

# Amos: True Worship - Amos 8:1-14

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thank you David for reading from Amos chapter 8 and in case you're joining us after some time away this summer we have been going through the series on God's word through prophet Amos and we are in chapter 8 of 9 so we are nearing the end of this of the study so during the time of Amos the northern kingdom of Israel was at the height of its prosperity politically it had never been stronger and religious activity was flourishing in Israel yet all of this was offensive to God their prosperity we find out was gained through oppression and ill-gotten means their political strength was obtained by inappropriate political alliances their religious activity was not in alignment with who God is so because of this God sends his prophets to speak to this rebellious nation worst of all the nation had repeatedly ignored the warnings of God what we've been looking at Amos was given from Amos who lived in the southern kingdom of

Judah most of the message was given to the northern kingdom of Israel but some of that message was also to his own southern kingdom of Judah and some of the message was also to the other neighboring nations because this is the living word of God that endures forever I hope that we will approach this with our years sharpened and heart softened so that we may hear what God has to teach us today through his word so let's look into the text that David just read for us in Amos chapter 8 so in the flow of Amos in case you're new to us in this series just to orient you where you are the book of Amos is approximately in three different segments we are in the third and the final segment of Amos and in this segment God is speaking through Amos in a series of five visions and so we are in one of those visions we're in the fourth of those five visions and all of these visions remind the hearers of an important truth God's eye is always on us God's eye is always on us now how you respond to the reality that there is not a thought that is not a word that is not an action of ours that is hidden from God's eyes is the scriptural truth but how we respond to this truth of God's omniscient God knows everything about us inside and out how we respond to that actually depends upon our relationship with God when we hear from scripture that that is not a thought of our heart that is hidden from God we may either make us cringe or it could give us comfort depending upon who you your relationship with God and that is very important as we go through this there is nothing that is hidden from God the reality is many of us go through life with scant regard for God's sovereignty and because of that God may take drastic measures to get our attention for our good and his glory so with that I want us to dive into this text before we dive into this text I want us to notice something very significant here there are only 14 verses in this chapter is a fairly short chapter but seven times in this brief passage God is referred to by the name he how he did reveal himself to Moses in Mo in Exodus chapter 3 Moses encounters God in the bush that was burning up but but it was on fire and he asked God for a name and

God simply responds I am who I am and God the I am the Yahweh name of God is such a holy name of God that its uniqueness there is a reverence that owed to the name of God that no Jew would use that lightly but in this brief passage God is identified by how he revealed himself to Moses as Yahweh the I am seven times in these 14 verses and this high frequency of this use would have been very striking to the years of Israelis because this is drawing attention to the holiness of God that God is not someone to be trifled with when God is speaking here you better have his attention so that is significant God intended to get their attention to his holiness as he's speaking these things so with that let's dive into the text so the first two verses it talks about depending upon the translations that you use some of we read from the ESV version of the translation up there the pew bibles in front of you or the new American standard some of you may be having the

NIV depending upon the translations that you have you may notice that there's a little play on words so the ESV and the new American standard talk about a summer fruit and the end there's actually a

play on words here in Hebrew the words for summer fruit and end they are very very similar there's just one letter apart and so God is having a little play on words here and the NIV actually takes the liberty of interpreting what this play on words is and it's saying that yep that time is ripe the time is ripe for God's judgment on his people God will not overlook their transgressions that repeated rebellion anymore it's time and that is the message of this play on words that the time is ripe God's word has a way of revealing our self deception we have a great capacity to deceive ourselves and God's word shines a spotlight on it we tend to mistake prosperity for a sign of being in good standing with God when in reality prosperity could be a sign of God withholding his judgment and giving his gifts that we don't deserve the kindness of God is for us to repent and return to God but we abuse the kindness to keep going our own way and that was the context here in Israel Israel is prosperous and because they were prosperous they thought they were in right standing with God could we make the same mistake yes we can because we too have that capacity for self deception that Israel had at that time both the Old Testament and the New Testament reveal that God is long suffering patiently waiting for people to repent so that they don't have to perish but you know what we do with it we become complacent as if there is no urgency to change our ways or worse thinking that there won't be any consequences for our ways we also err when we become impatient and expect

