

Prepare to meet your God

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[0 : 00] I believe one holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen. I invite you just to remain standing and bow your heads in prayer. Father, sometimes things in your word frighten us.

And Father, sometimes when things in your word frighten us, it goes against our flesh, it goes against how the world thinks, it goes against how our culture thinks, it goes against what we want to do.

And so, Father, it's very easy for us to almost be like the serpent and say, did you really say this, Father, and to turn away from it? Father, we thank you that you love us.

We thank you that you sent your Son to die upon the cross. We thank you, Father, that your Son in his death upon the cross and in his resurrection that he has done everything that needed to be done so that we could be reconciled to you, and that we receive this purely and only and utterly and completely by faith, that we can add nothing to the finished work of your Son.

[1 : 11] Father, grip us with the gospel so that as we read your word, we will not be afraid, but that we will be willing to repent, to learn, to grow, and to hold fast to your word as we hold fast to you.

Father, do this work in our lives, and we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen. Please be seated. So I don't know how closely you were listening while Amanda read, but you might be saying, George, did the Bible just say that God causes famine, God causes drought, God causes crops to fail, God causes disease, God causes plague, God causes violent death. Is that what... I was only sort of half listening, George. Is that what Amos 4 says? Is that what Amanda just read for us?

If that's what it says, it touches a really, really, really deep fear in most of our hearts. And we want to turn away from it.

And it's in fact one of the deep fears that many people in our culture have. In fact, you know, I've noticed increasingly in Hollywood and in paper that when they talk about something being really disastrous, they say it's going to be of biblical proportions.

[2 : 43] It's the only time they refer to the Bible when something's going to go really, really, really massively badly wrong. It's just sort of the way we assume that the Bible is what it says.

Is that what the Bible's saying? Is that, George, is it... That's a bit worrisome. So let's look. If you have your Bibles, and if you don't, once again, there's still some copies up there.

You're welcome to take one. Turn to the book of Amos, chapter 4. And if you're a guest here this morning, one of the things we do at Church of the Messiah is we preach through books of the Bible. I try to make sure that every year we have at least one series, one book in the Bible from the Old Testament at least, because it's important for us to be able to read those parts of God's Word as well.

And anyway, so we're going through the book of Amos this summer. We'll end it on Labor Day Sunday, God's willing, and then we'll move on to 2 Corinthians. That will be the next book that we'll be preaching through.

So let's turn to it. And the book, Amos, that has this worrisome thing about Amos 4, whether God's causing famine and plague and pestilence. Actually, we all know that during the last election, we all know that the conservatives caused all those things.

[3 : 54] Sorry, never mind. That was a bad joke. Anyway, just like whoever wins in the election down there, it's the people who lost. It's that party that causes it.

Anyway, never mind. But the text is saying something really terrible. But what begins actually with something that's a bit reassuring to us, which is that God is completely and utterly opposed to

robbery and to oppressing the poor.

So Amos 4, verse 1, this is how, actually, we'll read 1 to 5. It begins with something comforting, but actually then goes on to do something which is deeply countercultural. And not only deeply countercultural, but actually quite surprising to many people, I think, who are outside of the Christian faith, what they think that Christians would think about things.

Because it pairs two things together that we don't always recognize that the Bible is against equally. Actually, Andrew, why don't you put up my first point, if you could do that?

What we're going to see in this very first thing, it's a bit surprising, but that the non-religious, the irreligious, the religious, and the spiritual, you know, the people who are spiritual, not religious, each are hardening their hearts to God.

[5 : 11] Each are hardening their hearts to God. It's not as if the Bible is going to tell us that we have to turn from capitalism to embrace some type of spirituality, which is what our culture would say.

Let's look at the text. Verse 1 of Amos 4. Hear this word, you cows of Bashan. Cows of Bashan were plump.

They were highly prized because they were plump. They were very well cared for and very well fed, and they could command a higher price. Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountains of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, bring that we may drink.

