

Prepare to meet thy God

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[0 : 00] Now friends, let us turn to the portion of scripture we read in the prophecies of Amos chapter 4. And let us base our meditations in the 12th text that the Lord will enable us.

Therefore thus will I do unto thee O Israel, and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. Particularly these words, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

Now Amos was a man of God who lived in a worldly, permissive society, and during the preceding decades, many years, there was a steady deterioration in the vitality of the religion of Israel.

Decay in the vitality of their Godliness, just as we ourselves experience today in the visible church in our lives. And despite the many chapters that are mentioned in this chapter here, we have this very sad refrain, yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And if we were to pose the question, what is the greatest need of the church today, we would have no expectation in replying repentance. On an individual level, and on a collective level, individually, congregationally, phenomenally, nationally, and nationally, we have a great need of turning away from sin unto God. From the vanities of matrimony to those things that concern the eternal well-being of our souls.

Amos was a palm labourer, or an ordinary labourer, in the rural economy, as it was in those times.

[2 : 13] Yet, he was a man who was thought of God and commissioned to bring this message to the people. And let us always remember, friends, that prophets were sent almost invariably at times when the vitality of religion, of the true religion, was at a very low ebb. And they were tokens of God's love and holy care for his professing church and the wisdom. And it is a great blessing when the gospel is preached in its fullness.

It is a great favour from God himself, when that gospel is proclaimed still among us. Or if he would but pour out the spirit of repentance upon us.

And particularly this evening, on a day which was traditionally set apart for repentance and humiliation by our forefathers.

Now I would like just to extract three thoughts from this verse and expand on them for a little, as the Lord will enable us in the little time we have. And first of all, let us collect our thoughts around the God whom we must all meet.

The God whom we must all meet. He is not just the God of Israel. He is the God of the whole earth. The last verse of this chapter shows, He with form of the mountains and creed with the wind, and declared unto man what is in its form.

[3 : 56] These are indications of the uniqueness of God, in that He is the only living and true God whom we must all meet.

Now He is the God against whom we have all sinned. There is no difference between one and another of our friends. We are all guilty. We are all under the same condemnation until we are justified.

The most damning indictment of the whole Bible is that there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.

And everything we put our hand to, or everything we touch in this world, is adulterated by our own sinful human nature.

Even what we preach, it is adulterated. Even what we sing, our prayers, we all have to be offered upon that one altar which sanctifies the gifts and makes it pure in the sight of God.

[5 : 04] The writings of the prophets, all of them catalogued the various sins of the people, and with almost monotonous regularity we read about the idolatry that they are persecuted in Israel and in Judah and in both kingdoms.

The children of Israel, in times of spiritual liveliness, they lived near to God, and these were often times of adversity when they were hard pressed by their enemies.

But in times of prosperity, they tended to forget the donor in enjoying his gifts. And they committed what the Bible calls spiritual adultery. They went after other gods.

And the New Testament, graceless, I would just say, that we all know. Out of the heart of man proceeds evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, blasphemy.

These are the things that defile a man. And we are all guilty because we have all descended from one common parent. The contempt of Adam is totally depraved in all his heart and in all her heart and we are in need of repentance.

[6 : 26] All these words are so relevant. Return unto me. unto me. And yet there is a deep faith of unlonging in here unto these words which the Lord inspired. Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord, despite all my fatherly chastisement. Dead indeed is the conscience. There is no awareness of who shall have inner the poverty and the need we have to return again unto the Lord. You know when there is a peculiar sweetness in forgiveness as it is experienced in expression. When the Lord forgives and when he restores there is a peculiar sweetness. Job was a singularly holy man, yet this is what he has to say about himself.

Behold, I am vile. Now God's testimony concerning his own sins, all of you are not by none that is spewed evil.

And yet in his own eyes he saw the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Behold, I am vile. Now God knows us intimately.

And he sees the full extent of our own eyes. And he has made a full provision for us in his sacrifice that his son offered once for all.

All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. The psalmist knew this so well. It is the same testimony of the Old Testament, saints and the new.

[8 : 12] He is the same testimony of the Lord. He is the same testimony of the Lord. He is the God against whom we have all sinned without exception.

But, he is the God who is longsuffering and has made provision for our restoration. Now friends, this is something that we ought to meditate a great deal on.

The longsuffering and the loving kindness of the whole Lord. He is longsuffering to us, words of the people, not willing that any should perish, that all should come to repentance.

As we were reading in Psalm 130, if thou Lord should not iniquity, O Lord, you shall stand. No one, not one could stand in God's presence.

