disciples: 'Whom do men say that I am?', and one of the characters of the Old Testament that they thought had come back from the dead was Jeremiah - and I believe that they mistook Jesus for Jeremiah because of His compassion, because of His breaking heart over His people. He had come to His own, but His own received Him not. We read in Luke 19: 'Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" - and He wept as He broke His heart.

All God's choice servants were men and women of tears. Albert Smith said: 'Tears are the safety valve of the heart when too much pressure is laid on'. Of course Amos, his name means 'burden', and we've seen, haven't we, how he came under the burden of God as he cried judgement to the people of Israel. He wept as he preached - tears were the safety valve, as the pressure of that burden was so great that there had to be an outlet. So this was the distillation of the soul, liquid prayers if you like, streaming forth like a river from God's prophet because, though he spoke for God and he didn't hold back, he put the trumpet to his mouth and he blew the warning, yet internally his heart was breaking for a people who would not hear, and for whom judgement was hastening.

I believe dry-eyed syndrome pervades the church of Jesus Christ in the West today. There are few tears in the eyes of preachers, this one included; few tears in the eyes of the people in the pew. Somewhere along the way we have allowed our tear ducts to become cauterised by the spirit of the age - whether it is materialism that we talked about last night, or religious pluralism, or post-modernism, eternal realities are no longer real enough to make us want to cry over them. Is that not true? But not God's man, Amos - God's man with God's message, chapter 5, chapter 6. He is lamenting in tears. Here's the reason, we saw it on Tuesday night: he was walking with God, he

was in agreement with God, and because he walked and had made his appointments with God - that's what that word 'agreement' means, by the way, to make an appointment with God - he was hearing from God, and his heart was bearing and sharing the burden of God for his people.

So he brings this third charge, a lamentation about their apathy. It's really, as I've said, a funeral dirge for a people who were about to be judged. It was as if Amos was preaching to them, and as far as he was concerned they were already dead, but they were left unburied! That's the sense we get from verse 2, if you look at it, in chapter 5: 'The virgin of Israel has fallen; she will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land; there is no one to raise her up'. Israel saw herself as a fair virgin, but as far as God was concerned she was a fallen corpse left to rot unburied - you couldn't get much different! Was it last night we said: we must learn to see the way God sees, not the way things seem to be, but the way they really are. The only way you can know that is getting close to God, and walking with God, and hearing what God is saying. Here He says: 'No, you're not like a fair virgin' - and He might say to the church tonight, 'You're not like a chaste bride, you're like a rotting corpse!'.

The tragedy of this judgement is seen in verse 3, is it any wonder the prophet's heart was breaking because we read there: 'Thus says the Lord GOD: 'The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel''. What that means, at least it's suggesting that there would be 90% of the nation would die, and only 10% live! That's why his eyes were soaking with tears, that's why his heart was breaking: because judgement was coming against the people of God. Now, last night in our study in chapter 4, we saw a sad refrain five times, where God said - having sent much chastisement and discipline - He said to His people: 'Yet you have not returned to Me, you have not returned to Me'. We saw last night that God's chastening always has restoration in view. He wasn't doing this because He was getting some sadistic kick out of chastising His children, but because He loves them, because He wants to lavish grace upon them, because He wants to bring them to His bosom and reveal His heart - but over and over again He had to say: 'You have not returned to Me!'.

In chapter 5 we find again God's grace, for there is a repetition of an invitation, and it's 'Seek Me and live'. Look at it, verse 4 of chapter 5: 'Thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: 'Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel''. Verse 6 of chapter 5: 'Seek the LORD and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph'. Verse 14: 'Seek good and not evil, that you may live'. We've taken as our title 'The God of Justice', that's what Amos is all about - but Amos doesn't just present to us a God of justice, but he reveals to us a God of grace, aren't you glad of that? Romans chapter 3 and verse 26 says: 'God is just, and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus'. Praise God, we heard about it this morning, the Man of Calvary. We were meditating on Isaiah 53 with Mr Darragh - and it was wonderful, as we came to Calvary, and how he explained to us that we are saved by grace. How my heart leapt as he brought that illustration out, that He was bruised for our transgressions, and that word 'bruised', he said, means 'crushed', it actually means Christ was bent for us that we might become straight! Not only being justified, but that we may walk upright - wonderful! He

emphasised this point: that not only are we saved by grace, not through our works, but we are sanctified by God's grace - holiness is a gift of God. It's not something, necessarily, to be striven after in the flesh, but it's something that is a gift of God. That's why Paul came to the Galatians and said: 'Have you begun in the Spirit, and are you now trying to continue in the flesh?' - no! It's all of the Spirit, it all of grace!

We celebrated this morning how the blood cleanses; how the sacrifice of Calvary straightens you up; how, with His stripes, we are healed. But not only does the blood heal us morally, but do you know something on top of that is this: the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost to empower us. Listen, I struggle with temptation, as we all do - but can I tell you tonight: the New Testament Gospel, as I read it in the word of God, is that not only are our past misdemeanours forgiven, but God the Holy Spirit, through the sacrifice, resurrection, and impartation at Pentecost, can give the Christian victory now and in the future! It's not a half a gospel! When we're preaching these nights, what God requires of us - we heard it this morning - God empowers us to do it. He's not requiring you to do it - He's requiring you to cooperate, yes - but He does it!

But what happens when we don't cooperate? Well, turn with me to Hebrews chapter 12, again I emphasise: this is New Testament truth. Here in Hebrews chapter 12 the writer speaks about the chastisement of God, His discipline upon His children. Verse 5 of Hebrews 12: 'And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives'. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?'. Does that sound familiar? Amos says: 'Seek Me and live', we are to be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live - and if we don't subject ourselves to Him, we come under His discipline. 'For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness'. He chastens us for the purpose that we might be holy. Verse 11: 'Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness' - the peaceable fruit of righteousness, holiness - 'to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord'.

When we are wayward, and when we need more holiness - there's the negative, when we're doing things we ought not to do - but also when we need to improve, and we all need that, the Lord brings chastisement and discipline in our lives because He loves us! We saw it the other night: why was God chastising Israel? Because they were elected! They were saying: 'We're God's chosen people, He can't judge us!' - that was the very reason He was coming to judge them and chastise them. Because He loves

us, the Lord chastens us - and it's not with a purpose to make us miserable, it's with a purpose to make us holy!

