

What influence has the Church on Society?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 April 2015

Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 0 0] Well friends, let us open our ears to hear the word of the Lord in the book of Amos. And if you have our hardback Bible, you'll find this on page 764.

I'm going to read Amos chapter 2 verses, sorry 765 it is, Amos chapter 2 verses 4 to 16. And just to remind you of the context here, the date is about 760 BC.

And Amos the prophet, speaking under compulsion from the Lord, he has an announcement that must be made. He's spoken first of God's judgment upon various Gentile nations round about the people of Judah and Israel.

You'll see Damascus mentioned and Gaza in chapter 1 and various others. But then when he gets to chapter 2 verse 4, he has a word from the Lord for Judah, the southern of the two Hebrew kingdoms.

And then from verse 6, he speaks to Israel, the nation in which he is living and prophesying as a prophet. So Amos chapter 2, reading from verse 4.

[1 : 1 0] Thus says the Lord, Thus says the Lord, For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted.

A man and his father go into the same girl so that my holy name is profaned. They lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.

Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath.

Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up some of your sons for prophets and some of your young men for Nazarites.

Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel, declares the Lord? But you made the Nazarites drink wine and commanded the prophets, saying, You shall not prophesy.

[2 : 5 8] Behold, I will press you down in your place as a cart full of sheaves presses down. Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life.

He who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life. And he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, declares the Lord.

Amen. The word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to our hearts and our understanding. Well, let's turn to Amos chapter 2, page 765.

My title for this evening comes as a question. What influence has the church on society? What influence has the church on society? Imagine our minister and our church elders sending the following letter to the leaders of the Glasgow City Council.

Dear friends, we realize that many years ago, the city fathers decided to shorten the city's motto to the three words, Let Glasgow Flourish.

[4 : 38] But you will know well that the original motto read, Let Glasgow Flourish by the preaching of your word and the praising of your name, meaning by the preaching of God's word, the Bible, and by the praising of the name of the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

We have long regretted the shortening of the city's motto, and we are writing now earnestly to request that the original motto be reinstated. Yours sincerely, William Philip, and the undersigned.

Now, what response would that letter bring? No doubt the city council would reply politely and smoothly. But if they allowed themselves to reply without polishing their language too much, their letter, I think, would read something like this.

Dear Dr. Philip and the elders of the Tron Church, You must be mad. The old motto is a cultural curiosity. It may have been thought appropriate in days long gone, when the links between the city and its churches were still strong.

Indeed, in the past, many members of the city council were strong churchmen and often church elders. But this is a new world that we live in. Today, we welcome people of all faiths and no faith into our city.

[5 : 56] We have no wish to impose the preaching of the Bible on our 600,000 citizens. We wish you no harm. But the days of the old motto are past, and you need to acknowledge that fact.

Yours sincerely, Glasgow City Council. Now, if you are senior enough, and there are a number here who are senior enough to remember the middle of the 20th century, you will know how much more influence the churches had in our towns and cities than they do today.

Christian ministers were respected and sometimes even feared. School head teachers, even if they weren't personally committed Christians, were expected to acknowledge that the Bible was the true source of discipline and upright behavior and truth.

School assemblies took the form of Christian worship. The Bible was read out loud, and prayers were addressed to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And this intertwining of church and society had very deep historical roots.

The gospel first came to Britain more than 1,700 years ago. And while its progress in British society has had many ups and downs, advances and reversals, the gospel has had great power in shaping British culture.

[7 : 17] A lot of energy went into the shaping of the institutions of our country, and much of that energy was created by the Bible. In education, in politics, in scientific work, in music and the arts, in medicine, and in the framing of British laws, manners, and morals.

Nowadays, however, the Bible and the churches have largely been pushed out to the margins of society. Christianity is largely tolerated as a kind of curiosity or a niche activity, but it has lost its place of influence in this country, as it is doing in almost all of the Western world, including the United States.

And one consequence of this sea change has been that Christian people have lost confidence, not in the power of the gospel to bring new life to individuals, but in the power of the gospel to bring so many people to Christ that the whole of society begins to feel the weight of the Bible resting on it.

Many Bible-believing churches are doing their work of evangelism and teaching with real enthusiasm, but the churches tend to be isolated units of godly endeavor and work, and God has become weightless.

Not in himself, he cannot become weightless in himself, but in the way that society perceives him. He carries no weight in the media. In this general election campaign that's going on at the moment, can you imagine a prime ministerial candidate commending the gospel or calling the nation to come to Christ?

