Amos: True Worship - Amos 7:1-9

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Preacher: Scott Liddell

[0:00] Thank you Eric and worship team and Melissa for reading the passage we're going to look at today. And if you're a guest with us today, we're in the middle of a sermon series this summer going through the book of Amos.

We, Amos is this prophet who is in the southern kingdom and he is proclaiming a word of the Lord to the northern 10 tribes of Israel in the northern kingdom.
And we have been reading in chapters 3 through 6 about five sermons that Amos has already proclaimed to Israel.
And in these five sermons, we find the reason for God's judgment that is coming. And I'll just cite some things that we have found in chapters 3 through 6.
We see that there's this legal injustice. There's this testifying and bearing false witness in the courts, especially against the righteous. There's this economic exploitation, especially of the poor.
[1:00] There's religious hypocrisy. There's this luxurious indulgence of living. There's this boastful complacency and false worship. All of these things are the reasons that Amos has been saying to the northern kingdom, this is judgment, this judgment is coming and this is why, the reasons for judgment.

In chapter 7, we're turning a little bit of a corner. In chapter 7, we begin a series of five visions that Amos sees.
The Lord gives Amos five visions and today we're going to cover two of these in our text today. Two visions that Amos sees. And Amos, if you will, in these visions, what is God doing?
Chapter 7 through 8 that we're beginning today, chapter 7, gives you the result of God's judgment. And so the visions in part communicate the result of God's judgment.
The previous chapters gave the reasons for God's judgment. And so today, we're going to find our first principle in our text today that judgment is not without purpose.
[2:13] Judgment is not without purpose. We begin our text today in verse 1. Or actually, I'm going to review the last verse in chapter 6.

So if you have your Bible with you, you can turn to Amos, chapter 6. In verse 14, we read this, I will rise up against you a nation, a house of Israel declares the Lord, the God of hosts, and they shall oppress you from Lebo Hamas to the Brook of the Arabah.
And that's from the north until the south. I will rise up against you a nation, O Israel. This is the judgment that is coming. The Assyrian Empire is going to come down on Israel.
That's the nation being referred to. And they will oppress you. The reason for judgment is they're going to oppress you and judge you for your disobedience.
Judgment will come at the hand of a foreign nation. And in these visions that Amos has, he has two visions that we're going to look at today.
[3:25] And they're a bit different from the inviting army that is coming down the Assyrian Empire. Yet they are equally, if not worse, devastating.

So devastating that Amos is moved to pray, Lord, would you please relent from that? The Assyrian Empire and what I've heard and have declared to the Northern Kingdom, perhaps we can take that. We don't want what you have just declared. And he's going to ask the Lord, please, not that. Let's look at what that is in verse one.
This is what the Lord, this is the first vision that Amos has. This is what the Lord God showed me. Behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout.
And behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowing. First note that who stands behind this judgment? God does.

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[4:30] He was the one responsible for the forming of the locust swarm. He says he was forming locusts. God is behind this judgment that is declared in Amos chapter seven, verse one.

The second judgment was aimed at wiping out the economy and their ability to sustain life. They are an agrarian culture. Their life and their economy was rooted in what they could produce.
Notice the timing of when these locusts would come. It was after the first harvest or the king's mowing. This was a form of taxation in Israel.
So every good nation has to have good, robust taxes. And so, so too did Israel. And after the first harvest, that was for the king.
The king had to supply for his government. He had to supply for his warring horses. He had to supply for his royal household.
[5:30] And so it took a lot to keep the king going. And so he would get the first harvest. So then when the second harvest was just beginning to sprout, when this is all that's going to be left for Israel was the second harvest.

That's when the second, that's when the swarm of locusts would come. And this is what Amos saw in the vision. And he, and it would be devastating.
Not only would Israel starve, but they also would not have produce and grass and things like this for their livestock, for sheep, for goats.
They wouldn't have anything. So they would ultimately disease would set in, starvation would set in, and massive loss of life would occur. And this is what Amos saw.
Not having anything to eat, nothing to eat for your livestock. And then imagine this, if sheep and goats and your agrarian lifestyle was your economy, your economy would be decimated.
[6:38] All your livestock would die. Everything that you could have not only to eat, but also to sell dead. It would have been devastating.

