

Prepare to Meet Your God

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[0:00] Good evening, everyone. I was going to start with rugby as well. I was going to say, if you felt a bit down after rugby this afternoon, I'm going to really depress you over the next half hour or so, as usual, John find the more positive message than I did.

But we're in Amos, we're in the difficult part of Amos in that the message is one of judgment, it's one of God's holiness, and yet I'm sure we've got lots that we can learn from it together this evening. So let's read together Amos chapter 4. Amos chapter 4, we'll read the whole chapter, it's not that long, and it says, Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria. You women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, bring us some drinks.

The sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness. The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fish hooks. You will each go straight out through breaks in the wall, and you will be cast out towards Harman, declares the Lord.

Go to Bethel and sin. Go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning. Your tithes every three years.

[1:13] That's probably every three days, actually, for better translation. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering, and brag about your freewill offerings. Boast about them, your Israelites, for this is what you love to do, declares the sovereign Lord.

I give you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town. Yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away.

I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain, the other had none, and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water, but did not get enough to drink.

Yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, I struck them with blight and milled you. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees.

Yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses.

[2:18] I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camp. Yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire. Yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel. And because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.

He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man. He who turns dawn to darkness and treads the high places of the earth. The Lord God Almighty is his name.

I'm sure God will be with us as we try to make some sense of this chapter this evening. If you ever watch soaps on television, not recommending you do, but if you ever do watch soaps on television, there's one sure sign that things are about to go wrong.

You have two people talking together and they say, we've been through really difficult times, it's been tough for the last little while, but things are going fine now, nothing can go wrong in the future.

[3:23] And that's immediately followed by a murder or a big fire or a confession of adultery or something that just blows everything up again. It's when people think things are going okay, when they become a bit complacent, that then they start to go badly wrong.

I think if you can get that picture in your mind, you've essentially got what Amos 4 is all about. You can imagine the people in Israel saying, we've had pretty tough times. We've had famines.

We've had droughts. We've had locusts come and devour all our crops. We've had wars. But that's all behind us now. We're doing well. We're wealthy. We're having a religious revival.

We've never had so many sacrifices on the altars. God must be really pleased with us. And God says to them, and not in a good way, prepare to meet your God.

It was when they felt things were going well, when they had become complacent in their religion, in their society, that God comes and says, you are about to be faced with judgment.

[4 : 28] One of the things that's come across very powerfully to me as I've been studying Amos and particularly chapter 4 is the danger that we can become complacent in that kind of way. We can look at a chapter like this and say, well, this is about people a long time ago.

It's about a godless people. It's about a people who were under God's judgment. We're not under judgment. We're under grace. It doesn't really apply to us. And I hope this evening we can see that a lot of this really does apply to us.

Not the ultimate judgment of God. If we are believing in the Lord Jesus and we have the grace of God in our lives, then we can have confidence that when we meet God that we will be declared righteous through the blood of the Lord Jesus.

But some of the practicalities of the way that the Israelites were acting and were thinking can be very relevant indeed to us. Before we get into the chapter, let's just orientate ourselves.

A reminder for those who've been here the last couple of weeks or if you haven't, just a brief introduction to Amos. So Amos is a preacher, a prophet who came from the southern kingdom of Judah.

[5 : 37] He was a shepherd and God sent him to be prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. And John presented to us very clearly two weeks ago that the code for understanding Amos is 8351.

If you remember 8351, then you're starting to begin to understand what it's about. It starts with eight oracles of judgment. There are then three sermons of rebuke.

There are then five visions of judgment. And right at the end, there's one oracle of salvation. And in 08351, we're halfway through three. So we had the eight oracles of judgment a couple of weeks ago from John.

We had the first sermon of rebuke from Mike last week. We're on the second sermon of rebuke this week. And then John will be back next week to give us the third one. So what we're looking at this evening is very much a continuation of what we looked at last Sunday with Mike and it will be continued next Sunday with John.

And this chapter, I think, divides into three main sections. So section one, it goes from verse one to verse three. And I've given that the title, Uncaring Comfort.

[6 : 48] You'll see why hopefully in a minute. The second section goes from verse four to verse five. And I've called that unworthy worship.

