

Walking Away from God

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, we ask that you would gently but deeply pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Father, we confess before you that we flatter ourselves too much to detect or hate our own sin.
- In fact, Father, that so often we flatter ourselves so much we don't even know that we are flattering ourselves. And we become deaf to your word. We also confess, Father, how easily the world forms us in its mold.
- How the world forms our heart without us even realizing it. So, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would use your word in a powerful way in our minds and hearts and lives today.
- That you would, Father, bring us freedom. The freedom to repent. The freedom to turn to you. The freedom to be gripped by the gospel. And this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior.
- Amen. Please be seated. Amen. So, some of you are going, I don't know how closely you're listening to Nigel read, but some of you are maybe going, Whoa!
- [1 : 0 8] Did the Bible just say that God causes disasters in the city? Did the Bible just say, did Nigel just read in the book of Amos that if there's disaster, it's caused by God?
- But some of you, that might have jumped out at you. I have to confess, I'm going to talk about this a little bit more. I'm a fast reader. And I have to really force myself to slow down and look at things slowly.
- By nature, I'm not like a, I don't read poetry unless I absolutely have to. And I like novels, the type of novels that grip you and you just want to keep turning the page and turning the page and going and going until they're done.
- And that's like a really, really good thing when you find a novel that grips you and you just want to keep reading and you don't really pause to notice the prose. And so, when I was first reading this text to prepare to preach on it, I'm going, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- I wonder what on earth I'm going to say, what I'm going to say. Whoa! God causes disaster in the city. And then after that, I could hardly pay attention to the rest of the text. And so, we're going to look.
- [2 : 1 0] Is that what the Bible said? What exactly does it say? What does it not say? Some of you, when you hear that the text, does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it?
- Some of us will think, how dare God? Or some of us will think, I always knew that God was evil and that's why I don't believe he exists. Others of you might say, I know now why my life sucks because I always knew that God hated me.
- There's no hope. I meet people who say that. My life sucks. I think God hates me. And so, is that what's going on in the text? Well, let's look. Be really helpful for me if you open the Bible yourself.
- And we spent some time in God's word in Amos 3. And here's how it begins. Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt.

Now, we're just going to pause here. We have to sort of think about this verse. I don't know how many of you are like me and you by nature are very, very fast readers. But there's different ways that the Bible can talk about hearing.

[3 : 19] And in this particular case, there's a very particular sense that it's using the word like to hear. Many of us, when we're in conversations, hearing really means we just have an opportunity to catch our breath.

And so that when the other person stops talking, we can continue to talk. Because what the other person is saying is actually completely and utterly irrelevant. We don't really want to listen and understand or hear.

We just use the other person speaking as a chance to marshal our thoughts, to catch our breath while we continue to speak. And some of us, when we listen to people or listen to particular people, we're really only listening to them because we already know that they're stupid.

And we're listening for examples so we can then once again prove to them that they're actually pretty stupid. We often listen because we want to mock. We want to listen because we don't respect them, but we just have to endure it.

I mean, there's all sorts of reasons and ways that we hear. And in this particular context, it could almost be translated hear to obey. Hear, H-E-A-R, listen with an attitude that you're listening to obey.

[4 : 34] So in other words, the model underneath it, the image underneath it, if you were to give it a modern cast, would be you discover that you have something very seriously wrong with you.

You have a very, very serious medical condition. And you go to the doctor. And the doctor starts to tell you not only what your condition is, but the next two or three or four things, including the medication you have to take and the steps you have to take.

And unless you're like a complete fool or an idiot, when you're listening to the doctor at that point in time, you're listening to obey. You're listening very, very, very carefully.

You don't want to go home to your mom or your dad or your husband or your wife or your best friend. And they said, what did the doctor say? And you go, I don't know. I think they said I have something wrong with me.

What are you supposed to do? Well, I don't know. Like that might happen. I mean, many of us go to listen to the doctor. And afterwards, it's hard to remember what they said. And we want to bring somebody along with us.

[5 : 30] But when the doctor tells us that this is very, very, very serious, it's cancer, it's hard, it's some serious liver problem or kidney problem, some serious disease, we listen very, very carefully.

And we listen because we want to get better. We listen with the intention that we will remember it and take the steps that we need to obey. And that's the way the text opens today.

Now, it's going to eventually talk about some very, very hard and difficult things. And many of us in our culture, we don't really like listening to God in that type of a sense. In fact, for many of us, the way we listen to God is we listen like this.