[8 : 57] As Tony Blair's press secretary said famously about 15 years ago, we don't do God in this country. Now, there are strong parallels between what is happening in this country today as godly influence leeches out of society, and what was happening in Israel and in Judah in Amos' day in the 8th century BC.

Now, let me anticipate an objection. You might want to say to me, now, come on, Edward, you can't really compare Israel in the 8th century BC with Britain in the 21st century AD, because Israel's situation was simply unique.

They were God's chosen people living in God's promised land and living under God's written law. The setup was a theocracy, God ruling his people through his word, the teaching of Moses.

And the kings of Israel and Judah were expected to be enforcers of the teaching of Moses. Their job was to rule the people by the word of God, just as Moses and Joshua and Samuel before them had ruled the people by the word of God.

So that was a unique situation, a unique theocracy. Whereas Britain today is a democracy. Britain is not the promised land and the British people are not the chosen people.

[10 : 19] However, I think that that is a distinction between Israel then and Britain now that can be overplayed, especially in a country like Britain, because of the powerful influence of the gospel in our history.

Until roughly the middle of the 20th century, the word of God has deeply influenced our history and our conduct. Britain has produced Christian preachers and leaders of extraordinary power and influence, men who have called the nation to submit to Christ as Lord.

Think of the work, for example, of John Knox in Scotland, or think of the English reformers like Ridley and Latimer, later Wesley and Whitefield, later still 20th century leaders like Martin Lloyd-Jones and John Stott.

Scotland and England have sent great numbers of zealous missionaries to all corners of the globe in the 19th and 20th centuries and still today.

And from John O'Groats to Land's End, to this day, there are church buildings and chapels and gospel halls in every village and town and city. The influence of the Bible gospel may have declined greatly in public discourse in recent years, but the marks of our Christian history are writ large across the nation.

[11 : 39] And this is why we can identify closely with Amos, because he, as a spokesman for the Lord God, was addressing a nation whose commitment to the true God had gone into sharp decline.

But he was calling them back. Seek the Lord and live, he cries out in chapter 5, lest he break out like a fire in the house of Joseph. God is ready, Amos is saying, to judge you and to chastise you.

The lion is roaring, ready to spring. But there is a tiny window of opportunity for repentance. So come back to him while you can. That's Amos' message to Israel.

And surely he is a role model for churches like ours, because our job is to call back our nation to the Lord, our nation which has departed so far from him that the idea of Glasgow taking up its old motto again would be simply laughable.

Well, let's turn to our passage, chapter 2, verses 4 to 16. I'd like to take it in three sections. First, we see God's law rejected in chapter 2, verses 4 and 5.

[12 : 50] Let me read those verses again. Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his statutes.

But their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem. Now, the historical situation here is very interesting.

Amos, as we saw last week, and you'll see it again in chapter 1, verse 1, came from Tekoa, a small village in the land of Judah. And he has crossed the border northwards into Israel, and he's speaking to the people of Israel.

And his words here in verses 4 and 5 are a very sharp critique of what is happening in his own country south of the border. And remember, there was no love lost between Israel and Judah.

They were often in real conflict together. So Amos, from Judah, is criticizing his own country of Judah in the ears of the people of Israel.

[14 : 00] And you can imagine his audience nudging each other and saying, Jings, he's got it in for his own people, hasn't he? What would his mother think if she could hear him now? But Amos, Mr. Courage, is prepared to tell the uncomfortable truth about his own people.

He is prepared to be critical of his own motherland, as you and I need to be as well. To be self-critical of our own culture is a necessary ingredient of effective Christian witness.

So what is Amos' charge, or more accurately, the Lord's charge, through Amos against Judah? There it is halfway through verse 4. Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked.

So who is it that has rejected the law of the Lord? It's the people of Judah. The people who are still being ruled south of the border by a direct descendant of the great King David.

The people who in theory know by heart the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The people who know that God graciously singled out Abraham as the father of a race who were to be under God's particular blessing.

[15 : 24] The people who had received God's solemn, unbreakable covenant at Mount Sinai. The people whose ancestors had been led miraculously through the Red Sea with the walls of water standing up to the right and to the left.

The people who had seen the army of Pharaoh as they looked back being drowned in the waters. The people who had witnessed the mighty power of God bringing them for 40 years through that dreadful wilderness and bringing them finally into the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey.

If anybody had seen the power of God revealed, it was the people of Judah. But they despised that heritage. All that had been written down by Moses. As Amos says, they've rejected the law of the Lord.

