

**[This is to be read during the week of 12<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020]**

**DAY 1: HOW CAN WE BE RIGHT WITH GOD?**

**EPHESIANS 3:17, ROMANS 12:5, 1 CORINTHIANS 1:30**

No matter which gospel text we turn to, that same question arises. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the gospel at all without first considering the quandary of human fallenness -- and candidly acknowledging all the seemingly impossible barriers sin puts between God and the sinner.

If we're all guilty before God, without any excuse for our sin, how will anyone stand in the judgment? If works of righteousness cannot atone for our evil deeds, how could any sinner ever be saved from the guilt and bondage of sin? If God demands utter perfection and we are already irreparably imperfect, what hope is there for us? Indeed, He expressly says He "*will not justify the wicked*"; so does that mean our doom is already sealed? How could a just God justify the ungodly?

Sound gospel answers to those questions go decidedly against the mainstream of popular opinion. Every belief system ever concocted by the human mind answers those crucial questions wrongly. In one way or another, all this world's religions (and all the major political ideologies and social theories, for that matter) teach that people need to earn righteousness for themselves through some kind of merit system. The means by which they seek to do this are as diverse as the many deities in the world's pantheon. Some put the emphasis on rites and rituals. Others stress self-denial and asceticism. In the postmodern West, people simply invent an imaginary deity for whom sin is really no big deal—thinking their "good" deeds will be taken into account in the judgment and their

sins will simply be ignored. But at the opposite extreme there are large numbers of people advocating jihad or some other outlandish expression of zealotry.

One of the most crystal-clear teachings of the Bible is that no one gains God's favor by self-effort -- least of all those who self-identify as righteous. True believers are united with Christ "*through faith*," and therefore they too are "*in Christ*." God accepts them and blesses them on that basis. That is how He "*justifies the ungodly*." The very One who gave the law that condemns us also supplies the righteousness needed to save us. And that is the only merit we need to have a right standing before Him.

## **DAY 2: THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE MESSAGE**

### **ROMANS 3:23, JOHN 3:18, EPHESIANS 2:8**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of divine accomplishment. It is an announcement that Christ has already triumphed over sin and death on behalf of hopeless sinners who lay hold of His redemption by faith alone. This is grace-based religion. The focus is on what God has already done for sinners. But to appreciate how such a message is good news, a person must know himself to be a wretched sinner, incapable of making an adequate atonement and therefore powerless to earn any righteous merit of his own -- much less obtain redemption for himself. The sinner must feel the weight of his guilt and know that God is a righteous Judge who will not sanction sin. Indeed, he or she must be prepared to confess that perfect justice demands the condemnation of guilty souls.

That means a clear message about the reality of sin and the hopeless state of fallen humanity is a necessary starting point for the gospel's good news. That's why the gospel according to Paul begins with a guilty verdict that applies to all humanity. "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" People apart from Christ are "*condemned already*." Any person "*who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*" Or, as Paul says in the preamble to his brilliant gospel summary in Ephesians, unredeemed people are "*dead in trespasses and sins*," walking "*according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience*," conducting themselves in the lusts of their flesh, "*fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.*"

But here's the good news: true believers are united with Christ "*through faith*," and therefore they too are "*in Christ*." God accepts them and blesses them on that basis. That is how He "*justifies the ungodly*". He credits them with a righteousness that is not their own -- an alien righteousness, reckoned to their account.

Paul prominently features this truth in his own testimony. His heart's desire, he said, was to "*be found in [Christ], not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.*"

### **DAY 3: THERE IS NO OTHER GOSPEL**

#### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:9-10, EPHESIANS 3:8**

Paul himself might have begun a study of this subject by stating categorically that there is only one true gospel. Anyone who suggests that Paul introduced an altered or embellished version of the apostolic message would have to contradict every point Paul ever made about the singularity of the true gospel. Although he expounded the gospel far more thoroughly and pains-takingly than any other New Testament writer, nothing Paul ever preached or wrote was in any way a departure from what Christ or His apostles had been teaching from the start. Paul's gospel was exactly the same message Christ proclaimed and commissioned the Twelve to take into all the world. There is only one gospel, and it is the same for Jews and Gentiles alike.

It was the false teachers, not Paul, who claimed that God had appointed them to polish or rewrite the gospel. Paul flatly repudiated the notion that the message Christ sent His disciples to preach was subject to revision. Far from portraying himself as some kind of super-apostle sent to set the others straight, Paul wrote, *"I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."*

Indeed, one major factor that set Paul apart from the others was the abundance of divine grace that had transformed him from what he once was (a fierce persecutor of the church) to the man we know from Scripture (an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles). The vast scope of the mercy shown to Paul never ceased to amaze him. His response, therefore, was to labor all the more diligently for the spread of the gospel and the honor of Christ in order to make the most of his calling. He wrote, *"By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I [Paul] or they [the rest of the apostles], so we preach and so you believed."* Notice he expressly states that all the apostles preached the same gospel.

### **DAY 4: HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE WORLD?**

#### **1 CORINTHIANS 1:22-24**

In the preaching of Christ and the apostles, the gospel was always punctuated by a clarion call to repentant faith. But it is not merely a summons to good behavior. It's not a liturgy of religious ceremonies and sacraments. It's not a plea for self-esteem and human dignity. It's not a manifesto for culture warriors or a rallying-cry for political zealots. It's not a mandate for earthly dominion. It's not a sophisticated moral philosophy seeking to win admiration and approval from the world's intellectual elite, or a lecture about the evils of cultural and racial division. It's not an appeal for "social justice." It's not a dissertation on gender issues or a prescription for "redeeming culture." They are all deviations or distractions from the true gospel as proclaimed by Paul.

The cross of Jesus Christ is the sum and the focus of the gospel according to Paul: *"We preach Christ crucified. God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."* And in Pauline theology, the cross is a symbol of atonement. *"Christ crucified"* is a message about redemption for sinners. How vital is that truth, and how crucial for the messenger to stay on point? To make the gospel about anything else is to depart from biblical Christianity. Paul's teaching is not the least bit ambiguous about this. It's the very definition of what he meant when he spoke of *"my gospel."* Quite simply, the gospel is good news for fallen humanity regarding how sins are atoned for, how sinners are forgiven, and how believers are made right with God. And the mission of the church is not to win the world's admiration.

Many of today's best-known evangelical strategists and the leading practitioners of *"missional"* methodology seem not to grasp that simple point. They constantly encourage young evangelicals to *"engage the culture"* and defer to the rules of political correctness. When they translate that counsel into concrete, practical plans of action, it often turns out to mean little more than trying to stay in step with fashion -- as if being perceived as cool were the key to effective ministry. You won't find anything like that in Paul's exhortations to young ministers. On the contrary, Paul candidly acknowledges that the gospel is *"a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles."*

## **DAY 5: WE CAN LIVE IN HOPE NOT FEAR**

### **TITUS 2:13, ROMANS 12:9**

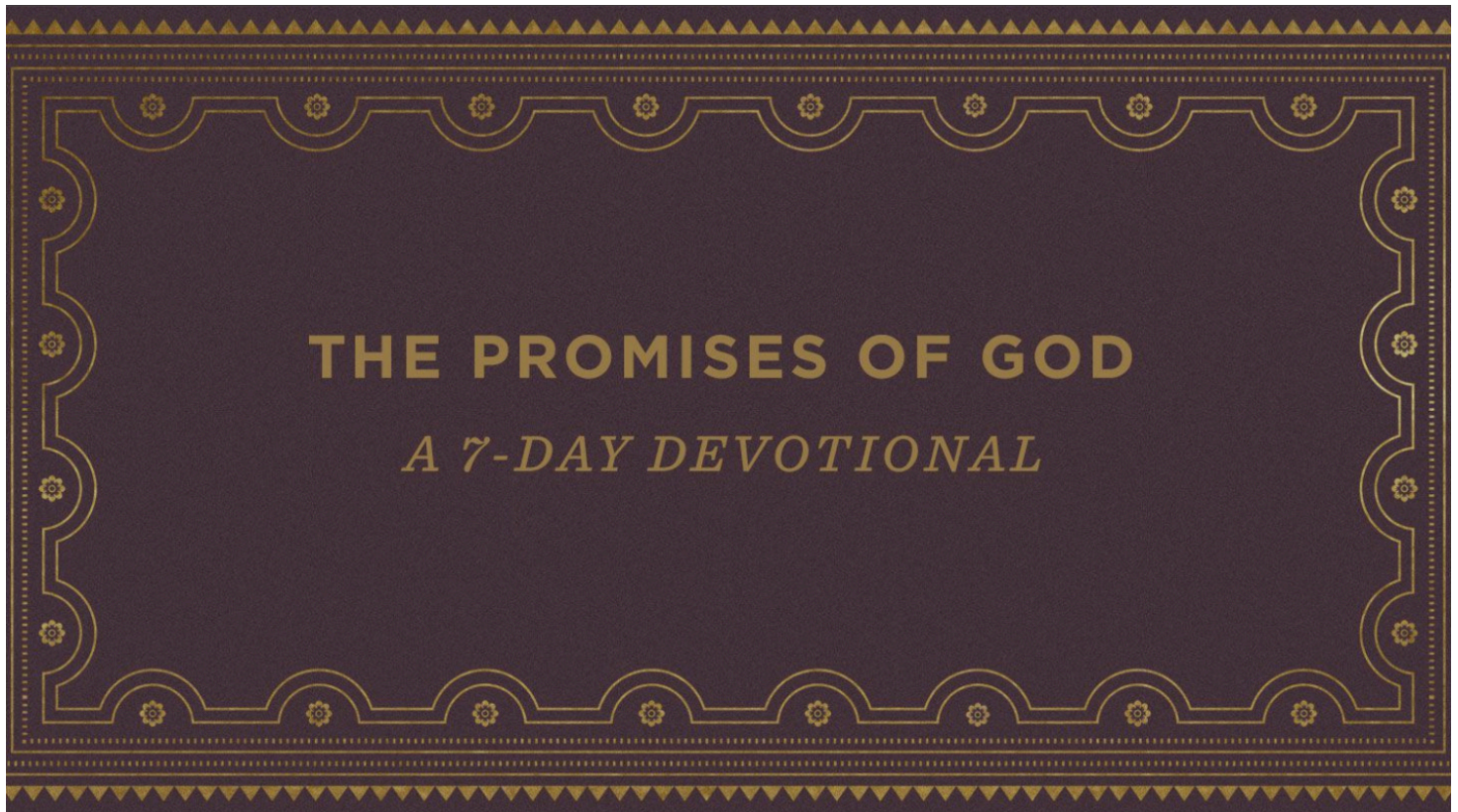
Although law and grace operate with the same moral standard, the eschatology of grace -- what it teaches us about things to come -- is infinitely brighter than the eschatology of law. Indeed, the eternal future of those under grace holds nothing but unending glory and blessings. But the only thing the future holds for those who remain under the law is death and eternal damnation.

Here is the fundamental difference between law and grace. The law makes no promise to sinners other than the guarantee of judgment. For those still under the law, the return of Christ will signal the final outpouring of the judgment to come, and it is a terrifying prospect. But God's saving grace teaches us to be *"looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."* Law threatens judgment and pronounces a death sentence. Grace grants forgiveness and promises eternal blessings. The law points to the sinner's past, filling the guilty heart with fear and regret. Grace points to the believer's future and fills the forgiven heart with gratitude and hope. The difference could not be more stark, and far from luring us into a kind of apathetic passivity -- rather than eliminating our desire to be and do good -- it should motivate us to pursue holiness with all our passions and energies. This, after all, is what Christ died for: to *"redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."*

Grace produces a holy hatred of sin in every true believer. It fills our hearts and minds with a sacred dislike for everything that dishonors God. Although our flesh is still



susceptible to sin's enticements, in our innermost soul we "*abhor what is evil.*" Indeed, hatred for evil is a necessary expression of love for God (Ps. 97:10), and this is the believer's motive for "*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts.*" Its positive flip side is an enduring hunger and thirst for righteousness -- the incentive that prompts us to "*live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age . . .*" The "*glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*" is the blessed hope we look forward to precisely because Christ's appearing in glory will mean the total and permanent removal of sin from our experience, and we will instantly be transformed and perfected.



This 7-day devotional is adapted from *The Promises of God: A New Edition of the Classic Devotional Based on the English Standard Version* by Charles Spurgeon, revised by Tim Chester.

**[This is to be read during the week of 19<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July]**

### **DAY 1: GENESIS 3:15**

This is the first promise to fallen humanity. It contains the whole gospel and the essence of the covenant of grace, God's eternal plan to save his people. It has been in good measure fulfilled. The seed of the woman, who is our Lord Jesus, had his heel when his heel was bruised, and a terrible bruising it was. How much more terrible will be the final bruising of the serpent's head! This was mostly done when Jesus took away sin, vanquished death, and broke the power of Satan. But it awaits a still fuller accomplishment at our Lord's second coming and in the day of judgment.