The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that behold, the days are coming upon you when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fish hooks. And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead, and you shall be cast out into Harmon, declares the Lord. Just before reading further, it's an image of complete judgment, and they'll be taken to a place of judgment and losing everything, completely and utterly losing everything.

[6 : 29] And it will be a completely straight, unheeded way. There's no wall stopping at nothing. They're just completely and utterly taken to having all that they have and all that they trust and all that they possess, all of their wealth, all of their power, positions, privilege, completely and utterly removed in a very straightforward manner.

That's the basic message of the text. As Canadians, we like the first part about oppressing. It's wrong to oppress and to take away things from the needy.

The last part we find troubling. Let's go on to verse four. Come to Bethel. Bethel and Gilgal are two important places, religious centers or spiritual centers.

And it would have been, both of them would have been places where there were both something that looked very much like traditional Jewish worship, hence it would look religious. And there would have been something that also would have looked far more like spiritual, not religious.

To put it in like a modern place, it would be a place where right beside a cathedral, there would be a coven. Right beside a place where there's a jazz vespers, there's also going to be a place where people are dancing to call down the moon.

[7 : 39] And right beside the place where they would maybe be having a very, very traditional sounding worship and stuff that from the outside looks like a choir or a praise band. And right beside that, there would be people all meditating together, trying to get in touch with their more spiritual self.

And it's describing, well, it's describing Ottawa. But they use the word Bethel and Gilgal. Come to Bethel and transgress, verse four to Gilgal, and multiply transgression.

Do you notice that? To come to a place like this is to come not to something that the Bible's going to approve of. It doesn't approve of religion or spirituality.

It sees it that to be involved in these things is actually increasing your rebellion against God. The mosque and the cathedral and the coven and the temple and the synagogue.

Come to Bethel and transgress to Gilgal and multiply transgression or rebellion. Some of your versions might say rebellion. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes, every three days.

[8 : 53] Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened and proclaim free will offerings. Publish them. For so you love to do, O people of Israel, declares the Lord. So it's a very, very surprising text.

Because in fact, as you know, like Eat, Pray, Love, you can think of lots of things in the culture and in movies and all. There's this picture that you get away from capitalism. You get away from the rat

race and then maybe you go and you learn how to meditate and you learn how to eat really good food and you travel and all that type of stuff as well as if everybody's really upper middle class and rich.

But sorry, that wasn't what I meant to say. The point is that Hollywood will portray that the option to capitalism is more like Walden Pond. It's a simple life. It's a spiritual life.

It's getting in touch with things. They probably wouldn't say that you'd go to a Catholic church for a mass or a church like ours, but you get this idea. But the first thing is to see that the Bible rejects that.

That's not the direction God wants you to go. And the other thing is just, and this is a really important thing for us, is that when it talks about the oppression of the poor in verse 1 and it talks about the crushing of the needy, to think that it's referring to capitalism only is a grave mistake.

[10:06] It's talking about bureaucrats and socialist czars as well. To think that governments don't for their own purposes crush their people is a way to allow the elite in our culture to not recognize not only what goes on in our own culture, but makes it that we don't actually hear the Bible.

Amos chapter 4, verse 1 is not a socialist rant against capitalism, nor is it a capitalist rant against socialism. It's saying that, you know what it's saying?

It's contrasting two people, two types of people. It's contrasting the people who are basically, you know, whether you go on Dragon's Den or some of those other places and they say, you know, frankly, I don't care about all these things.

You know, basically, I just want to make some money and at the end of the day, after I've made some money, I just want to be able to have a drink. And, you know, basically, I think that you want to meditate, you want to go pray or sing praise songs.

I think that is unbelievably boring and that a glass of Jack while watching TV, while watching some sports is infinitely more relaxing and they're completely and utterly irreligious and the Bible says they're going to be judged.

[11:21] And the people who go to the cathedrals and jazz vespers and covens and mosques and synagogues, they're also going to be judged. I mean, this is a surprising thing in our culture and we in churches often talk purely and utterly as if it's those more capitalist or worldly sins that the Bible condemns.