And Amos knew this would wipe out Israel. People, livestock, people would starve to death. Disease would set in, massive death.
The second vision, I'm going to take these because they're similar. The second vision is going to be found in verse four. This is the second vision.
This is what the Lord of God showed me. Behold, the Lord was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land.
In the second vision, Amos sees this great judgment of by fire, it's, it were told. Whether it's just a severe heat wave or actually a devastating fire that catches flame that rips through Israel or both, the text isn't really that clear.
[7:43] But we do know that this is what Amos saw and it was so devastating that he said, Lord, anything but that too, please relent. Whatever this fire was, it was so devastating that Amos thought, oh, please, Lord, not that.

To illustrate how devastating this is, imagine this, look how this judgment by fire, how devastating it is. It says, it devoured the great deep.
Now, I don't know what sea or ocean the great deep is, but I'm going to speculate. It's probably the Mediterranean Sea. Amos is from the town of Tico in northern Judah, in the nation of Judah, which is close to the Mediterranean Sea.
So likely the body of water, the great deep that Amos saw was probably the Mediterranean Sea. And so can you imagine a fire or an intense heat so great that it would dry up the Mediterranean Sea?
And that this is what Amos saw in this vision. And he knew that that kind of devastating heat and fire that would rip through Israel, again, massive devastation, loss of life.
[8:57] Your economy would be tanked, people would starve. And so he praised for the Lord to relent. And what can we take comfort in today with regard to this text?

We do not always know what the purpose is for our present circumstance or for adversity or some form of judgment that we may have or receive, not all, by the way, adversity is a form of judgment. We think of the man born blind in John chapter nine, and that was for God's glory. It wasn't really a form of God's judgment. It was just a thing that occurred for God's glory.
So we can be comforted that all adversity, all judgment is not without purpose. It has purpose, and we can take heart in this.
And so too did this judgment, and we will find the purpose and the response to this. And we come to the second point, and I'll read it here in a bit.

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[10:03] But I want us to, I'm going to say it. I don't have a slide for it until the end, but God withholds what we deserve. That is His mercy.

Second point is God withholds what we deserve. That is His mercy and demonstrates the pleasure of His compassion, which is grace. And how do we see God's mercy and God's grace here in this passage?
Look with me in verse three. We're not going to read Amos's plea to the Lord. Please relent, but we are going to read the fact that God relents. Look with me in verse three.
Amos pleads to the Lord about the locus. Don't send that. And then in verse three we read, and the Lord relented concerning this.
And it shall not be, said the Lord. Look with me in verse six. So after this great fire and heat that we read of, this great form of judgment in the vision that Amos saw, Amos pleads to the Lord, please not that.
[11:04] And in verse six we read, and the Lord relented concerning this. This also shall not be, said the Lord God. So in both cases, both in the locus and in the fire, that God was going to send Israel, that Amos saw in the vision, and he pleads before the Lord, God relents.

But it's not because the people of Israel didn't deserve it. So God withholds what we deserve, and that is his mercy. And demonstrates his pleasure of his compassion and that is his grace.
We see mercy and grace in this passage that God relents. And he says, it shall not be, and it also shall not be in response.
Think of this, how much better off Israel was because one man decided to pray.
Amos understood Israel had sinned. He had been given five messages already declaring that you've sinned against the Lord. Amos understood Israel was deserving of God's judgment. He had just completed those five sermons.
[12:18] He had spent two to three years of his life in the northern kingdom, preaching and warning God's people of his coming judgment. Judgment was no surprise to Israel, but this, the locus, but this, that fire.

This calamity was too much for Amos to bear, and he intercedes on Israel's behalf. And the Lord hears Amos' plea and relents.
This theologically presents a very difficult theological conundrum when we read, and the Lord relented.
To understand and appreciate this passage, there are two questions that we're going to fill the remainder of the sermon with that we're going to consider today. And the first question is this, if God relents, then does God change his mind?
You have to answer this question. This is where the theological question comes in that presents a difficult question of, does God change his mind? Let me answer the question and then we'll look at scripture here in a moment.
[13:27] Does God change his mind? No. God never changes his mind, nor is he swayed by circumstances. Here we're going to look at Malachi together.