God's Torah, God's statutes. Come on, boys, we live in a different age today. Moses died more than 600 years ago. The books of Moses are a cultural curiosity, surely.

What then had the people of Judah turned to instead? Well, Amos tells us. Lies. Their lies. And these are ancestral lies.

[16 : 34] You might call them transgenerational lies. The lies, Amos says, after which their fathers walked. Untruths which have been rooted in the culture and are passed on from one generation to another.

Now, in Judah's case, this was probably the lies of Baal worship and Canaanite religion, which were constantly festering under the surface of society, constantly threatening to pop up. What might they be in the case of a country like ours?

Let me give one or two examples. There are the kind of silly superstitions which nevertheless exert a grip upon people. Touch wood, for example.

You can see people doing this, don't you, occasionally? Or a mother says to her daughter, read your horoscope, darling. That's the way I found your father.

It always works. Well, how about this one, rather more important? The central plank of our educational philosophy at this school, says the head teacher on speech day, is that we are committed to helping each pupil to discover who he or she really is.

[17 : 47] If John or Jane can answer the question, who am I and where does my potential lie, then surely the school has done a good job with its pupils. Now, that's a subtle one because there is truth in that.

For example, it's pointless trying to be a concert pianist if you can't tell a C sharp from a B flat. It's pointless trying to be a dairy farmer if you're frightened of cows.

We do need to discover where our limitations are as well as our capabilities. But the problem with that educational theme, which we hear again and again year after year, is that it's so deeply self-oriented.

It assumes that my life revolves around me and my potential. Whereas the Bible teaches that life revolves around God. And it's in serving him and not ourselves that our genuine humanity is discovered and our genuine potential is realized.

Discipleship consists in renouncing everything and being prepared to put our priorities right according to Christ. And the lies embedded in our culture, no doubt there are many more that we could think of, they can lead the churches badly astray.

[19 : 00] One of the most powerful at the moment is the lie about same sex relationships. The culture, as you know, applauds homosexuality and glories in it. And some churches, rejecting the law of the Lord, simply fall into line with the culture.

But in that particular matter, and in lots of other ways, we must follow Amos. It will always be costly for us to be at loggerheads with the lies of our culture, but we must stand against them if we're not to be led astray.

Quite often you hear senior church leaders in England and in Scotland saying on the radio, of course culture is changing rapidly, and the churches must change with the culture if we're to expect to be listened to.

That's the fast road to ruin. So there's the first thing, we see God's law rejected in favor of the lies passed down through the generations.

second, we see God's grief expressed against the social behavior of the people of Israel in verses 6 to 12.

[20 : 09] Now just notice again this historical situation. Verses 4 and 5 are about Judah, and you can imagine Amos' Israeli audience rather enjoying Amos' criticisms of their neighbors south of the border.

So there must have been a stunned silence when Amos says in verse 6, for three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, says the Lord.

Israel? Amos? Israel? You're going too far now, my friend. Remember where you are. You're a guest in our country. You're eating bread baked in Israel. You're eating lamb cutlets grown in the hill country of Ephraim.

Be careful what you say about your hosts. But Amos goes straight on. He is not to be deflected. He has a message from the Lord, and he must declare it.

In the words of chapter 3, verse 8, the Lord God has spoken. Who can but prophesy? If God has said it, the prophet must speak it. Now do you see how Amos here is tightening his noose and focusing his words?

[21 : 16] He speaks first to the Gentile nations around the promised land. then to Judah, but then Israel. And that is his real target. That's why he's come north of the border.

The Israelites may not like it, but they've got to listen to him. What then is the grief that the Lord expresses against the people of Israel? Well, he brings his charge against Israel in verses 6, 7, and 8.

And the central feature of this charge is that wealthy and powerful people are grievously oppressing those who are poor and weak. Verse 6 and the first half of verse 7 are about corruption in the law courts.

Let's look at verse 6. For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke the punishment because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals.

Now, the righteous there are people who are taken to court by a rich person who wants to deprive them of land or even perhaps of their freedom. So what does this rich person do?

[22 : 23] Here's where the corruption comes in. Well, he goes to the judge privately outside the court, if you like, and he says to the judge, I'll give you a heavy bag of silver, my friend, if you'll find in favor of me.

Huh. Thank you, says the judge. That's very acceptable. I think we understand each other. We must stick together so as to ensure that our wealth and our status continue. Or it may not be silver.