Amos wanted them to see that their chastening was in order to seek the Lord, that's my first point tonight. They needed to see that their chastening was in order to cause them to seek the Lord. He was giving them a way out, hallelujah! That is our God! Let's not water down His character: He is a God of justice, and He's a God of holiness, and that's a side of His character that you hear very little about today - but it's not all about Him. He is a God of love, He is a God of mercy, He is a God of grace, He's a God of deliverance, He's a God of salvation, He's a God who gives a way out! He makes very clear where it is to be found, verse 4: 'Thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: 'Seek Me and live; but do not'', verse 5, 'seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba' - but seek Me and live, not Bethel. The people flocked to their services, we saw that, didn't we? They heaped sacrifice upon sacrifice in offerings, but God wasn't to be found in any of it - it couldn't save their soul, nor could it sanctify them. I want to tell you tonight - I hope to God that you have not misunderstood anything I have said these evenings, and I know I've been preaching against sin in all our lives, but I don't want you to think for one moment that I'm expecting you to go out and, with a spiritual bar of carbolic, clean yourself from head to toe - because you cannot! You cannot make yourself acceptable by good works, you cannot make yourself acceptable by legalistic ritual or rite or rule, it is only by seeking the Lord and seeking His grace!

Is that what we do? Sometimes I feel - and I identify with this, I'm talking about myself - sometimes when my back's against the wall, the last thing I do is seek the Lord! When things are bad, what do you do? Do you go to church? That's not a bad thing to do, but sometimes we seek solace in church, or we bury ourselves in some kind of activity. Or maybe it's our denomination, and we're head and ears in it? Or maybe it's a movement that we're involved in? Or maybe we run to a personality preacher, or a prolific author? Or maybe we take solace and security in the sacraments, or in some kind of charitable deeds? A lot of people, instead of seeking the Lord, they seek a new doctrine, or they even seek a true doctrine, and it takes the place of seeking the Lord. Or maybe an ecstatic experience, they want the hairs to go up the back of their neck, they want the bright lights to shine for them - sensuality - but there are very few people, very few people who truly seek the Lord for the Lord's sake, that He might be seen by them and they may share in His likeness, holiness.

Duncan Campbell said: 'Do you know what our problem is in this modern church age? We have everything but God'. Do you know why that is? Sometimes we seek everything but God. Well when things are as bad as this, as they were in Israel - and I believe they are in the Western church today - do you know what we would really be better doing? Now this might shock some of you: sometimes I think we'd be better cancelling our normal programs, and we'd be better calling a solemn assembly, and we'd be better getting on our faces - like the prophet - with the tears tripping us, broken, crying out to God: 'We want to seek You and live again! Where have we gone wrong? What is the reason for Your divine chastisement on the nation?'. It's there! You're blind if you don't see it! 'What is the reason for Your displeasure in the church?'

- but what do we do? We go on doing the same. I've said before that if the Holy Ghost didn't turn up at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning, we would be able to go on right ahead and we wouldn't notice hardly any difference half the time. We go on in our activity, and what the prophet Amos is saying is: 'No, don't! Stop! You Israelites are living in denial, you're thinking God is well pleased with your activity, you're thinking God is well pleased and satisfied in His heart with your half-hearted devotion!'. What Amos was preaching - and I think what needs to be preached today - is that the church needs to take radical action in seeking the Lord, to hear what the Lord says. We've got all the answers, we can buy all the paperbacks and watch all the DVDs from America on how to fill your church with people, how to have seeker sensitive services, how to get the community in - but friends, most of it is a sham! God isn't in any of it! We need God! We need to find out how to get God back! Who is there who knows how to get God down, to seek Him that we might live, and that our people might live?

You see, we need to seek Him to hear what He's saying - that's what the Psalmist spoke in Psalm 85: 'Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation' - listen - 'I will hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly'. You see, he cried 'Revive us, O Lord', and he waited on God and he sought the Lord to hear what He will say. What do you think we need to do to revive the church in the United Kingdom? What do we need to do? You know, people would give you a list, here's the ABC - you need to put this in the right place, and do this, and we need to be preaching this way, that way, and the other way - and all of it is fine and dandy, but wait till I tell you: I really don't know where we would start, I honestly don't know. There are things we could do better, but I do know this: what we do need to do, collectively, across denominational boundaries, we need to seek God! We need to put everything on hold! Who will do it? What churches will do it? What denominations will do it? Who of them will unite together and say: 'We will put everything on hold, and we're going to seek God, and say 'Lord, what's happened? Where have we gone wrong? Where is our blindspot? What sin is in the camp, Lord? What do You want us to do?'".

In the island of Lewis, before the awakening, did you know that they were in dire straits spiritually on the isles? A place that once had experienced refreshing from the presence of the Lord had now begun to grow cold and indifferent. That burden was shared by the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis who, in the following declaration that I'm going to read that was posted in the Stornoway Gazette and West Coast Advertiser, publicly expressed their deep concern. This is verbatim what they said, listen: 'The Presbytery of Lewis, having taken into consideration the low state of vital religion within their own bounds, and throughout the land generally, call upon their faithful people in all their congregations to take a serious view of the present dispensation of divine displeasure, manifested not only in the chaotic conditions of international politics and morality, but also and especially in the lack of spiritual power from Gospel ordinances, and to realise that these things plainly indicate that the Most High has a controversy with the nation. The Presbytery affectionately plead with their people, especially with the youth of the church, to take these matters to heart and to make serious inquiry as to what must be the end should there be no repentance! They

call upon every individual, as before God, to examine his or her life in the light of the responsibility which pertains to us all - that haply, in divine mercy, we may be visited with a spirit of repentance and may turn again unto the Lord whom we have so grieved with our iniquities and waywardness'. Is there not a low state of vital religion in our land? True Christianity? Do we not need to take a serious view of the present dispensation of divine displeasure manifested? Do the conditions of international politics and morality not drive us to see that the Most High has a controversy with the nation?

They saw it in their day, and I tell you: it's far worse in ours. Isaiah tells us what seeking the Lord involves, Isaiah 55: 'Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near' - here it is - 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon'. He's a God of grace, He's a God of mercy - thank God that stream from Calvary still flows, and we might plunge in and be cleansed, but there is repentance! There is repentance that God requires, and it's not a work - it's the other side of the coin of faith, it's believing you're not good enough, and that you haven't reached the standard, and that you change your mind about your sin and about yourself. Is there an unsaved person here tonight? Have you ever repented and believed? I'm not asking you where you worship, what denomination you are, or what creed you recite - I'm asking you: are you born-again? Have you repented and believed the Gospel?

In verses 8 and 9 we see a parenthesis in the passage: 'He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; The LORD is His name. He rains ruin upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress'. This is the God of the heavens with whom we have to do! The pagans worshipped the stars and the constellations and the planets, but our God made them, our God flung them into space! He is the God of creation, He is the God of justice, He is the God of holiness - and we have all got to face up to our sin, and the Israelites wouldn't do it! What was stopping them? Two things: something theological and something moral. This is the second thing that Amos wants them to see in this third charge of apathy. He needed them to see that their chastening was in order to seek the Lord and live, but second: he needed them to see that they had confidence in a spurious security. Confidence in a spurious security.