God to act on our timeline no God's timing is not our timing God gets to decide when the time is ripe for him to act and here God says that in his sovereignty he has overlooked nothing and he decides when and how he's going to act and that is the context we are in today in Amos here's the important part about bearing the name of God every human being is created in the image of God and in God's plan of salvation God chooses a people Israel to bear his name and under the new covenant those who call upon the name of Christ we bear the image of God we bear the name of God so God's people represent God to the rest of creation right from creation the plan was for God create a human beings in his image to represent him to creation and in redemption those who bear the name of Christ we represent God to creation and here Israel represents God to the nations around them so when Israel sins it actually profanes the name of

[ 9 : 19 ] God and we see this repeatedly in the Old Testament in Leviticus in Isaiah in Jeremiah in Ezekiel many places in the Old Testament God repeatedly reminds people when you sin you're profaning my name and that is true for us those who call upon the name of Christ our sin reflects poorly on Christ to the world around us and that is another reason why God takes a sin of his people seriously and yet the way God approaches this is as a father who disciplines his children we know from Hebrews 12 verses 5 and 6 it talks about to not take lightly the discipline of the Lord because this is like a father who's disciplining the children because the children carry the name of the father bear the name of the father the children represent the family to the outside world the father disciplines the children so in the same way God disciplines his people Israel so one of the things that we see here is that in verse 2 even though God is about to pronounce judgment on his people but notice that in verse 2 he says that for my people Israel so this is still God acting as a father correcting his children these are still my people

Israel so I'm going to discipline them so in the same way that a good father wants to discipline the children to represent the family while God is disciplining his people we must carefully intentionally and repeatedly remind ourselves that all of the attributes of God hold together this is the passage that is heavy on God's judgment when we look at a passage in isolation that is heavy on God's judgment it is easy to forget other attributes of God so as we look into the heavy hand of God upon his people in this passage we must remember that God is doing this not as an angry fickle God but as a father who cares about his children who is correcting his children in this passage God's patience God's holiness God's mercy God's justice God's sovereignty all of those things are inseparable from each other and from who

God is so as we look into these passages of judgment let us remember the character of our God and why he does what he does to his people let's continue in verse 3 one of the things that we see here is that verse 3 talks about songs of the temple as we have seen throughout this book of Amos and in the other passages where we see prophet Isaiah begins his ministry just a couple of years after Amos and there are a lot of similarities from Isaiah Amos around what's happening in Israel at that time one of the things that we'll notice is that there is no shortage of religious activity there are all kinds of activities and festivities going on in the temples so if you were to come in from the outside oh yeah these Israeli people they're very religious all kinds of things going on in the temples

wonderful except that's not how God sees it God must be worshiped on his terms not ours God gets to decide how he's to be worshiped not us and what we see is that God is not pleased with their worship because it is contrary to who he is God repeated this message a few years later through Isaiah when you look at the first chapter of Isaiah in the opening of Isaiah God goes on to call out the worship of Israelis by really strong words he called this worthless detestable that's how God looks at all of this vibrant worship festivals going on in Israeli temples why because it's not about the activity God can see through that to see if this is in accordance with this character and in that case of Israel it was not so because of the repeated rejection of his message God severe hand is going to come upon Israel and that's why God says to the end is near the time is ripe for judgment of his people so God was going to cause death destruction and utter despair the passage that David read he talks about this silence when God acts in this way silence is the appropriate response before God we see this in many times in Scripture when God acts in a way that people have nothing to say when