To us the promise stands as a prophecy that we will be afflicted by the powers of evil in our bodily life, and thus bruised in our heel. But we will triumph in Christ, who sets his foot on the old serpent's head. Throughout this year we may have to learn part of this promise by experience as we experience the temptations of the devil and the unkindness of the ungodly, who are the devil's offspring. They may so bruise us that we are forced to limp with our sore heels. But let us grasp the second part of the text and we will not be dismayed. By faith let us rejoice that we will yet reign in Christ Jesus, the woman's offspring.

## **DAY 2: HOSEA 2:18**

Yes, the saints are to have peace. The passage from which this gracious word is taken speaks of peace *"with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground"* (Hos. 2:18). This is peace with earthly enemies, mysterious evils, and little annoyances! Any of these might keep us from lying down, but none of them will do so. The Lord will utterly destroy those things that threaten his people: *"I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land"* (v. 18). Peace will be profound indeed when all the instruments of discord are broken to pieces.

With this peace will come rest. *"For he gives to his beloved sleep"* (Ps. 127:2). Fully supplied and divinely quieted, believers lie down in calm repose. This rest will be a safe one. It is one thing to lie down, but quite another to *"lie down in safety."* We are brought to the land of promise, the house of the Father, the chamber of love, and the heart of Christ: surely we may now *"lie down in safety."* It is safer for a believer to lie down in peace than to sit up and worry. *"He makes me lie down in green pastures"* (Ps. 23:1). We never rest till the Comforter makes us lie down.

## **DAY 3: MATTHEW 5:8**

Purity, even purity of heart, is the main thing to be aimed at. We need to be made clean on the inside through the Spirit and the Word, and then we will be clean on the outside by consecration and obedience. There is a close connection between the affections and the understanding. If we love evil, we cannot understand that which is good. If the heart is foul, the eye will be darkened. How can those who love unholy things see a holy God?

What a privilege it is to see God! A glimpse of him is heaven below! In Christ Jesus the pure in heart see the Father. We see him, his truth, his love, his purpose, his sovereignty, and his covenant character. Yes, we see God himself in Christ. But this is only apprehended as sin is kept out of the heart. Only those who aim at godliness can cry, *"My eyes are ever toward the Lord"* (Ps. 25:15). The desire of Moses, *"Please show me your glory"* (Ex. 33:18), can only be fulfilled in us as we purify ourselves from all iniquity. *"We shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure"* (1 John 3:2-3). The enjoyment of present fellowship and the hope of this coming vision of God are compelling motives for purity of heart and life. *Lord, make us pure in heart that we may see you!*

#### DAY 4: MATTHEW 11:28

We who are saved find rest in Jesus. Those who are not saved will receive rest if they come to him, for here he promises to “*give*” it. Nothing can be freer than a gift. Let us gladly accept what he gladly gives. You are not to buy it, nor to borrow it; but to receive it as a gift. Do you labor under the lash of ambition, covetousness, lust, or anxiety? He will set you free from this iron bondage and give you rest. You are “*laden*” -- yes, “***heavy laden***” with sin, fear, care, remorse, and fear of death. But if you come to him, he will unload you. He carried the crushing mass of our sin, that we might no longer carry it. He made himself the great Burden-Bearer, that we might no longer bend under the enormous pressure of our heavy burdens.

Jesus gives rest. It is so. Will you believe it? Will you put it to the test? Will you do so at once? Come to Jesus by quitting every other hope, by thinking of him, believing God’s testimony about him, and trusting everything with him. If you come to him in this way, the rest which he will give you will be deep, safe, holy, and everlasting. He gives a rest which grows into heaven. And he gives it **this** day to all who come to him.

#### DAY 5: EXODUS 3:12

Of course, if the Lord sent Moses on an errand, he would not let him go alone. The tremendous risk it would involve, and the great power it would require, would render it ridiculous for God to send a poor, lone Hebrew to confront the mightiest king in all the world, and then leave him to himself. It could not be imagined that a wise God would match poor Moses with Pharaoh and the enormous forces of Egypt. Hence he says, “*I will certainly be with you*” (Ex. 3:12 NKJV), as if it were out of the question that he would send him alone.

In my case, also, the same rule will hold good. If I go on the Lord’s errand, with a simple reliance upon his power and a single eye to his glory, it is certain that he will be with me. His sending me binds him to back me up. Is this not enough? What more can I want? If all the angels and archangels were with me, I might fail. But if **he** is with me, I must succeed. But let me take care that I respond to this promise in a worthy way. Don’t let me go timidly, halfheartedly, carelessly, or presumptuously. What type of person ought he to be who has God with him? In such company, I ought to play the man and, like Moses, go to Pharaoh without fear.

#### DAY 6: ISAIAH 53:10

Our Lord Jesus has not died in vain. His death was sacrificial: he died as our substitute, because death was the penalty of our sins. And, because his substitution was accepted by God, he has saved those for whom he made his soul a sacrifice. By death he became like the grain of wheat which produces a great harvest. There must be a succession of children for Jesus, for he is the “*Everlasting Father*” (Isa. 9:6). He will say, “*Behold, I and the children God has given me*” (Heb. 2:13). A man is honored in his children, and Jesus has his quiver full of these arrows of the mighty (Ps. 127:5).

A man is represented in his children, and so is Christ in Christians. In his seed a man's life seems to be prolonged and extended; and so the life of Jesus is continued in believers. Jesus lives, for he sees his seed. He fixes his eye on us; he delights in us; he recognizes us as the fruit of his soul's labor. Let us be glad that our Lord does not fail to enjoy the result of his dreadful sacrifice, and that he will never cease to feast his eyes upon the harvest of his death. Those eyes, which once wept for us, are now viewing us with pleasure. Yes, he looks on those who are looking to him. Our eyes meet! What a joy is this!

#### **DAY 7: 1 SAMUEL 2:9**

The way is slippery, and our feet are feeble. But the Lord will keep our feet. If we give ourselves up by obedient faith to be his holy ones, he will himself be our guardian. Not only will he charge his angels to keep us (Ps. 91:11), but he himself will preserve our ways (Ps. 121:8).

- He will keep our feet from falling, so that we do not defile our garments, wound our souls, and cause the enemy to blaspheme. ‘
- He will keep our feet from wandering, so that we do not enter paths of error, or ways of folly, or routes of the world's custom.
- He will keep our feet from swelling through weariness, or blistering because of the roughness and length of the way.
- He will keep our feet from wounding. Our shoes will be iron and brass, so that even though we tread on the edge of the sword, or on deadly serpents, we will not bleed or be poisoned.
- He will also pluck our feet out of the net. We will not be entangled by the deceit of our malicious and crafty foes.

With such a promise as this, let us run without weariness and walk without fear. He who guards our feet will do so effectively.



# RADICAL

BY DAVID PLATT

## A 6-DAY READING PLAN

**[This is to be read during the week of 26<sup>th</sup> July – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020]**

### **DAY 1: RADICAL ABANDONMENT [MATTHEW 4:18-22]**

*“Follow Me.”* These two words contained radical implications for the lives of the disciples. In a time when the sons of fishers were also fishers, these men would have grown up around the sea. Fishing was the source of their livelihood and all they’d ever known. It represented everything familiar and natural to them. That’s what Jesus was calling them away from. By calling these men to leave their boats, Jesus was calling them to abandon their careers. When He called them to leave their nets, He was calling them to abandon their possessions. When He called them to leave their father in the boat by himself, He was calling them to abandon their family and friends. Ultimately, Jesus was calling them to abandon themselves.

The men were leaving certainty for uncertainty, safety for danger, and self-preservation for self-denunciation. Let’s put ourselves in the positions of these eager followers of Jesus in the first century. What if you were the one stepping out of the boat? What if you were the potential disciple being told to drop your nets? What if it were your father asking where you were going?

This is where we need to pause to consider whether we’re starting to redefine Christianity. We have to give up everything we have to follow Jesus. But slowly, subtly, we have reduced following Jesus to the idea of following Jesus. We do this in all sorts of ways. We rationalize Jesus’ demanding teachings: *“Of course, Jesus wasn’t actually telling you to abandon your family. And of course, He wasn’t really saying to leave everything behind to follow Him.”* While it’s true that Jesus didn’t—and doesn’t—require everyone to leave their father and their occupation to follow Him, He does require absolute obedience and

commitment. Rather than joyfully embracing His call, we have the self-serving tendency to water it down to be theoretical sacrifice and hypothetical abandonment. We want to follow a Jesus that doesn't require anything of us.

In essence, we've redefined Christianity. We've given in to the dangerous temptation to take the Jesus of the Bible and twist Him into a version of Jesus we're more comfortable with. It's a Jesus who's OK with our materialism, fine with nominal devotion that doesn't require any sacrifice, and pleased with a brand of faith that requires attendance on Sunday but no real commitment in day-to-day life. But I wonder if I could help you push through the haze of self-justification and ask a simple question as we study the words of Christ together: ***What if He was actually serious?***

## **DAY 2: RADICAL GRACE [PSALM 5:5, ISAIAH 6:1, HABAKKUK 1:13, JOHN 3:36]**

I wonder if sometimes we intentionally or unknowingly mask the beauty of God in the gospel by minimizing His various attributes. Peruse the Christian marketplace, and you will find a plethora of books, songs, and paintings that depict God as a loving Father. And He's that. But He isn't just a loving Father. Limiting our understanding of God to this picture ultimately distorts the image of God we project in our culture.

Fourteen times in the first 50 psalms we see descriptions of God's hatred toward sinners, His wrath toward liars, and so on. All of this springs from the absolute holiness of God, His separateness from anything sinful. In John 3, where we find one of the most famous verses about God's love (see v. 16), we also find one of the most neglected verses about God's wrath (see v. 18). It seems that much in the same way we try to soften the radical demands of Jesus, we also tailor our knowledge of the character of God to fit our own desires. Some of us might come by this innocently; maybe no one ever told us that God is wrathful and jealous for His own glory.

More likely, though, our inattention to the more uncomfortable characteristics of God's perfect character is an intentional blindness. We choose not to think about God in this way because doing so would require more of us than we're willing to give. When we either intentionally or unintentionally limit our knowledge of God to the parts of Him that we're comfortable with, we have the luxury of thinking much less seriously about our sin, priorities, resources, goals, and dreams. But if the Bible is true and God is who the Bible says He is, there's nothing we can rightly hold back from Him. He has laid claim to every part of our lives.

If we saw God as He is, then our lives would have to change. Dramatically. But there's another effect of having a limited view of God, and this one is counterintuitive at first. When we don't see the holiness, wrath, and justice of God, we aren't able to truly experience the fullness of His grace. Ironically, we might choose to emphasize God's love over God's wrath, refusing to think much about the reality of hell and justice. We might even make the argument that we're doing so in order to emphasize just how great God's love is. But we're actually diminishing the very love we're attempting to hold up. We can't fully appreciate the grace of God without fully appreciating the holiness of God. To put it

another way, we can't know the greatness of our salvation without knowing just what we've been saved from. The Bible is very clear on this point: What we've been saved from, by God's grace, is God Himself.

### **DAY 3: RADICAL FOCUS [2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17]**

Ask yourself this simple question today: Do you really believe the Bible? Of course you do, right? Maybe not.

For many of us, our belief in the Bible isn't much more than an intellectual assent. Although an intellectual understanding of the Bible is important, it can't really be called belief. Belief isn't measured by intellect; it's measured by obedience. If we were judged not by our words but by our commitment to do what the Bible says, our answer to the question in the previous paragraph might be different.

We live in a culture that's always looking for the next thing. We're constantly on the hunt for the next stage in life, the next step in our career, or the next advance in technology. We're obsessed with the new. God loves the new too. After all, He's making all things new in Christ (see Rev. 21:5). But if we're looking for new revelation from God, we're going down the wrong path. God has given us all we need in His Word.

In our lives and in the church, we're never without revelation from God. At all times you and I have His message in all its power, authority, and clarity. We don't have to work to come up with a word from God; we simply have to trust the Word He's already given us. But is that enough for us? Do you see what was happening? It was an epic battle between the Son of God and Satan. And what did Jesus see as sufficient? What did He rely on? What did He revert to? The Word of God.

This wasn't the only time either. Read through the Gospels, and you'll see the fullness of Jesus' commitment to and love for God's Word. The Sermon on the Mount is full of references to the Old Testament. When Jesus was making His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Zechariah 9 was on His mind. When He cleared the temple of the moneychangers, He quoted Isaiah 56. Even in His last moments as He was being tortured to death on the cross, He quoted Psalm 22.

