

# There's Only One Place to Turn

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we come now to our reading from the Bible, from the prophet Amos, and if you'd like to follow in our church Bibles, you'll find this on page 767, 767, Amos chapter 5, and I'll read the whole of this chapter this evening.

Amen. Amos, the prophet, has journeyed from Judah at the call of the Lord to Israel, and he has his message from God for the people of Israel.

So Amos chapter 5 and verse 1. Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel. Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel, forsaken on her land, with none to raise her up. For thus says the Lord God, the city that went out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel.

For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, seek me and live, but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal, or cross over to Beersheba.

[ 1 : 17 ] For Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the Lord, and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour with none to quench it for Bethel.

O you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth. He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth.

The Lord is his name, who makes destruction flash forth against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress. They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth.

Therefore, because you trample on the poor, and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them.

You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins. You who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.

[ 2 : 32 ] Therefore, he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time. Seek good and not evil, that you may live. And so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said.

Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord, In all the squares there shall be wailing, and in all the streets they shall say, Alas, alas!

They shall call the farmers to mourning, and to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation. And in all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through your midst, says the Lord.

Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness and not light. As if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, Or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him.

Is not the day of the Lord darkness and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

[ 3 : 49 ] Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. And the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs.

To the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

You shall take up Sikuth, your king, and Kiyun, your star god, your images that you made for yourselves, and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this evening. Well, friends, do let's turn up Amos chapter 5 again, page 767.

It's the longest chapter in the book of Amos. And when you first open this chapter, it looks a bit of a muddle.

[ 4 : 58 ] In fact, our English Standard Version, the one that we have in front of us, divides this chapter up into no less than nine paragraphs. And I think the reason why the editors of the ESV do that is because it's genuinely difficult to trace a thread of developing thought through the chapter.

The prophet appears to leap from one place to another. There are scenes from a funeral, then a law court, then farming, vineyards, Genesis 1 on creation, music and worship, even the forty years wandering in the wilderness are mentioned.

It seems to be an almost incomprehensible pick and mix of Bible themes. But I think we can begin to make sense of it when we remember the situation of Amos himself and what he was doing.

The book of Amos, the whole book, is essentially the notes of the sermons that Amos preached in the land of Israel in about 760 BC. And the two Hebrew kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, were not on friendly terms with each other.

Amos came from Judah. The Lord sent him north into the land of Israel. So he was a little bit like a Catholic going into a Protestant part of Belfast at the height of the Troubles.

[ 6 : 15 ] He would have been received with suspicion and hostility. And his sermons, they wouldn't have been like our sermons. I mean, we're so used to the scenario where you have a quiet and friendly congregation listening respectfully to a preacher who preaches for quite a long time.

Now here in our church, if the preacher went on for a whole hour, you would still be listening. You might start to cough a bit and wriggle about, but you'd probably endure it.

But Amos, it was a very different situation. Almost certainly he had to preach in the open air. Most of his listeners would have been at least a little bit hostile. And he knew that they were not going to sit down patiently for half an hour and allow him to develop his theme, as if he were preaching in the Tron Church at Glasgow.

So he had to resort to various preachers' tricks, or attention grabbers. We noticed his series of sharp questions in chapter 3. Do two walk together unless they've agreed to meet?

Does a lion roar if it hasn't taken its prey? And his gentle mocking of their religious customs and their call to worship that we saw last week in chapter 4. And here in chapter 5, it's as though he knows that he's not likely to hold any of his listeners' attention for more than half a minute.

[ 7 : 34 ] So he fires off a salvo of very short sermons. But the thing that holds these little sermons together is that each one of them is a sharp moment of self-revelation from the Lord.

In each of these mini-sermons, we see something of God's features being revealed. Now, of course, the whole Bible is a self-portrait delivered by the Lord to the world.

But here in Amos chapter 5, we have a series of very brief but focused moments of self-portraiture. And in a moment, I'd like to bring out five features of the Lord's self-portrait in this chapter.