Job we go on for chapter after chapter after chapter of Job and his friends who are arguing about God's ways and then God finally reveals himself Job's response was oops I better shut up here and that there's something appropriate about that in that we are put in our place similarly in Romans 3 it talks about how God's laws revealed so that every none of us is gonna have anything to say before God we better shut up and listen and there is that appropriate sense of awe before God and God acts in a way silence is the appropriate response to the heavy hand of God that is revealed here the way this passage is structured is that it's actually bookended by the verdicts it begins with a verdict and ends with a verdict and in between the verdict in the beginning and the end in the middle the reason for the verdict the charge for which they're guilty is given so we are told from the get-go that this is the verdict of the people that there is going to be end there is going to be death there is going to be destruction and it's repeated again and now we are getting into the middle of the passage now we are given the reason for the verdict so look with me in verses 4 through 6 verses 4 through 6 they speak of external religiosity that's disconnected from the heart what we see here in verses 4 through 6 of that look all kinds of religious festivals are going on the new moon festival is going on people are observing the Sabbath great what's there to complain about except that God sees through to the heart we talked about how God must be worshipped on his terms are not ours one of the things that we see here is that these new moon festivals in verse 5 and Sabbath that's talked about in verse 5 these are external activities these are external activities that are trying to hide some internal contradictions this is true for all of us that all of us often fail to live up to good aspirations we may aspire to something good but we fail to live up to it but that's not what this is talking about this is also not talking about sometimes we inadvertently cause harm on others we may not intend to cause harm but sometimes we do this is not talking about inadvertent harm nor is this talking about striving to do the right thing but failing now this is talking about hypocrisy the word hypocrisy has its origins in the Greek term for a stage actor in theater you have an actor what does an actor do an actor portrays a character that's not the actor so when you watch a movie some famous actor is playing a character we know that this is a movie that's the character that's not the same as the actor but a hypocrite is someone who tries to convince people that this is this yep I'm putting on a stage act what we are seeing here is an act people are going through all of these religious festivities but what they're really doing is there it's an act they're projecting an image they're projecting a character that's not really who they are and that is what God is able to see through it's true when it comes to our lives that hypocrisy by the way comes natural to all of us but God is not

deceived we may be able to deceive a few other people around us by our external signs of religiosity but God is not deceived God sees the new moon first of all in Sabbath instead of nope I can see through your heart I'm not fooled and that is the issue here God is not deceived as I said there are a lot of similarities in the message through Amos and message through Isaiah and through Isaiah God condemns Israel and says in Isaiah 29 these people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me actions that contradict our profession of faith actually reveal our true nature so what's happening here with Israel is that they're following all of these religious activities new moon festivals and Sabbath and all of these things but what they're really wanting to do is to pursue their true love money well talked about that in just a moment a few weeks ago Pastor Scott preached from Amos chapter 5 he talked about the he walked through that famous verse in Amos chapter 5 let justice roll down like waters and how it has been used over history to call our wrongs in our society one of the things that we have seen throughout the book of

[ 20 : 09 ] Isaiah is God's emphasis on justice the reason is because justice is a part of the character of God God is just and therefore God expects human beings that were created in his image to live in a way that's consistent with this character injustice is contrary to the character of God and throughout the Old Testament the prophets in particular call out injustice by God's people all the while practicing external religiosity as something that is offensive to God because in all of those cases God diagnoses what's going on when God's people live this way when talks about exploiting widows and orphans when people do that God is diagnosing the root disease that you've forgotten me says God when you do this what you're really saying is that you've forgotten me you've rejected me so in these cases well all of these religious activities are happening what we see is that people buying and selling other people as if people are a commodity and people cheating one another in business transactions all of this is assuming that a God's not looking at what I'm doing this is actually revealing your view of God when we function like this it actually reveals what we really think about God and that is what God is calling out here the specific example that's brought out here the specific indictment that is given in second half of verse five and verse six when it talks about making the bushelt smaller and the shekel bigger in other words charge more and give less out of good business practice maybe it's good to make money but it's unethical and it talks about buying and selling people that we may cheat with dishonest skills that we may buy the helpless for money and buy the needy for a pair of sandals all of those things are contrary to the character of God the specific indictment that's behind all of these things behind the mistreatment of poor and the needy is the what it reveals what it really reveals is our heart that things that our financial status is the basis of our value our worth and our identity was it just Israel that's guilty of it no we are all susceptible to this deception that somehow our financial status is going to give us ultimate security we're all guilty of this temptation that this is where we derive our value all of these things eventually lead to idolatry all of these things are contrary claims to who God is our substitutes for God that we believe will give us ultimate security many of you are familiar with the phrase especially those of you who've or more than college age you may remember the phrase it's the economy's stupid you may remember that phrase it it originated after the 1992 presidential election when president George HW Bush he had lots of reasons to be confident in his accomplishments as the president and yet he lost the re-election and in diagnosing what was going on the summary of political pundits was is the economy's stupid in other words what this is trying to get at was that no matter how well everything else is doing if your finances are not doing great nothing is going great on the flip side you can have a whole bunch of things