It seems pretty arrogant to think we might need something different. If it was good enough for Jesus Christ, I'm pretty sure the Bible is good enough for us too. The Word of God is absolutely sufficient for us. Again, the question is about our commitment to it. Do we really believe this Book? Do we have a radical focus on God's Word? If we do, our lives will show it.

### **DAY 4: RADICAL STRATEGY [MATTHEW 28:18-20]**

Jesus stood on the mountain, ready to ascend into heaven, and gave His marching orders to the disciples: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20).

Jesus never intended to limit this invitation to the most effective communicators, the most brilliant organizers, or the most talented leaders and artists—all of the allegedly right people whom you and I are prone to exalt in the church. Rather, this statement is meant for everyone. We are all called to make disciples. If the 11 disciples standing there were to teach all nations to observe everything Jesus had commanded them, then that had to include what Jesus was commanding them that day. Part of making disciples for that initial group was to tell others to make disciples. Then those disciples were to tell new disciples to make disciples, and on and on.

Unfortunately, you can look around Christianity today and find a definite divide between lay people and professional Christians. Where did we get the idea that some people are specifically charged with the disciple-making task while others are not? Certainly not from Jesus. It’s surprising when you think about the people to whom Jesus entrusted this mission. Fishers? Reformed tax collectors? A prostitute? It’s hardly the core group most church planters dream of today. Jesus didn’t seem too worried, though. Perhaps that’s because these “*wrong*” people were more ready for the mission than they realized.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus spent more time with 12 men than with everyone else put together. In John 17, when Jesus recounted His ministry before going to the cross, He didn’t mention the multitudes He’d preached to or the miracles He’d performed. As spectacular as those events were, they weren’t His primary focus. Instead, 40 times Jesus spoke to and about the men in whom He’d invested His life. They were His focus. Jesus commanded His followers to do with others what He had done with them. Jesus didn’t sit in a classroom; He shared His life. He walked and talked and ate with them, and at every turn He taught them about the kingdom of God. You can do the same.

#### **DAY 5: RADICAL VISION [EXODUS 14:4, PSALM 23:3, ISAIAH 43:1-13, DANIEL 2:28-29, REVELATION 7:9-10]**

If you ask any Christian what their mission is, hopefully they’d respond with something similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

What many of us fail to realize, however, is that this is the Great Commission; it’s not the New Commission. The fact that we often don’t connect the Great Commission to the Old Testament is to be expected; many of us, whether or not we acknowledge it, operate under the assumption that there are basically two Gods in the Bible.

There’s the Old Testament God who commanded holy war and swallowed up the disobedient with fire and earthquakes. And then there’s the God of the New Testament, a God of love, mercy, and grace. Such a dichotomy is more than just bad theology; it’s

theology with drastically bad side effects, whether we believe it explicitly or implicitly. God is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Theologians call this attribute of God His immutability; He doesn’t change. When you think about it, it only makes sense. Why does anyone change? It’s because that person wants to become better or different than he or she once was. If God altered His operations or character in the four hundred years between Malachi and Matthew, the implication is that in the previous years He was somehow imperfect. Further, if God changed then, who’s to say He might not change again? Do you see it?

If we think of God in the New Testament as different from God in the Old Testament, we attack the perfection of the holy God. We then remove any sense of security we might have that comes in knowing God never makes mistakes or operates in anything less than absolute perfection. But if it’s true that the God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament, it means when Jesus commissioned His first followers, He did so as an extension of what God had already been doing in the previous centuries. One of the clearest places we see God’s work of redemption in the Old Testament is in Genesis 12, the call of Abram.

#### **DAY 6: RADICAL GOD [EXODUS 14:4, PSALM 23:3, ISAIAH 43:1-13, DANIEL 2:28-29, REVELATION 7:9-10]**

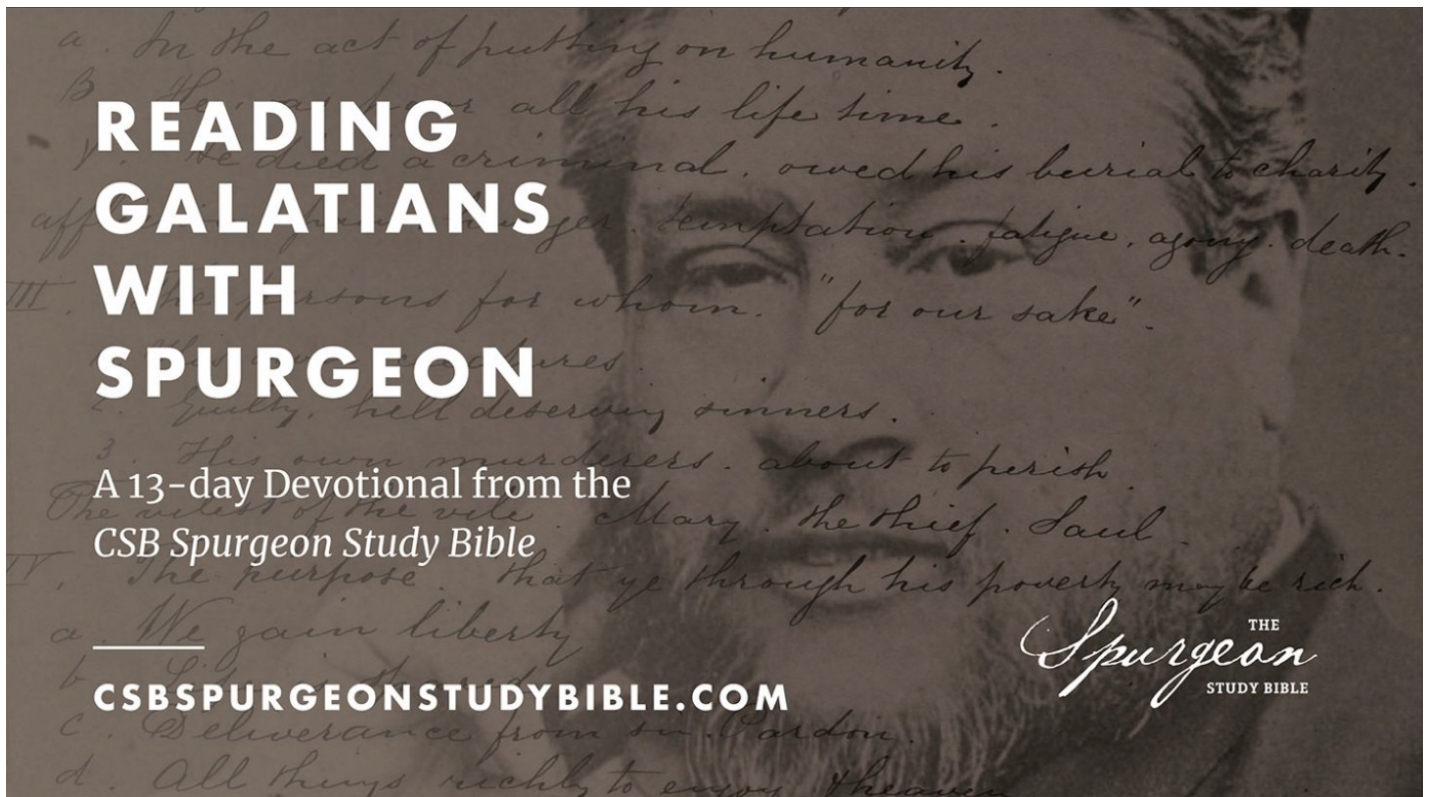
We are selfless followers of a self-centered God. The Christian life is about dying to self. It’s about giving up the right to determine the direction of our lives. Our God is our Lord, our Master, and our King. He holds our lives in His hands, and He is free to spend them in whatever way He pleases. Several years ago many churches debated whether someone could know Jesus as Savior without knowing Him as Lord. This, at the heart, is really a question of authority. Could someone trust in Christ for eternal salvation and yet not recognize His authority in their lives by their absolute obedience?

Jesus walked, talked, taught, and healed with power and authority. He didn’t need to appeal to anyone else to justify His teachings; He was the authority. But to the religious leaders in this passage, that authority was threatening. If Jesus’ authority was from heaven, they knew they had an obligation to obey. Authority is like that. If you recognize that someone has authority, then suddenly that person has a claim on your life. Jesus knew it too, and that’s why He didn’t answer the religious leaders’ questions outright. Jesus knew they had ulterior motives in challenging His authority, but He isn’t interested in theoretical questions and mind games. He’s looking for followers.

To recognize the authority of Christ is to submit to the authority of Christ. To put it in terms of the argument about Jesus being Savior and Lord, there’s no difference. There’s no Jesus except the Lord Jesus. To follow Jesus at all is to follow Him completely. That’s what it means to be selfless. But to call God selfish? We might bristle at a suggestion like this. But over and over again, the Bible teaches us that God acts in His own self-interest. At the beginning of earthly history, God’s purpose was to bless His people so that all people would glorify Him for His salvation. At the end of history, God’s purpose will be fulfilled. Individuals from every nation, tribe, people, and language will bow down around His



throne and sing praises to the One who has blessed them with salvation. This is the final, ultimate, all-consuming, glorious, guaranteed, overwhelming purpose of God in Scripture. God is seeking His own glory from the entire world. It's the great why of God. If we want to follow the radical God, then, we must have the same core desire in our hearts.



**[This is to be read during the week of 2<sup>nd</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020]**

## **DAY 1: GALATIANS 1:1-10**

*Delivered from Bondage and Slavery*

*Spurgeon's Note on 1:3-4*

God's great objective with regard to his people is to deliver them from this present evil age; and, as Paul called it by that name, we need not alter the phrase, for we cannot help knowing that it is still an evil age. And in it are God's redeemed and chosen people, by nature part and parcel of that age, equally fallen, equally estranged from God, equally set on mischief, equally certain to go down into the pit of destruction if left to themselves.

The objective of Christ is to carve out a people from this great brook of stone; it is his purpose to find his own people who were given to him before the earth was and to deliver them from the bondage and the slavery in which they are found in this Egypt, of which they seem to form a part, though to the eyes of Christ they are always as separate and distinct as the Israelites were when they dwelt in the land of Goshen.

## **DAY 2: GALATIANS 1:11-24**

*The Eyes of Love Darted Upon This Chief of Sinners*

*Spurgeon's note on 1:15-16*

Paul's conversion is generally considered so remarkable for its suddenness and distinctness, and truly it is. Yet, at the same time, it is no exception to the general rule of conversions but is rather a type, or model, or pattern of the way God shows patience to them who are led to believe in him. It appears from the text, however, that there is another part of Paul's history which deserves our attention as much as the suddenness of his conversion, namely the fact that although he was suddenly converted, yet God had had thoughts of mercy toward him from his birth.

God did not begin to work with him when he was on the road to Damascus. That was not the first occasion on which eyes of love had darted upon this chief of sinners, but Paul declares that God had separated him and set him apart, even from his mother's womb, that he might by and by be called by grace, and have Jesus Christ revealed in him.

## **DAY 3: GALATIANS 2:1-10**

*Planting Grace in the Soil of Poverty*

*Spurgeon's note on 2:10*

Poverty is no virtue. Wealth is no sin. On the other hand, wealth is not morally good, and poverty is not morally evil. Virtue is a plant that depends not upon the atmosphere which surrounds it but upon the hand which waters it and upon the divine grace which sustains it. We draw no support for grace from our circumstances whether they are good or evil. Our circumstances may sometimes militate against the gracious work in our breast, but no position in life is a sustaining cause of the life of grace in the soul.

But yet, mark you, God has been pleased, for the most part, to plant his grace in the soil of poverty. He has not chosen many great or many mighty men of this world, but he has chosen "*the poor in this world to be rich in faith and Heirs of the Kingdom that he has promised to those who love him.*" (James 2:5)

## **DAY 4: GALATIANS 2:11-21**

*Christ Has Loved and Given Himself for You*

*Spurgeon's note on 2:20*

Paul speaks of it as a knowable fact and one he himself knew—that Jesus Christ loved him and gave himself for him. He is not speaking, now, of the love of benevolence that the Lord Jesus Christ has toward all people, or even of that aspect of his work that bears on every creature under heaven. He is thinking of that special love, that Grace which had come to him. That is the point around which our thoughts are to gather as we meditate on Paul's words, "*who loved me and gave himself for me.*" The Apostle knew Christ had loved him and had given himself for him. And we, also, may know it.

## **DAY 5: GALATIANS 3:1-6**

*Sanctification Comes by the Spirit, Not Self-Reliance*

*Spurgeon's note on 3:2*

We have received the Holy Spirit to help us in our sanctification, but we have obtained no sanctification apart from believing. If we have reached after sanctification by our own efforts, made in unbelief, we have never succeeded. Unbelief works toward sin and never toward sanctification. Our good works are fruits of sanctification, not causes of it; and if we put the fruit where the root should be, we greatly err.