But before I do that, and so as to help us to feel the force of the chapter a bit more, let's remind ourselves of what the people of Israel were like in 760 BC.

The short answer is that they were wayward. They were deeply wayward. And they'd been wayward for a long time. Amos arrived in Israel in 760 BC. But the rot had set into Israel about 160 years previously, in about 920 BC.

[ 8 : 44 ] That was the year, give or take a year, when Israel and Judah split into two separate kingdoms. The great King Solomon had just died, and his son Rehoboam began his reign in Jerusalem unwisely, threatening to rule the kingdom with a rod of iron.

Remember what he said? My father may have ruled you, may have chastised you with whips, but I'm going to chastise you with scorpions. And the ten tribes who lived in the northern half of the Promised Land told him he could go whistle.

They weren't going to be the subjects of a king like that, so they broke away. And they set up Jeroboam I as their first king. And Jeroboam, ungodly but shrewd, very quickly set up shrines for worship at Dan right up in the north, John O'Groats you might say, and Bethel deep in the south.

And he made two golden calves, one for Dan and one for Bethel. And he said to the people of Israel, these are your gods who brought you out of Egypt. So he cunningly mixed up elements of true Jewish faith, the God who brought you up from Egypt, with blatant pagan idolatry, golden calves.

So when Amos arrived, the people of Israel for 160 years had been worshipping these wretched calves, and yet they still spoke of Yahweh, the God of the covenant, as if he were their God, and as if it didn't matter that they'd polluted the true faith of Israel with their pagan idolatry.

[10:13] Now what was going on in Israel at the time is actually very similar to what goes on a great deal in the Western world today, where you have true faith, real Christian faith, and false faith, which can get mixed up together.

Let me give you just one example of this. There's a program that you can hear on Radio 4 every Sunday called Something Understood. Just raise a hand if you ever listen to Something Understood.

Yes, there are a few. I'm not surprised that there aren't many, because it comes on at a very unearthly hour, 6.05 a.m., and it runs till about 6.30. And then if you're a real glutton for punishment, you can switch it on again in the evening at 11.30 p.m., and listen to it all again, if you want to.

Now, what this program does is to open up a window on the way that religion is thought of in the Western world today. It's a Sunday program. It's about religion. The chief presenter is a man called Sir Mark Tully.

And Mark Tully, as you may remember, was for many years the BBC's correspondent in Delhi. He loves India. He knows his India very well. And Mark Tully has a very soothing voice, rather like the voice of a favorite great uncle, as he offers you a slice of homemade cake.

[11:30] Oh, have another slice, Edward. I'm sure you need it, that sort of thing. A reassuring and friendly kind of voice. And every week he chooses, or he takes a selected theme. And the themes vary a great deal.

Joy, death, marriage, suffering, loss, forgiveness, childhood memories, ponies, all sorts of things come up. And what he does is to develop the theme a little bit.

He then illustrates it with musical excerpts and readings of poetry and prose. And then usually he will interview somebody who is thought to be an expert in the theme of the day.

He'll interview one week a Hindu teacher, then a Jewish rabbi, a Catholic monk, a professor of English literature, a Muslim academic. But the underlying position of the program is this.

Religion, at heart, is a single entity. It's about how to live your life with serenity and joy and understanding. And it manifests itself in a variety of guises.

[12:32] Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, even modern pagans who go to Stonehenge for the summer solstice might get a look in occasionally. We can glean shafts of truth from all these different sources.

That's the underlying philosophy. Not so the Bible. In the Bible, God says, I am this and not that. I save in this way and not that way. I have sent one Savior, my son Jesus Christ, and there is no way of salvation except through him.

In fact, one of the great themes of the Bible, one of the underlying structures of Bible thought is not this, but that. That's the way the Bible teaches truth, negatives and positives.

Not this, because this is false, but that which is true. Now, the modern Western attitude to religion hates that kind of thing because it hates to draw lines between truth and falsehood.

