

A Famine of God's Word

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. I just want to read the first three verses of that again, but this time in the NIV. It's a very, as we saw, it's a great picture, Amos chapter 8.

And these two translations, the ESV and the NIV, get different bits more helpfully than others. So let me just read the first three verses and then I'll pray and then we'll have a look at it together.

This is what the sovereign Lord showed me, a basket of ripe fruit. What do you see, Amos? He asked, a basket of ripe fruit. I answered, then the Lord said to me, the time is ripe for my people Israel.

I will spare them no longer. And that day, declares the sovereign Lord, the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies flung everywhere.

Silence. Father God, we come here tonight, the end of a busy weekend, at the end of a busy day. Father, with Monday crouching at the door, so many things that we could think about in this time.

[1 : 14] But Lord, we pray you would send your spirit, that our minds would focus on what you're saying, that our ears would be open to your voice. That our hearts would be soft.

Father, that we would benefit from this time. And that we would see the real treasure trove of your word. And that we might hear you.

And leave here loving Jesus more. Father, help us. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So we're in Amos chapter 8.

It's our penultimate sermon in Amos. Some of you will be mortified by that. Some of you will be absolutely delighted. For me, it's been a real joy.

I think we've started to see an area of the Bible that we seldom go into. And my hope is that Amos will be a friend. A friend who tells us hard truths about what life is like and what we need to be.

[2 : 18] That he may go back on the shelf for a while. But we'll have learned lots about him and understood his message perhaps a little bit more. So next time he comes up in our personal devotions or in years to come where he's a sermon series, we might be reacquainted with him and learn to love him more.

And it's been a very difficult book, if we're honest. It's not been happy stuff. It's been predominantly dark. But don't worry. Because Neil's going to make it all better next week.

So tonight the big message is when the room runs out, when the room for repentance runs out. And Amos has been dark. It's been very, very dark.

It just seems like week after week on a dark winter's evening, we've been trawling through judgment after judgment after judgment. And there's been very little good news.

That really Israel is in God's crosshairs. And it's been pretty mortifying to those that heard Amos the first time. And pretty mortifying to us as we've gone through it again and again and again.

[3 : 29] It's very easy, isn't it, as we've read it, to think, well, Israel, why don't you just wake up? Why don't you change your ways? We can spend so long looking at them and what they've done wrong and completely miss what God's been saying to us through this book.

Got to be very careful of deflection, of looking down on them and missing what's going on in our own lives as far as this is going. It's very easy, isn't it, to see the speck in Israel's eye and totally miss the plank that is totally obscuring our vision of what's really going on.

And it's been quite repetitive. I'm sure we've got that. Amos has been hitting the same things over and over again. One day I'll remember my water. It's been hitting exactly the same things, that there's almost been a tediousness about it.

But just think how Amos feels. He's been bringing the same stuff to the same people day in, day out, week in, week out. We come to chapter 8 and nothing's really changed.

He's preached a load of times to a load of people and nothing's really altered. Amos, as I'm sure we know, is from the south. He's from Judah.

[4 : 43] He comes from Tekoa. That's just down near Bethlehem. He's a mixed farmer who keeps both sheep. We learn in chapter 1, verse 1. And last week we learned that he also does sycamore fig trees.

He grows and looks after them. And he comes to Israel during a time of great affluence. Things are going great. It's boom time in Israel. Victories won.

Territory gained. Bollinger flowing. Caviar heaped high on the Bellinis. This is a really good time in Israel. And Amos is sent by God. And he comes and he bursts their bubble.

Though prosperous on the outside, he says, they are rotten on the inside. The upper class are swinging from the chandeliers, but the lower class are dying in the gutter.

It's a picture of exploitation. It's a picture of utter chaos. And the fabric of society is completely disintegrating around them.

[5 : 44] And Amos comes speaking the roars of God in judgment to his fickle and faithless people. And we saw in week one, and we tried to repeat it, that there's a combination code to Amos.