And then the third section goes from verse six to the end of the chapter. And I've called that unrecognized rebuke. And then at the end, there is God's message of judgment on the people. So with that in mind, let's get ahead into the chapter. The first thing we've called Uncaring Comfort. And Amos, having talked largely to the men in chapter three, or God three, Amos having talked largely to men in chapter three, he concentrates to begin with on the woman at the start of chapter four.

And he describes them as cows of Bashan. Now, in our culture, to describe a woman as a cow is about as bad an insult as you could ever get. But this wasn't in itself an insult.

In that culture, cows were very important. They were a very important part of society. And to describe someone or a woman as a cow was not the insult we'd be today.

[7 : 51] To describe them as a cow of Bashan might even be treated as a bit of a compliment. The cows of Bashan lived in a part of the country or exist in a part of the country where there was lush grass, where there was lots of feeding for the cows, where they could go big and fat.

And the Bashan cows would have been, I suppose, a bit like the Aberdeen Angus in our day. They were the best of the best. And they were the cows that people would want, the beef that they ate it, that the people would want to have.

And so it's not in itself describing them as cows of Bashan an insult. But what God takes from it is certainly a condemnation of the woman here.

Because he says, your comparison to the cows of Bashan isn't because you're the best of the best, you're the ones everyone would want. Rather it's because the cows of Bashan have this lovely pasture, they have these great fields full of grass and flowers and everything else, and they just tramp around, they take whatever they want, and they don't care what they leave behind.

And he says, you're a bit like that. You oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husband, bring us some drinks. He says to the woman that they're, what they are thinking of, what they want to remember, their luxury, their luxury is important to them, but they want to forget the poor and the downtrodden.

[9 : 17] Now when it says, they said to her husband, bring us some drinks, I don't think the picture is of sitting beside the pool, sipping pina colodas and saying, hey husband, come and give me another drink. I think rather it's saying to her husband, you go out and you make sure my lifestyle is funded.

So I can live a life of comfort and of ease, you go and do that, and I don't really care what you do to achieve it. The women probably weren't directly oppressing the poor, but they were encouraging their husbands to exploit others, and so God says, you are oppressing the poor and crushing the needy.

You who think you're the cream of society, who think that God has really blessed you, and you've got everything you need. Actually, you're getting it only through your own greed and only through exploiting others.

And so God says, there's a judgment coming on you. Verse two, very strong, the sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness. So we have to say, well, God has said you will be judged, but it actually says, the sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness.

The holy God has looked on them, and he has said, I am a God of justice, I am a God of holiness, and because of that, I must do something about it.

[10 : 36] And then you get the picture, and we're in quite difficult territory in terms of the translations here, but I think the NIV has probably got it about right here, and the picture is of the woman being led away.

If you imagine a cow being led, it'll often have something through its nose, a hook through its nose, and is led by that. And God's saying to the woman, it will be the same for you.

Now we know from contemporary history, and from pictures that we see, that the Assyrians, who would ultimately conquer the Israelites, quite often they led their captives away with a hook through their nose, or through their mouths.

So perhaps quite literally, what God is saying here, would come true. That these women who thought they were in great comfort, that they were secure, that they had everything they needed. Ultimately, what would happen to them would be led away in disgrace, into exile, or into slavery. And they wouldn't even be led through the gates of the city.

[11 : 36] That's what verse 4, verse 3 is about. They would go through breaches in the wall. In other words, a conquering eye would come in, it would destroy the walls of the city, and as part of the humiliation of the residents of the city, it would drag them out of it through the holes that had been made in the wall.

We don't know what cast out towards Harmon, and mean, Alec Matier says, it's one of the great unsolved mysteries of Amos. Let's not try and solve it this evening, but I guess it wasn't a good place for them to be going.

This was a message of God against the luxury of people, people who depended on luxury, and saying, because you've got your luxury through exploiting others, then you are going to be judged for it.

What's the relevance of that for us today? Well, we live in a society that in many ways has been built on exploitation, on people in positions of power and authority and exploiting others.

Now, whether it's in our own country, or whether it's the way our country in some ways has treated other countries, certainly in the past, and taking advantage of them in a way which is not fair.