[13:37] It wants to say, everything is really true in its own way. But the Bible occupies an altogether different landscape. It distinguishes what is true about God and man from what is false about God and man.

And in 760 BC, Israel was mixing up real Old Testament faith with pagan idolatry. And God sent Amos to call the Israelites to repent of their folly.

God loved them. He loved them, but he didn't love their ways or their mindset. So he sent this courageous prophet to summon them to repentance. So as we look now at chapter 5, we're looking at snippets of self-portraiture which have a very sharp edge to them.

God is preaching to the wayward people of Israel. He's appealing to them to return to their senses, and he is commanding them to forsake their wicked ways. Now, just one more thing before we drive off down the fairway.

These words of Amos are not addressed to us in a direct sense. And I guess that's obvious. They were addressed to the people of Israel then in 760 BC.

[14:47] So for example, have a look at verse 22. There's a mention there of burnt offerings and grain offerings and fattened animals. Well, obviously, we don't do that, do we?

Well, look at verse 26. You and I are not tempted to worship Sikuth or the star god Kiyun. But although these words are not addressed to us directly, the god who speaks them is our god, and his character has not changed since 760 BC, and it will never change.

So as we look at his self-portrait, we know that we're looking at features of the one true god whom we serve and worship today. The words are not addressed to us, but they are very instructive for us because they teach us about God's unchanging character and ways.

As he was then, so he is now. Five things, then, by way of self-portrait. First of all, we see the Lord who mourns.

Look at verses 1 and 2 again. Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel. Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel.

[16:00] Forsaken on her land with none to raise her up. Now, in the prophetic books of the Bible, the Lord often pictures himself as the husband of his people.

Yes, he is also their shepherd, their king, their judge, their father. And each of these ideas conveys a great truth about the way that he relates to Israel.

But there is no picture of him quite so filled with love and longing as the picture of God as the husband of Israel. Israel as his bride. It is a marriage relationship.

At least, it should have been. This is why in the New Testament, Jesus is pictured as the heavenly bridegroom and the church as his beloved bride. But here, the marriage has gone disastrously wrong.

It's almost as though Israel has jilted him on her way up the aisle. As though the marriage has not really been contracted at all. The Lord here in verse 2 looks out across the promised land and he sees his beautiful loved fiancé lying on the ground like someone with an incurable wound.

[17:10] And she's forsaken. There's no one to take her lovingly by the hand to lift her up and comfort her. She's what in days gone by would have been called a fallen woman. And what do we see in the face of the Lord?

We see tears and weeping and longing and lamentation. Now of course God is angry with his people as Jesus was angry with the many in Israel who rejected him centuries later.

But this divine anger is anger expressed in lamentation. Jesus of course was just the same. Think of him. He argued with so many Jews and had to condemn so many because of their stubborn hardness.

but finally as he approached Jerusalem just before his crucifixion he mounted the hill overlooking the city and he saw the city stretched out before him and he broke down and wept.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem would that you had known the things that make for peace but now they're hidden from your eyes. It's the same divine heart fallen no more to rise is the virgin Israel.

[18:19] You hear the same note same note sounded in verses 16 and 17. Therefore thus says the Lord the God of hosts the Lord in all the squares the town squares there shall be wailing and in all the streets they shall say alas, alas it's like a funeral they shall call the farmers to mourning and to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation and in all the vineyards there shall be wailing for I will pass through your midst says the Lord.

Pass through your midst words which echo what God did to the Egyptians on the night of Passover God will have to judge Israel as he judged the Egyptians which is a horrifying thought but it causes grief to the Lord and as the Bible molds our hearts and minds to become more like the Lord's heart and mind we too will learn to mourn over those who stubbornly harden their hearts against the gospel.