Malachi 3.6 reads this, I the Lord do not change, so you descendants of Jacob are not destroyed.
Numbers chapter 23 verse 19, God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind.
Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? No. God is unchanging and he is unchangeable. The theological word for this concept is called immutable.
God is immutable. He does not change. He does not change his mind. He does not change his will and he doesn't change his nature and aren't we grateful for that?
There are occasions in scripture where it appears that God changes his mind. We're going to look at one now in the book of Jonah.
[14:31] Jonah, you remember Jonah is a prophet. He is sent to Nineveh. He goes in the wrong direction. He goes to the ocean.

God sends a big fish, swallows him, spits him up on dry ground, runs to Nineveh, and then finally proclaims the word of the Lord. This, that's Jonah and he's speaking to Nineveh, this prophet of God now in Nineveh, who happens to be the Assyrian Empire's capital city.
And Jonah is this prophet. Jonah began to go into the city. We read here in the text, going on a day's journey and he called out yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

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So let me stop. God has said in 40 days, this city is going to be destroyed, overthrown. It's, it's done. That's what the Lord said.
And the people of Nineveh believed God and they called for a fast and put on sackcloth from the great of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself in sackcloth and ashes, and then issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles.
[15:48] Let neither a man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let the beast be covered in sackcloth and let them call on the mighty, call out mightily to God.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. There are certain people that I would like to meet when I go to heaven and if this king happened to believe in the Lord, which we're not necessarily given that this is a lawless, godless king, but he would be someone who if he happens to be there, I'd love to meet someday because I want to ask him this question.
Why did the animals have to put sackcloth on? I love how thorough he is. Let us put on symbols of remorse.
Let us mourn over our sin. So everyone put on and why don't you put them on the sheep too? Can you imagine? Come here, Bessie. Got to put the burlap on.
But I love how thorough he understands the weight of sin. Let's make sure everything is covered. Let's take this oh so seriously. Judgment is coming.
[17:05] Man and beast alike adorn. And then we read verses nine and ten and this is what the king continues to say and who knows?

God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish when God saw that they what they did and how they turned from their evil way.
God relented from that disaster and he said that he would not do to them as and he did not do it. Notice the Lord saw how they had turned from their evil way.
Remember God said in 40 days no more and here God sees what their response was and he relents.
What is going on here? Scott you say God does not change his mind and yet I'm seeing a lot of evidence that he does.
[18:11] What's going on? I believe Jeremiah to be helpful. Jeremiah 18 7 through 11. If at any time I declare concerning a nation and or a kingdom oh by the way Jeremiah is a prophet also.

He is prophesying in Jerusalem to the southern kingdom of Judah and he is warning them that Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar are coming down and judging them.
So he is about 50 years or so later after Amos. It's down in the southern kingdom and this is what he is declaring. So now he has a different audience in Jerusalem warning them about a different kingdom coming down 50 to 100 years later.
This is what he says. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down or destroy it. This is God speaking. He says if I declare that a nation will be plucked up, break down or be destroyed and if that nation concerning which I have spoken turns from its evil.
I will be relent from the disaster that I intend to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build it up or plant it. And if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I intend to do to it.
[19:32] Now therefore say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem thus says the Lord, Behold, I am shaping the disaster against you, devising a plan against you, return everyone from his evil way and amend your ways and your deeds.

Do you see what the Lord is doing? He intends one thing, but contingent upon the response of the people.
He may relent from that. And it could be judgment or it could be blessing that he intends, but based on the response, he will either judge or relent from judgment or bless or relent from blessing.
So then I think two distinctions that are helpful to understand how we're talking about this is this. If God does not change his mind, then what is this? There are unconditional declarations of God, meaning like when he came to David and he said to him, Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me.

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Your throne will be established forever. This is the part of the Davidic covenant. And this is why Jesus, when he came on the scene, people were wondering is he a descendant of David?
[20:43] Because this was an unconditional declaration of God. God's going to fulfill this whether you like it or not. But then there are conditional declarations.