But here, the Bible pairs them together. Pairs them together. The non-religious, the irreligious, the religious, and the spiritual, each are hardening, their hearts to God.

In fact, this text, you know, one of the things that we say sort of in our culture is that there's many, many different paths to God.

And actually, I think the Bible would say that that's completely wrong. The Bible would say that there's many different paths to hardening your heart to God.

There's not many paths to God, just many paths to hardening your heart to God. For some, it's making money and drinking jack and for others, it's being deeply spiritual.

[12:40] Now, some of you might be saying, George, that is one of the most hard-hearted, judgmental rants I've heard in a long time. No wonder people don't want to come to church.

Don't you think that's hard-hearted and judgmental? And, don't you think that? And, I mean, I'd have to say that it's very, I don't think I was being hard-hearted and saying, I was just trying to bring out the Bible, but I do want to acknowledge that it's very, very easy for us to read texts like this in a way that are very hard-hearted and judgmental.

It's easy for me to do it. It's one of the reasons why the rest of this text is very, very important and that we need to call out to the Father to never have our hearts hardened even as we read the Bible. You see, one of the things which is condemned in verses 4 and 5 about religion and spirituality is that it's religion and spirituality that we declare for ourselves. We make up for ourselves.

We set the rules. We do it for our own purposes and for our own advancement. for our own exalting. And it's easy for us to slip into doing this even when we're reading the Bible, even when we're doing things we think in a way that's obedient to God.

[14:00] But it's very easy for us to slip into having everything be around ourselves. One of the things I struggled with last week was I actually thought my sermon last Sunday was one of the worst sermons I've done in a long time.

I know some of you are shocked. You were here last Sunday and you thought, George, that wasn't even in your top ten of your worst sermons in the last year. Boy, you've really been missing the

boat.

But I, you know, I really struggled for several days throughout the week because I thought I had done such a poor job. and then the Holy Spirit slowly but persistently had to do a work in my life because why is it about me?

Like, I didn't see anything unorthodox and I tried to explain the Bible and I don't think I did a good job and then I felt really bad and the reason I felt really bad is I thought it was about my performance that I thought it rested on my shoulders that I had to do things in a different way so that by my efforts things would go better and you know what?

All of a sudden I've moved into an area of self-declared, self-centered, self-organized, self-structured understanding of religion.

[15:19] So I don't want you to hear this text and I definitely, especially God, really worked in my life. Sorry if you had to sit through a bad sermon last week but God really worked in my life in preparation for Amos 4 to help me realize just how easy it is for us to take even good things that are really literally coming from God and turn it in a subtle twisted fallen way into something which is hardening my heart to God.

But the rest of the text, in fact, the text that really worries us is in fact the way into a deeper comfort and confidence confidence with God.

So the hard drinking, money-making or bureaucratic control person, that's the first thing and then the religious and the spiritual and then we get into this very hard part in verse 6.

I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. By the way, in the Hebrew the I is emphatic. So if we were to almost be re-editing this we'd bold it.

We'd bold it and maybe even underline it. I gave you cleanness of teeth. It's an image of famine. Cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places yet you did not return to me declares the Lord.

[16:43] And we're just going to pause there for a second. And some of you maybe are going to think to yourself is this now, George, where you tell us that in the original language it's not as bad as it sounds.

Well, I looked at two academic, three academic commentaries this week and I can tell you it's translated the Hebrew very accurately.

It's translated the Hebrew very accurately. In fact, the Hebrew as I just mentioned actually makes it more, for us Canadians it makes it actually harder because all the way through every one of the eyes of the five sections is emphatic in Hebrew.

Actually, maybe and so when it says about God causing famine that's actually what it says and I'm not going to actually try to explain it away. Maybe before I read any further, Andrew, could you put up the next point or Rebecca, could you put up the next point?

In the hope that people will return to him, God does at times bring disaster. That's what the text says. I'm not going to spend time about all of the different ways that God interreacts to his created order and know that those of you who sat through my Revelation series and when we went through Romans, you know that there's sometimes God just allows things and etc.