This message of the Lord molding our thinking to be like his it came out this morning if you were here this morning Alan who was preaching for us made the point that God shows no partiality towards Jew and Gentile because the gospel comes to both and therefore Peter the apostle and we should show no partiality and it's the same here where God is mourning we too should learn to mourn so when you're arguing about the gospel with a friend or a relative who's not a Christian you'll feel frustration and pain but also sorrow lamentation and even more so if you're speaking to somebody who once appeared to follow the Lord but does so no more the Lord mourns we too

need to learn to mourn now secondly let's look at the Lord who declares himself and here we're in verses 8 and 9 just run your eye again over verses 8 and 9 now what kind of a short sermon would you say verses 8 and 9 are what would the housewives the Israelite housewives hurrying to market have made of verses 8 and 9 if they happened to hear

Amos speaking them in a loud voice at the corner of the street what would the teenagers have thought as they walked along the road practicing how to look cool just look at verse well that's what teenagers do isn't it look at verse 8 he who made the Pleiades and Orion now most of us including me don't know our constellations very well I guess for two reasons in this neck of the woods we don't often see the stars do we it tends to be cloudy in this part of the world but also there's so much electric light on at night that we don't see much of the sky even when the sky is clear but in Israel in the 8th century BC with no light pollution and often not many clouds people would have known their constellations as well as we know our city streets and maybe Amos knew what the Israelites were saying about the constellations Pleiades Orion yes they come up every night just like clockwork very reliable never miss now says Amos

Israelites what do you make of the daily cycle of the 24 hours oh same thing Amos regular as clockwork sun comes up in the morning sails across the sky drops away again what would you say Israelites about clouds look here at verse 8 and condensation and the exchange of warmer and colder temperatures and rainfall how would you account for that in Israel Mr. Prophet didn't you do that in P6 geography water is in the sea remember gets caught up condensation takes place it becomes clouds it moves across the land drops on your head we call it rain no says Amos no Israel you have forgotten the most important element these things don't just happen it is the Lord who makes them happen he made the Pleiades and Orion it's he who turns darkness into morning and daytime into night time it's he who by the power of his voice calls for the waters of the sea and then pours them out as rain you're observing the creation but you're forgetting the creator and I'm going to remind you of him look at the end of verse 8

[ 22 : 37 ] Yahweh is his name now of course in our modern world there's an even greater disjunction between the creator and the creation some of our brilliant scientists these days like Professor Hawking get quite close to the truth as they examine and quantify the dimensions of the universe and they begin to think well perhaps after all there may be a unifying power that gives coherence to everything that we can see and measure but they will fight shy of confessing that there is a creator because to acknowledge God inevitably means bowing before him and that's what the human heart is so reluctant to do and so the myth is perpetuated that scientific endeavor and the Bible can never be friends but it was Albert Einstein who said the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible I think what he meant was you observe and examine and measure you study the physical data carefully and as you study them to your amazement you see just how precisely every mechanism is tuned there is a comprehensibility about it it's quite obviously not simply the product of random physical activity how then can these things be the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible now Amos cuts to the chase by linking the creator with the creation it is he who made the Pleiades and Orion the 24 hour cycle of darkness and daylight doesn't just happen it's the Lord who turns darkness to daylight and vice versa and the rain doesn't just fall from the sky it's the Lord who calls for it and it's the Lord who pours it out and if verse 8 is making the point that the Lord is the prime mover of the creation verse 9 is making the point that the Lord is the prime mover of human history look at verse 9 so when a fortress or a strong city is destroyed by military might to speak of the cause only in terms of politics and international relations is to miss the reality it is the Lord who makes destruction flash forth against the strong our secular patterns of thought about both science and history they've moved a long way from the Bible's thinking modern man erases or wants to erase the decisive element of both science and history from modern thought but Amos reinstates the decisive element in two brief verses the Lord is his name the Lord declares himself as the prime mover of both creation and history third the Lord hates the Lord hates now I put it rather starkly like that because our thinking can be altogether soft we often speak about the love of the Lord and quite rightly because he loves very greatly far more greatly than we do and far more deeply than we can understand as the apostle John puts it this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins that is the greatest love in the world that the spotless glorious son of God should go to the cross and bear there the vile consequences of our sins but the sins that Jesus took to the cross those are the sins that God hates and we can see something of his hatred of Israel's sins in this chapter of Amos let's start with verse 21 because it begins with the words