If we have gone out to fight against a temptation in our own strength, have we ever returned a conqueror? It has been written of all other believers, "*They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb*" (Rev. 21:11). And this is true of us also. Sanctification does not come to us from self-reliance but as a work of the Spirit received by faith in Christ. Believing in him, he is "*wisdom from God for us -- our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*" (1 Cor. 1:30).

## **DAY 6: GALATIANS 3:7-9**

*Faith Has the Golden Key of the Ivory Palaces*

*Spurgeon's note on 3:7*

There is no communion with God except by faith, without which we cannot ever please God. The favorites of heaven are in every case people who believe in God. Faith has the golden key of the ivory palaces. Faith opens the secret chambers of communion to those who love her. The works of the law bring no nearness to God. When we are under a sense of backsliding, when we feel unworthy to be called God's child, when we have erred and strayed from his ways like lost sheep, we must not rush like a madman to the law, for that would be to leap into the fire, but still say, "*Lord. I believe in you. As a sinner I trust the sinner's substitute.*"

## **DAY 7: GALATIANS 3:10-26**

*The True Gospel is as Old as the Hills*

*Spurgeon note on 3:10*

The true gospel is no new thing; it is as old as the hills. It was heard in Eden, before man was driven from the garden; and it has since been repeated in sundry ways and in many places, even to this day. Oh, that its antiquity would lead men to venerate it and then to listen to its voice! The gospel blessing which was thus preached to Abraham and to his seed came to him by faith. He was justified by his faith. The blessing, which is the soul of Abraham's gospel, must come to us in the same way as it did to him, namely by faith. And if we expect to find it in any other way, we will be grievously mistaken.

## **DAY 8: GALATIANS 3:27-4:7**

*The Holy Spirit has Come to Dwell in Us*

*Spurgeon's note on 4:6*

This wonderful blessing is ours “*because [we] are sons,*” and it is filled with marvelous results. Sonship sealed by the indwelling Spirit brings us peace and joy. It leads to nearness to God and fellowship with him. It excites trust, love, and vehement desire and creates in us reverence, obedience, and actual likeness to God—all this and much more because the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in us. Oh, matchless mystery! Had it not been revealed, it never would have been imagined, and now that it is revealed, it never would have been believed if it had not become a matter of actual experience to those who are in Christ Jesus.

## **DAY 9: GALATIANS 4:8-31**

*Discriminating Properly between Law and Grace*

*Spurgeon's note on 4:24*

There cannot be a greater difference in the world between two things than there is between law and grace. And yet, strange to say, while the things are diametrically opposed and essentially different from each other, the human mind is so depraved and the intellect, even when blessed by the Spirit, has become so turned aside from right judgment, that one of the most difficult things in the world is to discriminate properly between law and grace. He who knows the difference -- and always remembers the essential difference between law and grace -- has grasped the essence of theology. He is not far from understanding the gospel theme in all its ramifications, its outlets and its branches, who can properly tell the difference between law and grace. They are as opposite as light and darkness and can no more agree than fire and water. Yet people will be perpetually striving to make a compound of them—often ignorantly and sometimes willfully. They seek to blend the two when God has positively kept them separate!

## **DAY 10: GALATIANS 5:1-15**

*By Grace Through Faith*

*Spurgeon's notes on 5:6*

All ways of justification by human works and outward forms are set aside by the apostle. In one sentence he closes up every road that is cast up by man and opens up the way of the Lord, even the way of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Some hope to be saved by ritualism. On the other hand, many are relying on their freedom from all ceremonies and place their reliance upon a sort of antiritualism. The outward -- whether decorated or unadorned, fixed or free -- touches not the saving point. The only thing which can save us is faith in Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth as a propitiation for sin.

## **DAY 11: GALATIANS 5:16-26**

*A Singular Joy*

*Spurgeon's notes on 5:22*

Many children of God, even when driven away from the outward means of grace, have, nevertheless, enjoyed such visits of God, such rivers of divine love that they have wondered from where such joy could come. In the wilderness, waters leap forth as do streams in the desert. Believers are not dependent on circumstances. Their joy comes not from what they have but from what they are, not from where they are but from whose they are, not from what they enjoy but from what was suffered for them by their Lord. It is a singular joy, then, because it often buds, blossoms, and ripens in the wintertime when the fig tree does not blossom and there is no herd in the stall.

## **DAY 12: GALATIANS 6:1-10**

*Sunbeams in the Dark*

*Spurgeon's notes on 6:2*

We should carry one another's spiritual burdens by helping one another in our soul struggles. There should be real fellowship, and we should converse with one another. We who are joyous might often lend some of our sunbeams to those who are in the dark. And we ought to do so. It would be to our own profit as well as the profit of others.

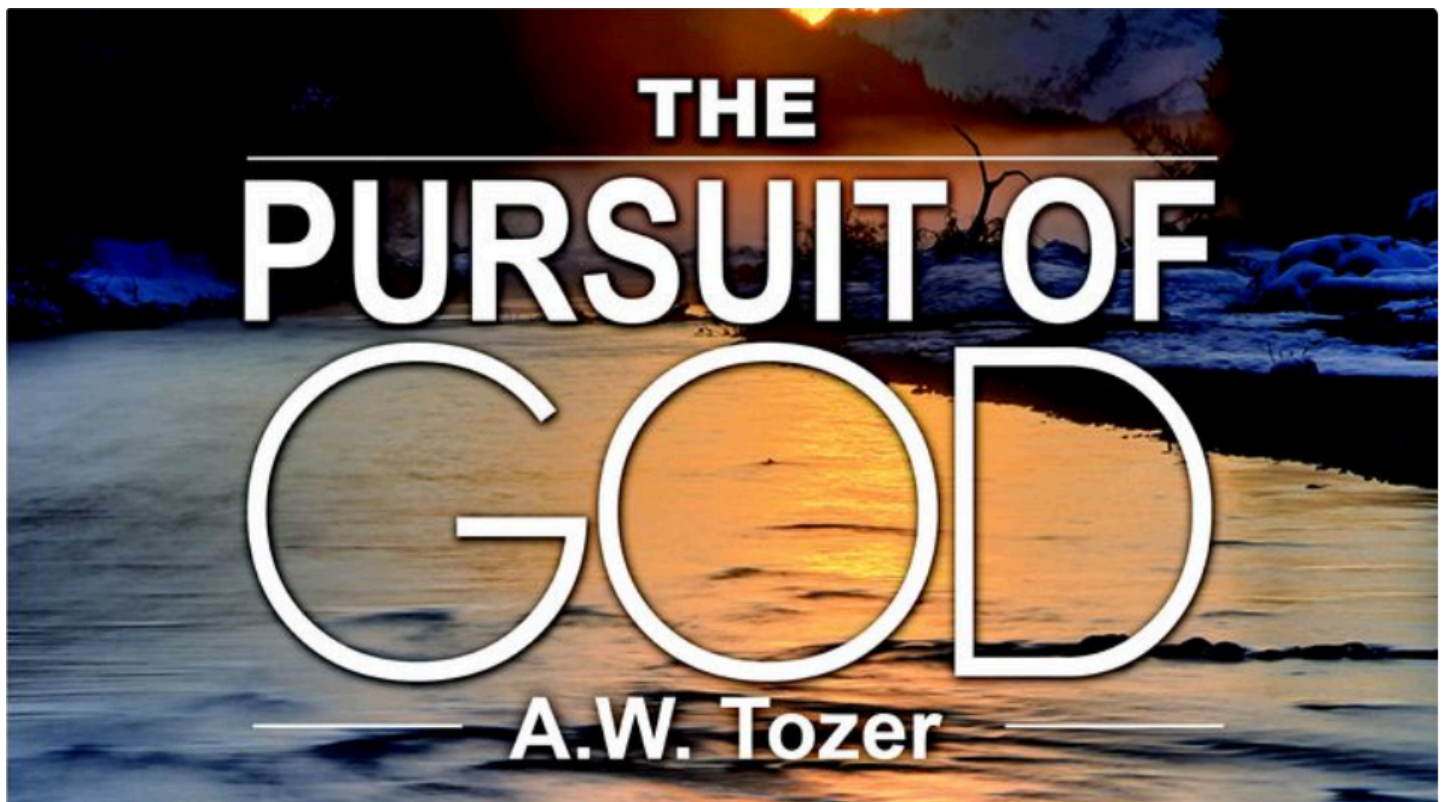
## **DAY 13: GALATIANS 6:11-18**

*Jesus to be Great Among the Nations*

*Spurgeon's notes on 6:14*

Among scholars Paul might have taken an eminent position. Yet, though he must have felt a human delight in the talents which God had given him—and must have known that he possessed them—he still says concerning them, *"I will never boast about anything."* He seems to take all that he had, all that he did, and all that he was, and put it all away, and come forward with no other theme upon his lips and no greater love in his heart except this -- Jesus crucified for the sons of men. Jesus to be great among the nations. Jesus, the slaughtered Lamb, to be made for people their life from the dead, their salvation from going down into the pit.





**[This is to be read during the week of 16<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2020]**

**DAY 1 DEVOTIONAL [JOHN 6:44-51, PSALM 63:8, PSALM 42:1-2]**

We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit. *“No man can come to me,”* said our Lord, *“except the Father which hath sent me draw him,”* and it is by this very prevenient *drawing* that God takes from us every vestige of credit for the act of coming. The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the out working of that impulse is our following hard after Him; and all the time we are pursuing Him we are already in His hand: *“Thy right hand upholdeth me.”*

In this divine *“upholding”* and human *“following”* there is no contradiction . . . Man must pursue God. On our part there must be positive reciprocation if this secret drawing of God is to eventuate in identifiable experience of the Divine. In the warm language of personal feeling this is stated in the Forty-second Psalm: *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”* This is deep calling unto deep, and the longing heart will understand it . . .

I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our present low estate. The stiff and wooden quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people. He waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He waits so long, so very long, in vain.

## Reflection Questions:

1. What are some specific ways that Christians can lovingly mentally engage with God?
2. Tozer writes that “complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth.” What are some specific ways that the Church is showing complacency today? How could we become less complacent?

## Day 2 Devotional [1 CORINTHIANS 4:7, MATTHEW 16:25]

We are often hindered from giving up our treasures to the Lord out of fear for their safety; this is especially true when those treasures are loved relatives and friends. But we need have no such fears. Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed. Our gifts and talents should also be turned over to Him. They should be recognized for what they are, God’s loan to us, and should never be considered in any sense our own. We have no more right to claim credit for special abilities than for blue eyes or strong muscles. *“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?”*

The Christian who is alive enough to know himself even slightly will recognize the symptoms of this possession malady, and will grieve to find them in his own heart. If the longing after God is strong enough within him he will want to do something about the matter. Now, what should he do?

First of all he should put away all defense and make no attempt to excuse himself either in his own eyes or before the Lord. Whoever defends himself will have himself for his defense, and he will have no other; but let him come defenseless before the Lord and he will have for his defender no less than God Himself. Let the inquiring Christian trample under foot every slippery trick of his deceitful heart and insist upon frank and open relations with the Lord.

Then he should remember that this is holy business. No careless or casual dealings will suffice. Let him come to God in full determination to be heard. Let him insist that God accept his all, that He take *things* out of his heart and Himself reign there in power. It may be he will need to become specific, to name things and people by their names one by one. If he will become drastic enough he can shorten the time of his travail from years to minutes and enter the good land long before his slower brethren who coddle their feelings and insist upon caution in their dealings with God.

## Reflections Questions:

1. Other than God, what do you love most dear? What “thing” is the most difficult to give up for God?
2. In what ways do we define ourselves by the “*things*” we possess? How would we change if we no longer possessed those things?

### Day 3 Devotional [GENESIS 28:16, EXODUS 34:5, 30]

If God is present at every point in space, if we cannot go where He is not, cannot even conceive of a place where He is not, why then has not that Presence become the one universally celebrated fact of the world? The patriarch Jacob, “*in the waste howling wilderness,*” gave the answer to that question. He saw a vision of God and cried out in wonder, “*Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.*” Jacob had never been for one small division of a moment outside the circle of that all-pervading Presence. But he knew it not. That was his trouble, and it is ours. Men do not know that God is here. What a difference it would make if they knew.

The Presence and the manifestation of the Presence are not the same. There can be the one without the other. God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is *manifest* only when and as we are aware of His Presence. On our part there must be surrender to the Spirit of God, for His work it is to show us the Father and the Son. If we co-operate with Him in loving obedience God will manifest Himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light of His face.