[18:21] etc. There's a range of different options here and you can read big complicated books on it but the fact of the matter is that this text does tell you just how I think I've summarized it in the hope that people will return to him.

God does at times bring disaster but the refrain is important. Let's read verses 6 to 11 and I'll read verse 6 again.

I gave you, this is God speaking, cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places yet you did not return to me declares the Lord. I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest.

I would send rain on one city and send no rain on another city. One field would have rain and the field on which it did not rain would wither so two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water and would not be satisfied.

Yet you did not return to me declares the Lord. I struck you with blight and mildew with your many gardens and your vineyards your fig trees and your olive trees the locusts devoured.

[19:31] Yet you did not return to me declares the Lord. I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword and carried away your horses and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils.

Yet you did not return to me declares the Lord. I overthrew some of you as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and you were as a brand a piece of wood plucked out of the burning. Yet you did not return to me declares the Lord. You know this isn't completely you know I'm not I mean for some of us this is not even remotely abstract.

Some of you are dealing with maybe really serious illnesses or serious financial disasters. I know that there's a people in this congregation who have survived attempts at genocide.

People who are going to murder them. I mean it's a very very small thing but my daughter Victoria her husband was in a multiple car accident this week on the Queensway and suffered a concussion amongst other things as car was totaled.

[20 : 42] And that just happened this week. In fact I didn't know about it I was going to go I'd been working in a West End coffee shop and I went to get on the Queensway and it was backed up forever and it must have been just a few minutes after the accident and I got off the Queensway and went around it and found out later on that Sean had been in the accident.

So it's not abstract is it for us? So I just want to say a couple of things about it. The first thing that I want to say about it is that this fact that God does things sometimes that are disasters to bring people back to himself it's the flip side the exact same doctrine that we in other contexts we place so much hope in.

Like later on in the service we're going to pray for sick people. Why do we pray for sick people? Because we believe that God can sometimes heal people slowly by apparently natural means. Sometimes he will heal people through drugs and medication. Sometimes he'll heal people instantly through prayer. There are many people here in this congregation who could probably tell you stories either in their own lives or in lives of people that are close to them of God acting in quite remarkable and miraculous ways to bring healing.

people. And you know one of the most precious doctrines for the Christian is the doctrine of eternal security. The doctrine that when you put your faith and trust in Jesus, when you reach your hand up to Jesus and realize that he is God's provision, that God sent his son to die upon the cross and rise from the dead to be the means by which human beings could be reconciled to him and that when we reached out to Jesus in a sense we can't reach Jesus but that it is his heart to reach down to us and to take our hand in his and that when he takes our hand in his because we have put out, we want to, we're trusting him to do what only God can do which is to reconcile us to him and that when Jesus takes us by that hand he will never let us go.

[22 : 53] He will never let us go. And what is part of the ground of that security is that God is sovereign. That God knows all of the events in the future. That there's not going to be an event in the future that will mean oh dang it I let go of George as he falls.

That that just won't happen because God is sovereign and he'll never let you go. Jesus will never let you go. You know the basis of prophecy that we believe that Jesus will return.

We can believe that Jesus will return because he defeated death and he rose from the dead and he ascended into heaven and he's going to come back and we can trust that he's going to do that.

Why? Because God is sovereign and all powerful and we can trust him.

But the same God who can act in such a way that I will never be let go. The same God who can act in such a way that we can pray for rain or that we can pray for healing.

That is a God who can heal who can do those things. And it also means that he is a God who for his own sovereign purposes who only desires that his fallen creation and creatures would return to him might sometimes also do things like cause famine in the hope that people will return to him.

[24 : 14] For me to deny this text would be to deny that we can pray. It would be to deny that we can have eternal security. It would be to deny that we can have any hope.

You can't have one without the other. You can't have one without the other. But there's something else as well. And by the way, this is one of the things here.