You see, some were saying: 'The day of the Lord will come, and when the day of the Lord comes then all our enemies will be defeated, and God will deliver us!'. Look at verse 18 of chapter 5: 'Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?'. Do you know what Amos was saying? 'You're crying for the day of the Lord, but for you, do you know what that's going to be like? It's going to be like meeting a lion, and then you dodge the lion, and you dodge him to go into the path of a bear. Then, when you're

able to sidestep the bear and get in your back door, and you lean on your wall and take a puff of breath, a snake bites you on the wall!'. You're crying out for the day of the Lord, but you don't realise that the day of the Lord, it's going to be for you from the frying pan into the fire - as we would say. You're saying: 'Our enemies are going to be judged', but you don't realise that you will meet your God! We saw it last night: 'Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!'.

I believe - and it's only my belief - that the day of the Lord is still a future time when the nation of Israel will be tested and purified, and God will still fulfil His word in all these prophets, major and minor. But applying this to Christians today, many Christians - and I'm one of them - who long for the fulfilment of prophetic Scripture, many of them are not ready to meet their Lord! Are you one of them? Many Christians view the Lord's return as an escape to heaven, as judgement on the wicked nations, all the saints living happily together for ever after - and there's no doubt about it, the New Testament presents the truth of the second coming of Jesus as a cause for Christian hope, 1 Thessalonians 4, 'Comfort one another with these words'. I don't want to take anything away from that, but all I will say to you tonight is: make sure your personal hopes on that day are not false hopes! Make sure you're not making the mistake, first of all, of not being genuinely born-again. Make sure, if you are saved, that you're prepared and ready to meet the Lord - because what Amos teaches us, and what the whole of the New Testament teaches us is that judgement begins at the house of God! And even when God takes us to heaven, and the trumpet sounds, and Jesus takes us home, I believe the sequence is that there will be this 'bema' judgement, and we will have to answer to God as to how we have lived our lives.

Even the layout of the book of Revelation - and I'm not going to fall out with anybody if you have a different understanding than me, that's not the point. The point is this: even the layout of Revelation testifies to this, that He starts off, this Judge-Priest Jesus Christ, walking among the candlesticks - before He judges this world and pours wrath, vials of wrath, upon it, He deals with the church first! I love prophecy, I really do, and I'm not ashamed of it either. I think there's a neglect of preaching and teaching on the second coming of Jesus, probably because there are so many views - but it was never ever intended to be a form of escapism for the children of God. It was never intended that we should use prophecy as a confidence in a spurious security to get us out of what God requires of us today.

The key verse in this whole book is verse 24 of chapter 5: 'But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream'. When you pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come' - do you understand what you're praying when you say 'Thy kingdom come'? If the Lord should return today, what would it mean for you? Would it upset your plans? How would He find you? Do you know the New Testament teaches that some Christians will be ashamed when the Lord Jesus returns again? First John 2: 'Now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming'. I rejoice in the second coming of Jesus, the joyful anticipation, but it's not meant to be a cause for apathy! It's meant to be a great motivation for holy living. John said it again in his little epistle: 'Everyone who has this hope in Him' - capital 'H' - 'purifies

himself' - small 'H' - 'even as He is pure' - capital 'H'. The hope of Jesus' return ought to make us holy, 'Seeing all these things shall be dissolved', Peter says, 'What manner of persons ought we to be in all holiness and conversation' - it's meant to be a motivation for faithful service. Jesus said: 'Blessed is that servant whom his Lord will find so doing when he comes'.

It's amazing how, in Amos' day, God's people could use theology, and even verses of the Bible, to disobey the declared will of God. You know, the same thing is going on today - it is. We can find a confidence in a spurious security that gets us out, we think, of what God requires of us now. The third thing he speaks to them in this third charge of apathy - he wants them to see the chastening of the Lord that they might seek the Lord, he wants them to see their confidence in a spurious security, but thirdly he wants them to see that they were complacent in carnal comfort. Verse 1 of chapter 6: 'Woe to you who are at ease in Zion!'.

Amos continues his tears and his lament over their sins, and in verses 1 to 6 he speaks about their indifference and their indulgence. In verses 7 through to 14 he speaks about their injustice, their morality, their idolatry - they are at ease in Zion. Tell me that's not a description of 21st-century Christendom in the Western world today. A woe is pronounced to all those, look down the chapter, all those who lie on beds of ivory, who stretch out on their couches, eat all they want, who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, who drink wine from bowls, who anoint themselves with the most expensive perfumes and recline at banquets - and all of this at the expense of the kingdom of God in Israel, and today at the expense of the kingdom of Christ's church!

I'm not the only one who thinks like this. William MacDonald, if you can get any of his writings - I quoted a book last night and, by the way, it's not a hard book, 'Revolution in World Missions', it's not a hard book to read, it's not a big tome, it's for everybody - but if you want to read any other good books, 'True Discipleship' by William MacDonald, and many other books that he has written that are life changing. He says this: 'Luxury living abounds on every hand while souls are dying for the want of the Gospel. Christians are wearing crowns instead of bearing a cross. We become more emotionally stirred over sports, politics, television, than we do over Christ. There is little sense of spiritual need, there is little longing for true revival. We give the best of our lives to the business world, and then we turn over the remnants of a wasted career to the Saviour. We cater to our bodies, which in a few short years will return to the dust. We accumulate, instead of forsake. We lay up treasures on earth instead of heaven. The general attitude is, 'Nothing too good for the people of God! If I don't pamper myself, who will? Let's get ahead in the world and give our spare evenings to the Lord'. MacDonald says: 'This is the condition on the eve of Christ's return'. Another prophet of social justice was James the apostle - I don't have time tonight, but if you go home and read chapter 5 verses 1 to 6 of James' epistle, it will fall on you like a hammer blow - it's devastating!

Isaiah said: 'There is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because

of our iniquities'. Leonard Ravenhill, in his book 'Why Revival Tarries', put it into a poem, Amos 6 verse 1, like this:

'Could a mariner sit idle if he heard the drowning cry?
Could a doctor sit in comfort and just let his patients die?
Could a fireman sit idle, let men burn and lend no hand?
Can you sit at ease in Zion with the world around you damned?'