Always, everywhere God is present, and always He seeks to discover Himself. To each one he would reveal not only that He is, but *what* He is as well. He did not have to be persuaded to discover Himself to Moses. “*And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.*” He not only made a verbal proclamation of His nature but He revealed His very Self to Moses so that the skin of Moses’ face shone with the supernatural light.

It will be a great moment for some of us when we begin to believe that God’s promise of self-revelation is literally true: that He promised much, but promised no more than He intends to fulfill. Our pursuit of God is successful just because He is forever seeking to manifest Himself to us.

## Reflection Questions

1. When Jacob saw a vision of God, he cried out, "*Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.*" Can you relate to that experience? Have you ever had a similar experience in your own life?
2. Tozer writes "*Men do not know that God is here. What a difference it would make if they knew.*" What kind of a difference do you think it would make if all Christians really did know that God is immanent? What kind of a difference would it make if all people, Christian or not, knew that God was everywhere? What would change?

### Day 4 Devotional [JOHN 1:1, PSALM 46:10]

It is important that we get still to wait on God. And it is best that we get alone, preferably with our Bible outspread before us. Then if we will we may draw near to God and begin to hear Him speak to us in our hearts. I think for the average person the progression will be something like this:

First a sound as of a Presence walking in the garden. Then a voice, more intelligible, but still far from clear. Then the happy moment when the Spirit begins to illuminate the Scriptures, and that which had been only a sound, or at best a voice, now becomes an intelligible word, warm and intimate and clear as the word of a dear friend. Then will come life and light, and best of all, ability to see and rest in and embrace Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord of All . . .

I believe that much of our religious unbelief is due to a wrong conception of and a wrong feeling for the Scriptures of Truth. A silent God suddenly began to speak in a book and when the book was finished lapsed back into silence again forever. Now we read the book as the record of what God said when He was for a brief time in a speaking mood. With notions like that in our heads how can we believe? The facts are that God is not silent, has never been silent. It is the nature of God to speak. The second Person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Word*. The Bible is the inevitable outcome of God's continuous speech. It is the infallible declaration of His mind for us put into our familiar human words.

If you would follow on to know the Lord, come at once to the open Bible expecting it to speak to you. Do not come with the notion that it is a *thing* which you may push around at your convenience. It is more than a thing, it is a voice, a word, the very Word of the living God.

## Reflection Questions:

1. Is it easy for you to be still and know that God is God? Is it easy for you to listen for the Voice of God? What makes this easy or difficult for you?
2. Do you come to the Bible expecting it to speak to you? Why or why not? What in your life has conditioned you to approach the Bible in this way?

## Day 5 Devotional [PSALM 57:5, REVELATION 4:11]

Much of our difficulty as seeking Christians stems from our unwillingness to take God as He is and adjust our lives accordingly. We insist upon trying to modify Him and to bring Him nearer to our own image . . . The pursuit of God will embrace the labour of bringing our total personality into conformity to His. And this not judicially, but actually. I do not here refer to the act of justification by faith in Christ. I speak of a voluntary exalting of God to His proper station over us and a willing surrender of our whole being to the place of worshipful submission which the Creator-creature circumstance makes proper. The moment we make up our minds that we are going on with this determination to exalt God over all, we step out of the world's parade. We shall find ourselves out of adjustment to the ways of the world, and increasingly so as we make progress in the holy way. We shall acquire a new viewpoint; a new and different psychology will be formed within us; a new power will begin to surprise us by its up surgings and its outgoings.

Our break with the world will be the direct outcome of our changed relation to God. For the world of fallen men does not honour God. Millions call themselves by His Name, it is true, and pay some token respect to Him, but a simple test will show how little He is really honoured among them. Let the average man be put to the proof on the question of who is *above*, and his true position will be exposed. Let him be forced into making a choice between God and money, between God and men, between God and personal ambition, God and self, God and human love, and God will take second place every time. Those other things will be exalted above. However the man may protest, the proof is in the choices he makes day after day throughout his life.

## Reflection Questions

1. Offer some examples of ways that people try to modify God in order to bring Him closer to our own image.



2. Tozer writes, “The pursuit of God will embrace the labour of bringing our total personality into conformity to His.” In what ways is this process laborious?



**THE LIES OF BUSYNESS: DEVOTIONS FROM THE TIME OF GRACE**  
**From Time of Grace Ministry**

**[This is to be read during the week of 23<sup>rd</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> August 2020]**

**Day 1 Devotional [PSALM 39:6] -- *"My busyness pleases God."***

Look at my calendar and you'll see a lot of stuff -- deadlines, commitments, responsibilities. I'm sure some people would be impressed at all the "*important*" things I keep myself busy with.

In the United States, our society prizes busyness. "*How are you doing?*" our friends ask us. "*Busy!*" we reply, waiting for the sympathy or gold medal we think we deserve as a result of the chaotic life we've built for ourselves. Who cares if other people are impressed though? The question is, Does our Creator approve?

Why are you busy? What's the point of it all? Psalm 39:6 sums up one of my greatest fears for us Christians in our hectic world: "*We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in nothing*" (Psalm 39:6 NLT). Doesn't that almost give you chills? Merely

moving shadows. Busy rushing that ends in nothing. The last thing I want is for most of my life to be pointless in the scope of eternity, but the truth is that much of my busy rushing is pretty pointless.

Busyness by itself isn't wrong, but busyness requires intention. Pray that God will guard you from pointless busyness and that if you are busy, that you'll live busy with a purpose.

## **Day 2 Devotional [LUKE 10:42, COLOSSIANS 3:23] -- *"Work and ambition are wrong."***

*"Mary has chosen what is better,"* Jesus said in Luke 10:42 when he visited Mary and Martha's home. While Mary was listening to Jesus, Martha had gotten distracted with housework. We Christians hear this story and often hang our heads in shame, heaping guilt on ourselves for being productive.

In the previous devotion, we looked at the problem that results from pride in our busyness. On the flip side, many of us suffer from guilt over our busyness as well. The truth is that work is one of our God-given functions. Countless people praise God through various types of hard work. They use the intellect and circumstances God has provided them with to preach, teach, build companies, raise families, and on and on. Numerous Bible verses praise having a strong work ethic. Work or ambition in and of itself isn't the problem. What the issue comes down to is heart, motivation, and priorities.

If our motivation is to serve God with our work but also make time with him our #1 priority, we're on the right track. There's a time to be still and to be in God's presence, and there's also a time to work and get stuff done. In those times when we're doing work, let's approach it according to Colossians 3:23: *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord."*

## **Day 3 Devotional [JOB 38:4, 12] -- *"There aren't enough hours in a day."***

Have you ever said something like that? I totally understand. Sometimes life feels like you're running on a treadmill while someone keeps pushing the button to increase the speed faster and faster.

Twenty-four hours never feels like enough. If only we had more time! A couple extra hours a day would make all the difference! Or maybe an extra week to be able to catch up, right? (How do I know your thoughts? Because I have the exact same thoughts myself.) The truth is that God will accomplish through you what he needs to accomplish in the time available. Our almighty God is the one who came up with 24-hour days after all. If God thinks that's good enough, it is. I love the end of the book of Job when God challenges Job's frustrations and puts him in his place for questioning God: *"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand . . . Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place?"* (Job 38:4,12).

In other words, God's the boss man and he knows what he's doing. You can wish for more time, but you're not going to get it. You can't make your days longer. What you can do is your best and leave the rest in God's hands. After all, if everything in life depended on us, no amount of hours would ever, ever be enough.

#### **Day 4 Devotional [MARK 2:27] -- *"I don't have time to rest."***

A couple years ago, I heard about how one of my former professors makes a conscious effort to seek Sabbath rest on Sundays. I was intrigued. How did she manage to *"give up"* so much precious time on Sunday and still get all her errands and cleaning and to-do lists done? I started reading up on the Sabbath and its value for today's Christians.

What I learned surprised me. Numerous books and articles I read pointed to a biological need for consistent, weekly rest. Could it be possible that God actually designed our bodies to need a day off each week? Was the scientific evidence true--that mental and physical rejuvenation for one day a week actually causes people to get significantly more done in six days than they can in seven days when they don't make time to rest?

Mark 2:27 indicates that the Sabbath is something God intentionally created for our good: *"Then Jesus said to them, 'The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath'"* (NLT). Jesus isn't explicitly clear what those needs are, but we know that we humans need rest. We need refreshment. Most of all, we know that we need to stop and pause and fill our cups with God, even if it's not on Sundays or for an entire day. Making time to rest in the Lord can be really challenging, but the benefits of that rest are worth the effort.

#### **Day 5 Devotional [PHILIPPIANS 4:6] -- *"I need to fix this on my own."***

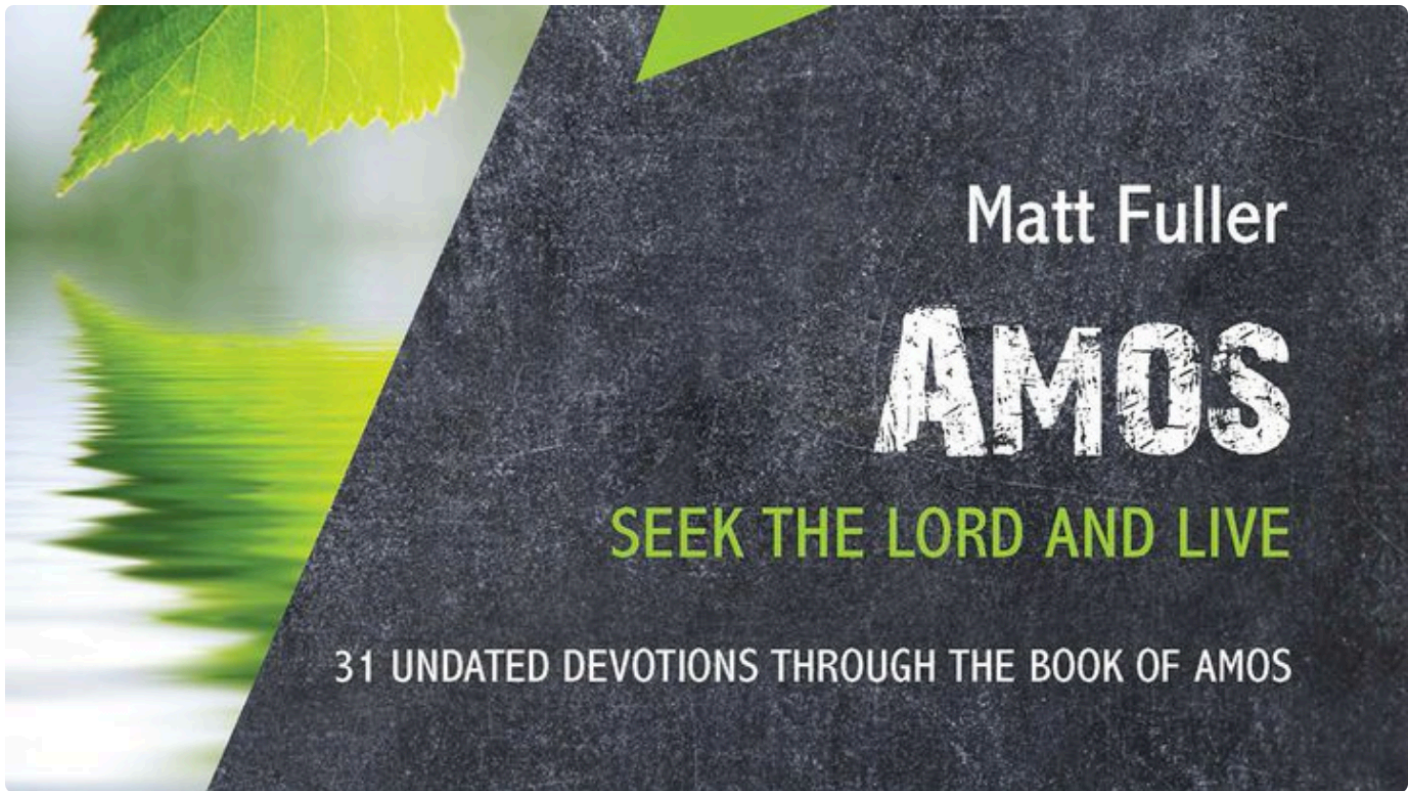
Now that we're on the final day of this series on busyness, you might be feeling there are some areas of your life you want to change. You might be thinking that the solution is to somehow find a way to do better than you're doing now--to set goals to spend your time more wisely, alter your thinking, or challenge your motivation.

When you think about how to actually make those goals happen though, your stress level rises. It feels daunting to think about tackling those overwhelming changes on your own.