Sort of waiting to see if it matches with what we think and with what we agree with. In fact, actually, if you read books on preaching, there's even a whole range of books that tell you about how to speak to the Bible that you have to answer the so what and now what question.

That after people listen, they want to say, they're saying internally, so what? Or now what? Without ever sort of challenging whether, in fact, that's the wise way to listen to God.

[7 : 07] That maybe a wiser way to listen to God is to listen with the question, how shall we then live? How shall I then live?

But it's very common to listen with a type of skeptical cast. And so this text in the Bible begins with a very, very stark challenge to how we listen.

It says, once again, if you listen to it, hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you or about you. It can be translated the same way, either against or about, oh, people of Israel.

Against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt. Now, in this particular case, it's really, really important that you notice the rest of verse one.

It's going to really, not only does it challenge how we listen, but it challenges something else in terms of our whole attitude to the rest of the text. My wife will tell you accurately that I am a very slow learner in terms of marriage.

[8 : 17] Fortunately, we've been married a long time, but I still have a lot to learn about marriage. And one of the hardest lessons for me to learn about marriage, one of the many hard lessons for me to learn about marriage, is that when Louise confronts me, she confronts me because she wants to connect with me more deeply.

In fact, in most marriages in North America, when the wife who loves the husband confronts the husband, the husband often experiences the confrontation as pushing away behavior.

But in fact, the wife is confronting because she desires to connect. She's trying to grab you by the shirt and say, listen up, I want to connect with you.

I'm not pushing you away. I'm shaking you so you come closer. And I'm a really slow learner at that. And it's really important for us to understand verse one.

Not only is it asking us to listen, is it challenging how we listen? It's challenging us to understand that all of the rest that's going to happen, and the way the book of Amos is structured is that the first, it's structured in three sections.

[9 : 28] And the first section, chapters one and two, it's a series of oracles. And amongst other things, it's showing that God is, in fact, a judge, is bigger than the nations.

And he's untamed by the nations. And he's going to judge the nations. And he has the right to do it. And the last three chapters of Amos, chapter seven, eight, and nine, are a series of visions about Israel and just about life.

They're a series of visions. And in between, chapter three, four, five, and six, it's sort of a list of, it's God speaking to his people with what's going on in their lives and what they need to deal with.

And it's sort of, you know, Old Testament writers, by modern standards, they're loopy. By that I mean is they sort of talk about something, and then they talk about something, and then they loop back, and then they loop over here, and then they talk about, you know, like it can often drive us, you know, A, B, C, D, one, two, three, four types of people really nuts because it keeps looping back.

It's just the way they talk. But it's the beginning of this God sitting before Israel, what's really going on in their lives, what really is the status of their hearts, how they really look from God's perspective at the level of the heart.

[10 : 51] And at the very, very start of it, he wants his people to understand that he's confronting them, to connect with them. Actually, if, I've already sort of missed some points.

I'm way out of whack with my thing. Well, I'm just going to fix this, and we'll go back to the other point. Look at verse one again. Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of Egypt.

He's saying, he's reminding them that he's talking to his family. He's reminding them that he's the one who made them his family.

They didn't make him their dad. He made them his children. And not only did they not make him dad, that he made them his children, that he adopted them.

And not only did he adopt them, he was the one who rescued them out of bondage and slavery. And it was him, it was God, who rescued people, slaves, out of bondage, out of slavery.

[12 : 06] He rescued them, and he adopts them, and enters into a covenant with them. And that's the one who's speaking. Now, I just need to put a couple of things up.

Could you put the first point up? This is the first thing which I neglected to say, but I need to put it up. It's very, very important all the way through this that it's clear that you understand that the Bible is claiming that this is God speaking.

As I put it up there, the Bible is God's word written down for every age, including our own.

Amos isn't saying, I spent some time on the mountaintop with God, and I think this is what God means. And Amos isn't saying, I spent some time up there with God, or I've had a vision, and I know this is what he means, and I'm going to try to say it as best I can.

No, the claim all the way through this text. It's the claim in verse 1, in verse 7, in verse 8, in verse 10, in verse 11, in verse 12, in verse 15. And if you go back and look at chapter 1 and 2, basically every oracle begins and ends with the statement, this is God saying this, and the Bible is making this claim.