I hate and you'll see there that the speaker is not Amos but the Lord himself 21 I hate I despise your feasts and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies even though you offer me your burnt off even though you do the religious things offer me your burnt and grain offerings I will not accept them and the peace offerings of your fattened animals I will not look upon them take away from me the noise of your songs to the melody of your harps I will not listen but let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream it's their empty religious practices that the Lord hates now these these gatherings were serious corporate gatherings they're described here in verse 21 as feasts and as solemn assemblies they carried more than a nod towards the law of Moses because they involved burnt offerings and grain offerings and the peace offerings of fattened animals and all that would be very expensive it's hard work and it's financially costly to prepare a big animal for a ritual sacrifice and there was a lot of music and it was loud music the noise in verse 23 he means the din the cacophony of your songs even the melody of the harp was unbearable to him so Israel was clearly full of active religion and religious meetings the choirs and the bands were practicing hard the farmers were feeding up their fat stock their assemblies were solemn as verse 21 puts it they were ordered and disciplined there was a sense of gravitas no doubt they were sincere in their own way they put a lot of effort into their festivals and their services but the Lord hated it despised it it disgusted him why?

look at verse 24 because they were doing all this religion but for the other six days of the week they were neglecting to live by the law of Moses they were neglecting justice in their law courts and their communities and they were living as if godliness were supremely unimportant now there's a penetrating message here for the Christian church it is good for us that we should meet regularly it's good that we're here that we meet regularly for praise and prayer and preaching and fellowship it's lovely I love coming here myself it builds us up it blesses us in all sorts of ways but if our Sunday worship did not translate into godly living from Monday to Saturday we would deserve the lash of Amos' tongue now I trust we don't deserve it but we need to be thoughtful and careful because a church can degenerate into noise and ostentation on a Sunday and godlessness on a Monday the Lord hates empty religious practice but he also hates the kind of injustice that Amos is exposing throughout his nine chapters and that's the behavior of hard-hearted wealthy powerful people who have power in society and treat poorer people simply as a means to their own greater enrichment let's turn back to verse 11 here you trample on the poor says the Lord in other words you force the poor he goes on to say you exact or force taxes of grain from him verse 12 you afflict the righteous you take a bribe you turn aside the needy in the gate now that word gate the city gates were the place where the city elders would meet regularly to hear cases and administer the law so when you read in the Old Testament of the gates it really means the law courts but in these courts of so-called justice in Israel the needy the people who came with a good case to plead are simply being turned aside and Amos portrays the brutality of these wealthy and powerful people they won't tolerate anybody questioning their integrity look at verse 10 they hate the one who reproves in the gate and they abhor him who speaks the truth in other words if a city elder still has a sensitive conscience and he speaks up and gains says these powerful people he's quickly shouted down and he ends up in verse 13 therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time for it is an evil time Amos realizes that there are people around who have been silenced whistleblowers you might call them if they dare to speak out against corrupt practice they may end up with a dagger between their ribs so they say nothing it's a picture of a society that has become brutalized and calloused and full of fear truthfulness is strangled the poor are the ones who suffer greatly but are powerless to get any redress and religion divorced from morality flourishes and is paraded when you think of the history of Europe and America in recent centuries you realize that it's only the gospel that has the power to lift a nation out of this kind of brutality and conversely as the gospel recedes from a nation the old brutalities threaten to reestablish their hold thank God for the gospel therefore friends let us keep preaching it it's the only hope for us