Can anyone tell me what the combination code is? Good, Graham, you can stay another week. The rest of you, we'll see. 8351.

And it stands for eight oracles of judgment. That was week one. Where we had six for the surrounding nations, one for Judah, and then Israel has been the target from then on.

The six nations are done for war crimes. Judah is done for having the law, but disobeying it. And Israel is done for two major sins, social injustice and hypocritical worship.

We then had three sermons of rebuke. That was Mike Fernandez giving us Amos 3, where it was very bleak, but there was the hope of a remnant, like the hind legs of a deer being rescued from a lion.

[6 : 54] Then we had Ian take us through Amos chapter 4, and again there was a little sprinkling of hope in there. And then in chapter 5, Amos is almost conducting Israel's funeral, as they look to the future of this unrepentant people.

Then Graham helped us and did the second of the woes, which comes at the end of those sermons of rebuke, and then we have five visions of judgment.

That was John Shearer last week. He gave us the first three. And so today we come to the fourth vision of judgment. The fourth vision of judgment, and it's going to take up the whole of chapter 8.

And then Neil next week will give us the last of the visions of judgment, and then what we've all been waiting for, ever since the introduction of Sermon 1 in chapter 1, this wonderful oracle of salvation, which is this beautiful building in the midst of a very dark and dangerous town called Amos.

And so, we're ready to begin. I love a legal drama. I'm a big fan. I love The Good Wife. I'm a fan of suits. I really like law and order.

[8 : 08] I love all things to do with legal things. I think if pastoral ministry doesn't work out, I try and be some kind of legal secretary or something. I love the films, A Few Good Men, and The Firm with a very young Tom Cruise.

And I enjoyed Aaron Brockovich, and The Pelican Brief. I even enjoyed Legally Blonde 1 and 2. I love novels with a legal theme.

I'm a massive fan of To Kill a Mockingbird. Although I haven't got round to reading the second one yet. Has anyone read it? Set a Watchman, the sequel?

Has anyone read it? No? Perhaps we could all read it together. I like The Count of Monte Cristo. I even quite enjoyed A Tale of Two Cities. I did a university dissertation on crime and punishment by Dostoevsky.

My favourite Shakespeare is The Merchant of Venice, which is very legal. I like legal things. And what I like about them is the whole genre is about parry and riposte.

[9 : 15] Prosecution versus defence. That kind of backward and forward arm wrestle, as they try to outmaneuver each other, as they try to get one up.

And in the midst of this, there's plea bargaining and suing and counter-suing and class actions and settlements and pre-trial hearings. I bet it's not really like that. That's just how I imagine it.

But it's all against the clock. Because when the time runs out, you get these immortal words, we're going to trial. We're going to trial. The time's run out.

It's time that we're going to meet in a courtroom and we're going to put this right once and for all. Chapter 8 of Amos is kind of like that moment. That moment's been reached.

That God looks at his people and says, we're going to trial. I've given you seven chapters of repeated warnings in order to try and shock you into repentance. But you've not listened.

[10:14] So the date is set. The subpoena is issued. The summons is in the post. And so chapter 8 marks the turning point in Amos.

Chapters 1 to 7 have seen a succession of charges, accusations and evidence presented to try and get Israel to change their ways. But in chapter 8, God says the clock's run out.

This is going on. It's time to get our wigs on. It's time to get a jury. It's trying to get that little hammer thing. This is court in session. Israel will be defending themselves.

But their case is shot through from the start. And so Israel's trial arrives with certainty. God summons Israel to appear in his court.

And he does it in the most bizarre way with the most bizarre vision. God shows Amos a basket of ripe fruit or literally a basket of summer fruits.

[11:18] And you might think that's a good thing. Oh, it must be so refreshing. Oh, it must be time for Wimbledon if we're getting the summer fruits out. That's not what's going on here. But, this is a very clear and present warning to Israel.