wrong but if a financial situation is great that everything is great what is it really reveal about us if in our national setting if our sense of security fluctuates but based on how well we are doing economically think about Israel at this time their economy was the highest it's been in 250 years they would have had lots of reasons to feel really good about themselves but what does God think about it not good that's why God sent Amos to preach this message our economics status as a powerful way of shaping our emotions and affections I'm guilty of it as an individual and the reality is we are all collectively guilty of it as human beings that's why idolatry of money is single-dog throughout Scripture the Lord said you cannot serve God and money he went on to say where your treasure is there is your heart also and Paul picks it up later in telling Timothy the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil why because money is a powerful competitor to God for our deepest love and greatest trust when we trust in money as the source of our satisfaction and security guess what we will do we will resort to anything and everything to obtain that which we think is most valuable and if we think money is the thing that is most desirable then we will commit all sorts of evil to attain that one thing that we believe will give us the greatest trust so Israel resorted to all kinds of unethical practices to obtain the one thing that they believed would give them the greatest security and that's true for all of us human heart has not changed in the 2700 years since this was written that's why God's people resort to buying the poor and the needy and the helpless as if they were commodities and cheat as if God were blind and that is the charge that was given on Israel that is the charge of which they were guilty now I know you know we're listening to all this indictment on Israel I'm thinking I'm glad I'm not like that I may not be committing those vicious crimes that is being talked about over there I may not be cheating people in my business I may not be buying and selling human beings as if people were stuff okay we may not be guilty of those specific crimes but let's remember that we are also prone to practicing external religiosity while our hearts are detached from God so think about how what they are talking about here they are participating in festivals like

New Moon festivities and Sabbath on all of those things but they can't wait for those things to be over so that they can go pursue what they really love to do okay I'm gonna step on a few toes right now how many of you are listening sitting through this sermon and say when is this guy gonna be done so that I can go we can all go through that we can all go through a Sunday morning we can all go through a worship service thinking that okay let me go through this so that I can go do fill in the blank that really brings my greatest satisfaction if we have that mindset let us be cautious that we may not have gone as far as the Israelis but we are following in their footsteps let us be mindful in our worship and our time before God that God isn't fooled by externalities God sees through the inside of our hearts there is a subtle sign there are subtle signs when we too may be making compromises that can put us on the same path let's continue in verse 7 there may be another plan words in verse 7 when you compare verse 7 to verse 14 in both cases there is swearing by a pride of something depending upon the English translation that you have if you have the ESV or the New American Standard it translates verse 7 as God swearing the Lord swearing with the pride of Jacob and the NIV translates it as God swearing by himself that is an interesting again a play on words over here throughout the Old Testament there is a picture if Israel had anything to boast about it only had one thing her

God God makes it very clear that he picked Israel not because there's anything great about Israel but he picked them even though the least of all people so that he would be glorified and in fact God is explicitly referred to in Samuel as the glory of Israel that's the way it should have been if Israel had anything to be proud of it should have been their God that's the way it should have been but what we see throughout Amos is that people are proud of their possessions people are proud of their prosperity people are proud of their political influence as a nation so on and so forth so in all of these things while the pride of Israel should have been her God they have substituted God for cheap imitations of prosperity and power and all of those things so it is both what it should have been and what is regardless of which translation you read the reality is that while God should have been the pride of Israel and by the way and whatever prosperity that they had was still a gift from God they exchanged it for a cheap imitation of prosperity and a false sense of security the northern kingdom of Israel did not learn this lesson that's why God is giving this message through Amos unfortunately that sin that disease continued to the southern kingdom of Judah a few generations later Lord of the destruction that prophesied in the northern kingdom also happened to the southern kingdom and few generations later God speaks through Jeremiah to the southern kingdom of Judah and says this but my people have exchanged their glory for that which is of no benefit are we capable of doing that I'm afraid so we'll talk to we'll talk about that in just a moment let's look at the similar passage similar phrase that occurs at the end of the passage in verse 14 for those who swear by the guilt of Samaria one of those things we see is that because they have rejected their identity in God as the pride of Israel and their pride has left let the sin what we see here is that their guilty verdict becomes their identity imagine we when we think about someone who is convicted of a horrible crime and we say that yep that's what that person is that person is fill in the blank a murderer or whatever that guilty verdict becomes the identity of that person what has happened to Israel is that while God should have been their glory with the pride of glory pride of Israel should have been their God because they exchanged it for their own prosperity their guilty verdict has become their identity this is the worst trade in history why would you trade your identity as the people of God for your identity as someone who's guilty and yet that is human tendency in our sinful nature Israel when we see in the end is that Samaria representing the capital the main city Israel put its confidence in the idol that it set up in the city of Dan we learn earlier from first Kings that Jeroboam set up these one of these golden calves in Dan this idol this false place of worship they have their confidence in their false worship they take pilgrimages to Beersheba those are the things where their confidence is interestingly throughout the Old Testament in the first Samuel and second Samuel as they're constituting the first King of Israel and the second King of Israel Dan and Beersheba are referred to as the ends of Israel from Dan to Beersheba to refer to the entirety of Israel so what this is really saying is that all of Israel is collectively guilty of this as a nation and this is not true just for Israel this message is very relevant for us I was going to read from Philippians chapter 3 verses 8 through 11 and Josh read that for me trust me Josh and I did not collaborate on this so well okay thanks Josh for putting up the verses that I was going to speak about today Paul tells the Philippians to not boast in any of their earthly status or accomplishment Paul tells the Philippians that you know what if I had something to boast about I actually do from my earthly status he says yeah here here's my long list of resume that I can boast about but he says