One of the most touching stories I've ever read, and with this I close, is told by Amy Wilson Carmichael who served her Lord as a missionary to India. One night in her diary she wrote these words, listen carefully, if you can and wish to, close your eyes and picture this. She says: 'I could not go asleep. So I lay awake and looked; and I saw, as it seemed, this: that I stood on a grassy sward and at my feet a precipice broke sheer down into infinite space. Back I drew, dizzy at the depth. Then I saw people moving single file along the grass. They were making for the edge. There was a woman with a baby in her arms and another little child holding onto her dress. She was on the very verge. Then I saw that she was blind. She lifted her foot for the next step - it trod air. Oh, the cry as they went over! Then I saw more streams of people from all parts. They were blind, stone-blind; all made straight for the precipice edge. There were shrieks as they suddenly knew themselves falling, and a tossing up of helpless arms, clutching at empty air. Then I saw that along the edge there were sentries set at intervals. But the intervals were too far apart, too great, and too wide, there were unguarded gaps between. And over these gaps the people fell in their blindness, quite unwarned, and the gulf yawned like the mouth of hell. Then I saw, like a little picture of peace, a group of people under some trees, with their backs to the gulf. They were making daisy-chains. There was another group. It was made up of people whose great desire was to get more sentries; but they found that very few wanted to go. Once a girl stood alone in her place, waving people back; but her mother and other relatives called, and reminded her that her furlough was due. Being tired and needing a change she had to go and rest for a while; but no one was sent to guard her gap, and over and over the people fell, like a waterfall of souls. Once a child caught a tuft of grass that grew on the very brink of the gulf; it clung convulsively and it called, but nobody seemed to hear. Then the roots of grass gave way, and with a cry the child went over. And the girl who longed to be back in the gap thought she heard the little cry and she sprang up and wanted to go, at which they reproved her; then they sang a hymn. Then through the hymn the pain of a million broken hearts rung out in one full drop, one sob. It was the Cry of Blood'.

I know these are hard messages I'm bringing each night, believe me I'm aware. Will we receive the word of God as it is? Is the Lord chastening you this evening that you might live? Is He calling you tonight to flee from complacency in carnal comfort? Are there those here tonight whom God has spoken to, who will say with Charles Wesley:

'I want an even strong desire,
I want a calmly fervent zeal,
To save poor souls out of the fire,
To snatch them from the verge of hell,

And turn them to a pardoning God,
And quench the brands in Jesus' blood'.

Is there one, is there one? Let us pray. Our God is the God who longs for restoration and reconciliation. He wants you to come tonight, if you're not saved. Jesus took your judgement that you might be never judged. God has not appointed us to wrath, but to deliverance, salvation. But Christian, there is bema - if you judged yourself you would not be judged. Could it be said tonight that all this congregation at the close of this meeting would be seeking the Lord? Some of you church leaders here tonight, maybe you think I'm just a young fellow that's very zealous and that I'll calm down when I go into my 50s or something? Would any of you be prepared to hold the program, to press pause, and to unite with brothers and sisters in Christ - even of other churches that maybe you look down on perhaps - for this nation that is on its way to hell, in order that God's people would seek Him again with all their hearts?

Father, I pray that this message which You have given will not be wasted on me, the giver, or on these dear people. Lord, I am the chief of sinners, I have no business talking down to people - I just, Lord, ask that we would be what we are destined to be, that we would stop fighting with Your chastisement, with Your discipline, but embrace it that all the quicker we might be holy, that we might see the Lord. For His glory and for the extension of His kingdom we pray, Amen.

The God Of Justice - Chapter 5

"The Sentence"

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by David Legge*

Good evening. Where does a week go? Hard to believe it's all over, almost! We're almost finished a week of ministry under the sound of God's word morning and evening, and I know that it's been a blessed time for me, and I hope and trust that all of you can testify to that as we have not only met together, but I believe met with God.

I want to thank, just before I begin my message tonight, the CPA for the invitation to return to this convention to preach the word of God. I do count it a great privilege, and I want to thank them for asking me to come and share in this very special occasion. I want to thank them also for inviting the whole family, and the accommodation that they set up for us was tremendous, and it was a real blessing to have the family with me as I was ministering this week - it would definitely have been very different to be running up and down from Portadown each day - but it combined a bit of a break, especially for the children, with ministry here. We do appreciate that very greatly.

Also the S.O.S. Club that is going on now, that have been looking after my children, that has been a real blessing, especially for my wife, allowing her to come and enjoy the ministry of God's word. It's a tremendous idea - so many churches, even up to now, don't have creches, would you believe it, and it's a very blessed thing particularly for mothers, to hear the word of God - especially when the husband and the father is the preacher!

I really have enjoyed fellowship with the Rev Noel Darragh. He said this morning that I was only a name to him before this convention, and he was really the same - though his reputation went before him, and I have some friends who know him and love him dearly, and I have grown to love him over this week in the sweet ministry that we've had from the prophet Isaiah. I do count him now as a good friend after this week and enjoying fellowship with him.

Thank you to you all. You know, it would be some job to stand up here and preach, and nobody in the pews! You've been here - some of you have been here every morning and every evening. At the door, when the preacher has given all that he can, and he's shaking hands, it's wonderful to have your encouragement and to have the assurance of your prayers. I do appreciate some of you intimating that you will pray for us from here on in - and thank you for that. Some of you didn't get our prayer letter, they ran out of them on the table, there might be some left now, we brought a few extra and you can get that this evening. I'm sure I've forgotten to thank someone, but forgive me for that - but we give all the praise and glory to God, don't

we? If we have anything, every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no shadow of turning, no variableness - and we give Him all the praise and all the glory.

We're turning to the book of Amos again tonight. As I've said, I haven't really been preaching straight Gospel messages each night - I do believe in it, by the way, I believe when we're preaching the Gospel, we are to preach the Gospel straight. I follow Spurgeon's exhortation that: 'If your objective is to win souls, take everything out of your message that isn't toward that objective' - but I really felt of God, as I told you at the beginning of this week, as I was up here a couple of weeks on holiday (people do come to Portrush on holiday, believe it or not! If you've been here this week you wouldn't think it!) - but the Lord impressed upon me to preach from the prophet Amos, particularly to believers. We have been applying some truths to unconverted folk - so if you're here tonight and you're not a Christian, there will be something for you - but primarily the message has been to the people of God.

On Monday night we looked at 'The Accused'. 'The God Of Justice' is the theme we took for Amos the prophet, but we looked at 'The God Of Justice' under the first heading on Monday night, 'The Accused'. The prophet accused eight nations, six Gentile and then the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, for their sins. Then we saw on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, three charges that the prophet Amos brought from God to the people over their sin. The first charge was 'Aimlessness', they were wayward - can two walk together except they be agreed? The second charge was 'Affluence', they were valuing the valueless, they were living for material things rather than the kingdom of God. The third charge, last night, was that of 'Apathy' - woe to you who are at ease in Zion! They were not stirring themselves up to seek the Lord and live.

Tonight we're looking at 'The Sentence' that this God of justice gives upon the nation of Israel, and how Amos delivers it through five visions that God gave to him. Now we're not going to have an initial reading, because I want to bring you through chapter 7, chapter 8 and chapter 9 bit-by-bit tonight as we follow these five visions.