[12 : 47] So whether it's the sweatshops in China, whether it's the banana planters in Africa, or whatever it is, in our society, we have been quite happy to see others exploited.

But actually, most of us, I say we're happy to see them exploited, we're actually quite happy not to see them exploited. We'd like to turn a blind eye to the fact that there is injustice in our world, and it makes us more comfortable, then almost so be it.

Now, we wouldn't express it in that kind of way, but that actually is probably how our society has acted. And I've seen things, certainly in the past, perhaps changing slightly now. And so there is a message here for us.

God has prospered us as a society, as a country. But has he prospered us, has our prosperity, to some extent, come through taking advantage through exploiting others?

Do we have a real concern as Christians for those who are being downtrodden in our world? I struck this morning when John was praying for other churches, when he mentioned P's and G's, he talked about their passion for social justice.

[14 : 02] That's a passion that all of us should have. And I'm not saying we go out with placards on the streets and demonstrate and that kind of things, but we shouldn't be willing to see injustice or to ignore injustice and to let it happen.

Now, hopefully, none of us would directly exploit. Others Christians do sometimes. Hopefully, none of us would do that. But perhaps, in some of the actions we take, even the things we go out and buy, in the way we treat others, in the way we look at situations like what's happening, in the Middle East at the moment, can we look at them with the eye that says, how would God view this?

And is our society, in some ways, going against God's way and exploiting others? Christians and I, early in the year, were in Miami Beach.

And when we were in Miami Beach, there was only really one church that was very easy to go to, which was the community church there. Now, it wasn't, by any stretch of the imagination, evangelical. We went to the service on Sunday and the minister sent quite a long time trying to defend himself against charges that he didn't teach the gospel.

And as far as I gathered, the gospel, where he was concerned, was God accepts everybody and we should too. So it wasn't the kind of sermon we'd expect here. It might be quite time to send him Graham's sermon from this morning, to teach what the gospel really is about.

[15 : 23] But the slogan of the Miami community, Miami Beach Community Church was, we do justice. And they do. We went to a soup kitchen while they were there, inviting the many poor and homeless in Miami Beach to come in and to see something of real love.

If you look on their website, there are lots and lots of things that they do that make it clear that they see justice as being a key element of Christian faith.

Now, very easy for us to think, well, we do gospel. And we do. And quite rightly so. At first, it doesn't preach the gospel. It is dreadfully failing the world round about us.

But as we do gospel, it is really important also that we do justice. If our lives really are being transformed by the grace of the Lord Jesus, which is our vision as a church, part of that transformation is being able to look with the eyes of God and to see what's wrong in the world round about us and to do whatever we can to make things better for the poor and for the downtrodden. Remember the words of God in Hosea, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. And it's great for us to come and to enjoy as church and being together, studying God's word, preaching the gospel, inviting others to come to know the Lord Jesus.

[16 : 55] But alongside that, we have to have the concern that God has for those who are not in such a privileged position as us. The Lord Jesus, remember, came to preach good news to the poor.

And while the proclamation of the gospel is our key thing as a church, we need also to have that passion for social justice and desire to see real justice in our world.

And not to say, I'm all right, I'm comfortable, so I'm not going to bother about anything else or where things come from or how I came to be comfortable. We need to have that passion for justice that God has that Amos displays here.

So no uncaring comfort for us. Let's move on, though. Verses 4 and 5, Amos moves on to the people's religion.

And so I've called this unworthy worship. Now what you need to understand with these verses is that God is being very, very sarcastic in what he says.

[18 : 05] that he is making the point by mimicking what would be a call to worship. So the call to go to Bethel or to Gilgal.

That would have been a call that would have been legitimately used for people to come and to worship God at his altars. But God is saying, you only do that because you are there to sin. Go to Bethel and sin, go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Now this would have come as a real shock to the people.

Because the people of Amos' day thought that they were okay from a religious viewpoint. Bethel and Gilgal had been shrines to false gods since the day of Jeroboam.

But there's no suggestion here that they're going to sacrifice to false gods. The suggestion appears to be they're going to sacrifice to the true God, the God of Israel.

[19 : 07] And as the people go, they say, we are really going to show our devotion to God. So the normal thing would have been to bring a sacrifice once a year to God.