[13 : 34] You don't have to necessarily accept it. I accept it. I believe it. This is what the Bible teaches. I believe it for a whole range of reasons. But this is the claim that the Bible is making. I have to try to understand it.

But it's not Amos trying to understand something that God has said. It's God speaking the words that he wants through Amos in this particular case.

And those are the words that we are to hear with the attitude that we desire to obey it, like listening to a doctor after he's told us something serious. And if you could go up to the next point, Andrew, and this is the last part of verse 1.

God confronts me to connect with me. In fact, not only here in Amos, it's the way we're to read all of the Bible. All of those parts that make us want to scream.

All of those parts that make us angry. All of those parts that make us afraid. Whether it's talking about abortion or about, you know, same-sex marriage. Or whether it's talking about sexual matters.

[14 : 36] Or whether it's talking about doctor-assisted suicide. Whether it's talking about, you know, ways to wage war or not to wage war. How it talks about tithing. And how it talks about money.

And how it talks about telling the truth. And how it talks about heaven. And how it talks about hell. And how it talks about divine power. And human responsibility. And whatever it is that can sometimes for us in our culture.

In terms of we're just thinking how harsh it sounds. We can think about how we would hate our friends to hear this. Because they would think I'm seriously crazy to actually listen to this stuff.

It can terrify us. We might want to explain it away. We have to understand in every case that God speaks it with the idea and the hope. We won't say so what and now what. But that we'll listen very carefully.

And he speaks even his hardest words to connect with us. That's his heart. That's his heart. And for Christians, after the cross, we know that even more deeply.

[15 : 41] Now, the very next part, you sort of have to understand. You see, the problem we often have with reading the Bible is the way we carry certain images towards the Bible. And we sort of invent a context which isn't the Bible's context.

A few years ago, a friend of mine who's a pastor, he had his daughter, his young daughter. She got very, very sick. It ended up being quite serious. She went to Emerge.

And after Emerge, she went into the department where they were going to deal with her. And Emerge, they brought the doctor. Anyway, it was very, very serious. It was actually very, very serious. But they started to get it under control after, you know, whatever, 12 hours, 24 hours.

So after he'd been there about 36 hours, he'd slept there. He went down to the cafeteria to get a coffee and get something to eat. And while he was in the coffee getting something to eat, he bumped into somebody from his church.

He's a pastor. He bumped into somebody from his church. And this person from his church was the head doctor of one of the departments in the hospital. Big cheese.

[16 : 44] Whole floor of the hospital that dealt with certain types of things. He was the head. And he bumps into my friend in the cafeteria. And the doctor says, you know, I'll just call him Bob.

Bob, what are you doing here? And Bob says, well, it's been really touch and go. My daughter came in like 36 hours ago. It was like emergency. He came in by ambulance. It was really hard.

And he talks. And, you know, the doctor was very listening. And he said, well, listen, I'll come up and I'll visit her with you. It's not a joke. I'm smiling, but it's not a joke. So they get in the elevator.

And as they get in the elevator, just before the elevator closes, another woman comes in with a younger man. And the woman says hi to the doctor.

And she said, where are you going? And he doesn't get off at his floor. He keeps going higher. She said, oh, where are you going? He said, well, I'm going up to your floor. She's the head of the department. Where my friend's daughter is.

[17 : 42] She's the head doctor. And he said, well, my buddy here, who's my pastor, his daughter is in your department. You know, she had this problem.

And I'm going up to visit her. So now the head of the department, who hasn't, I mean, there's no reason for, you know, the fellow's daughter had only seen interns and stuff.

But he had no complaints about his care or anything like that. But now the head of the department looks and looks. Oh, he's not just some schlub.

He's important. A guy who's really high up in the hospital is coming up on my floor to check on one of my patients with his pastor, his friend.

So after my friend's friend leaves, the head of the department comes in to examine his daughter, concerned, of course, that she's getting the best care.

[18 : 41] And in the course of the conversation, she says to him, listen, here's my private mobile number. If you have any concern at any time about your care, give me a call. I'll deal with it. So here's the, this whole context, right?

This is what we see in the world all of the time. That if you know the right people, things go, you know, go better. I had a knee pain a couple of, you know, a week, a couple of weeks ago. And, you know, I, you know, I just self-diagnosed myself and all that.

But you know how it is. Like if I was a senator's player or if I was in the NFL and I was an important player and I had knee pain, I would see a doctor right away. And if I needed surgery, it would happen the next day, right?