But let's come to the Lord in prayer, let's give Him thanks for what we have received this week - but I believe God to meet with us tonight, and I believe God to take a dealing with our hearts. He is able. On Tuesday night I exhorted you to give all the keys of your heart over to the Lord, and a person at the door said to me: 'I am resolved to go home and give the last key to the Lord'. I said last night at the close of the meeting: 'Is there one here, is there one whom God has touched, and God has changed?' - and at the door a gentleman said to me, 'I was the one'. There perhaps were more. I don't know what God is doing in your heart, I know what He's doing in mine even through this ministry delivering it. But let's come and all of us open our hearts to God, and say 'Lord, I want You to speak to me, touch me, change me on this final night of convention'.

Father, we thank You that You are the Almighty God. We cannot restrict You nor restrain You. We come to You in all Your omnipotent power, and we come with our

impotence and our great weakness and need. Lord, we come as sinners via the cross, the shed blood, the resurrection power, the gift of the Holy Ghost - and we ask now tonight Lord, that You will come, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and that You will meet us where we are at. We thank You that You are a God of grace and mercy, and not just a God of justice and a God of holiness - but, Lord, You are long-suffering. We thank You that as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. We thank You that You remember that we are dust, You know our frame - and yet, our Father, You have given everything at Your divine disposal, that we should be what You have asked us to be. Lord, we pray that You will impress that upon us tonight as we come and hear Your word. Lord, help me, I need Your help. Lord, we take a moment to remember William and his family at this time, we think of his sister and his brother-in-law. O God, we pray that You will draw very near, and that You will bring comfort to them and salvation. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

So we're at chapter 7 then, and at the end of this great prophecy Amos beholds five visions from the Lord, five visions of impending judgement. Now, let me just cast your mind back, if you were here, I think it was Tuesday night, in chapter 3 verse 7 I alluded to the fact that there is great teaching concerning the gift of the prophet, whether it is an Old Testament prophet, or a New Testament prophet - and they differ ever so slightly. Nevertheless, the gift of prophecy concerns God revealing certain things before time. It is not only the forth telling of God's word, but the foretelling of what is going to happen. Chapter 3 and verse 7 says: 'Surely the Lord GOD does nothing', that's an emphatic statement, 'Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets'. We saw on Tuesday night that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and we saw that: can two walk together unless they are agreed? Or, as I said last night, it can be also translated: can two walk together except they have made an appointment? Because Amos had regular appointments with God - I hope you have them - and he walked with God (that meant, we saw, to be in agreement with God, he and God were not arguing about anything), he had surrendered everything to God; because of his walk with God he heard from God, and that qualified him to deliver God's message. God gives him five dramatic visions concerning the future of Israel.

The first vision is a vision of a plague of locusts, chapter 7 verses 1 to 3. The second vision is a vision of a devouring fire, chapter 7 verses 4 to 6. The third vision is the vision of the plumbline, that's probably the most familiar to most of you, chapter 7 verses 7 to 9. Then the fourth vision is the vision of the basket of summer fruit, chapter 8 verses 1 and 2. The final, fifth vision is the vision of the ruined temple in chapter 9 verses 1 to 2. So let's take each of them, and read each portion as we come to it tonight. We're looking tonight at 'The God of Justice', 'The Sentence' - the sentence that this God has pronounced upon Israel.

So the first vision, chapter 7 verses 1 to 3, let's read it: 'Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop; indeed it was the late crop after the king's mowings. And so it was, when they had finished eating the grass of the land, that I said: 'O Lord GOD, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small!'. So the LORD relented concerning this. 'It shall not be', said

the LORD'. The first vision that God gave Amos of judgement was the vision of the plague of locusts. These locusts are about to destroy the crops, the harvest - and as Amos sees it in this supernatural eyesight that God has given him, he begins to intercede for the people of Israel, they're small, and for their harvest. He cries out to God on behalf of the people, he becomes a go-between for the people, and the Lord stops the plague of locusts.

Now Amos, as we've seen, was a farmer, though he was a sheep breeder he still knew that locusts could have a devastating effect. A swarm could strip a whole harvest in a moment, and it's happening in some parts of the world even to this very day. What a picture of what God was going to allow to happen to the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians coming in in 722 BC and taking them captive. We saw how they would take them with fishhooks through their noses, through their lips, and carry them away like fattened cattle ready for the slaughter. This is what God was allowing to happen as a discipline, as the chastisement for their backsliding, their waywardness, their aimlessness, their affluence, and their apathy.

I want to say to you tonight that I believe that the forces of darkness can be like a swarm of locusts, and what locusts can do in devastating natural harvest agriculturally, spiritual locusts, demonic forces of darkness, principalities and powers, rulers of wickedness and darkness in heavenly places, can do this in the spiritual realm. When the walls and the foundations of the righteous are destroyed, often this is what can happen - irrespective of our heritage this can happen: we can be invaded by the locusts. We read in the New Testament that even the apostolic heritage can be devastated. In 2 John and chapter 1 and verse 8 the apostle John says: 'Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward'. Thank God for the blessed heritage we have in our land, much of it the overflow of revival even to this very day, we're still living in some of the remnants of the blessings of 1859 - and yet, in a moment, if we let our guard down as individuals in our Christian lives, no matter what our parentage is or the blessings of our lineage and family, if we let our guard down in our churches and denominations, the swarms of locusts of evil can come in and destroy in a moment - and we can lose in an evening what has been laboured for for centuries!

I believe it is happening to us in our land. The Old Testament prophets said, 'The ancient landmarks are being removed'. Now sometimes when you talk like that people misconstrue you're speaking about traditions - I'm not talking about legalistic traditions, like how you dress and how you speak, and what translation of the Bible you read - though they're not all brilliant, but nevertheless those are not the things that I'm talking about. What style of music you like - although they're not all, perhaps, appropriate for the Gospel and worship, many of those things are down to taste. What I'm talking about are the unchangeable godly principles of the word of God in the life of faith, those ancient landmarks are now being eroded and are starting to crumble in what is called 'Christendom' in our land. What do we do when that happens? Surely as we've gone through these evenings, surely God has spoken to you and opened your eyes, and unplugged your ears, to see that this is in fact happening in our day and generation? What do we do when the foundations are being destroyed?

Well, what did Amos do? He interceded, he went to God. When he saw this plague of locusts in a vision, he cried out to the Lord, verse 2: 'O Lord GOD, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small!'. So the LORD relented concerning this. 'It shall not be', said the LORD'. The role of the intercessor is intrinsic in deliverance. It is essential in the issue of renewal and revival among God's people that there are those who know, and persistently lay hold of God on behalf of the need. Like Queen Esther, who interceded to King Ahasuerus of Persia on behalf of the Jews. Esther, who had come into the kingdom for such a time as this. At times like these, times of devastation, we need intercessors who are willing, upon peril of their life - 'If I perish, I perish' - to go and touch the sceptre of the King on behalf of those who are about to be slaughtered. History teaches us, not just Scripture but history, that whenever God is going to revive His people, He moves a remnant to intercede and pray. We read in the prophet Ezekiel 22 that in his day: 'I sought', God says, 'for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land' - you see, the wall has broken down, the enemy is penetrating, but God is looking for someone, a man or a woman, men or women, to stand in the gap that God should not destroy the land. But God said in Ezekiel's time: 'I found none' - imagine that!