The chastisement. The chastisement that we read of here from verse 6 down to verse 11. We are a powerly chastisement. The Lord, as it were, put his pressure on his professing church.

[9 : 42] Those who profess. Those who profess the Lord. That includes, of course, those who know him in truth and those who only profess him. Who only profess to know him. These are the chastisement that we read of here. And they were intended to bring back to people, to give a positive response to the Lord's chastisement.

God in order that they may repent of their sins. Now he tells us he does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. There is no practice or vindictiveness in God. There is no small print in the gospel or in the Old Testament writing. All is made clear to us that it is his fatherly care for his people that causes him to turn them, causes them to chastise them in order that they might be turned.

And yet in this instance there was no response. And yet God still leaves this way open whereby his people may return.

It is still open and oh friends at what a cost it was opened. The way back to God was opened at a tremendous cost. By him we say I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.

We tend to forget that we have no right to God's blessing or forgiveness except in the covenant that he made with the Lord Jesus Christ in the covenant of grace.

[11 : 31] He is the surety and he keeps the way open for us. And highway it is called in the Old Testament. And highway shall be where and away and it shall be called the way of holiness.

Now that is a word that is rapidly falling out of our vocabulary. Holiness. And it is something that ought to characterize every professing passion. Holiness of life.

Because after all, without holiness no man shall see the Lord. And in that short first sentence the writer to the Hebrews tells us that it is impossible for us.

To see God unless we are partakers of his holiness. That is the raw righteousness of our failure which he wrought for us.

Now God will not pass over in sins. We have to remember this. God will not win with sin. He will not let these things pass by.

[12 : 39] Because he is the God of unimpeachable justice. One of the marvelous things in surveying the cross of Calvary is that where you have missed the justice of God and the love of God.

Both are inherent. Both are inherent. They are evident in the cross of Calvary. Do you think or do I think that God will pass over your sins and mine of which we do not repent?

If he spared not if he spared not his own sins but delivered enough for us all? That was justice. And that justice stands as God's monumental justice shall not be judged of all the earth do right.

And we are in a greater, we live under greater privileges than ever the Old Testament saints live.

We are the full light of scripture. We look back on the events of Calvary and the resurrection and the exaltation of Christ and with the assurance of his continuing as our great tithing.

We have so much life. We have so much life. And let us remember too, it would be a contradiction in terms if God passed over the sins that we permit and that we do not confess and forsake and seek forgiveness.

[14 : 09] And the Father for His We have so much faith. For God, who has concealed us, come with all the rinp. We■■■■ it is the blood.

and to the spirit of grace. That is the God with whom we are to meet. A God of unimpeachable justice, of equity, that will judge everyone according to his work.

He is a God nevertheless, who is of compassion and long-suffering and loving kindness, and one against whom we sinned daily and hourly.

And oh friends, isn't it wonderful to think that the throne of grace is open at all times, and that we are called to come to it, to come with liberty, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of peace.

And yet, we are these words repeated, we have not returned unto me in the spiritual law. How likely, our own generation, see how impenitent we are, and how reluctant we are, to come and confess our sins, and seek forgiveness.

[15 : 44] Now let us see, in a second please, those to whom this urgent message is delivered. Well of course, here, it is in the first instance to Israel, because this nation was God's chosen nation.

He loved them because he loved them, not because they were a great nation, or that there was anything peculiarly attractive about them. Only, because he set his love upon them.

And, when the time of the Gentiles came, of course, they are now called into the fellowship of the Church of Christ. Hence, we, as Gentiles, we are admitted to the privileges of God's children of us.

And these words are as relevant to you and to me this evening as they were to the children of Israel when they were first uttered by Amos to them.

God, who at sundry times and in diversion on us spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.

[16 : 52] And it is the voice of the Son that we hear in the New Testament and of course in the Old Testament too. As he pointed out to the disciples as they journey towards Amos in that morbid and sad condition, he pointed out to them in scriptures the things concerning himself in the law and in the prophets and in the Psalms.

And incidentally, one of the most heartfelt parts of the New Testament with respect to Old Testament quotations is the epistle to the Hebrews. And there the apostle in writing to convert to Christianity from Judaism was pointing out to them the proliferation of messianic references in the Old Testament.

The Bible is full of Christ from Genesis to Revelation and all of it is relevant to you and to me. Well then, he has spoken unto us in these last days by his Son.

He executes the office of a prophet by revealing to us by his word and spirit the will of God for our salvation. And this is the will of God.