I mean, in Canada, there is two-tier medicine. Like we never think about it. But the star player on an NHL team does not have to wait three months to see a specialist.

Why? Because he's the star player on the Maple Leafs. He's the star player in the Canucks. He's the star player on the, on the Ottawa Senators. The whole season depends upon him. He doesn't have to wait an extra three months after he finally sees the specialist to finally get an ultrasound.

[19 : 46] And then after that, wait two months to see the specialist again. And after that, wait four months to see a doctor. Right? It's funny. We don't even think about the fact that, okay, my, my aunt has to wait a year for surgery.

But the star player of the Maple Leafs is operated on the next day. And that's partially because in our culture and just in our human flesh, we understand that if you're important and you matter, the rules are different.

Isn't that what we think? So in that context, listen to verses one and two again. And when you, within this context, you're going to understand the shock of verse two.

And many of us are shocked with verse two, the second part of verse two for a different reason, but it's because we haven't grasped something about our heart and about how we think the world works.

Listen to verse one and two again. So hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt. You only have I known of all the families of the earth.

[20 : 56] Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities. But that's not how the world works. I mean, for us, it's a bit of a shock because we maybe wonder if it's a sadomasochistic type of thing or what's going on.

But the biggest shock is, the biggest shock is that's not how the, you know, oh, you're a really important person I've now discovered because you know the head of another department.

Therefore, I am not going to help you. No, no, that's not how it works. Therefore, I mean, my friend never even, you know, this wouldn't have been the way it worked.

But imagine that he had gone in if he was another type of person and he had to take his daughter into an emergency. And it turns out that her problem was exactly, his daughter was going to go to the floor where the guy from his church was.

And aren't there many of us who would want to say as we're in emergency, they say, just so you know, your boss, your boss is boss's boss's boss is my best friend.

[21 : 54] And I think I've been waiting too long. Did I just tell you again? Like, you want, I have his personal mobile number.

I don't have to go through a secretary. And that's your boss's boss's boss. We want special treatment. And so what's going to be going on, one of the big charges and one of the ways to understand the rest of chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and even the visions is a particular human sin.

And it's a sin of presumption. If you could put it up, Andrew, that would be very helpful. Presumption is the perennial counterfeit to saving faith. Presumption is the perennial substitute to saving faith.

And we presume that we will be treated differently. We have a sense of entitlement, a sense of self-satisfaction.

We are self-congratulatory. We are self-righteous, self-justifying. We feel entitled. We feel special. We believe that the rules do not apply to us in the same way that they apply to other people in certain regards.

[23 : 08] And it is very, very powerful in society and culture. Like, I'll just, here's something which, I don't know, maybe some of you who have been in economics, you know this. Did you know that if we were to go back 100 years ago and you had a choice of living in Canada or Argentina, you know where most rational people would have chosen?

Argentina. Argentina. In the first three decades of the 20th century, Argentina was considerably wealthier, more prosperous, more stable than Canada.

Maybe not more stable, but richer. In fact, in the early part, the first three decades of the 20th century, Argentina, by per capita, was the 10th richest nation on the planet.

10th richest. If you were looking in terms of economic opportunities in 1916, you would choose Argentina over Canada and over Australia or over New Zealand.

That over most nations. It was one of the most prosperous nations on the planet. Now, in terms of prosperity, it's in the bottom half. Why is it that we in Canada don't think that that could happen to us?

[24 : 22] Why is it that we think that we can make any type of political decision or economic decision or economic policy, and that what happened to Argentina can't happen to us? Why is it that we think that in our culture?

Is there some divine right that means that just because we're Canadians, that we will always be prosperous and safe and free? Well, that's BS.

You don't have to zip that out, right? I just used the letters, right? But it's presumptuous. And how presumptuous is it to listen to God's word and go, so what?

Okay, now what? I'm... I just woke up one morning with a sore knee.

I don't know what it was, a virus? Like, you just wake up with it one day. And all of us, either ourselves or have family members, is that one day all of a sudden there's something really bad going on physically.

[25 : 27] We can be felled by this tiniest little microbe. And yet we presume as if we are the judges of God and the judges of nations and the judges of people in the center of the universe.

And it can mask in religious and social and spiritual forms. It doesn't matter how I live, I speak in tongues. I'm spiritually sophisticated and more advanced than other people because I speak in tongues.