The work of intercession is essential for renewal and revival in the church. A great biblical example of intercession is found in the patriarch Abraham. If you turn with me to Genesis chapter 18, you will see where Abraham interceded for the wicked city of Sodom. Genesis chapter 18, we'll not read it all, but we'll read from verse 20 down to verse 26, Genesis 18 verse 20: 'And the LORD said, 'Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great'', remember we saw on Monday night that God takes note what is happening in the nations of our world, "The outcry against Sodom", God said, "and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know'. Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD'. If you read the book of Jeremiah, you will see that that, in essence, is the role of the intercessor - they stand before God. It is also the role of the prophet, standing before God to hear what God has to say. Verse 23: 'And Abraham came near to God and said, Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'. Do you see what he's doing? He is appealing to the character of God, interceding for wicked people. He is appealing to God's justice. Verse 26: 'So the LORD said, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes' - but you know the story, I hope. Abraham didn't give up there. He then pleaded for the 45, and God said He would spare the cities if there were 45 righteous. Then he appealed to the 40, then he appealed to God for the 30, then he appealed for the 20, and then he appealed for the 10. He held onto God for the people - that's an intercessor! A go-between.

We see it wonderfully in the patriarch Moses. We haven't got the time, but if you were

to turn tonight to Exodus 32, you would see the incident of the golden calf, and how Moses was on the Mount meeting with God and receiving the law of God. Then God informed him what was going on down at the foot of the Mount. The children of Israel, what had they done? At the behest of Aaron they had taken their golden earrings and jewellery, and they had put them into the fire and, as Aaron put it, out from the fire jumped a golden calf! They made it, and they wanted an idol, they thought Moses was dead up on the mountain. They started worshipping this golden calf, and God said to Moses on the Mount, listen to these words: 'Let me alone' - God is saying to Moses, 'Let me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them, and that I may consume them'. Do you know what an intercessor does? He doesn't leave God alone, he gives Him no rest! Then Moses pleaded, and said to God: 'The Egyptians will say, if You destroy them, 'He brought them out of Egypt not to save them, but to harm them''. When Moses said that, we read: 'Then the LORD relented of the harm that He would do' - what was Moses doing? He was appealing to God's character again: 'You brought them out of Egypt to save them, and the Egyptians will say You destroyed them, and You only brought them out to harm them'. He went between a sinful people and a holy, just God - he interceded.

Come with me again to Numbers 14, Moses once more. This time the children of Israel are afraid to enter into the Promised Land of Canaan because of the enemies. They have arisen up in insurrection, and they want to go back to Egypt. They disregard the promises of God, and they in fact are now going to lift up stones and stone Moses and Aaron to death! God says, because they're rejecting the prophets of God for them, and their leaders, God says: 'I am going to strike them with a pestilence, and I'm going to disinherit them'. He turns to Moses, and He says: 'Moses, I will make a nation of you. I will eradicate them, exterminate them, and start all over again with you, Moses'. Moses says, listen how he pleads with God, Moses said to God: 'Then Egypt will hear of it, and they will tell the Canaanites, saying 'The LORD is not able to give the land He swore to His people''. Moses the intercessor, what does he do? He pleads to the covenant of God, to the promise of God, and he touches the character of God on behalf of the people. Here's how God responded again to Moses: 'I have pardoned the people according to your word, Moses'. What a statement! Do you see the power of the intercessor? 'I have pardoned the people according to your word'.

Oh, I could go on, Samuel was a great intercessor, 1 Samuel 12, you remember the people, the Israelites again, wanted a King. Samuel knew that this was wrong, although it was in the permissive will of God. You see Samuel calling down thunder and rain upon their harvest, and the people go spare and they say: 'No! Don't do that!' - and the thunder cracks, and the rain falls, and they think famine is ahead. They plead with Samuel, the intercessor: 'Pray for us' - and Samuel retorts, 'God forbid that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you'. This was a man, essentially, whose ministry they had rejected - but he wasn't going to cease praying for them! Elijah, in 1 Kings 18 is an intercessor. He cries to Jehovah who answers by fire, and the fire falls. We go into the New Testament and we see Paul the apostle as an intercessor, as a go-between in Romans chapter 9 for the Jews. He says: 'I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh'.

When God is going to revive and renew the church, He raises up intercessors. My question to you tonight is: who will intercede like this for Ireland? Who will intercede like this for the United Kingdom? Maybe you're here these nights, and you're getting on in years, and you hear the challenge and you think to yourself: 'What could I do for God?'. I know I've been relaying a lot from the revival of the Hebrides and the Isle of Lewis. There were two old ladies, I think their names were Peggy and Mary, bedridden, who interceded to God for those islands - and God heard their prayer, and God will hear your prayer too if you rid yourself of sin, if you cleanse yourself, if you keep short accounts with God, if you rest in His grace, if you wallow in His love, if you fellowship moment by moment - but if you've a heart like Amos for the people that is breaking, and you can hear what God is saying, and you can see visions from God about what is happening to our nation and to our church, I believe God will hear you! E.M. Bounds says: 'It's a great thing, as the prophets did, to talk to men about God; but it's a far greater thing to talk to God about men'.

God gave him a vision of the locusts, and he interceded. See the second vision, verses 4 to 6 of chapter 7, it's a vision of a devouring fire: 'Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, the Lord GOD called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory. Then I said: 'O Lord GOD, cease, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small!'. So the LORD relented concerning this. 'This also shall not be', said the Lord GOD'. An awful drought is this devouring fire, that's what it is. It's going to hit the land, and Amos intercedes again and God delivers. Now here's my conviction, and I believe I have Scripture to back it up: though Amos appears to be the sole, lonely intercessor, receiving the second vision - if all the people, in a general sense, if a remnant of the people had arisen to pray and to intercede against God's judgement, I believe it would have stemmed the fire of judgement that came upon them. Now I know the sovereign will of God is a great mystery, but I do know this: when God made His covenant with His ancient people, Israel, one of the stipulations that He spoke was this in 2 Chronicles 7:14: 'If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land'. So if the people, even in a small remnant number, had turned to God - who knows how God would have panned it all out?

There is a great power in an intercessor, but there is greater power in an army of intercessors. Andrew Murray, in his book 'With Christ in the School of Prayer', said: 'The man who mobilises the Christian church to pray will make the greatest contribution in history to world evangelisation'. The man who mobilises the Christian church to pray will make the greatest contribution in history to world evangelisation.