but I'm not going to do that it's all rubbish he later tells the Galatians that he strives to not boast in anything except in the cross of Christ for a Christian knowing our value that is given to us when we are created in the image of God and the value that we have when God pays the price of his son to purchase us when we have that identity and when we are told that God in the form of Holy Spirit [ 35 : 01 ] indwells in us to seal us to Christ and adopts us as children when we have that identity for a Christian to boast in anything other than that is actually an offense to God and so for Israel to boast in anything other than they were God's people is an offense to God in the same way for a Christian to boast in pick whatever you want your nationalism your money your accomplishments well your politics whatever else we know boast about God says that's offensive to me that's what Paul talks about all of these things that I could boast about that's rubbish compared to knowing Christ may I boast in nothing other than in the cross of Christ that lesson that Israel did not learn is a hard lesson for us our identity is in who we are and whose we are in Christ period all other forms of identity will lead to idolatry and that is a lesson that Israel did not heed and I pray that we would heed the lesson that Israel did not God can see through our heart God is not fooled by our facade we cannot go through our lives as if God is unable to do anything about our lives that's why the consistent teaching of God's word is that God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble we see James talking about that we see Peter talking about that they're quoting from power problems three here God opposes the proud by humbling them the true pride of Israel will humble the false pride of

Israel by causing devastation for every person and the land itself we see that the whole land faces the judgment see earthquakes and floods that it's talking about from the beginning of humanity's rebellion against God described in Genesis 3 what we learn is that sin has collateral damage what we see here is that the sin of Israel has collateral damage both on man and the land the earthquake to hit Israel is both literal and a symbolic one in that much like the day of the Lord that was preached on a few weeks ago in chapter 5 there will be widespread destruction of land and life but here's an interesting thing when we read about large-scale devastation we cannot tune it out we ever noticed that Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin is allegedly said this a single death is a tragedy but a million deaths is a statistic a single death is a tragedy but a million deaths is a statistic this is a lesson that our

Hollywood script writers know really well have you ever noticed this when you watch like a disaster movies aliens attacking and you know trying to wipe out earth massive natural disasters millions of people die they always focus on individual stories why because our mind tunes out calamities on a national scale we need something to be personalized for us to really for it to resonate well guess what well Hollywood may have some pretty good story tellers God is the ultimate storyteller and God say tells us true stories that are stranger than fiction what we see here is that in the midst of all of these accounts of red national calamity that the whole nation is going to suffer God realizes that that's probably not going to sink in on this people so in addition to this big national story I'm also going to give some personal stories of how this is going to affect individual lives so what we see here if you look at verse 10 second half of verse 10 this this will be like the lamentations of people will be like and I'll make it like a time of mourning for an only son this horrible thing of a parent losing their only son that type of it oh that is personal I can see it's not just about a widespread national calamity this is going to hit personally again in verse 13 it talks about young women and men who have so much to look forward to in life they're not going to be spared by the way I work with college students and one of the amazing things that they think they're invincible nothing can happen to them but God it's a yeah all you young people you're not going to be spared of this either so God is personalizing the judgments so that nobody can escape the seriousness of this but here's the part that really struck me as I was meditating on this passage over the last few weeks all of these things we've talked about are serious the widespread devastation death bodies everywhere nobody's going to be spared earthquakes floods all of those devastations are real but that was not the most devastating judgment in this passage the most devastating judgment is found in verses 11 through 12 and that is being deprived of the word of God Jesus lived what he preached that man shall not live a bread alone but by every word from the mouth of God the worst consequence of Israel's rebellion was not the death and destruction but being cut off from hearing the Lord thankfully we are in a different era of God's plan of salvation we have ready access to his word and God's spirit dwells in those of us who are under the new covenant but the underlying principle remains the same we ought not to take access to God's word for granted we ought not to take access to God for