I'm more advanced than people because I use the Book of Common Prayer. I'm more advanced than people because I know how to say Hail Mary, full of grace. I'm more advanced than other people because I'm Reformed. I'm more advanced and better than other people because I...

I don't know. You just start to fill in the blanks because I'm Methodist, because I'm Wesleyan, because I'm Anic, because I'm whatever. That it's not faith. It's not a relationship.

We're not connected to God. We're presuming upon God. We're acting and thinking as if we are somehow entitled. And we give ourselves a pass on thing after thing after thing.

[26 : 33] So to understand the text, we've only gotten into verse 2. Just so you know at this rate, there's 15 verses. This is going to be a three and a half hour long sermon. We're going to go through a bit quicker.

But it's a really important beginning to the text, right? It's this perennial danger about presumption. And I'm going to put up two other texts. Actually, where am I in my notes?

Always dangerous. Actually, Andrew, could you put up the... No, no. We're going to go to verses 3 to 8.

Sorry. So here's the thing then. I told you I'm a really fast reader and I sometimes skip over things.

And I have to confess that when I read the text for the first time, I didn't notice... One of the things that happens is when you read the text really, really, really quickly. And you have to often read the Old Testament in particular very slowly and notice a very subtle change that it makes in the text.

[27 : 39] And that's probably one of the reasons why I often, in my own personal devotions, because I read fairly quickly even in my personal devotions. I probably don't get as much out of it as I should. I should probably be a slower reader.

Those of you who are slow readers, you probably get more out of the Bible than I do many times. But the Bible does something very, very subtle. It's challenging us about what God's Word is.

It challenges us about the danger of presumption. And then it's going to do something else that it talks about disaster. It sounds very, very judgmental, but it's actually very, very, very open-ended in terms of how it starts to go into the problem that the Israelites are facing.

Now, look, read with me with verses 3 to 8. And then you probably won't notice it. I'll go back and show you what it means. Do two walk together unless they have agreed to meet?

Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den if he has taken nothing? Does a bird fall on a snare on the earth when there is no trap for it?

[28 : 41] Does a snare spring up from the ground when it has taken nothing? Is a trumpet blowing in a city and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? That's a really scary verse we're going to look at in a moment.

For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets. The lion is roared. Who will not fear? The Lord has spoken. Who can but prophesy? Now, here's the very, very subtle thing in the text, but it's really, really very important.

And we're going to spend just a minute or two on it to try to help you see it. But, you know, it's this sort of little thing that leads you to the shocking conclusion. Can two walk? You know, about the traps, about the roaring, about the disaster.

Whoa, God's causing disaster in the city. I wasn't expecting that. But if you'll notice, look at verses 4, 5, and 6. There's always a pair in every case. Verse 4, there's a pair around lions roaring.

In verse 5, there's a pair around traps. In verse 6, there's a pair around fighting and about disaster to a city. But in verse 3, it says, It says, do two walk together unless they've agreed to meet?

[29 : 55] But there's no second bit. And that's because, as Amos is going to get into the rest of the book, the challenge is for the listener to complete the couplet.

If you don't listen to God in words of obedience, if you don't capture the fact, if the fact that God's going to punish you only angers you, it doesn't make you think that you're self-entitled, that you're presumptuous, that you're self-righteous, that you're self-satisfied, that you're self-congratulatory.

It doesn't make you think of any of those things. All it does is make you mad. Then there will be one second part to the couplet. And the couplet will begin, Do two walk together unless they have agreed to meet?

Can two people live together after they have divorced? Or can two people walk together when one punches the other in the face? Or can two walk together when one spends all of his time abusing the other person?

Or can two walk together when one person wants to walk away and run away? Is that how it's going to finish? Or is it going to finish? Do two walk together unless they have agreed to meet?

[31 : 07] Cannot two walk together when there has been repentance? Like, Amos intentionally didn't complete the couplet because he says, How you listen to the rest of the book will determine what the second part should be.

Now here we go, just before we go on. Andrew, could you put up a scripture text? This is a really good verse to memorize in life, folks. It's from the book of Ezekiel. And you'll notice there's a funny thing at the end because there's three verses almost identical in wording.

And I had to look at, I ended up picking this wording, but if you want to look it up, all three of them are very, very similar wording. Same idea. For those of you who are old Anglicans, it's actually a really important part of Anglican spirituality because it's a key part of morning and evening prayer to say a version of this verse every time you do the daily offices.