Don't underestimate God's role in your busyness and the changes you want to make. Yes, you can make a lot of progress with strategic prioritization and some valuable time-management tips, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't turn to God for help. God invites us to come to him over and over throughout the Bible, to call on him in all circumstances. If you're overwhelmed with the current state of your busyness, go to God. *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God"* (Philippians 4:6).



Ask God for his guidance as to how to move forward, for his wisdom in setting your priorities, and for his help in keeping your motivation in check. Remember that you don't have to be perfect. God's love for you does not depend on what's on your calendar today. Enjoy peace and rest in that precious truth.



Day 1 [30 August 2020]  
Meditation : **Spiritual Complacency**  
Read Amos 1:1-2

If you go to a modern zoo, lions are one of the most impressive creatures to see. Normally they are lying around in the sun, not doing a lot. Yet, if you get to see them tearing away at some raw meat with their enormous teeth, it's a magnificent sight. However, if you somehow found yourself *inside* the enclosure with nothing between you and a hungry lion, then 'magnificent' might not be the thought running through your head. If an adult male lion shook its mane and let out a full-throated roar, then more likely it would be "*Uh-oh*" or some more terrified equivalent that you would utter.

The book of Amos reveals the Living God as a roaring lion (v2), a picture that sets the tone of the book (See also Amos 3:8). It is an uncomfortable image because He is roaring *against His own people*. Amos is a book designed to shake believers out of their moral complacency. Amos reminds us that the Lord is not a domestic cat who purrs when we bother to meet with Him; He is a lion who roars.

Even though it is placed third in the '**Minor prophets**', Amos was the first prophet of Israel who had his words written down in a book. Verse 1:1 reveals that he was preaching around 760 BC to the Northern kingdom of Israel. You can read what was going on at the time in 2 Kings 14:25–28. The headlines were that Israel had a popular monarch, Jeroboam II, who had ruled for nearly 40 years and brought great prosperity to them. They were wealthy and also one of the strongest military powers of the day. The people had every reason to feel comfortable with life. But they therefore neglected the Lord.

**Reflection: Do you find that it is easy, when things are going well, to shrink God down to a convenient size for you?**

Day 2 [31 August 2020]

**Meditation: God Will Judge the Wicked**

Amos 1:3-15, 2:1-3

Even though the Lord's complaint is against Israel, He starts off by proclaiming that He will judge every nation. God's throne was located in Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but He is the sovereign ruler over *all the earth* and wants all to recognise that. The repeated drumbeat is obvious when you read this passage:

- **"For three sins of . . . even for four, I will not turn back my wrath"**
- **"Because . . ."**
- **"I will send fire . . . that will consume"**

"For three . . . even for four" probably is an equivalent expression to our '*this is the final straw*'. The Lord is saying, "*Enough!* The time has come for justice to fall." The sins of these pagan nations are what we would call '*crimes against humanity*'.

- Damascus has '*threshed humans*' (v3), that is; dragged heavy iron rollers over people to crush them.
- Gaza '*took captive whole communities*' and sold them as slaves (v6). You can almost imagine the screaming mother saying, 'Please leave the children.'
- Tyre and Edom are similarly culpable (vv9, 11).
- Ammon '*ripped open*' pregnant women (v13), and so killed two people, merely '*to extend his borders*.'
- Moab burned alive Edom's king (Amos 2:1).
- 

Here is comfort the next time you see some horrific crime against humanity described on TV: the Lord sees; the Lord knows; the Lord will bring justice. That is an enormous relief.

**Reflection: Praise God that He will judge all wickedness. The dictators of history who have died in luxury and comfort, having slaughtered thousands, will receive their punishment.**



Day 3 [1<sup>st</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Do unto Others as You would have Them do unto You**

Amos 1:3-15, 2:1-3

One of the striking features of God's blast of anger in Chapters 1-2 is that none of the nations He denounced, had God's Word. None of them had received the revelation of God that Israel had. Yet they are not being judged here for ignoring God or disobeying God's Word (unlike Israel – see Day 4 Devotion); they are judged for their mistreatment of others. As Paul explains in Romans 2:14-16, everyone should know in their conscience that this sort of behaviour is wrong. That remains true of every individual. We may be a long, long way from committing war crimes, but all of us are still judged on how we treat others.

At the end of history, when people stand before Jesus for judgment, perhaps some might argue, *"It's not fair that I'm rejected. No one taught me the Ten Commandments, and no one told me about Jesus."* To this God could reply, *"Very well, I will judge you purely on how well you have kept the moral standards that you applied to everyone else."* Perhaps He might show footage of you saying, *"I hate it when people gossip, lie and are mean to others."* And then He may show further footage of you yourself gossiping, lying and being mean to others.

What is clear is that on that final day, the mouth of every person will be silent – for no one has consistently lived up to the standards they demand of others, let alone God's perfect law. That is true for us too. All of us do, say and think things of others that we know in our consciences are wrong. The Lord says repeatedly that He will not relent from judging people for their mistreatment of others.

**Reflection: Confess the ways you have behaved in this way in the last week. Then praise God for the only person who had a pure conscience and treated others perfectly – Jesus, who nevertheless endured the 'unrelenting' judgement of God in our place.**

Day 4 [2<sup>nd</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Do Not Dishonour the Name of God by Your Actions**

**Amos 2:4-16** [It is Amos 2:14-16 in the app's reading plan]

Right up to Amos 2:6 Israel would have been loving this sermon. All their pagan neighbours were being rebuked by God. Even their kinsmen in Judah were rebuked. Yet Amos' sermon has been building up to his attack on Israel in Amos 2:6-16. This is far longer and more detailed than the rebuke of any other nation.

The summary of their crimes comes in verses 6-8. In essence, they have oppressed the weakest in society. People are being sold into slavery (v6). Justice is denied to the poorest

(v7). Father and son force themselves sexually upon the same slave girl, probably one who works for them (v7) and they are taking immorally-gained products to the house of God (v8). It would be easy to think, *'Amos 2:6-8 are bad, but they are not as oppressive as the brutal pagans of Chapter 1.'* Yet the emphasis is that Israel should have known much better. They, like Judah (v4), knew the Lord and had received His grace. Israel was held to a higher standard because they should have understood better.

Similarly, I read recently of a 12-year- old girl who was sat in the family car waiting for the rest of her family. She put the key into the ignition to turn on the radio and listen to music. However, somehow she tragically put the car in reverse and ran over someone walking behind the car. That is heart-breaking, but the police treated it as an accident and not a crime. However, if a 30-year-old who has been driving for 12 years reversed over someone, it is treated as a criminal offence. The greater the knowledge, the more culpable you are.

**Reflection:** It is not good enough for a believer to say, for example, *"I may have sex when I shouldn't have done it, but hey, I'm not a slave trader like them over there."* The Lord's comment is that, in this way you "profane My Holy Name" (v7). Are you conscious of dishonouring God's name before a watching world?

Day 5 [3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Show Mercy to Others, Physically and Spiritually**

Amos 2:9-16

What makes Israel so guilty is not merely that they had received God's law, but that they had received His grace (Verses 9–12). *"Look what I did for you,"* says the Lord in essence. With the repeated use of 'I ...' He details how:

I destroyed your enemies  
I redeemed you from slavery  
I guided you in the wilderness  
I gave you a fertile land  
I gave you godly leaders

It is not merely that I gave you knowledge, but that I showed you favour and kindness beyond all other nations. I showed you grace. As God concludes, *"Is this not true, people of Israel?"* (v11). But Israel's response was to get the Nazarites (young, keen, godly role models) drunk and to tell the Bible teachers to shut up (v12).

The Lord effectively says, *'I showed you grace and kindness when you had nothing and were desperate. If you truly understood that, you would treat others the same way, rather than exploiting the helpless.'* Amos warned Israel that unless there was change, the whole nation – even the bravest and strongest – would be destroyed.

I cannot tell you how to hear this word of Amos. Christians know that although we fail to honour the Lord rightly and we fail to treat others with the kindness God has shown us, we will not be punished. Christ was crushed in our place (v13). His strength failed Him as He died in order to give us life (v14). Although He was the bravest man to walk this planet, He was stripped naked (v16). So, the Lord will never destroy those who trust in Jesus. But He may well roar against some believers who mistreat others, despite receiving His grace. Christians live somewhat in verses 9-12. We have received God's grace in Jesus. How are you responding?

**Reflection: Do you need to hear the roar of the Lord warning you that you cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus and mistreat other people? We are those who know the Lord's kindness and generosity. We should pass that on.**

Day 6 [4<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Christlikeness**

Amos 3:1-2

Having declared God's imminent judgment upon Israel, Amos now spends Chapters 3-6 trying to undermine their false sense of security. His audience would have thought it ridiculous that they would be invaded and destroyed. After all, they were wealthy, militarily strong and they had the Lord as their trump card 'in case of emergency'.

Amos 3:1-2 is a good summary of the shock of the book. They start so well! Israel has been adopted as God's family (v1). They have been redeemed from slavery (v1). They have been chosen above the other nations (v2). But the second half of verse 2 is shocking: *"therefore I will punish you for all your sins."* God will not have spoiled children in His family.

Likewise, sometimes the individual Christian might declare, *"I've been adopted into God's family. I've been redeemed from slavery to sin and Satan. I've been chosen for holiness."* But if we show no sign of living by the family rules, after a while we cannot really call ourselves Christians.

Jesus warned, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven ... everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand"* (Matthew 7:21, 26). Amos wants to warn us of presumption. Just being part of a church and claiming the name Christian is not enough. The Lord wants His children to live like members of His family.

**Reflection: How do the privileges of being a Christian affect you? What difference does it make to be able to call God 'Father'? Are you encouraged by seeing yourself increasingly displaying a family likeness to Jesus?**

Day 7 [5<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

## **Meditation: Called to be a Watchman Proclaiming The Truth**

Amos 3:1-8

This section of Amos divides into three 'judgment oracles'. Three times Israel is told, "*Hear this word . . .*" (Verses 3:1; 4:1; 5:1). One difficulty with applying the book of Amos is that the nation of Israel was both a political body (a nation) and a spiritual body (the people of God). This side of the cross, the church is only a spiritual body as the people of God. We are not a political nation. So we will have to work hard at some of the social and political comments Amos makes.

By way of introduction:

### **The Nation of Israel**

*Could never* lose God's covenant promises completely (Amos 9:8-9)

*Could* lose the blessings of the covenant in life

ie. lose the land; lose crops; be invaded

Israel was mixed – some individuals were true believers; others were not. Amos is preaching so that even though judgment is coming, there may be a remnant of true Israelites who would remain faithful.

### **The Christian Church**

*Can never* be defeated or overcome.

*Can* lose the blessings of salvation in this life (Hebrews 12:6).

God may discipline a church or an individual to bring them to repentance.

The church is mixed – some are true believers; others are self-deceived (Matthew 7:21-23). Even in gospel churches there are those who were never truly converted and will fall away, and those who are faithful. In Amos 3:3-8, Amos adopts a little series of riddles. The answers are clearly:

No (v3);

No, No ( 4 – lions do not reveal themselves needlessly);

No, No (v5).

Then the shift comes in verse 6 where the response is yes. Yes, people do tremble when a trumpet warns them of attack. And yes, disaster comes because the Lord calls it. In verses 7-8, Amos declares that he cannot hold back from warning the people of God's judgment now that it has been revealed.

**Reflection: What about you? Did Jesus warn of God's judgment? Did He die so that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life? Have you spoken of this to others?**

Day 8 [6<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Confidence in Worldly Possessions**

Amos 3:9-12

Amos attacks two deceptive sources of security in the remainder of the chapter: Wealth (vv9-12), which we will look at today, and Worship (vv13-15).

Clearly the people were impressed with fortresses (vv9-11). The scholars tell us that these were fortified luxury houses. We might compare them to modern big houses hidden behind security gates. Strangely it is the fortresses of Ashdod and Egypt that are summoned as witnesses (v9). These pagan nations are to observe Israel's unrest, oppression and, in a shocking phrase, that: *"They do not know how to do right"* (v10). Israel has lost all sense of moral bearing. Nor do the Israelites worry about the future, because the affluent have their fortresses. But Amos tells them they may store up wealth in their fortresses; but they will be plundered and looted (v10).

Not a lot will be left of Israel. The picture in verse 12 comes from Exodus 22. If you were a shepherd and a wild animal ate one of your master's sheep, then you had to take back a piece of bone to prove that you had not stolen the animal. God says that a few Israelites will be saved when the land is invaded, but not many. All that will be left of the fortresses is a bedstead or a piece of fabric from a sofa.

So for us, do we perhaps think that our future is secure because we own a house? Or because we have some money in the bank? Or because the bank of mum and dad will bail us out? Do you think these things make you safe? The Lord says that He can take away them all.