This, you know, if you read, for those of you who come to faith in Jesus and you start to read the Bible, every Christian at different times in their life, they're going to have to make a decision.

will I trust the Bible and want to have my mind conformed to the Bible? Or will I do this?

For many of us, this is one of those times. But I want to say something else about this text. If you could put up the next point, Rebecca, please. It is only because God is sovereign and all-powerful that human beings have freedom and hope.

[25 : 25] It is only because God is sovereign, that means he rules and has authority, and he's all-powerful that human beings have freedom and hope.

Just this, a few months ago, our church, people from our church joined up with a few other people as well, and the Dig and Delve Apologetics organization to sponsor a conversation, a dialogue between Aus Guinness.

We worked with the main atheist organization in Ottawa, and they picked a person to speak, and we got Aus Guinness. It actually happened to be right here.

They sat down. Some of you were here for it and had a conversation. He is a philosophy professor from the University of Toronto, and Aus Guinness is a D. Phil from Oxford, well-published speaker, and if you go dig and delve and you Google it, Aus Guinness, in this debate here in Ottawa, you'll see something very, very, very remarkable.

The debate, the conversation was over whether you can have meaning in life without God. And I think for many, many people who were there, the shocking thing for us was how weak the atheist case was.

[26 : 36] And one of the many shocking things is that he actually wasn't able to say whether we have any freedom from an atheist perspective. If you don't believe me, go looking for it.

Dig and delve. If you can't find it easily, email the office or email me this week. No, I'm going on holidays soon. Anyway, just, we'll let you, we'll find it for you somehow. Somebody will check it, we'll send it about, but you Google it.

So here's the thing about all of this. This is a very, very shocking truth. It's a very hard truth. But one of the things is many people, when they think about this truth, they just think about this idea that God can cause these terrible things, and they don't like it.

They don't like the idea of God being sovereign. They don't like the idea that human freedom, here's the thing, every system of, there's no neutral place. Every system of thought has to come to term with the fact that on one hand we seem to have human freedom, and on the other hand there seems to be causality.

Every system of thought. And so it isn't as if somebody might say, this is terrible, I'm going to reject this, this is completely and utterly a horrible thing. Well, one moment, how do Muslims deal with it? How do Buddhists deal with it?

[27 : 42] How do Hindus deal with it? How do atheists deal with it? And I want to tell you this, I want to challenge you and say, if you're there horrified at this, that if you end up looking at Muslim thought, and you look at Hindu and Buddhist thought, and you look at atheist thought and secular thought on this, you will end up thinking, you know what?

The Bible makes the most sense. because, you know, you think about it from a fundamental secular point of view that everything is just a result of causality.

Then really, if you're on a mountain and an avalanche starts to come towards you, you have a perfect image of human life. And if an avalanche is coming towards you, you have no freedom and you have no hope.

But if it's God who is using a hard time in your life, you can call out to him for mercy. Or you can call out to him and know that he will be with you in the midst of that really hard time.

You see, it goes beyond this sermon. Sometimes when very hard times come, maybe it is something that God is specifically doing and we have to call out to him. Maybe he is trying to get our attention because we have to repent or we have to return to him.

[29 : 13] Maybe it's something that is just something that we're going to have to endure because our enduring will endure in a way that brings him glory. I mean, I just think, again, I've mentioned her many, many, many times that in my early ministry, one of the most horrible things, one of the hardest things I had to do was to visit a woman.

I think she had a Lou Gehrig's disease in the very, very final, final year of her life and she could, by the end of it, all she could do, she couldn't move anything. She could hardly even blink. She'd move her eyes and look at me.

She had these haunting eyes. They'd follow you around the room. She had a little tube right here by her mouth and all she could do is just, she'd speak into it, try to amplify her voice and half the time I could only understand, most of the time I could only understand half what she said.

And she loved Jesus. I didn't bring her any comfort at all, I think, when I went to visit her because I was so deeply addicted to wanting to be able to pray for healing or do something to fix it.