People say, we don't just do it once a year, we do it every single day. Now, probably some exaggeration here for effect, but they're saying not once a year, every morning.

Normal thing, again, would have been to bring your tithes to God every third year. And I think with the right translation which the ESV and others use, the people are saying, actually, we bring our tithes to God every three days, not every three years.

The significance of the leavened bread is slightly less clear cut. It might be that the leavened bread was a kind of voluntary extra in the thank offering. So you brought your animal sacrifice, you brought your leavened bread, and if you're really, really spiritual, you brought your unleavened bread as well.

Or perhaps it was the fact that it was burnt, that the offerings normally would be given and would be taken by the priest. This was totally devoted to God. Or perhaps in this context, it was simply the fact that unleavened bread would be a bit more obvious than leavened bread because the yeast had made it rise.

[20 : 20] And so people could very clearly see, oh yes, you've brought a really good sacrifice to God and you might then get credit for it. But the point in what Amos is saying here is these people weren't coming to God with real worship.

They were coming to God from their lives of injustice, of oppression, of others, and they were doing what they saw as their religious duty and they thought, well, that will be okay for me.

And I'll just do a bit of extra in my religious duty to particularly please God and everything will be all right. And when they looked at their worship, the first thing they wanted was that it would look good. So that's in verse 5. Brag about your freewill offerings, boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do. They were coming to God, coming ostensibly to worship God.

Actually, what they were doing was they were looking around and saying, everyone should be really impressed with me and with how often I worship and with all the things that I bring to the altar.

[21 : 33] They really weren't coming to worship God at all, they were coming to look good to others. They also think, I think, coming to feel good. If you think you've come and you've done your religious duty and you say, God has prospered me and I'm giving back to God, I'm making these sacrifices, you're thinking, well, I'm all right.

God's going to really think I'm a great believer in him and follower of him. I feel good about my worship of God.

But perhaps what Amos is saying, what God is saying through Amos, it's no good looking good, it's no good feeling good if you're not actually doing good.

if your worship isn't genuine, if your lives deny what you would attempt to portray to others, then your worship is absolutely worthless.

Looking good, feeling good, may make you think you're good, but actually it's the way you act, it's the difference that God in your life makes in your everyday living that really matters.

[22 : 43] remember the parable of the Lord Jesus, of the traditionally called the Pharisee and the publican, and this guy goes into the temple and says, really thankful God that I'm not like other people, I do my fasting, I do my tithing, and I do my religious duty, unlike this guy in the corner, and it's the one in the corner who is so repentant and so broken that God hears and God forgives.

Well, the people were like the Pharisee. How should we come to God? Psalm 24, Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart. What does that mean for us? I think it means when we come on a Sunday or at other times, when we come to do our obvious acts of worship for God, that we don't come with the attitude, either I'm here so that I can look good to others, or I'm here so that I can feel good before God.

We must come with the attitude of the publican, the attitude of the one who can say, I'm not worthy to be in God's presence, and yet by the grace of God, by the marvellous things that he's done in my life, I am able to be here.

And we must also come looking back at our lives, looking back and saying, in the past week, has my life, has my testimony as a Christian been consistent with how I am portraying myself today?

[24 : 24] Or am I actually as hypocritical as these Israelites here, that I come to present apparently to God and to engage fully in worship, and yet the real worship, the worship that is in my transformed life before God, that is just not there.

The fact that I come to three services on a Sunday, however many I do, the fact that I'm enthusiastic in my worship, the fact perhaps I lead worship or lead services or preach, or whatever I do, these things are all worthless, unless I come before God in sincerity and with a desire that he is glorified and not that I am glorified.

It is so important that when we come before God, we come to give our thanks, our praise, our worship to him, and that we come with our sins confessed, and that we come with lives where we are trying to follow him and to live for him and to be obedient servants of the Lord Jesus.

So easy to be guilty of unworthy worship. Finally, unrecognised rebuke. Now I'm going to have to turn around because I can't read that on the back screen.

The words of C.S. Lewis, very well known, God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.

[25 : 55] It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. In other words, very often the way in which God tries to gain our attention and to point out what's wrong in our life can be through the bad things that happen to us.