**Reflection: What makes you feel safe? Do you feel safer when you look to the Lord or when you look at your bank balance or possessions?**

Day 9 [7<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: What and How do You Worship?**

Amos 3:13-15, 4:1-5

The issue is still false security. Israel trusted in its wealth and its worship. Let's focus on their worship today. Around 930 BC the Kingdom of Solomon had split. Rehoboam became King of the two tribes of Judah, where Jerusalem was located. Jeroboam I became King of the ten northern tribes of Israel. Jeroboam I was a bit nervous that his citizens would keep going back to the temple of Jerusalem. His solution was to create two golden calves and place them at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12). He effectively declared, *"Here you go, Israel. There's no need to go to Jerusalem like God told you to. I've made it far more convenient for you to knock God off the 'to-do list'. You can pop in and take off your cap at Bethel or Dan. A choice of two places! Brilliant, hey?"*

The people thought that if they grasped hold of the horns of the altar upon which the calves stood, then all their sins would be forgiven. But the Lord warns, "*the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground*" (v14). Their false sense of forgiveness will be destroyed. We are meant to worship the Lord on His terms, not in a manner which is convenient to us and fits around our lives.

Then in Amos 4:4-5 the Lord opts for outright sarcasm. You need to read these verses with that tone: "*Why don't you go to Bethel and sin!*" They are told to go through the motions of religious worship. The sting is in the end of Verse 5: they brag and boast about their worship "*for this is what you love to do*". They are not there to worship God; they are only going to make themselves feel good.

**Reflection: Although our motives are always mixed, do we go to church to honour the Lord, hear from Him and encourage others? Or do we go because it makes us feel good? Is it 'what we love to do'?**

Day 10 [8<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Deceptive Security in Wealth**

Amos 4:1-3

Ouch. I cannot remember a preacher ever turning to the congregation and saying, "*Hear this, you fat cows!*" Amos was not a man for genteel company. Here he attacks the affluent women of society. To be clear, he is not criticising them merely for being wealthy. Rather he attacks them for how they obtained their wealth. It is due to the oppression of the poor and the crushing of the needy. Their wealth comes at the expense of others. There is clearly a sense of entitlement here as the women turn to their husbands and in effect demand, "*Bring me another gin and tonic, darling.*"

The Lord warns them that there will be a complete reversal. They who live in luxury will be pulled away with hooks through holes in the city wall. It will be miserable.

It is helpful to know that the cows of Bashan were actually prized beasts. In that culture this was the finest cow there was – it was top of the range. So it seems that Amos' point is that here are a bunch of women who cared only about their bodies and not about their souls. They may have been 'top animals', but they still had the values of cows.

It makes us ask some awkward questions:

- Do we care obsessively about our body to the neglect of our soul?
- Are we content to expand our own wealth without a thought to how the most vulnerable in society are surviving?

I am writing this a couple of weeks after the Grenfell Tower went up in flames, killing dozens of people in Kensington, London. That second question feels quite awkward and acute for many in our affluent capital city. Having more money can give you more choices in life, but it cannot nurture or protect your soul.

**Reflection: Have you recently heeded Jesus' warning about the deceitfulness of wealth? (Matthew 13:22) It can choke the Word of God so that it bears no fruit in your life. It offers a deceptive security.**

Day 11 [9<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Blessing of Divine Chastisement**

Amos 4:6-11

Here is a staggering list of ways that the Lord has blocked Israel and caused them difficulty. There were five ways in which He had sought to discipline them and shock them into returning to Him, but they did not. We need to know that the Lord will allow His people to suffer pain and hardship as a warning in order that they may return to Him and ultimately be safe.

I read an article a while ago about a lad called Stephen Pete. He has a genetic disease which means he feels no pain. He described how as a child of five months he bit through his tongue and how he badly burnt himself. He spent most of his childhood with a cast on as he pushed his body beyond a point where most of us would say, "Ow!" and stop. He described being at a skating rink and having a good time until someone pointed out that his trousers were covered with blood and that he was skating on a broken leg. He titled the article: *'The agony of feeling no pain'*.

In life, physical pain is a warning to us so that we do not experience the agony of serious harm. The Lord tells His people that He will send upon them the pain of no food, no crops and no rain so that they do not experience the pain of something far worse: His decisive judgment. You and I need to be discerning. In the Bible pain and suffering are not always discipline. Job's pain was not. Jesus' suffering was not. But when God sends troubles, it is sensible to ask the question, *"Lord, is there something of which I need to repent? Do I need to return to you in some way?"*

**Reflection: Are you willing to view hardships in your life as the Lord's discipline? Hebrews 12:4-11 tells us that His discipline is a mark of His love. He wants us to return to Him and keep walking with Him.**



Day 12 [10<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: He is El Shaddai, the Lord God Almighty**

Amos 4:6-13

Verses 12 and 13 conclude the first two judgment oracles beginning '*Hear this . . .*' (Amos 3:1 and 4:1). The Lord has said that Israel placed their security in their fortresses of wealth (Amos 3:9-12) and in their self-centred worship (Amos 4:4-5). They have also ignored God's warnings. "*Therefore this is what I will do . . .*" declares God (v12).

The '*this*' is a reference back to Amos 3:11 and the fact that Israel would be invaded by Assyria. This did indeed happen, leading to Israel's destruction in 722 BC. At this conclusion the Lord emphasises His mastery over all creation. It is what He does repeatedly throughout the book of Amos. It is as if He is saying,

**"You do realise that I am the Creator God who controls all the elements?  
You do realise that you are tiny creatures and I am the Almighty one?"**

Here and another eight times in the book He describes Himself as the Lord God of Armies (Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:14-15, 16, 27; 6:8, 14; 9:5). It may be translated as '*Lord God Almighty*' or '*Lord, the God of hosts*', but it has a military tone. You cannot resist Him.

Back in yesterday's section, it was almost as if the Lord had turned the events of the Exodus against the Israelites: they would experience

famine (vv6-7);  
locusts (v9),  
plagues, (v10) and  
destruction (v11).

Here in verse 13 it is a plague of darkness. We are foolish to think that we are anything more than little creatures. It is madness to resist the Almighty Creator who is God of Armies and can send the power of creation against us. And yet ... there is a hint of hope in Amos 4:12: "*prepare to meet your God*". Israel may have abused and neglected their relationship with the Lord, but He still calls Himself '*your*' God. Return to Him while there is time!

**Reflection: How often do you reflect upon the overwhelming power of the Lord? It is easy to blame, ignore or shrink down the Lord. Take time to meditate upon His overwhelming power.**

Day 13 [11<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Compassion for the Lost**

Amos 5:1-3

Amos 5:1 begins the third judgment oracle: '*Hear this . . .*' Yet this one begins very differently in tone. It has neither the fierce anger of Amos 3:1-3 nor the biting sarcasm of Amos 4:4-5. Rather, here is the Lord lamenting over the judgment that must fall upon Israel. We should imagine Amos 5:1-2 being read out to the soundtrack from *Schindler's List* – a sad, lonely violin playing in the background. It is so sad that young '*virgin*' Israel, with her whole life ahead of her, is about to fall. She will never rise again and there is no one to lift her up. Not even the Lord will help. Verse 3 reveals that she will be literally decimated. It is a tragic scenario and one the Lord laments.

A while back I read of Judge Phillip Wassall. He presided in the trial of a lorry driver who had killed a motorcyclist when he carried out a dangerous U-turn. The judge sentenced the driver to four years in prison for '*death by dangerous driving*', but as he did so he broke down in tears. He said, "*I cry chiefly for the two young girls who have been robbed of their father who was killed. Yet I cry also for the stupidity of this lorry driver who has ruined his own life too.*"

That is a faint echo of our perfect God. He is perfect in His justice, but not dispassionate. He laments over the judgment that must fall. Elsewhere we are told that judgment is God's '*strange work*', His '*alien task*' (Isaiah 28:21) and that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11; see also Ezekiel 18:23). We must hold together His overwhelming power in justice with His compassion and love for those He has made. We praise Him for the cross!

**Reflection: Do you have the same sense of compassion as the Lord? When you look at the sin of people around you and the corruption of your town, village or city, do you rush to condemn or do you cry over the fate of the lost?**

Day 14 [12<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Seek the LORD in His Ways to Live**

Amos 5:1-17

When you read all of Chapter five, it is quite hard to make sense of it. It is almost as if someone has chopped up three different speeches and then jumbled them together. There is the certainty of unavoidable judgment, followed by an appeal for repentance. I take it that the writer wants to unsettle us and make us feel like we are on the deck of a ship swaying violently in a storm.

I think that the structure works like this:

Lament (v1-3)  
Offer of mercy (v4-6)  
Accusation of injustice (v7)  
Hymn of God's power (v8-9)  
Accusation of injustice (v10-13)  
Offer of mercy (vv14-15)  
Lament (vv16-17)

How can God declare that judgment is certain in Amos 5:1-3, but then immediately call Israel to repent and seek Him in Amos 5:4-6? It is a tension that grows throughout the book, becoming clearest in Amos 9:8. The answer is that although the majority of Israel would be destroyed, there would be a remnant who were truly believers and so did indeed seek Him in repentance. As Amos 5:15 states, "*Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant*".

This concept of the remnant became clearer in the later prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah (see Isaiah 10). Paul picks up on this in Romans 11:5: "*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*" God never abandoned His promise to Israel, but only a remnant has trusted Him.

So, overall the book of Amos is the record of God pronouncing judgment *with the aim* that a remnant would repent and truly trust in the Lord. They would truly seek Him rather than engage in superficial religious activity such as a pilgrimage to Bethel, Gilgal or Beersheba (Amos 5:5). True preaching always has that divisive impact.

**Reflection: What do you think it means to truly seek the Lord as opposed to being engaged in religious activity? How do the parallel verses of Amos 5:14-15 help explain what it means to seek the Lord?**

Day 15 [13<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: God Loves Justice and Righteousness**

Amos 5:7-13

Let us turn to the issue of justice which so heavily concerns the book of Amos. Amos 5:7 is the first time that Amos explicitly condemns Israel for abandoning justice and righteousness ('*mishpa't* and '*tsedeq*' in the original Hebrew; see also Amos 5:24 and Amos 6:12). In fact, it is worse than that. As the ESV translates verse 7, some have turned '*justice into wormwood*', a highly bitter herb synonymous with bitter calamity. Righteousness has been dramatically cast to the ground. The two words have overlapping meanings, yet justice has a little more sense of righting individual wrongs – it is the judge who ensures that someone is granted justice. Righteousness has a little more of a communal sense – it is justice within a whole community or society.

Within His Word, God reveals Himself as One with a particular concern for the oppressed or marginalised. More than fifty times He insists upon care for the fatherless, widow and alien. These were the powerless with no one to provide for them or protect them.

To desire to see a church and a society where there is righteousness and justice for all is to have the heart of God. To be indifferent to such issues is to fall well short of Christlikeness. As an example, my church is located in an area of London which is synonymous with prostitution. There are huge numbers of women who have been illegally trafficked for the sex trade. We could all say, *“That’s not my problem – I don’t visit prostitutes.”* Yet a number are involved in reaching out to these young girls, working with the police to try and see them rescued out of slavery while also seeking to share the gospel with them. I hope that Amos would approve.

**Reflection: Do you tend to view righteousness only in personal terms? Do you look for communal righteousness in a church and a church without favouritism? Do you care about a just society?**

Day 16 [14<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: What Drives You?**

Amos 5:10-13

Here are further details on the lack of justice.

First, there was double taxation on those who could least afford it to pay for the luxuries of the elite (v11). Second, it seems that there was no guarantee of impartial justice in the courts (vv10, 12). Those of us who live in countries that operate under the rule of law and whose legal system is overwhelmingly free from corruption should give thanks to God. It is a blessing that not all nations have!

I want to pause and briefly ask how does a pursuit of justice in this world relate to the task of evangelism? It is an important question and there is probably a drift in every generation towards social justice projects. The watching world will be positive about Christians when they are involved in anti-trafficking campaigns and often negative when they share the gospel. It is always nice to be liked! So how do we hold biblically to both with an appropriate emphasis on eternity?

These words of John Piper’s from the Lausanne conference in 2010 are a helpful starting point:

*Could the evangelical church say – we Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering? I hope we can say that. But if we feel resistant to saying ‘especially eternal suffering,’ or if we feel resistant to saying ‘we care about all suffering in this age,’ then either we have a defective view of hell or a defective heart.*

Believers who are like Christ, care for justice in this world, but they care for people's eternal souls even more. As Christians we should care first for justice within the church and then secondly for justice in the wider world, remembering that the Lord is sovereign over the pagan nations too (Chapter 1) and cares about their societies.