And there was nothing to fix, only to endure. And let me tell you, wouldn't you rather endure that knowing that you can talk to God and that he loves you? That after a short time in comparison to eternity, that we will have resurrection bodies and that we will be with him for all eternity?

[30 : 42] Wouldn't you rather endure that knowing that you have a Savior who died on the cross because he loved you? Than to endure it like being on the slope of a mountain, seeing the avalanche coming at you?

And you are powerless and hopeless. And I don't want you to choose it because one of them is a fanciful tale, an imaginary tale that gives you hope.

Our hope ultimately is on the fact that God sent his son. That God worked a miracle in the womb of Mary and he sent his son and that his son walked amongst us and that eventually his son died upon the cross.

And that which seemed like the defeat of evil and the defeat of empire and the and that which seemed like a victory of empire and a victory of armed might and a victory of religion and a victory of spirituality over God's own son ended up being in fact the means that God used to reconcile fallen human beings to himself.

Why don't you return to me? And we have a sure and certain hope because on the third day the grave was empty. The grave was empty because he was no longer there.

[31 : 59] He was risen. And he will come again. And there's other things you can say in terms of the wisdom of the philosophy and the power of the narrative. But we Christians have a sure and certain hope.

Some of us our response is still going to be I don't like having to decide George.

I would I even hate thinking about the fact that God would do something like this. It just makes me angry. I mean I know that there's people in this room that they know people who've left the Christian faith because of something that happened to a person that was really good.

And it makes them angry at God. It makes them hate God. And they don't like this language of return. It's just the whole thing. George it might very well be the case that if I studied Islam and if I studied natural sciences and if I studied atheism and if I studied Buddhism and Hinduism I still might come to the conclusion George that the Christian answer is a better way to understand how human beings work.

That it's only the Bible that ultimately can really account that causality is really causality yet human beings really have freedom and if we have freedom and if there is a God that does exist and he sent his son to die upon the cross that we can have some hope but it still makes me angry.

[33 : 19] I'm going to turn my back away and I'll have to deal with it. Just before we read the last two verses here's the thing that this whole text is trying to communicate to us.

If you could put it up for me please. God is untamed and untamable. He is only good and wholly just.

He is present and he is all powerful. He is truly real and he is inescapable. He is inescapable. So heed him when he speaks. Receive the gospel. And live each day knowing you will meet him. Every one of us meets God every day.

But we meet God every day in a way that we don't recognize it. We don't thank him for air conditioning. We don't thank him for the breeze that cools us. We don't thank him for our breath or for our thoughts.

[34 : 25] We don't thank him for even the tiniest bit of health that we have or the fact that we have money. We don't recognize his design and order and that he's all around us and that he's present to us that he's closer to our breath.

But the time will come when the inescapable God will be inescapably recognized. Verses 12 and 13.

And note in the Hebrew how he repeats himself twice. It's for emphasis. Therefore thus I will do to you O Israel because I will do this to you O Israel. Prepare to meet your God O Israel.

Many of you have heard that phrase prepare to meet your God. This is where it is in the Bible.

Amos 4. Prepare to meet your God O Israel. For behold he who forms the mountains.

Who creates the wind. Who declares to man what is his thought. Who makes the dawn darkness and treads on the heights of the earth.

[35 : 27] The Lord. The God of hosts. Is his name. Is his name. You know it's very very interesting thing.

This is a text of mercy. You know all the way through it says yet you did not return to me. Yet you did not return to me. Yet you did not return to me. Why does it say that? Many of us are familiar with this famous line for Augustine.

You have made us for yourself. And our hearts are restless. Until they rest in you. It's funny. It's a sign of how deeply addicted we are to being God. That we are bothered by being told that we are a creature. A creature created by a creator.

And when our creator created you and me. He made us in our in his image. And we were always meant to be in relationship with him.

[36 : 32] And when we turned away from him and decided to become God ourselves there was a rending of that relationship. But every human being has a God shaped space in their life.

And we might try to fill it with robbing and drinking and having lots of money. We might try to fill it with meditation. We might try to fill it with religious rituals of our own choosing.