The third vision is verse 7 through to 9, the vision of the plumbline. Verse 7: 'Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. And the LORD said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?'. And I said, 'A plumb line'. Then the Lord said: 'Behold, I am setting a plumb line In the midst of My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword

against the house of Jeroboam". The vision of the plumbline is the Lord standing at the wall, and it seems He is holding a plumbline, and He is testing to see if the wall is straight. What God is doing is, He's measuring Israel by His law, that's the plumbline - but she does not conform to His law, she is out of plumb with His word and with His statutes. Therefore judgement is coming upon the nation.

Now, it's at this point in these visions that there is an interjection. It comes from the state priest, Amaziah. He had had enough of this backwoods prophet Amos, this sheep breeder, this uneducated prophet. In verse 10 we read: 'Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said: 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive from their own land''. Then Amaziah said to Amos: 'Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, and there prophesy. But never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is the royal residence''. He interrupted Amos, he said: 'You are unpatriotic, you are treacherous! Amos, take your soapbox and return to the backwoods of the South and preach there, but you're no welcome here in the North'. Though Amos was from the southland of Judah, Amaziah and all the people saw Amos as a traitor to their nation, a traitor to their faith, and a danger to national security. Do you know something? Prophets have often been seen in that light. Jeremiah was seen as a traitor, in fact Jeremiah was so opposed that he wanted to hand in his resignation - and so did Moses by the way.

Can I ask you a question tonight: would you be willing to be thought a traitor to your country for the cause of Jesus Christ? Would you? Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying, Scripture is very clear that we are required to respect the powers that be - Romans 13 - we're to fear God and honour the King, 1 Peter 2. We are to pray, 1 Timothy 2 teaches us, for rulers God has placed an authority over us. But we also know from the New Testament that Peter and all the other apostles were commanded not to speak, by the state forces, in the name of Jesus - and they said: 'We must obey God rather than men'. Now I'm not talking here this evening about any form of civil unrest or breaking the law, or breaking out in violence - there has been enough hurt in the name of Jesus Christ and His kingdom - but what I am talking about is: there might come a day very soon in our land, in the United Kingdom, where we will be considered unpatriotic for standing beside Jesus. It might be that we will be required again to make vocal protest, peaceful though it is, but very vocal. It might be that we are required to make peaceful non-compliance with evil laws - what a challenge that will be for some Christian police officers. But sometimes, when being faithful to God, you can be accused of being unfaithful to your country and unpatriotic. Sometimes, to tell the truth, you become a traitor and a threat.

It happened to Hudson Taylor. He went to China at a time when Britain was at war with China - it's like a missionary going to Germany during World War II. If that wasn't stigma enough, Hudson Taylor took the monumental decision of becoming a Chinaman to Chinamen in order to win Chinamen. He shaved all his hair off, and he just kept a long ponytail like the traditional ponytail the Chinese men wore. He dyed it black and almost blinded himself in the process with the dye. He continually wore

Chinese dress everywhere he went. Now not even the Chinese believed that this was acceptable for a white man, they thought that a white man's dignity rested in his strict adherence to British dress. So Taylor's actions not only deeply shocked the British people at home, but it was shocking to the Chinese. He had gone native, and as far as the British were concerned he had lost all credibility, he lost some financial support, and it even went to the extent of him being labelled a traitor to the Empire - but he did it all to win Chinamen and women for Christ!

Now listen, the lesson is this: Amos was thought a traitor, and often when we walk with God, and we hear from God, and we speak for God, it will upset the status quo politically and even ecclesiastically. You see, Amaziah the state priest, he wanted to conserve the past, and he was motivated by self-interest. He was good living for a living, and he was lining his pockets of the people of God. He had a position, and he wanted to preserve the past because of that - but Amos, he was motivated by God-interest, and he wanted to preserve the future. Can I ask you, Christian tonight: what are you interested in conserving and preserving? Is it the future?

Amos wasn't perturbed, he told the false priest - we haven't got time to read it - 'God has told me to preach, I must obey, and as for you Amaziah, you will pay for your compromise and your sins because your wife will become a harlot and your family will die by the sword' - that's what he said! Now, after the first two visions, the vision of the plague of locusts and the devouring fire, Amos interceded for the people and the Lord relented. But you will note that Amos does not intercede after this third vision of the plumbline - the reason being: the nation had clearly been measured and found wanting, and it was too late! What an awful thing for the nation to be too late to be saved from judgement! Maybe you're here tonight and you don't realise how serious it is to be weighed and found wanting in the eyes of the holy God of heaven. If you're here tonight and you're still in your sin, you need to be warned that you're lost, you're condemned already, and you need to repent and flee to the cross of Jesus Christ! This is an awful thing to individually be in such a state - and I believe there are men and women in Ulster tonight who are walking in shoe leather, and it's too late for them because they heard God's voice at one time, and they resisted the Holy Spirit, and God has left them.

It's an awful thing for a nation. God is patient, we have seen that this week. He speaks again and again to the conscience of a nation. He allows things to go wrong, He brings a nation low and even to its knees - and if that nation still ignores God, what does He do? He raises a foreign nation, a power, to execute His will. For northern Israel He rose up the Assyrians. For southern Judah He rose up the Babylonians. Who is He raising up today for the United Kingdom, for Western Europe? Is it a war of terror? Amos refers eleven times in his book to 'the LORD God' - that is, the Sovereign Ruler over all things. God was in control, God was dealing with the nation - He's dealing with our nation! Benjamin Franklin was not a believer, but he said it well at the Constitutional Convention of the United States, he spoke: 'I have lived, Sir, a long time. The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men' - the LORD God.

First there is a vision of a plague of locusts, he intercedes, God relents. Then there is a vision of a devouring fire, the prophet intercedes, God relents. Then there is the vision of a plumbline, no intercession, but judgement. Now comes in chapter 8 and verses 1 and 2 a vision of a summer basket of fruit: 'Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, a basket of summer fruit. And He said, 'Amos, what do you see?'. So I said, 'A basket of summer fruit'. Then the LORD said to me: 'The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore'. The message was: Israel, like summer fruit, has ripened for judgement. Amos has used a lot of agricultural analogies, hasn't he? Here is the summer fruit ready to be cut off because they are ripe, so Israel is ripe for judgement. Again in verse 4, if you glance your eye down to verse 14, the prophet names the sins of the people of God: robbing the poor of their homes, verse 8; complaining about holy days interfering with their business, verse 5; setting excessive prices that hurt the poor, verse 6. His wrath is coming, he told them, in an earthquake, verse 8 at the beginning - and we see in chapter 1 verse 1 that this prophecy was given two years before the earthquake. Look at chapter 1 and verse 1, two years before the earthquake Amos give this prophecy proving that God had come. We read in Zechariah 14, historically this took place in the reign of King Uzziah. God was going to judge His people.