And that's what the rest of this chapter is all about. Five times God describes bad things that happened to the nation of Israel. And five times he says, despite that you have not returned to me. The megaphone was on at full blast. It should have been obvious to the people that God was trying to say something to them. And yet they totally ignored it.

They didn't realise that God was speaking to them through the pains they were suffering. So I have to look briefly at these five things. Verse six, I've called it clean teeth and empty stomachs.

NIV talks about empty stomachs. The literal translation with some other versions use is clean teeth. Now the idea is if you've got clean teeth it suggests you've not been eating so it has the same idea as empty stomachs but it's just a slightly different idiom.

[27 : 14] So in other words God says in the past I've sent famine to you. You've had times when you couldn't eat when there wasn't enough when I was trying to speak to you through that famine and yet you ignored me.

When things got better, when you got the food, you forgot about it and my message to you wasn't received. He then said you had parched fields and dry mouths.

So with a picture of God withholding rain and the quite strong imagery of there'd be rain in one place and everyone would rush to that place, find the rain had gone there and rush somewhere else and it'd be going all over the place trying to get water, trying to get something to drink and hoping that somewhere the crops would have come at the time of harvest.

God says to them, you had this as a second warning. You had these droughts that should have spoken to you and help you to recognise that I was judging you and you ignored them, you still didn't return to me.

Third thing that God sent was blighted plants and devoured fruits. Verse 9, I struck your gardens and vineyards destroying them with blight and mildew, locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord.

[28 : 35] So plants were diseased, became unfruitful, inedible because of that, or when there was fruit, the locusts came along and they took it all so the people had nothing, again a time of a shortage of what the people needed, a time when they should have looked and said, what is God saying to us?

But they didn't, they ignored him. Number 4, called diseased bodies and rocked corpses. I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt, I killed your young men with the sword along with your captured horses, I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord.

Comparison of Israel and Egypt. Egypt for the Israelites was the place where there had been slavery, it had been a place of wickedness where God had judged the people of Egypt to force the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.

And Amos says, God says to Amos, I sent the kind of things on you that I sent on Egypt and even then you didn't recognize it and didn't return to me.

And then the final one I've called destroyed cities and scarred survivors, not quite so clear exactly what's in mind here, but it appears to be again that there was some kind of distraction.

[30 : 03] I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. If Egypt was bad, Sodom and Gomorrah was much worse.

Sodom and Gomorrah would speak of the utter depravity of man, the cities which were so wicked that God had to destroy them completely. And God says to Amos, you were like that.

I came and visited you, and we don't know what it was, it might be the earth grace, it might be something like that, but something happened that God could say it was a bit like my judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, but in my mercy I spared you like a burning stick snatched from the fire, so you just about got away, and yet still you didn't return to me.

And so says God, now is the time to prepare to meet your God. You've had all the warnings, you've had all the opportunities to turn back to me.

It's too late now, and this isn't a gospel message that Amos is preaching or God is preaching through Amos, this is a message that says you are going to be judged because you have ignored me, prepare for that time of judgment.

[31 : 24] Look in a minute at verse 13, but let's just apply this a little bit just now. God speaks to us as C.S. Lewis says, he shouts at us through our pain.

And I wonder how often when things happen to us, when things go wrong and are not the way that we would want them to be, how often do we look and say, well, what is God saying to us through it? We might pray that God will take us out of it. We might pray that God will send healing or restoration or whatever it is. We will pray to God for his help in the situation.

How often do we examine ourselves and say, what is it that God is saying to me through this? Sometimes God sends bad things or allows bad things to happen so that he will be glorified.

Not always remember John 9 and the blind man disciples say, well, who's in this man or his mother or his parents? And the Lord says it's so that God will be glorified that he's in this condition.

[32 : 27] So sometimes it is God sending things for his glory and through the way that we are able to trust in God and be a witness to his grace in our lives. That can be a powerful thing that he uses.

I think we also need to recognize that those whom God loves, he disciplines and God does send things, sometimes allow things to happen to us because there is something in our lives that needs to be put right and we need to be willing to listen to God's voice in these circumstances.

Five times he's spoken to the Israelites, five times he's spoken very powerfully to things that happened to them, five times they ignored him. We need to make sure that we don't ignore God when he comes with warnings to us.