The agricultural calendar of Israel runs September to August. And it's full. It's not like here where we have some times called winter where the ground's too hard to plant anything.

They have a very rigorous agricultural cycle. It starts in September and November where you harvest olive oil and olives. In November and December, you sow wheat and barley.

In January and March, you're planting and harvesting chickpeas, melons and cucumbers. In April, you pull the flax to make rope and other things. In April, you harvest the barley that you planted.

In June, you harvest the wheat you planted. In June and July, you prune back your vines because it's grape time. And in August, at the end of the year, you have summer fruits.

[12:28] Figs and pomegranates and berries. And so when God says, what do you see? And Amos says, I see a basket of summer fruit. No one's in any doubt what that means.

It means the season's over. It means the period's finished. He had all this time to repent and now it's over. We've come to the end of the cycle.

We've come to the end of the line. The space for grace, the room for repentance, the terminus of time has arrived. There's also, and again, I take the commentators for this.

There's also a wordplay going on. The word for summer fruits is the word quiet and the word for end is quick. But I think in the northern territory of Israel, they shorten vowels so it kind of sounds like quick and quick.

So the fact that they see a basket of summer fruits, a basket of the end is really what's going on. I think the NIV gets the closest with, I saw a basket of ripe fruit and Israel is ripe for repentance.

[13:31] That seems to me to be quite alarming to a people. What do you see about our judgment? Well, it's like the end, a big basket of the end coming.

I guess it's a bit like James 5.5. You have fattened yourself for the day of slaughter. You are ripe. You're full of iniquity and it's time to be judged.

You're at the zenith of your rebellion. You've been caught red-handed and you must be judged. And so this is not a nice vision. This is a vision of the room for repentance running out.

And so at the end of verse 2, God says, I will not pass by them. I will spare them no longer. I will never again pass by them.

And this would send shockwaves if you were an Israelite because you're looking back to a time. You're looking back to a time of Passover where God definitively did pass by.

[14:35] That on the eve of the Exodus, God was coming to Egypt to judge Egypt. And the only safe place to be would be found in the shelter and security that God offered sheltering under the blood of a firstborn lamb.

And so when God judged, his people were safe, but now his people are told, I won't pass by.

There's no means of escape. The space for grace, the room for repentance has run out.

There's no shelter, no refuge, no sanctuary. God is coming. And he's coming to judge. Terrifying vision. The future is not bright. It is very bleak and it's not orange.

It is crimson red. And these summer fruits would be particularly associated with Sokot, the feast of tabernacles. The time at the end of that agricultural calendar where everyone would gather in the

temple, bring their produce and celebrate for seven days God's goodness to them.

They would joyfully remember the fact that they'd had a harvest and that they would pray and rejoice expectantly at God's faithfulness that next year there would be another harvest. So here in verse three, when they're gathered in the temple, normally to sing these songs of joy, see what it says, the songs in the temple will turn to wailing.

[16:00] Harvest festival will no longer be a joyous occasion. And what is expected to be joy in the future is actually deafening silence because there is no future for Israel.

The celebration of life and fruitfulness and abundance turns to a terrifying picture of death and destruction and decimation.

Many, many bodies flung everywhere and silence. An ominous warning, the clock is ticking.

God is saying, I've given you countless opportunities and yet you've carried on. You've been like that stiff-necked people this morning. You would not change. I was pulling on the reins and yet your trajectory was set.

God has spoken to his people of judgment for seven chapters through Amos, trying to shock them into a response of seeking mercy, repenting of sin and pleading for forgiveness.

[17:09] They haven't moved a muscle. Did the sun that melts the wax has hardened their hearts? Their hearts are hard. And I wonder, friends, we must be very careful.

We must be very careful about continuing to ignore God's challenge and warning in our lives.

Seven chapters, God has been on at these people about this.

This is wrong in your life. The way you treat the poor is wrong. The way you come to the temple is wrong. He's been putting his finger where they're going wrong and they've carried on regardless.