In other words, when God said, I will destroy Nineveh in 40 days or here in our passage where he says, I am forming locusts or I am going to send fire.
These are those conditional declarations of God where he was speaking conditionally based on the Assyrian's response. He knows this because the Assyrians repented and then God did not.
In fact, meet out his judgment on Nineveh back in Jonah's day and God did not change his mind.
Rather, his message to Nineveh was a warning meant to provoke them to repentance and his warning was successful.
So God relented and it's not because he changed his mind, but it was a conditional declaration that God spoke.
[21:45] He say, well, Scott, let me go to my point that you have not yet seen on the screen.

Oh, here it is. God withholds what we deserve. That's his mercy. And he demonstrates the pleasure of his compassion and that is his grace.
Does the Lord still withhold what we deserve? In Amos' day, he did not ultimately send the locusts.
He did not ultimately send the fire even though they were well deserving of it.
And he withheld what they deserved. Does he still do that today? And does he demonstrate the pleasure of his compassion upon us and grace? Yes.
I want to read a few verses today. I'm going to say, but God being rich in mercy because of his great love for which he loved us.
[22:47] God being rich in mercy. This word rich, what is was hard about this word rich is what there's almost nothing I can think of that is like it today in our existence. Because everything is finite.

My wife had to buy oatmeal for us yesterday because I eat oatmeal about four or five times a day every morning. I love oatmeal. And so, and because when I scoop oatmeal out of the container and to cook oatmeal, it's not an infinite supply.
We're not rich in oatmeal. And so it's going to run out and we're going to have to go buy more. But that's not the case with the Lord. He's rich in mercy.
He's not. There's no exhaustion to it. The Lord gives mercy readily and and he doesn't deplete any of his resources of mercy.
He's rich. It's inexhaustible. And that's how merciful God is. It's inexhaustible. And because he is rich in mercy.
[23:55] He doesn't give you what you deserve. Because of his great love of which he loved us even when and look at our condition. Even when we were dead in our trespasses.

He has made us alive together with Christ. We were dead in our trespasses and sin. We were unable to respond to the Lord.
We were spiritually dead, dead to truth, dead to righteousness, dead to peace. There was no life that could respond to spiritually things.
We were dead and it gets worse. Not only were we dead. We were dead in our trespasses and sin because we read in Romans 5 10 for while we were enemies.
We were reconciled to God the death of his son, Jesus Christ. We were dead in sin that put us in a posture of being enemies of God.
[25:02] And it even gets worse. It gets worse in Ephesians 2 1 through 10. It says, and we who were dead in trespasses and sin as we once walked and followed in the course of this world.

And following the prince of the power of the air. So not only were we dead in sin, we were enemies of God. And now we read that we were following the prince of the power of the air.
That is Satan. It gets even worse in Romans 6 23. It says the wages of sin is death. So not only are we dead in sin and enemies of God and following after Satan.
We were dead. The wages of sin is death. That is a spiritual separation from God for eternity. That is because of sin. We deserve to be in an eternal abode that places us in internal torment forever.
And if you're not depressed yet, it gets worse. Not only were we dead in sin and an enemy of God following after Satan deserving to be in a place of torment for eternity.

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[26:11] We read in Ephesians 2 3. That we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. The nature children of wrath.

That is this eternal judgment and eternal condemnation. Objects of perpetual continual judgment. And last, it gets even worse. Not only we dead to sin enemies of God aligned with Satan following after patterns of this world deserving eternal judgment and torment being children of wrath.
It says for we sinned and fell short of the glory of God. All of us that is that contributes all that is that who have God is we fell short of the weight and the worthiness of God.
All that is good, all that is beautiful, all that is generous. We fell well short of that. But then we have verses like this that we have on the screen.
[27:19] God who is rich in mercy because of his great love. In verse five, even when we were dead and our trespasses, we were made alive together with Christ for by grace you've been saved.