It may be, as verse 6 puts it, a pair of sandals. Now, there was a well established convention in Israel at that time that if a piece of property was changing hands, the buyer and the seller would exchange a pair of sandals as a token that the property was being transferred.

So that final phrase of verse 6 refers to the unjust acquisition of property, where rich people essentially are stealing property from poor people. And yet the law courts are smiling on the rich and depriving the poor man of his proper rights.

And in verse 7, Amos vividly pictures all this as the rich man wearing, as it were, a pair of heavy hobnailed boots, getting the poor man down on the ground and crushing his head into the dust.

[23 : 40] So much of human history is there in the first half of verse 7. those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted.

Now corruption of this kind, of course, is endemic to the human race. It has a much stronger hold in some countries than it does in others. The United Kingdom, with its residue of Christian ethical values, is less corrupt than some other countries.

but we'd be naive to think that there's very little of this kind of thing going on in Britain. And we'd be naive to think that it could never take place in bodies that profess to be Christian.

Just think of this on the individual level, for example. Every time that you and I entertain the thought of getting hold of a little bit more money by dodgy means, Edward, this is the Tron Church.

This is a bastion of all the Christian virtues. Nobody who darkens the glistening portals of the Tron Church would ever think of getting hold of money by dodgy means. Really?

[24 : 52] Really? Corruption is endemic in the human race, isn't it? The human heart. But Amos is saying that it has no place in the people of God. It's a wicked thing.

Not only because of its dishonesty and greed, but because it always ends up robbing and dehumanizing the poorer people in society. The second half of verse seven and all of verse eight are about a cluster of abuses taking place at shrines in Israel, places of worship.

You'll see in verse eight, altars are mentioned and the house of God. Now that would not have been the temple because the temple was in Jerusalem, in Judah. But there were various sanctuaries or shrines in Israel dedicated officially to the God of Israel, but being used for all sorts of purposes.

First of all, Amos speaks about cult prostitution in the style of Baal worship. Now Baalism was a fertility religion. A lot of religions in the world have had that at their heart.

The idea that the religion is going to produce more in the way of crops and so on. So the basic idea in Baalism was that if a man had sex with one of the shrine prostitutes, the land would be more fruitful, there'd be more lambs in the flock, more calves in the barn, better harvests of grain and fruit.

[26 : 13] And the idea was that if you were active in this way at the shrine, Baal in his heavenly residence, who was a male god, and his female consort Astarte, or Ashtaroth, they would take the hint.

They'd see things going on down here, and they'd get to work in the heavenly residence, and thus the earth would become more fruitful. So this unbridled sexual activity had a perverse theological basis.

It was a religious orgy. And Amos is saying here in verse 7, older men as well as younger are all doing it. It's not just the young bloods, but their fathers as well.

Where the marriage bond is unraveled and despised, a society can only be heading for disaster. And of course verse 7 also makes the point that God's holy name is dragged through the mud by this.

But that's not all. As these men lie down with the prostitutes in the shrines, they're lying down on garments, cloaks and coats, which have been taken in pledge.

[27 : 18] Now this means that poor people have taken out loans of money from wealthy pawnbrokers. The pawnbrokers have taken the very clothes off their backs, knowing that the poor people are never going to be able to redeem them and pay off their debt.

Now the law of Moses said very clearly that a cloak or coat taken in pledge must be returned to its owner before nightfall, so that the poor man can at least sleep in it and not get too cold at night.

But these wealthy men are using the pawned cloaks to lie on with prostitutes. And verse 8 also tells us that these orgies are fueled by alcohol taken by extortion.

So these three verses, 6 and 7 and 8, paint a picture of a society degraded and debauched. There's corruption, bribery, greed, promiscuity, and drunkenness, and all done with a veneer of religion.

And the result is the grinding of the heads of the poor into the dust. And the manufacturers of this cocktail of wickedness are not the Assyrians or the Babylonians or any race of the Gentiles.

[28 : 27] They are the people of Israel. Now the next few verses help us to feel God's grief at this behavior, even more poignant. Let me read verse 9 again.

Yet it was I, says the Lord, who destroyed the Amorites before them, the people of Israel. The Amorites whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath.

Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up some of your sons for prophets and some of your young men for Nazarites.

Is it not indeed so, people of Israel, declares the Lord. In other words, it would be bad enough for you to behave like this even if you had no kind of historical relationship with me.

But you do have a potent historical relationship with me. I was the one who brought you into this lovely land flowing with milk and honey. It was I who removed the Amorites from the country.