And rather than just look at Israel and go, goodness, what a slow bunch of people. What about us? That in our own lives we read God's word, we hear God's word, we walk with God, but he puts his finger on areas of our lives that are not right.

God's word, God's word, and this is a stark warning that you continue to ignore him at your peril.

While he's still speaking to you about it, there's hope, but the room for repentance is not infinite.

[18:27] Is it a behavior we're entrenched in, an attitude we're clinging to, a past hurt that you can't let go, a sin you're feeding and not fighting? God has been on their case for ages.

He has been so gracious in flagging their sin up to them. And yet they've gone, carried on. They've ignored him.

They thought they were getting away with it. They thought just because judgment was delayed it would never come and God says in chapter 8, no, it's coming. The room for repentance is ended in your life as you continue to ignore what God is saying as I continue to ignore what God is challenging me on.

We're doing serious damage to our relationship with Jesus, our effectiveness in God's kingdom and we may even be storing up trouble. We read repeatedly in 1 John, didn't we, that anyone who continues to sin neither loves God nor has seen him.

And I wonder how true that is in our lives. Will a day come where God stops challenging us to us and he gives us over to us? He does it in Romans 1 and I pray that he would never do it in our lives so our conscience is seared and we no longer bother.

[19:54] the gospel knows nothing of cheap grace. It doesn't. Jesus didn't die for us so we could continue regardless and have him like an insurance policy that we can slap on the desk at the end and say, well, that the great love God has shown us must invoke a response.

Faith in the past, what Jesus has done, gives us infinite hope for the future which must encourage us to pursue holiness in the present. Or else we're just playing at it.

And so Israel's trial has arrived. Israel's trial is here but it's not going to go well because the trial itself is a formality.

This would be the worst courtroom drama anyone's ever conceived. From the opening credits everyone knows how it's going to go. No one in the jury is sitting on the edge of their seat waiting for the next bit of evidence no one in the public gallery is even dreaming of acquittal.

And so in verses 4 to 6 we get the charges read out, the indictments read out. These are not new crimes. These have been the very things that God has been on that case about since chapter 2.

[21:16] God even uses the same imagery, these twin sisters of social injustice and hypocritical worship. Look what's mentioned. Verse 4 trampling on the needy.

People going to the cash machine to get their hundreds out and not even going around the beggar on their way to do it but just walking over the top of it. Keeping to oppress them. Keeping them down in the gutter. Doing away with the poor. It's not bothering. Leaving them to their own devices. No charity.

No social justice. And them exterminating themselves because they can't survive. The dishonest trading is unbelievable.

Look halfway down verse 5 there. Skimping on the measure, boosting the price, cheating with dishonest scales and mixing in the sweepings, the chaff of the wheat.

[22 : 14] That is quadruple extortion, right? That is not giving people what they pay for, asking them to pay too much, measuring it on scales that are stacked in the vendor's favour, and what they're paying for isn't even the real deal anyway.

It's just the sweepings off the factory floor. Quadruple exploitation. Quadruple extortion. And not just trading commodities, but trading people.

Buying the poor with silver, taking advantage of people's destitution, buying them as slaves to ease the comfort of your own lives, but doing nothing for them. Even using a pair of sandals.

What a way to look on the poor, to think, oh, buy these with my spare pair of Birkenstocks, come, come and be my slaves. social injustice woven into the very fabric of Israelite society.

This makes the subprime mortgage look almost ethical. Yet now the God whose heart beats specially for the widow, orphan, and stranger, that God who defines what pure and faultless religion is, is going to roll up its sleeves and weigh into this iniquitous inequality.

[23 : 33] See, also there's hypocritical worship at the beginning of verse five. When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?

People sitting in church, not listening, not taking part, but thinking, when can I start earning money again? This whole religion thing has become an incredible inconvenience.

It's halting my commerce. stopping me getting my produce to market. Utterly distracted, utterly duplicitous. Yes, we're there in body, but our mind is thinking of the marketplace.