Nicholas Sturgeon David Cameron listen to the gospel and the ethics of the Bible if you want the nation to flourish God hates empty religion and he hates injustice and corruption now friends here's the question for us are we prepared to develop hatred in our hearts as well as love one of God's fundamental commands is that we should be like him be holy he says because I am holy model your style of life and your views upon mine his holiness involves hatred and love love for his people and hatred of sin Amos is teaching us not only to seek to avoid sin but to hate sin it means that the growing Christian learns to hate to abominate lying and murder and adultery and fraud and injustice to say yuck those are horrible things not simply to avoid these things but to learn to hate them the

Lord hates fourth the Lord loves look again at the self-portrait in verse 15 hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate what the Lord loves is the the idea the concept of a human society which has justice and righteousness deeply embedded in its DNA it comes out so memorably in verse 24 let me read it again it's such an important verse but that justice rolled down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream this is Niagara Falls isn't it not the river

[ 34 : 01 ] Kelvin this is a society which has been washed and vitalized by a constant flow of the kind of life that brings honor to the Lord and joy and delight to other people can you imagine a society where everybody in the society really treats one another as human beings all the time I'm not saying that we never see this in our modern world of course we do because the image of God though tarnished is not erased in our fellow human beings we see some delightful examples let me give you one there's a little snippet of a program that you sometimes get on radio two yes I listen to that as well as radio four and they get maybe Simon Mayo at five o'clock in the afternoon I forget quite quite where it comes but it's a little snippet which is called something like thank you and it shows people expressing their thankfulness for something which has happened in the past so for example a woman will come on and she'll say something like this it happened way back 1989

I was driving up the motorway it was a winter's evening and it was just beginning to snow and two things happened simultaneously I had a flat tire and I ran out of petrol now can you believe that those two things could ever happen simultaneously well they did and it was before the days of mobile phones and I had a bad leg so I couldn't walk to the next SOS telephone box so I got out of my car on the hard shoulder and I was in despair all of a sudden a man pulled in just in front of me having trouble hen he said or was to that effect you might put it like that I said and do you know he changed my tire he didn't have any spare fuel in the car but he had a rope in his car and he towed me ten miles up the motorway to the next service station where he bought me tea and a hamburger and he went on his way and I never even asked him his name so if he's out there listening somewhere I want to say thank you to that man now that kind of story demonstrates human beings behaving like human beings showing something of the image of God that man showed mercy and love to a person who was in great need and the woman showed thankfulness by putting her message out on the radio now in our verse 24 let justice roll down like waters and in verse 15 hate evil love good establish justice in the gate

Amos has more in mind than individual people behaving lovingly to each other he's talking about love and compassion and fairness expressed in judicial procedures but these things are all of a piece because when a society loves and honors the ten commandments righteousness will be expressed both on the individual level and on the level of the administration of law the Lord loves justice righteousness and truthfulness if we too are to love those things it will sometimes be costly for us look again at the man in verse 10 the man who speaks the truth but is hated for it he tries to uphold justice in the law courts but he arouses anger for his pains but just as we are to learn to hate what the Lord hates let's also learn to love deeply what the Lord loves and friends here is the joy of it one day if we're

Christian people we shall be part of a society where justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream remember those great words of the apostle Peter in 2 Peter chapter 3 according to his promise we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells so the glorious new creation is the place where righteousness is at home it's not very much at home in this world in this world righteousness is a shy stranger she shows her face occasionally then covers it but in the new creation she will be everywhere and we shall know then what it means to be human the Lord loves righteousness now fifth and last the Lord summons the people of Israel summons people to live verse 4 seek me and live verse 6 seek the Lord and live verse 14 seek good and not evil that you may live and so the Lord the God of hosts will be with you now historically Israel collapsed before the Assyrian army only about 40 years after Amos had been preaching there Samaria the capital city was sacked and all the people were carried far away in other words they did not respond to Amos call to repent but when Amos was preaching to them 760 BC the Lord was still holding out the possibility of repentance and new life for Israel there was still a window of opportunity now let's notice the strange and sad predicament that the Israelites had worked themselves into they had a false confidence in all their religious activities as we've seen in verses 21 to 23 but they also had a false confidence in the