God takes no delight in death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live. It's actually part of the basic structure of Anglican Bible reading as it was formulated by the English reformers.

But could you say this text with me? Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn from his way and live.

[32 : 27] Just think of this. When Jesus died on the cross, he died between two thieves. And if you look at all the accounts of his death upon the cross, the day begins with both thieves abusing Jesus.

But sometime during the day, one of the thieves is convicted and stops abusing Jesus. And he eventually turns and says to Jesus, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And Jesus says to him, today you will be with me in paradise. And Jesus died between two thieves with very different destinies. The thief who is the penitent who we will see in heaven if we have given our lives to Jesus.

That thief reminds us that we should never despair. That no person is so far from God that repentance is not an option. The penitent thief reminds us that no human being should despair, nor should we despair in sharing the gospel with any human being.

And the thief that began the day and ended the day abusing Jesus reminds us that nobody should presume. No one should presume. Andrew, if you could put up A.

[33 : 53] Here's just sort of two things to pause before we just bring the servant to a close. We have a bit to go still. But dear Lord, please deliver me from all traces of presumption, entitlement, and self-satisfaction.

Instead, by your grace, make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel, living for your glory. Like for many of us, this is the challenge. That entitlement and presumption slip into our lives without realizing it.

And we're redeemed, we're saved by grace, but our walk with Jesus is deeply burdened and broken and compromised because we aren't growing in holiness, we're growing in presumption.

Self-satisfaction and entitlement. And here's the second thing. Andrew, if you could put up the second prayer, many of us read the Bible with a so what, now what attitude.

And this text is challenging us to consider praying a prayer like this. If you don't have time to write it down, it'll be on the webpage. We'll maybe a little bit, have to wait a little bit because Shirley's on holidays, but it will go on the webpage.

[35 : 00] Or you can email me. Dear Lord, please deliver me from all vain, false, and self-congratulatory listening to your word. Please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who is learning to listen to your word humbly, deeply, obediently, and well so that I will live for your glory.

Now, some of you are saying, George, you can't finish the sermon now without dealing with disaster in the city. George, you just can't. You can't, you can't, you can't. You can't sort of just say, okay, well, my time is up.

Let's just stop and go, whoa, you go, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, George, does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? Now, we're going to, here's, here's the thing.

I'm going to say one very important thing about this text and we're going to talk about it more next week because there's the same type of idea only it, it actually, about half of chapter four has the similar idea so I'm going to talk about it more next week but I'm going to just give you one analogy to help you understand the problem we have when we hear it.

So the big problem we have when we hear it is we think of, we think of a different context, we think of a context of an innocent person that has something bad happen to them. I know some people that if they hear this text all by itself, they say, well, my life has been one disaster after another and I've always known that God hates me.

[36 : 22] Now I really know that he really does hate me and that's not the way to understand it. I want you to think of the Kameshi affair, I don't know if I pronounced his name right, the Kameshi affair in CBC. It was a disaster for the CBC and it was a disaster for Kameshi.

But what type of disaster was it? And I have to be careful. You know, it's funny, sometimes people tell me why do you always use examples from other countries and don't use Canadian examples and one of the reasons is whenever I use Canadian examples I get so much pushback from some people.

But anyway, I'm going to do it and here's the thing, if the press is to be believed and I, so I have to, just a bit of a caveat and I've been in the press and I know that the press doesn't always get things right.

There's a trail and everything like that but it appears as if this man sexually harassed quite a few women over quite a long period of time and the system and the CBC failed and he was able to get away with it and eventually somebody had the courage to go to the press.

A lot of this came out and it was, what was it for him? A disaster. Isn't that a good word for it? What was it for the CBC? It was a disaster.

[37 : 44] Now, is it a disaster for you and me? Well, I'm not going to talk about the outcome of the case and all of that and I know there's going to be civil suits and all of that but you see, here's the thing.

Here's the thing about this text. Here's the context for the text. Remember, we've already begun to get to the context about this, the problem of presumption, the problem of people listening to God with a so-what attitude and all of that type of thing.

How did the people in authority listen to the woman who had complaints? Did they listen well? They had authority to stop it.

Did they stop it? No, they didn't. Did Kameshi, he didn't. And it's not a disaster on one hand.