It's a real grave warning, isn't it, to sitting in church, but just totally consumed with Monday morning. Totally consumed with this and that, being here to feed our spirits, but thinking it all about shopping and selling.

That's what these people are doing. I'm sure that there's many husbands in here who will have that occasion where your wife is speaking and you've zoned out.

[24 : 41] Quite often she's telling you really important stuff and you've totally missed it. I wonder how many times we've been in church and God has been speaking to us and we've totally missed it because we're thinking about the Grand Prix or that meeting or that legal drama we were watching.

I'm sure that's what's going on here. The church attendance has become a chore.

Doing the religious thing has become a real inconvenience and really dented profits. God brings charges and Israel is not looking good.

There's no excuse, no mitigating circumstances, no legal loophole, no technicality. The charges are read out and the defense attorney stays seated.

No questions, your honor, they say. And this is what we've seen. These twin themes of social injustice and hypocritical worship are one thing. Jesus says the most important thing is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.

[25 : 53] You fail to do this one and you start not doing that one. The two are connected. this is the most one-sided court hearing in history proceeding at a pace as God prepares to give his verdict and here it comes.

Verse 7, the Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob. In Amos, God has sworn two oaths already. In chapter 4, he swore by his holiness.

In chapter 6, he swore by himself. And in chapter 8, he swears by the pride of Jacob. And that's very interesting because what is God swearing by?

He's swearing by that which is immutable, that that does not change. He says God's holiness, it will not change, so my oath is pure. Because swearing by my holiness, my holiness won't change, so therefore my vow won't change.

In chapter 6, the Lord does not change, so when he swears by himself. It's that same immutability that his vow will not be broken, but see what he's done here. I swear by the pride of Jacob, they've got to the point where their pride will not be quelled, where they cannot be humbled.

[27 : 07] He's using a destructive trade in their lives and saying you're so stiff-necked you won't change, therefore it's worthy of an oath. I swear by the very thing I'm judging you for because I know you will not change.

the sun has hardened the clay, their arteries have become so clogged and calloused with themselves that they have no time for God. And the judgment is seismic.

I will not forget says God. Chapter 2 verse 7 he says I will not relent. The God disposed to casting sin into the sea of forgetfulness that is his nature is so provoked by his people that he says I'm going to write these sins indelibly on my eternal memory.

So heinous, so persistent, so habitual, has this sin become? Will not the land tremble for this and all who live in it mourn?

that's a very ominous verse considering where we started in chapter 1 verse 1 two years before the earthquake. And here he's talking about the earth trembling as he judges his people.

[28 : 32] And the Nile is symbolized, the hydrological cycle of the Nile where it floods. and then the flood waters dissipate but leave nothing.

Even mentioning the Nile is haunting geography for God's people because the Nile is synonymous for Egypt and Egypt is synonymous with slavery and bad times.

It's kind of like talking about Bannockburn for English people or talking about Glencoe if you're from the McDonald's clan. worse God says I'm going to judge you.

I'm going to judge you but this time not sending you to Egypt. And then rescuing you after 400 years like we were looking at this morning. I'm going to judge you and it's going to be Assyria.

And return is not going to be on the cards. Worse than that it'll be like de-creation.

[29 : 33] Halfway through verse 9 the God who said let there be light now says I'm going to bring darkness. I'm going to undo all that I did at the beginning.

It's going to be a complete reversal. Day to night feasting to mourning singing to weeping plush garments to sackcloth shaved heads. I will make you mourn as for a first born.

only son. It will be bitterness everywhere. This is a verdict of pure catastrophe and absolute horror.

It's a vision of national torment and universal loss that God rains down on a stubborn heart-hearted entrenched people that have dulled their ears to his voice and seared their hearts to their own sin.

And see God is intimately involved in verse 9. Who is the protagonist of this judgment? Well it's God. I will. I will. I will. I will. God is there.