It is the very first step and it is a step that we must take. It is to repent of our sins. And it is a constant exercise of the people of God.

[18 : 18] It is a daily, yes, hourly exercise that they turn to God and seek forgiveness. If we have any consciousness of our guilt, if we have been shown our guilt by the Spirit of God, then we turn to

him who was of authority on earth to forgive them.

And that is the Lord himself. In I see you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. And there you have the covenant of grace in its very basic form as it was revealed to Abraham so long ago.

And this is the blessing, repentance and remission of sins. And oh friend, if we have this, we have everything.

If we do not have this, we have nothing, whatever else we may have. How opposite are these words at this present hour when God is a stranger in the land as a wayfaring man that turneth aside the tarry for the life.

But let us remember that this is the God of justice and he commandeth all men everywhere to repent. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see the events of all of us here who profess the Lord's name who would go home and we would fall on our knees before him with whom we have to do and confess our sins.

[19 : 57] And even if we say, well, we have hard heart, we cannot generate repentance in ourselves. We have the words with which we may come to him in scripture.

Turn thou us and we shall return. For thou art the Lord, our God. It is a grace of course. But how often do we ask for his grace?

How often do we plead with the Lord that he would turn it? Ah, it is so often the case that we love to go our own ways and merely pay lip service to the Lord.

It comes here in this case to be leaving people to stir them up. We need to be stirred up. This is an awesome process. But we may quite suddenly meet our God unprepared.

Has it ever occurred to you that we may be in a moment cut off unprepared? Now, there are younger people here this evening and no doubt when we were young ourselves, younger than we are today, we thought, of course, we have plenty of time.

[21 : 18] You know, the only man who ever lived on this earth and knew the exact moment of his demise, of his leaving the world, I don't believe anyone worked more steadily and with such diligence and earnestness of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, the night can it, when no man can walk. I was seeing an elder, not of our own church, recently, in hospital, and he is dying of terminal illness. and he said to me, oh, he said, how thankful I am that I am at peace with God, that it is not now I am thinking of these things, when my whole horizon is filled with pain and I can think of nothing else.

It is said concerning Walter Scott, that when he was a young man of 32 and he was about to get married and he was setting up house, he had a sundial erected in his garden and carved into the stone of his sundial over these words, a night candle.

We would constantly remember that our time is short. We would be more penitent believers than we are.

[22 : 49] We would not be so complacent, so indifferent concerning this essential grace that we must exercise, repent, and turn to God.

It is the exercise of believers. Be ye ready also, for ye know not when the Son of Man comes. Oh, prepare to meet thy God, oh Israel, prepare to meet thy God.

Wouldn't it be wonderful when, just when death came to you unto me, we would not consider it a morbid thing. Paul didn't. He says, I am now ready to be offered on the time of my departure to such time.

I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. There is a note of time, an eager anticipation to his reward, to the crown of righteousness that he was to receive, and not him only, but all those who love disappear.

They can look forward with confidence who come to the throne of grace regularly and confess and forsake their sins. Listen to the master himself what he has to say.

[24 : 06] I have glorified thee only God. That is the chief end of none. It is your chief end and mine to glorify God, not to glorify ourselves and enjoy ourselves but to glorify God and all the enjoyments, the lasting enjoyments will be yours and mine.

All we will have to do when the messenger will come will be to enter him to higher sets where there is fullness of joy and where at God's right hand is precious forevermore.

He knew just when. We don't know whether not we might be to watch and pray and let us be exercised in this way.

Now also this is a call to the unbelievers and I'm sure there are those here this evening who on their own confession would say that they are unbelievers. This comes to you too and all friends it comes with an even greater urgency.

let me remind you that this is a meeting that you cannot avoid. It is a meeting that I cannot avoid and we as ministers have even more to answer for it.

[25 : 27] We have to answer for our people as well as ourselves and how we have put the truth before them. Well on the credit side you may be very diligent with respect to all the outward forms of your holy religion you might be diligent and attentive to the means of grace and to the prayer meeting and to all these things.

But God has met you in so many ways as he met these people and he speaks here in these verses in the beginning of this chapter there is indication that these people were religious also.

they were multiplying they were bringing their sacrifices on their kind and offering sacrifices of thanksgiving with leaven and so on. But nevertheless if we harbor any sin in our lives whether it be overtly or covertly it matters not.

The Lord knows and we have no need to fear in confessing it to him who knows in the first instance and who is able and willing to forgive he knows our lives intimately and he is able to do exceedingly abundantly above what we can ask or even think.