[29 : 30] Amorites here I think is a collective description for all the Canaanite tribes that God removed from the promised land to allow the Israelites to come in. The Amorites, as verse nine puts it, were strong and powerful and tall, but I expelled them for your sake.

And, verse ten, have you forgotten your earlier history? How I saved you from your slavery in Egypt and how I preserved you and fed you and guided you for forty years in the wilderness?

And then, verse eleven, have you forgotten how I spoke to you through prophets that I raised up from your own number? I wasn't silent. I had much to say to you for your benefit, so I raised up prophets.

And I showed you the sweetness of godly self-discipline by raising up Nazarites to be examples of holy living to teach you my ways. But, verse twelve, you forced the Nazarites to break their vows by making them take alcohol?

And as for my prophets, you gagged them. Shut up, you said to them, because you were determined not to listen to me. God is expressing very great grief here, grief that arises out of his love for Israel and his covenant commitment to Israel.

[30 : 46] I guess it's similar to the kind of grief that parents might express to a wayward teenage son who is running wild and rejecting everything they've stood for. Son, they might say, we brought you into the world at the beginning.

We've loved you. We fed you and clothed you and taught you. We taught you how to walk. We taught you how to talk. How to avoid danger. Everything you've needed has come to you from our hands.

How can you turn your back on us like this and live like this? Amos, remember, he's not speaking to some wild northern barbarian tribe like the Picts or the Scots or the Anglo-Saxons.

He's speaking to Israel, to God's firstborn son, God's beloved. But Israel has forgotten the extraordinary saving graces that God has shown them, the kindness and tender mercy that he's showered upon them in the past.

And their crowning disgrace surely is the one shown in verse 12, where they stitch up the lips of the prophets to make sure that they cannot hear God speaking to them.

[31 : 53] God is grieved over Israel. And the very fact that he tells them of his grief through Amos shows how much he wants them to turn back to him in repentance and fresh obedience.

So we've seen, first, God's law rejected. Secondly, God's grief expressed. Now thirdly, God's covenant upheld in verses 13 to 16.

In this final section of chapter 2, God is telling the people of Israel how he is going to judge them according to the terms of the covenant. These judgments are exactly the kind of judgments described in his covenant in the later chapters of the book of Deuteronomy.

The heart of Deuteronomy can be expressed in twin ideas. Love me, honor me, and obey me, and you'll be wonderfully blessed, says the Lord.

But, here's the other idea, turn your back on me, disregard me, and disobey me, and you will come to ruin and disintegration. Disintegration at many levels.

[32 : 59] Your farming will fail. You'll be riddled with disease. You'll lose your military superiority. You'll be brought to a point of utter national despair. Your children will be taken off you, and you yourselves will be carried off into exile, where you will worship foreign gods.

In short, if you desert me, you will have to bear the bitter consequences of your folly. It's because God loves his people so dearly that he spells out the fruit of disobedience so graphically in the book of Deuteronomy.

And Amos gives them verses 13 to 16 because hope for Israel is not yet completely gone. Amos is going to hold out to them the possibility of repentance and restoration in chapter 5.

But their disobedience is so deeply entrenched that God is telling them how great the danger is for them. And look at verse 13. I will press you down in your place as a cart full of sheaves.

It's as though a heavy harvest wagon full of corn sheaves is going over them and pressing them down and crushing them. Flight shall perish from the swift. The strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life.

[34 : 17] He who handles the bow shall not stand. He who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life. And he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, declares the Lord.

In other words, even the strongest, the bravest, the swiftest, and the most skillful of your soldiers will come to ruin in that day. That is the day of God's reckoning. And that's exactly what happened to Israel some 40 years later, when the Assyrian army overran Israel, sacked its capital city of Samaria, and carried all its people away.

And that was the end of Israel. Israel, 722 BC. Judah continued for another century and a half, and then suffered a similar fate for similar reasons at the hands of the Babylonians.

Well, Tronites, can I call you Tronites, are you hoping for a crumb of comfort before I announce the last hymn? There might be a crumb, if you listen carefully.

Just look back over these first two chapters, chapters 1 and 2. As chapter 1, verse 2 tells us, right at the start, the Lord is roaring like a lion as he prepares to pounce for the kill.

[35 : 37] First, he announces judgment on the Syrians of Damascus, then the Philistines, the people of Tyre, the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Moabites. Then we get to chapter 2, verse 4, and then verse 6.

And the point is made there that the all-seeing eye of the Almighty, while missing nothing of what happens in the Gentile nations, examines even more carefully everything that happens in the Promised Land, in Judah and in Israel, amongst those who are called by his name.