Our life is now indistinguishable for those who are in Christ from the life of Christ. We cannot help but be pleasing to the Lord in that way.
Verse three, verse eight and nine toward the bottom there for by grace you've been saved through faith and this is not of your own doing.
It is a gift of God not a result of works so that no one can boast by grace this unmerited favor. His unmerited favor offering his only son to die on the cross and those who believe in his person and his work on the cross to forgive sin may have eternal life.
There's no better news. There's no better news. And I pray that if you are here today and you have never believed in Christ, I pray that today would be a day of salvation.
[28:38] And if you have questions, I would love to visit with you afterward. So look at that second point with me one more time. God withholds what we deserve and demonstrates his pleasure of his compassion.

He did it in Amos's day and we are recipients of that same principle today. And lastly, the prayer of a righteous is powerful and effective. Verses two and five.
If the first answer the first question, does God change his mind? The answer is no. Then the second question leans into that answer that answer and asked this question. If God does not change his mind, then why pray?
Why pray? But notice what Amos does. Look with me in verses two. And when they had finished eating the grass of the land, this is the locus that he's referring to.
This is what I said. So Amos said, oh Lord, God, please forgive. How can Jacob stand? Speaking of Israel, Jacob, he is so small.
[29:45] Whatever the size of the swarm of the locus was, Israel was tiny compared to that. And he knew what it would mean for Israel. And he said, oh Lord, please not that.

Second, look at his prayer in verse five. And he said after the raging fire, oh Lord, God, please cease. How can Jacob stand?
He is so small. One man prayed for a nation and that nation avoided two judgments that would have been oh so devastating.
One man who prayed. So Scott, if God does not change his mind, why pray? Because prayer of a righteous person, prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.
You say, well, how? Does God change his mind? No. If God were to change his mind, he would have to improve on himself in some way. In other words, if God changes mind, that action would suggest that the first way of thinking was in deficit.
[30:55] And because we prayed, he would improve upon his plan concerning what he was wanting to do. Could God improve on his plan? No. No.

And how unlike us that is. I change my mind all the time. And that's not a joke.
I find a better way of doing things. My conscience stops me. The Holy Spirit stops me. The Word of God stops me. Or changes and alters the plan. I change my mind all the time. Counsel stops me. We thought A, but then realized B was better and so we change our mind. But since God always knows all things from the beginning and the end in Revelation 22, it is not possible for him to improve on any plan that he has made.
God's plans are already perfect in 2 Samuel 22. And he has stated that his plans will always prevail in Isaiah.
[31:58] So if the first question is, does God change his mind? And the answer is no, then why pray? Does prayer change outcomes?

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The answer is yes. Here's how. God delights in changing our circumstances and responds to our prayers of faith.
Jesus instructed us, always pray and do not lose heart. First John says this and reminds us that when we pray according to his will, he hears and he answers our prayer.
And the critical phrase there is according to his will. It would be like this. Let me illustrate it with an illustration. Let's imagine a father wants to give his daughter a car when she turns 16 years old. And he knows that by that time that she'll have a job and praise that she'll be active in the church and school activities and will be able to purchase her own insurance by that time.
[32:58] But he also plans to wait to give it until she asks for it because he wants her to value the gift. But at age 11, she begins to beg for the car and she pleads, she bargains, she gets angry with her, gets angry.

And then on her 12th and 13th birthday, she begins to approach her father in a more thoughtful way and explains her need for a car. And then by the age of 16, she matures and now has lots of responsibilities and thinks about all that what her parents are doing for her as they drive her around. And she says, Yeah, she expresses that she would appreciate a car and she knows that her father has every provision to be able to produce that for her.
If he chose in a very short amount of time, he joyfully hands her the keys. And did the father change his mind? No.
He always planned to give her a car when she had turned 16, but she had to ask. From God's perspective, he does not change.
[34:19] But from a human perspective, not knowing what his will is, we pray by faith without doubting, according to his will. And God responds with his provision and his decision.