In verse 9 he speaks of an eclipse, in verse 10 of a funeral, and then in verse 11 famine. Look at verse 11 of chapter 8 please: 'Behold, the days are coming', says the Lord GOD, 'That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it. In that day the fair virgins and strong young men shall faint from thirst'. Amos is saying that not only will there be a natural famine of food, but there will be a spiritual famine for the word of God. Listen, this is what Amos is saying: 'If they will not listen to my word, the opportunity to listen will go. God will take His word away from them!'.

Oh you know, don't you, believer, that there is no substitute for the word of God. There is no substitute in the life of the believer for the scriptures, there is no substitute in the life of the church for the scriptures. Jesus said: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'. But imagine, for us, in our New Testament era, if the penalty for not using the word of God was losing it! You say: 'It couldn't happen!' - could it not? Here we have a picture of people left starving, left wondering. Verse 12, look how graphic it is: 'They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it'. I'll tell you: this is happening, it's happening now. You say: 'What are you talking about?'. Well, we've got plenty of 'Christianity', but very little prophetic word from our pulpits - and there is no substitute for that. Can I tell you something: young people are fed up with the sham, they're fed up with gimmicks and froth. There is a real hunger, particularly among young people today, for the genuine article. They want to be fed by the word of God. They don't want to be fed by legalism, or just naked precepts and principles of some kind of external Pharisaism - but they want to know what God has to say to them now for their lives today! Do you want to know that? You say: 'Surely we've more of the word of God

today than ever, there's not a famine, all you have to do is go on the World Wide Web and you've more sermons than you could ever want, we've more translations than you could imagine, more study resources, maybe more preachers for all I know' - that's not what we're talking about! I hear it and over again in meetings all over our land, Isaiah 55 and verse 11: 'My word shall not return unto Me void' - my friend, quote the whole verse! It says: 'My word shall not return unto Me void' - 'My word that goes out of My mouth'. 'The word that I speak', that means the prophetic word, it's not just about preaching the word, it's about preaching the word with the Holy Ghost upon you! In 1 Corinthians 4 verse 20 Paul said: 'For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power'. It's the word and the Spirit, it's the word for today.

Paul said to the Thessalonians: 'Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sakes'. Christians come to me and sometimes say this: 'Where would you go today to meet with God?'. Have you ever felt like that? Where would you go today to hear from God? I know of believers whose souls are parched, and they never miss a meeting - but they're not hearing from God. There is a famine in the word of God. I tell you, we heard the other morning about how few Bibles there are in China - and the ones, most of them, that are being published, are coming to the West - but I'll tell you, there's no famine in the word of God there. It's got nothing to do with hardcopies of the Bible, it's got to do with the prophetic voice. We have the Bibles, yet we've got the famine!

The fifth and final vision is in chapter 9 verses 1 and 2, the ruined Temple. Verse 1: 'I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: 'Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, from there my hand shall take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down' - what words! Amos now gets a vision of the Temple and the altar, and now he sees the Lord Himself at the altar - it's not a symbol, but it's the Lord in person - why is the Lord at the altar? Because, as we've preached every night this week, judgement must begin at the house of God! It's a principle right throughout the scriptures. We see it in Ezekiel's day, in years to come concerning Judah, about to be taken into captivity, in exile some of them already. In Ezekiel 9 we read judgement was coming to Judah, the word is given: 'Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary', says the Lord, 'So they began with the elders who were before the temple'. 'Begin at my sanctuary', says the Lord!

God orders the doorposts of the Temple to be broken, and the roof caves in. He's about to destroy the whole sanctuary and everyone in it, no one is going to escape. Look at verse 2: 'Though they dig into hell, from there my hand shall take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down' - imagine it! They are tracked down, anybody that seems to escape, they're tracked down. There is a coming judgement, we read in verse 9, there is a sifting of the grain, and God will send the Israelites among the Gentile nations and sift out the true from the false. Boy,

there is a sifting out happening now, but there is a sifting out that's going to happen on that great day of judgement between the good seed and the chaff.

Oh, you've been with me these nights, and I hope you've shared in Amos' burden - the God of justice accusing the nations, and God's people along with them; charging them with aimlessness, and affluence, and apathy. Showing these five visions of a plague of locusts, a devouring fire, a plumbline, a basket of summer fruit ripe for the picking, and a ruined Temple - and He's calling on His people to come back. Is there any hope? I heard the story years ago of an S4 submarine that plummeted down to the depths of the ocean, and that was in grave trouble, and the oxygen supply was being exhausted. They sent down rescue divers to see if they could salvage any life, and they put their ear to the side of that vessel to see if they could hear anything, and they heard a tapping in Morse code - and it was four words: 'Is there any hope?'. The nation of Israel is sinking, the church of the West is sinking - is there any hope? Yes! There is hope!

Amos closes this chapter in a note of victory, the promise of the future restoration of Israel. Verse 11 of chapter 9: 'On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name', says the LORD who does this thing'. If you go home and read Acts 15, you will read those very words recited at the first church council in Jerusalem, because today in the church God is calling out a nation of people of all nations for Himself, a peculiar people. I believe God still has a plan for Israel and the house of David in Judah in a day that is yet to be, but the promise is, listen: God will fulfil His word, God will honour His covenant, God will live up to His character - the God of justice. Though we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

Have you seen the God of justice this week? What will you do with the vision that God has given to you? You're responsible now. If you have heard His voice, harden not your heart. Let us pray. What is your need tonight? Maybe you're an unbeliever, and I know I haven't been preaching an evangelistic message, but the entrance of God's Word brings light, and maybe you have seen a just God before whom you will have to answer. It is appointed unto men once to die, and after it the judgement. Will you repent and flee to Calvary where Jesus bled and died for you, where He suffered for your sins and take your place, bore your judgement, endured your hell? Will you look to Him and live? Backslider, do you understand why God is chastising and disciplining you, because your back is toward Him and you're grieving His heart. He is a God of justice, will you come back to Him tonight? Believer, lukewarm, will you be fired for God? You've seen who He is, He is a consuming fire - what will you do? You're now responsible for the ministry of both mornings and evenings this week - what will you do? Church leaders, elders, ministers, pastors, what will you do? There's something for you to do now. The Rev Hamilton Moore of Connor Presbyterian Church, just before the revival of 1859, he said to some of those young men who ended up in a prayer meeting in Kells, he said to them: 'Do something more for God'. Is that what God's asking you to do?

Father, Your word has gone forth, and we pray: 'Let him or her who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. Gracious Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus we thank You for Your speaking voice this week. All we can say, Lord, is: we need You to revive us. Come, while here to Thee we bow, descend, O gracious Lord, descend, and come and bless us now. Let nothing be lost of this week, as we give You thanks and ask Your blessing upon the police force, the CPA, and all of us gathered here, and every family represented, every home. Bless us now on our onward way, and in future days, that we may learn what it is to walk with God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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