[30 : 40] He is so enraged by their sin that he says I'm coming and I'm coming to judge and I'm going to be at the forefront. That as Hebrew says it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Well Israel are going to learn just how terrible it is. in chapter 4 God has said prepare to meet your God. In chapter 5 he talks about it all going bad because God is going to pass through their midst. And in chapter 8 he's here and it's national and it's total and it's final. That's not even the worst bit. The worst bit comes as he lays out the punishment.

Verse 11 God will send a famine. Not a physical famine. We're not going to be phoning Bono and Bob Geldof and trying to get Band-Aid back together.

It's going to be a spiritual famine a famine of God's word. God declares that I will send a famine through the land not a famine of food or a thirst for water but a famine of hearing God's word.

[31 : 53] God has declared it but Israel has incited it because in chapter 2 they've told the prophets to shut up the people that were bringing God's word.

The Nazarites who were to be a pillar of God's word are the ones that are told to drink up your wine and don't worry too much about your vows. And now God has given them what they wanted.

A famine of hearing God's word. God is going to stop roaring. He's going to stop speaking. God's word is going to disappear from the land.

God will withhold his life-giving, life-changing, life-granting word from his people because they've had so much of it and they've done nothing.

And the picture is horrendous of people staggering from sea to sea, wandering from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.

[32 : 52] it's like the walker, the hiker, being lost in the highlands, but the mobile phone signals out, the map has blown away, the tent is ripped, the sleeping bag's wet, the fog has descended, and the blizzards come in.

That God says you are lost, but I'm going to withhold from you my word, which is the only thing that will bring you back. God says thirst.

The results are devastating. First 13, the lovely women and the strong young men will faint because of thirst. If you go into a pub in Edinburgh, there's two groups of people that will be well hydrated. There'll be strong young men who have the money and the lovely young women who will be the recipients of many drinks. thirst. And here, they're thirsty.

So, total is this judgment. The lions now stopped roaring. The lion, he was roaring in chapter 1, verse 1, is now prowling in the shadows.

[34 : 06] It is a catastrophic judgment. Idolatry exposed. What's going on in verse 14 is the sin of Samaria. I think it's a reference to the worship of the God.

God as Asherah, this fertility God. And I think it's come round about that they've been worshipping this fertility God in secret who legitimates all their high living and luxurious life.

And this God who was supposed to bring fertility has only actually ripened them for judgment. No more harvest.

They will fall never to rise again. total. My people are like a basket of ripe fruit. They're ripe for judgment.

Their sin has remained unrepented of. It's going to be catastrophic earthquake and everything's going to be different. And they'll fall and never get up.

[35 : 08] What a thoroughly depressing evening, right? A lot of you are thinking I should have just stayed. antiques, roadshow and songs of praise would have done me tonight rather than come and listen to this.

It's heavy. However, before we give up, I think there is hope. Hope, not from this passage. This passage is devoid of hope, but as those that know the end of the story, I think we can read hope into it.

That way in the shower on Monday morning, we might not just be tempted to just stay there. We stand here this evening as those not just given the written word of God, but those given the living word of God.

That we're not here suffering a famine of God's word, we have an abundance, a full disclosure of God's word in the Lord Jesus. We are not famished, we are privy to God's word in all its fullness. But I think it's even better, because as I've read this this week, I realize I'm not actually that different to Israel, I want to condemn them, but they're kind of as sinful and as rebellious and hard-hearted as me.

[36 : 16] But this is the truth, that God sent his son, the living word, to take all of this judgment on himself that I might have life, that I might never suffer these consequences.

God himself was the one who mourned as for an only son. Jesus was the one who's hair was ripped out as he went to the cross that I deserved, because I too have hypocritically worshipped God and continued in my sin and repented.

He was a young man who cried out in thirst from the cross. He was the one for whom the son really did go down at noon as he died for my sin on that terrible and awful hell.

He was the one who shed his blood so that God would not say, I will no longer pass by, but he was the one who said, if you shelter under my blood, I will pass by.