If there is this we must all appear before the judgment seat of practice and this is an imperative that we have used prepared.

[27 : 03] it is not an option it is not contingent on something else it is an imperative prepare to meet thy God O Israel we are to exercise the responsibility that God gave us he hath made the provision and there is no way that we can escape from it.

you read in Psalm 139 whether shall I go from thy spirit or whether shall I flee from thy petitions and he catalogs a number of places in heaven and in earth but there is no hiding from God this is surely the overture of God's love that he brings this command to the people through the agency of his own prophet prepare to meet thy God O Israel this is what he has me as to do now let me remind myself on you again he that despised Moses Lord died without mercy under two or three witnesses of how much sore punishment to both ye shall be thought worthy who have counseled underfoot the Son of God and accounted the blood for which he was sanctified and unholy things and unvestite unto the spirit of grace range in his mind

I will recompense sayeth the Lord that is his just his absolute justice and it was sneaked out fully when the vials of his wrath were poured out upon the substitute of representative Lord the Lord Jesus Christ the head of the new creation the surety of the covenant our Savior but finally the time has almost gone the necessary preparation and how it is to be made now the urgent appeal is born of the fact that they did not repent this appeal comes because they did not repent because I will do this unto thee prepare to meet thy God O Israel they did not prepare and Lord finds the word O that appears there it is what the older divines used to call engemination it is aside from the soul because of the underlying affection that undergirds this call it is

God's deep abiding affection for his covenant people it is the love that he has for them all history it is the same as we have in the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 11 and at verse 8 how shall I give thee up to him how shall I deliver thee to him how indeed and how can he give over those whom he loves but they are bent as it were on committing spiritual suicide turn and meet with him while mercy is still to be found and we have the added word in the new testament God who is rich in mercy with a great love and with the loveless now these are things that we ought to turn our minds to again and again the incomparable love of God it is not like the love that we have one another that walks and wanes it is a constant it never wanes it is eternally the same your meeting with

God in the judgment will be a joyful occasion if you meet him in mercy in this world it will indeed be he shall openly acknowledge and equip all those in the day of judgment who meet with him here on mercy's ground and seek forgiveness God God has visited our nation many times this century with chastisement and I believe we have been visited at this very time in chastisement for the sins of the people in a peculiar way and yet we have not turned unto them to them what preparation do we need we need this friend holiness I come back to these words and holiness without which no man shall see the law profanity is surely the hallmark of those who are impenitent those who do not return unto him they are profaned we have no holiness of our own and how then can we be made holy well

[32 : 11] Christ has a holiness of which we may be made partakers not the holiness of his godhood but the righteousness if we may put it the righteousness which he wrought for us for at the moment that he became man and continued throughout his whole life I have glorified thee on the earth and as the head of the covenant of grace those who are federally joined to him and united to him they are the ones that are partakers of his holiness we have the righteousness of Christ imputed to them we need forgiveness and that forgiveness comes from him who has the authority to forgive sins there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared and then there is this in new events of such a momentous event I think the older we become the more awesome these events seem to us the most momentous of all events is the moment when body and soul part company with one another because then our destiny is forever seen either for glory or despair oh will we not respond in a positive way to what the Lord requires of us here to turn unto him this is the complete and it is it is channeled through these words oh

Israel ye have not returned unto me saith the Lord there is a very deep pathos in these words that cannot be measured in human terms with finite minds but we can see that the infinite mind of God which is eternally the same shows us that he has a fatherly care for his own people and he has this desire that they would be blessed and what greater blessing can we enjoy than remission of sins and restoration to all the privileges of sins that God has to give for us he has made all the preparations for the coming sinner and oh it is incumbent upon you and me to respond in the way that he demands now you may say again it is not within the compass of your ability to do this it is not a matter of whether we can or we can't it is the complaint of the Lord ye will not come unto me that ye might have life or that God would give us that will that he would make us a willing people in the day of his power and may such a day come upon us when we will be willing to respond to these calls prepare to meet thy God all this way let us pray we acknowledge oh Lord that in us there dwelleth no good thing and yet our hearts go out in gratitude for there is one at thy right hand in whom there dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily in our nature and we thank thee that we can come to thee and plead his righteousness and his only oh Lord be merciful to us as sinners this evening grant us forgiveness and enable us to savor the sweetness of being fully reconciled and knowing the blessedness of being in communion with God himself through Christ bless the people Lord take them to their homes in safety and the glory shall be all thine in Christ in whose name we ask all Amen