It's a disaster for an unpenitent wrongdoer who's getting away with terrible things when all of a sudden the day of reckoning comes and he can't get away from prospering, from doing terrible things.

[38 : 52] But if you have an unpenitent heart and you've been living off the fruit of doing evil and you are presumptuous and finally the day of reckoning comes, it is a disaster.

disaster. But it's not a disaster, is it? Something approaching justice begins to happen. In this text, Amos has used chapter 1 and chapter 2 to say, listen, nations think that God is completely and utterly irrelevant and that at best he's a kindly doddering old grandfather who's asleep in his chair not noticing what's going on.

Okay, nations might think that God is tame but Amos has spent chapter 1 and 2 establishing that God is bigger than the nations, that God will judge the nations, that the nations might say what is right and wrong but at the end of the day there is a real right and there is a real wrong and they will be judged and not only will individuals be judged but social structures will be judged.

And for people who write till the end continue to maintain that God is tame and that they really are God and they have gotten his job, when judgment comes it is a disaster.

But Amos is trying to us understand that God is bigger than the nations, he is bigger than social structures, that he is bigger than Canada, he is bigger than the CBC, he is bigger than Hollywood, he is bigger than the education elites, he is bigger than the United Nations, he is bigger than NATO, he is bigger than the United States, he is bigger.

[40 : 24] And that if in many cases we have to wait until death before there is judgment and justice, it will come. God's lack of action is mercy in the hope of repentance, not agreement that he is daughtering, incompetent, disinterested, or tamed.

He is none of those things. He is the roaring lion. Let's just, I want to read the rest of the text and I see the time but I just want to say a couple of other things about the rest of the text.

Let's read verse 7. For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets, the lion is roared who will not fear. The Lord has spoken who can but prophesy.

This is that last part. I'm not going to talk about this much other than to say this is terrifying because this is a word to us. If we hear God's word there is an obligation for us to have the courage to speak a word of God's word when it disagrees with our culture.

And he goes on to say verse 9, proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt and say assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her and the oppressed in her midst.

[42 : 02] They do not know how to do right declares the Lord those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds. Therefore thus says the Lord God an adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you and your stronghold shall be plundered.

Remember Israel was destroyed in 722 BC. Thus says the Lord as the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion and two legs or a piece of an ear so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued with the corner of a couch and a part of a bed.

Hear and testify against the house of Jacob declares the Lord God the God of hosts that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions I will punish the altars of Bethel and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground and I will strike the winter house along with the summer house and the houses of ivory shall perish and the great houses shall come to an end declares the Lord.

Andrew if you could put up the first the next point please just very in brief we read this now listening to it knowing that the you know in the old westerns in the 50s you could tell who the good guys and the bad guys were if they were a white hat or a black hat if you watch the original Star Trek you know that people with a certain color shirt are going to die and people with a certain color shirt are going to live and so we sometimes read the Old Testament this way but the first thing just very briefly is if you put up the point Andrew social structures customs and institutions can be powerful forces leading me away from saving faith in Jesus and that's that's the point here and the hard part about the point is because we're looking at it like they're wearing the right the wrong color shirt or they're wearing the wrong color hat but you have to think about it for a second these guys are Canadians they're spiritual not religious they have many altars they're not hung up on just one way to God they're not hung up with just one way or just one word from God they're not hung up with these things they're spiritual and they're not religious and they practice their religion in a way that it doesn't sort of bother other type of people and there can be as many altars as you want and when it talks about winter house and summer house you know isn't it usually that in the citizen or the national post or the globe and mail don't they usually have the rich and the famous and the powerful at little benefit types of things and don't they have homes that they sort of go and they take you through and don't all the magazines talk to you about the most spectacular houses and all of that type of thing and don't they always do it in such a way that it's a fawning type of thing about the rich and the powerful and don't they have things that are made out of ivory isn't that just a sense that you isn't that just telling you that you're not just a you know you're not just some poor schlub who thinks that going to

McDonald's and having a Big Mac is the height of a haute cuisine but you know the right types of restaurants you know the right types of things to eat you know the right way to dress you know that when you can wear brown shoes and you know when you can wear the type of chandals you should have you understand that if you see somebody walking down the street you can tell whether that's a good purse or a bad purse or whether the watch matters and that's why you have the fancy magazines with all of those types of things and if just whoa whoa whoa don't read it with read it it's talking about Canada strongholds is another word for elites fawning descriptions of the new heads of universities fawning descriptions of the new chief of staff for the prime minister fawning descriptions of the coolest restaurants the sign that you have just exquisite taste not part of the hoi polloi it's written in the citizen in the national post in the globe and mail and put on television and twitter and facebook so that those of us in the hoi polloi know what matters and these social structures the strongholds have led to presumption and people being away from God and and one other thing actually