But at the end of the day it can only be filled. By our creator. And that's why it says return. That's why it says return.

Return. Return. Return. Return. Return. And then it's very very surprising because still God shows grace. Because we don't return. We don't return. We don't return. We don't return.

We don't return. We don't return. And then it doesn't say prepare to meet your doom. No. There's still time. It says prepare to meet your God.

[37 : 32] And the phrase your God is only found two times in the book of Amos. And the time the second time it is found in the book of Amos is the very end of the book of Amos where God talks about how he will restore.

He will redeem. He will ransom. He will reconcile. And he will provide a means by which his people are in relationship with him. So there's a choice.

We can say. Lord at first when I heard about the fact that you caused all of these things. I always knew. I think I said this last week.

I always believed that you hated me. I've had so many bad things that happened to me. I just believed you hated me. But now I hear that you don't hate me. That you want me to return to you. And that even now I can prepare to meet you. If we don't prepare. We still will meet God. And then it will be our doom.

[38 : 37] We'll be crying just like that. Only a lot worse. But this is does not have to be your fate because it says prepare to meet me.

I will be your God. God. You can be my child. By adoption and grace.

Prepare for it. And then it just reminds us to make sure that we don't understand that we are to meet God in our own image. And in verse 13 in five these little descriptions six descriptions it gives us in just like you know how some people can take a drawing and just I can hardly draw a stick figure but they can just like oh this they go like this and they can go like this and they can go like and with just five or six lines you can say that's a person I recognize that and that's what that's what he does here in poetic imagery.

Who is God? He is the one who forms the mountains. If you go to Vancouver and you see the Rockies just think those look really big they're really majestic it rains all the time in Vancouver but people always tell me but it's always worth it because every once in a while the rain goes away the clouds go away the sun comes out and there are the Rockies and they are awesome.

God is bigger. God formed them with his hand. He formed them so they would be just so. God is bigger than the mountains.

[40 : 10] He formed them. He creates the wind. In the Hebrew there's different words for the word creation and the word that's used here in the Hebrew is only used of God creating.

In fact ultimately the Bible would say that human beings don't create. We're not creators in the same way that God is. We are sub creators because in a sense only God creates but God creates the wind.

If you go out and there's a beautiful breeze God creates that wind. He creates the invisible that still has such an impact and an influence in your life. And that God is not just something who is big and makes mountains and and sort of invisible and can cause the wind that we cannot see yet it feels us.

God is closer than our thoughts. He knows every thought you have. He's there right in the he's closer than our breath. He declares to man what is his thoughts. He's present so close.

He's as close as my thinking as close as my words as close as the imagination as close as all of the things that go on in my head. He's closer than that. He sees it all.

[41 : 13] And then there's this wonderful line and in Hebrew there's the in English they try to smooth it out. It's actually the way Yoda would speak. It really is a need to have a Yoda version of the Bible.

The maker of maker of dawn comma darkness. That's what actually says literally in Hebrew maker of dawn comma darkness.

Darkness. Light and dark. The beginning and the end. The presence and the absence. And he treads on the heights of the earth.

But he is not an impersonal God. He is not a force. Merely a force. You cannot call God it. We can tame it eventually.

You cannot tame God. He is the Lord. That is the name of the covenant God. The God who desires to be in a covenant relationship with people. He is the God of hosts.

[42 : 16] The God of the angel armies. And it's his name. He is a he. A person. So given such a God.

How on earth can we prepare to meet him? In Amos' time. 750 years before the birth of Jesus. The first thing that he could do is realize that the God who was a person speaks.

So maybe I should listen. See that's the problem. That's the problem with the rich and the bureaucrats. Who don't listen to the voice of conscience or revealed religion.

That it's wrong to oppress the poor and to oppress the needy. And it's a problem. It's very interesting. They talk about leaven. In other words, it's even when the worship seems to be very, very traditional and religious.

They still completely and utterly stop listening to God. The Bible says not to put leaven in the worship. In your sacrifices. And they go ahead and put leaven in the thing. Even when it's most apparently traditional.