So does God change his mind? No. Does prayer change outcomes? Yes. We are given this assurance in James 5, 16b.
It says, the prayer of a righteous person has great power and it is working. The prayer of a righteous person has great power and it is working.
Prayer does not change God's mind, but it changes our circumstances. Amos knows this after seeing these two visions.
These two would devastate Israel. These two plagues, the locus and the fire, these would devastate Israel.
[35:18] So he prays. And God conditionally declared that he was going to send the locus and send the fire, knowing he wouldn't. He was conditioned upon someone praying, seeking, asking him for something that would please him, for his glory's sake, and so he relented.

And God gave him his request. And Amos did pray and God did relent. Does God change his mind? No.
Does prayer change circumstances? Yes. God being entreated through prayer makes possible the impossible. That we would be, it would be impossible to stop the locus.
It would be impossible to stop fire. But God, through prayer of a righteous man, found favor in his side and prayed and prayer proved to be the most powerful and effective thing.
Consequently, the impossible was made possible. I don't do this. In fact, I don't know if I've ever done this as a senior pastor, but I'm going to ask us today as a church to pray together.
[36:30] I'm going to conclude the sermon in a time of prayer together as a church. What I'm going to ask you to do in a moment is to gather in groups of three or four individuals.

You can turn those before you or behind you. If you're uncomfortable praying, you don't have to pray. But when we pray corporately, let me just share this.
If you're listening, I'll say this, all of you are praying all the time together. One person may be orating and speaking a prayer, but that doesn't mean you're not praying.
If the Spirit of God in you agrees with what the Spirit of God is moving that person to pray, say, yes, Lord, amen. So you're participating in this prayer. All are praying all the time as we do this together in a moment.
And I'm going to give us a few things to pray for. I would love to see the impossible make possible.
[37:33] We are about 10 months away from launching a church and planting a church through Pastor Eric, who was leading worship today.

And in that name of that church will be Lampstand Gospel Church and Pastor Eric. I pray that we would pray protection and provision for Pastor Eric and for that Lampstand Gospel Church.

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It's interesting. I was sharing this with Eric that I was going to want to pray in the service. And he mentioned that he had asked a couple of locations up on the South Hill where we're wanting to plant this church.
And he was mentioning to me that he had heard back from the district that the school does not allow churches to do this. And but two days ago, he received an email saying, hey, we're actually going to make that final decision in September.
So please don't accept that no as of right now. Now they may still come back and say no. But from all intents and purposes, we're having a hard time finding a location that would work for the church planned.
[38:39] And here's an opportunity and we received an email two days ago. Moran Prairie Elementary School. I'd love to be there.

Next month, they meet to make a decision. If that's the Lord's will, would we pray Lord, would you provide that as a location and the members and the finances for a church plant?
Lord, would you do this? Churches just don't plant without miracles. God would you be glorified and we see the salvation of the lost.
One of the most effective outreach things a church could do is plant a church. More people come to faith in Christ through a church plant than any other outreach event they ever would ever host.
Think about this. Fourth Memorial Church is 120 something years old. How many people have come to faith in Christ because Fourth Memorial Church was here?
[39:35] It's the far more, it's the best evangelistic thing we could ever do is plant a church. That God would be glorified. We would see salvation the lost and there would be a unity of the body shared at Lamstan.

Fourth Memorial Church, would you pray for us? For protection and provision. The REACH initiative that we have, it's lagging behind in a little bit of finances and that's going to affect the church planned among other things.
And so Lord, would you just provide future staff? We're sending some of our best and who is it that is going to replace those staff members?
I'll share that I've interviewed many already for many positions, especially in the area of youth and worship. And either they or we have declined all of them and we're at ground zero.
Lord, would you provide? Make possible the impossible Lord. And also that Lord would revitalize and strengthen church that we rebuild quickly back to health as we send a contingency of our of our church to Lamstan Gospel Church.
[40:46] Lord, would you revitalize and strengthen fourth? Make possible the impossible. Would God be glorified and we see and continue to see the salvation of the lost and for the unity of body?

Not altogether different from that of how we pray for Lamstan. So as Eric comes forward, he'll play a little music. Would you please quietly gather around people around you and know this?
The prayer of a righteous is powerful and effective. Would we pray? Let's conclude our service in this way at this time. So gather around two or three to four individuals and pray together.
I'll leave the slide up. Thank you.

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