But then there is the message of judgment. By the grace of the Lord Jesus through his death for us, we don't need to be concerned about the fact that when the Lord returns or when we go to be with him, if our trust is in him, then we are secure, not because of any good in us, but by the blood of the Lord Jesus and by his wonderful grace to us.

And yet there is a world round about that doesn't know him. There is a world round about of people who are going towards an eternal destiny which is separate from God where they will face the full wrath of God.

[33 : 57] And we can still go out to them and we can say, perhaps not in these words, perhaps in these words, we can say, prepare to meet your God, but we can go with a message that is not hopeless, this is not a saying that judgment for you is inevitable.

We can go with a message of hope that says if you do prepare, if you do trust in the Lord Jesus, then you can have forgiveness, you can be ready to meet your God.

What a motivation it should be to us. There are people around about who are going not knowing anything about the Lord Jesus, not knowing the message of the gospel, heading towards judgment. And we have the opportunity to give them that warning and to give them the opportunity to trust in the Lord Jesus and to know his forgiveness. Let it be a motivation to us as well as a self examination as we look at these verses.

Let me look briefly at verse 13. This is verse 13 where the Lord having said, prepare to meet your God, he presents his credentials. Why should they be concerned about falling into the hands of the living God?

[35 : 06] Because he is all powerful. He is the one who created, he is the one who sustained, he formed the mountains so the physical things around about us are his.

He created the wind so it's not just the visible, it's the invisible as well. And he reveals his thoughts to mankind. He is able to provide information for us that is vital to life.

We live, they tell us, in the information superhighway, more information available now at the top of a button than the whole of human history. And yet anything that has been truly revealed to us has been revealed by God.

Now, that revelation, of course, is in his word. And he is the one who turns on to darkness, night and day, treads the height of the earth, the Lord God Almighty is his name.

What a marvellous God it is we know and we worship. The one who is the creator, the sustainer of life, without whom the universe could not exist. He is our God and he is all-powerful.

[36 : 14] But as he is all-powerful, so he is all-just as well. He is the holy God and that is why we have chapters like Amos chapter four, pointing out that there are consequences for those who don't believe in him, who don't follow in his ways.

Our time's pretty well gone, so let me just finish with three conclusions just to summarise the key points that we've looked at. The first thing is let's examine ourselves and see have we got an attitude of uncaring comfort.

Thou do my selfish desires blunt my desire for justice in this world. Have I got that consumerist attitude that says I want everything I can get I'm not going to ask too many questions about how it came to be.

Second thing is about unworthy worship. When I come to God in my acts of worship whether it's in church or in other contexts in private as well, is my worship God honouring?

Or is it sinful? It's going to be one or the other. There's going to be no middle course on this. Either when I come to God, it's honouring to God because I come with the right motives and with the right lifestyle, or it's dishonouring to God, it's sinful because I've come with the wrong motives or with a life that is not consistent with what I would present in my worship.

[37 : 43] Let our worship be worthy before God. And then there's the unrecognised rebuke. Do I hear God's voice? Am I willing to listen to what God has to say to me?

And am I willing to put it into practice and to change my life if necessary? And have I got that desire to help others to hear it too? To bring to them the glorious news of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, that they may truly be prepared to meet their God and prepare to meet them because they know the saviour, because they know their sins have been forgiven.

So a hard passage in many ways in terms of the messages that God would bring to us. But let's take them, let's apply them in our hearts and let's go out and live lives that are worthy of the Lord Jesus who died for us and who called us to be his own.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word to us. We thank you for this prophet Amos and for the way that you, through him, are able to present your truth to us.

We thank you for your passion for justice, that you hate injustice, that you hate hypocrisy and those who would present themselves as being religious and upright before you, but actually in their hearts and their actions disprove it.

[39 : 10] We pray that we may not be like that. That we may have a concern for justice in our world, that we may have a concern for those in our world who don't know the Lord Jesus and a real desire to bring them to him.

And that when we worship, when we actively come before you with our songs of thanksgiving, with our words of praise, that it may be done with clean hands and pure hearts, and that it may truly be honouring to you.

Thank you for our presence this evening. We ask for your blessing now on us as we part, as we give thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.