Therefore, we can conclude that the Lord misses nothing of what happens in his church, in the churches of all generations. He sees everything, he knows everything, he assesses everything accurately.

But do you see what Amos does not allow? He does not allow the people of Israel to hear God's words about the other nations, and then to feel smug and self-satisfied.

He brings it all home to Israel. And in the same way, you and I and our church, we'd make a big mistake if we thought that we could enjoy homing in on the sins of other churches or other denominations, which appear to be falling short in various ways.

[36 : 52] These two chapters show that examination begins at home. We dare not assume that logs are in other people's eyes and mere specks in our own.

But, and here's the comfort. When you work through this passage, if you look at the reverse angle of the judgments and the griefs, you can see Amos's vision of the people of God as God loves to see them.

Let's do this. First of all, chapter 2, verse 4. The true people of God don't reject the law of the Lord. They love the law of the Lord. They delight to keep his statutes.

And they learn to discern the lies that grip contemporary society. They expose them and refute them for people's blessing. Verse 6. The true people of God set their hearts against bribery and corruption.

And that means that they welcome and love and support those who are poor and needy. They stand up for those who are afflicted. They stand alongside those who are afflicted and in real need.

[38 : 05] Verse 7. They cherish chastity in marriage and in singleness. They set their faces against the promiscuity of contemporary society. They model fidelity and respect.

They shun the drunkenness of the modern Western world and show how much more human and delightful life is when it's lived soberly and with self-restraint.

And verse 9. They remember constantly with great joy and thankfulness how God has rescued them from a slavery far worse than the slavery of Egypt. They remember the main point of the rescue.

They think of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus himself, taking up his cross for their sake and walking out of Jerusalem and allowing men who knew not what they were doing to nail him to it.

So that sin, the problem of sin, could be dealt with fully and eternally. Verse 12. They respect self-discipline.

[39 : 07] And far from gagging the prophets, they love to read the words of the prophets and the evangelists and the apostles. And verse 13. They look forward with great joy to the moment when freed from all fear of the downward pressure of judgment, they shall see the Lord, their Savior, face to face.

Is it possible then that the Christian church could ever again influence British society, Western society, so as to make the whole of society feel again the weight and the power of God's truth?

Is it possible that a city, a modern city like ours, could ever again contemplate including reference to the Bible and the grace of God in its civic motto? Amos' vision, as he opens up God's judgments, is a vision of a renewed society where the word of the Lord is re-embraced, where the lies, the falsehoods of society are confronted and refuted.

Now, this is a very important point. We'd be wrong to think that society could ever be Christianized by changing our laws or our policies in education or housing or health care.

The gospel changes individuals who then come to love the Bible and the Lord. And if sufficient numbers of individuals come to Christ, it's then that the sweet fragrance of Christian living begins to permeate our institutions and our national life.

[40 : 44] Could this happen in Britain today? History suggests that it could. For example, in England, in 1739, Bible-believing Christians had good reason to be very gloomy at the dilapidated state of the Lord's Church.

But in 1739, John Wesley was converted. And soon afterwards, he and his brother Charles, the hymn writer, also a preacher, and George Whitefield and many others were preaching the gospel boldly.

And people were coming to Christ in very large numbers up and down the country. And the face of the country was changed. So, friends, let's continue with our work joyfully, enthusiastically, and boldly.

Evangelism, teaching, training, caring for those in need, standing alongside them. But let's keep our eyes on the city and the nation, as well as the church.

Amos is not interested in little holy huddles. He's calling the nation back to the only true God. So let's pray that God will stir up churches like ours, not only to preach the gospel of salvation, but to live it out, so that once again, our cities might know deep in their hearts that to flourish is impossible, except by the preaching of God's word and the praising of God's name.

[42 : 15] Let's pray together. Amen. Dear Lord, our God, we thank you so much for sending this man, Amos, to the people of Israel all those years ago.

And we know that in the midst of that declaration of judgment against sin and wickedness, there's this implicit and lovely appeal to turn back to the ways of the Lord and to discover again the sweetness of his grace and tender mercy.

And we pray, therefore, dear Father, that you will so stir us up and give us fresh confidence and boldness in the proclamation of the good news about Jesus, that we are sustained in this work, and that many here in Glasgow, and many others hearing the gospel through many churches up and down the country, may once again come to honor Christ, not to regard the church as just a kind of a museum piece or a niche activity, but the body of people who love the truth and hold the truth out to the nation.

And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.