[43 : 23] Even if it's a very, very fancy cathedral. And they're all walking around very, very solemn. It doesn't, you know, if they're all walking around very, very solemn. And it's to an organ music. But they're singing to God as she.

And they're going to celebrate a same-sex marriage. I've just been very controversial. The Bible says that all you're doing is refusing to listen to me. And hardening your heart. See, it's why we need to pray that our church is reformed by the Bible.

And is always reformed by the Bible. Because it's so easy for us to go astray. So first we can listen. But for people in Amos' time, they would realize that there is no way they can prepare to meet a God who's so close that he's closer than their thoughts and can shape, can create the wind and can shape mountains.

And how can you ever prepare for that? And so before the cross, all they could do is say, Lord, have mercy. There is a riddle here in what you've asked.

And I don't understand how you're going to solve the riddle. All I can do is call out to you for mercy, trusting that you will solve the riddle of how I listen and prepare to meet my God.

[44 : 45] I have to throw myself on your mercy. If you could put up the next point. Three scripture texts. Amos, prepare to meet your God.

Second one, found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This is my beloved son. Listen to him. And the third quote from John, Jesus himself. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his son, his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

On the cross, Jesus bore our doom. And on the cross, when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we are not only exchanging places with Jesus so that he has borne our doom, but he offers to us his perfect standing for the Father.

His righteousness can stand for mine. So this is not, this then means that it's not that we have to all of a sudden deny the world or anything like that.

[45 : 59] It's a matter of being gripped with the gospel and then living in the world as God's creatures. Living, reconciled to our creator.

Saying no to being the center of the universe in God. Knowing we're going to keep messing up and being gripped by the gospel. If you could put up the final prayer. You see, this text is calling us to hear it because we're so blessed that we're reading in this text after the cross.

That we have to be gripped by the gospel. It's not just calling us to religious busyness. And we're being called to be a disciple of Jesus, to know him. The Bible isn't another type of religion. It's not calling us to religion. It's calling us to a relationship with God. In response to good news from God. About what he's done for us in the person of his son.

It's inviting us to live a relationship with God. Always mindful that the only basis we have is not because we are better than other people. But purely and utterly because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

[47 : 16] And that when we receive that, we are responding to the cry of God. Why won't you return to me? Why won't you return to me? Every single person you see today on the street.

God is saying to them. Why won't you return to me? If we say some small thing pointing them to Jesus. All we are doing is acting in accordance with the direction of the heart of God.

Who says to each human being. Why won't you return to me? Because that is his heart. And this text is inviting us to be gripped by the gospel.

Now living for his glory not our own. Calling us to obey his word. And to live every day in a growing knowledge. That God is all powerful.

That he's real. That he's good. That he's untamed. He's inescapable. To live. To begin to learn to live every day knowing that God is inescapable.

[48 : 20] For a Christian, a non-Christian, this prayer is the beginning of your Christian walk. For a Christian, it's an entering into deeper discipleship.

God is inescapable. Please stand. And I invite you to pray this prayer with me.

As I said, for some of you, if you have never given your life to Jesus, then, you know, there's nothing special about these words. And I know some purists would say it's missing this little aspect or this little. You know, if it's your words to be connected to God for the first time as his child, then pray it out.

And for those of us who God is touching, it's a call for us to live each day knowing that he is inescapable. That he's bigger than every promise, every problem we face.

And that we can live not as religious people or as spiritual people, but as people gripped by the gospel. I invite you to pray it with me. Dear Lord, please make me a disciple of Jesus, gripped by the gospel, who is living for your glory, by daily obeying your word, and growing in the knowledge that you are all-powerful, really real, only good, untamed, and inescapable.

[49 : 42] In Jesus' name, amen. Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Make us such a people. Father, make me such a man. Make me such a pastor. This I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Please be seated as we go into a time of intercession. As we enter this time of prayer, please feel free to take whatever position helps you to communicate with us.