And you can be one whom condemnation is not a part of your life because you are in Christ Jesus. And so while this is bad news for Israel, I think, I hope, it only paints a bleak dark black ground so that the jewel, the precious cornerstone of Jesus Christ might shine all the more.

[37 : 45] Because we deserve this and we get that. We deserve this judgment but we get that life. And so three quick things.

As we sum up. Response time is finite. We see that so clearly in this chapter. They had seven chapters to repent.

There was space for grace but now it's run out. And yes, the Assyrians won't come for a while but they're coming. They won't turn back.

And this is important for us. I don't care how long we've been coming to church. If we have not come to Jesus in repentance and faith, these guys went to church all the time but it made no difference to them.

The real difference is made by trusting the Lord Jesus that he took our judgment for us. But also, we can so easily go out from this into Monday morning.

[38 : 45] We can so easily go and hang out with friends and colleagues and relatives. ourselves. But the clock is ticking for them in a very real way. Because Jesus is coming back and their life is slipping away.

And their only hope is to respond to this living word. Response time is finite. And true life comes through God's word. That's why when God takes his word away, famine and death is the only option.

that we know about the living word by reading the written word. And so if we have no access to this, we have no hope of meeting Jesus.

And so true life comes through this living word. Are we obsessed with this book? Not because we like reading words on a page, but we like meeting the God who perfectly reveals himself in it.

And as I was telling the students yesterday, it's the most glorious virtuous circle. As we were reading in 1 Peter 2, crave the pure spiritual milk of God's word.

[39 : 54] How do you build up a craving? How do you become addicted to God's word? Well, exposing yourself to it all the time. That as we learn of God, we learn how lovely and beautiful and majestic and glorious he is.

We see his plan in fulfilled and gloriously accomplished in Jesus, which makes us love him more, which makes us want to read more of him, which makes us understand him better, which makes us love Jesus more, which makes us want to read more of God's word.

The reason we all struggle so much with Bible study and daily devotions is because we don't do Bible study and daily devotions. But if we start, we'll get a real taste for it.

We'll get a real craving. We'll become obsessed with what God has done. And then I guess connected to that, substitutes for God's word bring death.

Israel does a lot of church, it does a lot of religious activity. But it's not done them any good because God's word is ignored.

[40 : 55] God's truth is sidelined. As you look through church history, there's been many occasions where God's word has been sidelined, where the sacraments have taken into stage, where spiritual gifts, where the traditions of man, war, where the type of worship music where social justice has taken center stage.

Let's be clear, a lot of that is really good stuff. But if it's not driven by God's word, it's not doing us any good. And so the main thing is that the main thing remains the main thing.

And this is the main thing and that's going to drive and bear all this fruit and bring real significance. But if this isn't the first brick in the wall, if it's not God's word we're coming to that is shaping our lives and giving us life, then we're in just as much danger as Israel found themselves in.

So chapter eight is dark. The beginning of chapter nine is dark. But by the time we leave next week, we'll be skipping off into the day as we see Jesus so clearly.

Let me pray. Father God, as we go out into this week, Father, would you keep our feet pointed towards what is good?

[42 : 17] Father, would you keep our hearts soft? Would you keep our minds fixed on things above? Would you keep our ears open to your voice that we might be responsive to all that you're calling us to?

And Father, that our eyes might be fixed with laser precision on your son Jesus. Father, we confess we're just like Israel, prone to the same selfishness.

Father, prone to the same just going through the motions and trying to keep up appearances. But we're so thankful for what we read in your written word of your living word, the Lord Jesus coming, taking the judgment we deserve so that we might have life.

And Lord, even more, you've given us your spirit that we might be shaped and molded. That we might be those that because of Jesus uphold the rights and the needs of poor people and have every hope of worshipping you in spirit and in truth.

So Lord, bless these things to us. Send us off into this week to be dangerous and different for Jesus, we pray. In his holy name. Amen.