[ 39 : 32 ] Lord's willingness to rescue them look at verses 18 to 20 these Israelites appeared to be wanting the day of the Lord to come Amos says woe to you who desire the day of the Lord now for

us living in the New Testament era the day of the Lord means the second coming of the Lord Jesus who will return to judge the living and the dead to bring the old world to an end but in Old Testament times that phrase the day of the Lord meant any significant and powerful visitation of the Lord when he would come to his people by way of dramatic intervention and the people of Israel in Amos's day were clearly talking a lot Amos heard it they were talking a lot about the day of the Lord and how much they wanted the Lord to come to them in some powerful and decisive way and Amos perceives all too clearly that when the Lord does intervene with Israel it can only be in judgment and destruction because for all their talk about him and for all their feasts and their solemn assemblies they were treating the law of

Moses with great contempt so he says to them woe to you who desire the day of the Lord why would you have the day of the Lord it is darkness and not light as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him it in other words he is saying you don't know what you're asking for Israel when the Lord comes to you it will be a day of darkness and gloom and terror and that's exactly what happened some 40 years later isn't that a striking picture there in verse 19 as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him can you imagine that I was once on holiday in a wild part of the state and every day I went off for long walks on my own with my binoculars looking for wildlife including bears and one day

I was going up a hillside trail I was very far from anywhere and I rounded a bend and there swinging down the hillside track towards me was a large black bull he was moving rapidly now friends you may know that I was never unknown athletic powers within about half a minute I shot up a very steep wooded hillside too steep for the bull to climb and I was just panting at the top and beginning to recover my breath when I looked up and there in front of me was an enormous bull elk with a pair of antlers like two rocking chairs on his head and he turned and looked at me well as you can see I survived he trotted off in the other direction now this verse 19 is intended genuinely intended to bring fear into the hearts of Amos his listeners Amos wants to shock them out of their complacency he knows that the only day of the

Lord they're ever going to experience will be a day of terror as their cities are destroyed and everything they've worked for will be taken from stone but you shall not dwell in them you've planted pleasant vineyards but you shall not drink their wine where then can they turn well there's only one place for them to turn verse four seek me and live verse six seek the Lord and live it's the Lord who gives life seek me and live so let me end tonight by saying to all of us life is the Lord's gift to us to seek him to trust him and to keep on trusting him is the pathway to life it is possible for a person to have followed the Lord for some time and then to become disgruntled unhappy with the Christian life perhaps suffering or testing has come your way and you think I'll turn away from the Lord but to turn away from the Lord is to turn away from life and to embrace death don't do it testing and difficulty are part of the authentic Christian life let's allow Amos to engrave into our understanding the connection between the Lord and life there's only one place to turn seek the Lord and live says Amos seek me and live says the Lord perhaps you're a person who's come here tonight and you've never turned to the Lord you've never come to him well do come these words seek me and live are more than an invitation they're a command from heaven Jesus says come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest don't resist that call from heaven on the ground that you want to keep charge of your own life yourself you can't keep it none of us can be shepherd and guide to our own lives we weren't made to live like that seek the [ 45 : 02 ] Lord says Amos and live seek me says the Lord and live let's bow our heads and we'll pray to him it is you our dear God and father upon whom we depend it is you who have given us life and when we were far from you away in the wilderness not loving you not wanting you it was then that you sent us the savior the one and only and it was he who so lovingly and at such cost to himself bore the weight of our sinful desserts upon his own shoulders and took the deserved punishment for our sin upon himself and absorbed the anger that we deserved and yet he took it for us how gracious you have been dear father we haven't deserved any of this but we thank you that you've opened up to us through the

Lord Jesus Christ the gateway into life everlasting so we pray that you'll have mercy upon each one of us and give us grace indeed to come to you to seek you to go on seeking you and discovering your grace and glory and truth and through it all to discover life we ask it