granted as God says in Isaiah seek the

Lord while he may be found call upon him while he is near I began this sermon by stating that our response to God's omniscience that God can see through everything God can see our every thought word and action how we respond to it depends upon our relationship with God same here how we respond to this judgment of God is going to reveal our relationship with God in response to the repeated rejection of him God says in verse 2 go back to the beginning of the passage that he will not pass by them any longer and that phrase I will not pass by them any longer should have caught the years of Israel because several centuries ago God bid pass by them as God led them out of slavery in the land of Egypt it is only those whose homes were covered in the blood of the Lamb where pass by from an angel of death that caused the death of all the firstborn in the land of Egypt God says in this time he will not pass by them but even the discipline of his chosen people here by the death of their only sons did not accomplish the restoration into a right relationship with God so God ultimately accomplished the restoration through the death of not their only son but of his only son God ultimately accomplished in the final Passover through the death of Jesus Christ the only one who is fully God and fully man these verses speak about this pain of parents who lost their only son but guess what as severe as this pain was of sinners grieving the loss of their only son it was nothing in comparison with the pain that God bore upon himself for our sake so as we read of this judgment on God's people we have to process it through the lens who is our

[ 44 : 05 ] God our God is the one who did not spare his own son for our sake so that we may be reconciled to him when Peter began to recognize who Jesus is he said Lord whom shall we go for you have the words of eternal life recognizing who our God is should make us desire our God God has given us abundant access to his word we may give intellectual assent to the importance of God's word and yet it may have no effect on how we live many Christians agree that the Bible is the word of God and yet do not feast on it as if we believe what we say the good news is that our appetites and our tastes they're not static they can be trained it has been known for a long time our that's true with physical food and drink we can train our taste to like something or not like something that's true with all kinds of food and drink that is also true with a hunger and a thirst for God's word we can train to desire God by feasting on his word unfortunately it's also true that at some point we have trained our taste so poorly it becomes increasingly hard to desire the good things so before it becomes too late to undo the cumulative self-inflicted damage of a lifetime of choices of bad food and drink let's retrain our appetites and our tastes what we consume physically affects our bodies what we consume spiritually affects our souls so we must desire the goodness of God's word as if we believed our claim that this is the word of the Lord if we continue unhealthy food and drink spiritually things like pride comfort materialism external signs of religiosity they will have effect on us that the longer we indulge in those things the harder it's going to be get back into shape in the same way we need to retrain our appetites and tastes for God's word the time is ripe for us to hunger and thirst for God the preeminent advocate of the inerrancy of God's word in the last century was perhaps a British theologian J.I. Packer in 1978 Packer led a convening of gathering all from all over the world leaders of the prominent Christian organizations into this international conference on biblical inerrancy and they agreed to a prominent declaration that this is the inerrant word of God wonderful you would think that paper about J.I. Packer would have been happy with that accomplishment no he wasn't satisfied he wasn't satisfied with the mere affirmation that this is the inner and word of God he went on to write this no no no merely saying that this is the inner and word of God is not enough we must act on what we say he says this let us then take our Bibles afresh and resolved by God's grace henceforth to make full use of them let us read them with reverence and humility seeking the illumination of the Holy Spirit let us meditate on them till our sight is clear and our souls are fed let us live in obedience to God's will as we find it revealed to us in scripture and the Bible will prove itself both a lamp

unto our feet and a light unto our path amen