[46 : 17] Andrew if you could put up the point five I don't really have time to describe this but it's I'm just going to put it up there the sacrificial death of Jesus upon the cross is God's subversive fulfillment of idolatry the sacrificial death of Jesus upon the cross is God's subversive fulfillment of idolatry why is it subversive fulfillment it's subversive because this whole text is just saying listen you trust in your possessions you trust in all of these types of things they're all going to fail they're all going to fail and but at the same time you know when we we have we have a sense that there is a better we have a sense that there is that you know it might get confused by just taste and looking down our noses at people who eat Big Macs and you know or just go to

Tim Hortons and don't can't tell what you know they don't know the right type of coffee or you know even worse they go somewhere even worse than Tim Horton like you know we have this sense that there is something better we have this something that there is something above us we have this sense that there is some type of of of there's some type of a quest that we should be on and on one hand the Bible is going to completely and utterly keep knocking everything out it's going to keep saying this is the wrong path this is the wrong path this isn't something you can stand on it's going to subvert it it's going to critique it it's going to knock it down but at the same time it's trying to knock all these downs it's trying to confront us and knock these things down because there is in fact a fulfillment that comes from God that if we lose our self congratulation and our self justification and our self righteousness that we can actually look to a power that comes from God where God justifies and God makes righteous and God makes right and he does it purely and utterly as gift and as grace

I had a friend come up to me this week just on Friday and he described himself as spiritual not religious he described himself as a nun and he said so what are you going to talk about this Sunday are you going to do you sort of misunderstand me I almost said his name I'll call him Bob you know the Christian faith is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread I'm a beggar I'm going to tell people where to find bread that's my hope and he said well that's a clever line although I prefer to say it's the blind leading the blind and I say well that's a pretty good line too and I acknowledge that I'm blind I'm a blind man telling other blind people about the one who can make them see and it's not me I said you know I happen to know that this guy both claims to be spiritual not religious he was also a huge fan of

Christopher Hitchens I said you know Bob Christopher Hitchens and Christians agree on many many many things I said you know one thing I know you've puzzled about is the fact that Christopher Hitchens mocked people like yourself who are spiritual not religious and I and Christians agree that we're blind that the finite cannot possibly know the infinite but what if the infinite speaks to the finite in words that the finite can understand and what if the infinite comes and acts for the finite so the finite can belong to God I make no claim that I can see all I can do is say there is one who can make you see there is a beggar there is there is a food that God will freely give to beggars and do the final the first of the final two prayers many of us have to leave here praying dear

Lord please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who has a heart for the world not a heart formed by the world so that I will daily live for your glory and the final one and with this could you all stand please the challenge of the text for many people is this prayer I mean the other three prayers are all really important challenges to us but this is a conversion prayer for many of you if you wonder how to give your life to Jesus and maybe you feel under conviction this is how you give your life to Jesus you know my words aren't magic or special I just try to take this text and form it in terms of a way that if you believe that it's time for you because you haven't been actually walking with God or connected with God you've just been presumptuous and the time is to come to leave presumption and to enter into saving faith I've just tried to put it into words and I'm going to ask us all to close by saying this prayer together for those of us who are

[51 : 42] Christians it's like saying the pledge of allegiance in the states you're already an American but it can sometimes just be so good Canada doesn't have anything like it it must be just sometimes so good just to remember once again the start of the Christian life prayer and what you're standing on what you're not standing on and how you're gripped and for some of us here in the room maybe this will be the prayer that begins your Christian life and if you haven't begun the Christian life I urge you to pray this prayer out loud saying to God this is me this is this I want this to be me let's pray it together dear Lord I turn from the hopes of this world from all idolatry and from all presumption I turn to you I turn to Jesus Christ crucified your son and my savior I open myself unreservedly to the

Holy Spirit please make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel living for your glory
thank you amen father pour out your Holy Spirit upon us make us disciples of Jesus
gripped by the gospel living for your glory and this we ask in Jesus name amen amen to
God s fors ing