**Reflection: Are you in danger of being too obsessed with pursuing social justice in this life or do you lean towards indifference to the plight of the widow, orphan and alien?**

Day 17 [15<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: God Loves Us, We ought to Love One Another**

Amos 5:14-15

In Chapter five, "*Seek [the LORD] and live*" (v4) is paralleled with "*Seek good, not evil, that you may live*" (v14). It seems very similar to Christ's command to His disciples: "*remain in my love*" (John 15:9-10). What is the evidence of remaining in Christ's love? It is loving one another (John 15:12). And the power to live this way? It is knowing that Christ has loved us sacrificially (John 15:13). Obedience does not merit or bring us into God's love – that is always an act of His grace. Yet our obedience is the evidence of our love for Jesus. It is in expression of our faith.

In Amos 5, the evidence that we are seeking the Lord is that we seek good, not evil. In fact, it is more than our actions; it is that we '*hate evil*' and '*love good*' (v15). Amos does not call for a veneer of moral action; he wants a love of good and hatred of evil to be the disposition of the heart. Our external action flows from our internal emotions. So how do we encourage a love of justice within ourselves? We remember God's work for us.

Back in Deuteronomy 15:15, the Lord said, "*Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you; that is why I give you this command today.*" One example of this was that they were to freely lend to the poor and needy (Deuteronomy 15:14).

In Ephesians 2:12, Paul describes Christians as being "*excluded from citizenship . . . without hope and without God*". But Jesus Christ showed us mercy and grace when we had nothing. Christians know that, spiritually speaking, we were orphans, widows, aliens. We were enslaved by sin. Yet when we had nothing and deserved nothing, Christ sought us out and showed us generous love and grace.

Knowing that empowers us to go and give of ourselves for others who are marginalised, excluded and without hope – first in the church and then in the world.

**Reflection: When you look at injustice in the world, do you hate it? Do you love justice? Does meditating upon Christ's generosity to you when you were excluded help you show a similar concern for others?**

Day 18 [16<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Are You Ready to Face the Final Day of the Lord?**

Amos 5:18-27

Let me remind you that in Chapters 3-6 Amos is trying to persuade Israel that they are not safe. They may think that a booming economy and a dominant military protect them, but within a generation they were to be invaded by Assyria and destroyed. So after the three "*Hear this . . .*" oracles, we now have two "*Woe to you . . .*" prophecies in Amos 5:18 and Amos 6:1.

In the first Amos attacks the idea that religion can protect them. In the second he undermines again their confidence in wealth. Both 'woes' end with warnings: of exile (Amos 5:27) and of invasion (Amos 6:14).

Today we will focus on Verses 18-20. Evidently Israel had misunderstood '*the Day of the Lord*'. Israel expected a Day when the Lord would judge how everyone had lived and reward or penalise them accordingly. Israel assumed that, as a nation, the Day would be great for them – they would be rewarded and all their enemies destroyed. But Amos warns it will be a day of darkness, not light. Verses 19-20 describe a man desperately fleeing from one danger to another. '*The Day of the Lord*' was going to be a day of pitch darkness, without a ray of brightness. Frightening. Terrifying. That Day came for Israel in 722 BC. The Bible is clear that history is heading towards one more final Day.

On that Day when Jesus will return and judge the world, no one will be worthy of reward; everyone who has lived will deserve judgment – except one man: Jesus Christ. Yet God in His kindness has set in history two days of darkness that matter for you and me. One is the Day of Judgment, but the first was the day of the cross. The day that Jesus died, a surprising darkness fell over the land between midday and 3 pm. It became a day of darkness, not light, when God's judgment on all the sins of those trusting in Christ fell instead on Jesus.

**Reflection: What will the Day of the Lord look like for you? We either trust that the darkness of judgment fell upon Jesus in our place or we will face it ourselves. Give thanks for the day of the cross!**

Day 19 [17<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Offer Sacrifices of Justice and Righteousness**

Amos 5:21-27

Does God like your church meetings? He did not like those in Israel: "*I hate ... I despise ... I will not accept ... I will have no regard for ... I will not listen to ...*" I expect that this Sunday there will be church services up and down the land that God will hate. They will stink offensively to Him (v21).

They may well be church leaders breaking bread earnestly while God says, *"I hate that."* There may be crowds of thousands swaying intensely as they sing songs while God says, *"I hate that."* There may be preachers delivering impeccably crafted sermons which people diligently transcribe while God says, *"I hate that."* Note that it is not that God hates all gatherings, but that these features demonstrated something that was wrong in Israel. He said to the Israelites that He hated *'your'* festivals, assemblies, songs, harps. There was something about Israel that made their *'worship'* obnoxious. The lacking element is revealed again in Verse 24: their religion did not affect their behaviour.

It is a beautiful picture in verse 24, famously used by Martin Luther King. Justice is not meant to be something that you turn your mind to for one hour a week. It is meant to be continuous, always rolling, never fading. In a brief history lesson in verses 25-26, the Lord reminds the Israelites of their 40 years in the wilderness. This text is a little tricky but Amos implies that they had not only offered sacrifices; there was a concern for justice then too (much as in v24). But now they merely worship convenient gods of their making.

For us today, what is religion that the Lord finds acceptable? James 1:26-27 tells us, *"Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."*

**Reflection: What do your church gatherings look like? Do they produce justice that rolls like a river? Does your religion have a concern for the powerless?**

Day 20 [18<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: What Is The Safest Place to be?**

Amos 6:1-14

Here Amos attacks the complacency of the wealthy. It is clear that it is the leaders of society, the *'notable men'*, who take the hardest hit (v1). The problem is not that they are wealthy but that they do not care about injustice and that they proudly think that they are secure. Amos quotes these elite men in Verse 2. They are telling the people to compare themselves to other poorer nations. That is always a good way to boost your self-esteem! Amos then attacks them for their uncaring wealth in Verses 4-6. They lie in opulence, eat only the finest foods and think that the songs they write are as good as David's! They may enjoy luxury and drink wine not from glasses but bowls! But they do not grieve over the ruin of the nation (v6). Once again they are told that they turn justice and righteousness into poison and bitterness (v12). The Lord hates their smug sense of security in their own resources (v8). It will not save them from God's judgment (vv9-10).



Here is a word primarily for those who exercise power in this world. You will be held to account by the Lord for your indifference to those who are poorest. Crucially nor can your wealth protect you!

I read recently that a number of Californian tech billionaires are buying up land in remote parts of New Zealand to flee to in the case of a nuclear holocaust. Well, good luck in outrunning a nuclear missile! It seems such a silly plan. Yet, do you ever find yourself thinking, *"I need more money in the bank to be secure. If I had one month's savings in the bank, I'd feel safer ... If I had one year's savings ... Phew, I have the bank of mum and dad to fall back on"*?

**Reflection: What is your confidence in? Verse 8 reminds us that the only place of security is the Lord.**

Day 21 [19<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: There is An End to God's Benevolent Patience**

Amos 7:1-17; 8:1-3

Having spent four chapters trying to persuade the Israelites that their complacency is misplaced, Amos now spends the last three chapters on five visions of the coming judgment. The first four are in pairs:

Amos 7:1-3 The swarm of locusts

Amos 7:4-6 The judgment of fire

Both are warnings of total devastation. But Amos pleads for mercy and the Lord relents.

Amos 7:7-9 The plumb line

Amos 8:1-3 A basket of ripe fruit

These are less catastrophic and suggest a careful judgment being made. There is no pleading. The Lord waits *'no longer'*.

Amos 9:1-4 The final judgment

There is no pair because this is the end.

At this point in the book, around 760 BC, God's patience with Israel runs out. We understand in normal life that patience is a wonderful virtue, but unlimited patience is not. A good parent is patient with a misbehaving child, yet eventually there will be some form of correction. Otherwise the parent is just lazy or indifferent.

We also need to remember the purpose of God's patience. As Romans 2:4 teaches us, "... do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?"

**Reflection: Who are the unbelievers you love and make you grateful that the Lord has been patient thus far? Pray that they come to repentance. We do not know when His patience will end.**

Day 22 [20<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Plead for God's Mercy on Others**

Amos 7:1-6

Twice here we are told, "*the Lord relented*" (vv3, 6). It is a Hebrew word that is also translated as '*repented*' or '*changed his mind*'. How do we understand that when elsewhere we are told, "*He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a human being, that He should change his mind*" (1 Samuel 15:29)? There are three things to notice:

God prompts Amos' pleading. In both visions the Lord adopts the tactic of '*leaking news*' to Amos to produce a response. The Lord '*showed*' these events to Amos (vv1, 4).

The Lord *wants* Amos to plead.

There is a desperate intensity to Amos' appeal. He "*cried out*" and begged the Lord to stop (vv2, 5). Biblical prayers always have such intensity for the lost. When Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and its wretched future (Luke 19:41). When Paul considered the plight of his fellow Jews, he declared, "*I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart . . . my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved*" (Romans 9:2; 10:1).

Amos' plea is answered by our *Personal God*. The Lord relates to us in our time. He is not a distant, uncaring deity, such as the concept of Allah. In verses 3 and 5 the Lord relented *as He had always intended to do*. God prompted Amos to pray so that He could have mercy in response to those prayers. The Lord reveals Himself as personal and responsive to the prayers of His people. Martin Luther famously wrote to his barber, "*Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of his willingness.*"

Pleading for others releases God's mercy. That is what the Lord intends. So what stops us? Busyness? Fatalism: '*It won't make a difference*'? Lack of compassion? God have mercy on us.

**Reflection: What stops you from pleading for the Lord to have mercy on others? Ask Him for a heart like Amos, Paul or Jesus and plead!**

Day 23 [21<sup>st</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Jesus, our Ever Interceding High Priest**

Amos 7:1-6

We considered yesterday that we should plead for God to have mercy on others. This is true. Yet it is impossible to read of this incident without thinking of the One who pleads for us:

*. . . because Jesus lives for ever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:24–25, my emphasis).*

*Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:34, my emphasis).*

Jesus may well plead, “*Lord forgive my people. They are so small and pathetic.*” Yet, His pleading is not merely hopeful, like Amos. It is confident and certain. It is pleading on the basis of His perfect life of obedience and a death that has paid for all of our sin. Jesus does not simply plead for mercy; He can also plead for justice – we cannot be punished as punishment has already fallen upon Him. Nor can God’s patience with us in our ongoing struggles with sin ever run out because Jesus lives and pleads forever on the basis of His perfect life and substitutionary death.

For more than 150 years Christians have delighted to sing of this truth:

*Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong, a perfect plea:  
A great High Priest, whose name is love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.  
My name is written on his hands,  
My name is hidden in his heart;  
I know that while in heaven he stands  
No power can force me to depart,  
No power can force me to depart.*

*(Charitie Lees Bancroft, 'Before the throng of God above').*

**Reflection:** No matter what we have done this day, or this week, we have utter confidence of the Lord’s love for us because Jesus is pleading on our behalf. Look up and give thanks for your interceding High Priest.

Day 24 [22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Do You Measure Up?**

Amos 7:7-17; 8:1-3

The picture of a plumb line summons up the image of God measuring Israel against the plumb line of His Word. A plumb line reveals faults that we might miss at a superficial glance. It shows us that the wallpaper or shelves may be wonky. The Lord has measured Israel and found her morally warped.

Why does God relent in the first two visions but not after the next two? Why does His patience run out in Amos 7:7-9 and Amos 8:1-3 so that He declares, *“I will spare them no longer”* (Amos 7:8; 8:2)? The answer comes in Amos’ conflict with the high priest Amaziah. This incident is deliberately placed between visions 3 and 4 to explain why God’s patience has ended. We will look at some of the details tomorrow, but the headline is that this final rejection of God’s Word by the leadership of Israel leads to the final rejection of Israel by God.

Amaziah is the chief priest in the land and in verse 10 he declares that the nation cannot bear the Word of God. He appeals to the monarch, Jeroboam II, in verses 10-11. I presume there is a gap in time while they await the response. That appears to have come by verse 12 for Amaziah tells Amos to get out of the land: there will be no more preaching or prophesying here. In other words, by this stage the government and the church both say, *“We’ve had enough of the Word of God. We don’t like what it says and we’re not listening.”*

At this point, the Lord effectively says, *“Enough. I will spare them no longer. I’ve been patient with your superficial worship. I’ve been patient with your immorality. I’ve been patient with your disregard for justice. But now you are deliberately refusing to listen to my Word. Enough.”*

**Reflection: Can you think of churches or denominations that have drifted from the plumb line of God’s Word? History reveals that eventually the Lord says, ‘Enough’, and they shrink away to nothing.**

Day 25 [23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Upholding the Truth, Irregardless**

Amos 7:10-17

It is a highly personal conflict between Amos and Amaziah. God’s man is placed under enormous pressure. He is subjected to misrepresentation (v11), as Amaziah exaggerates the words that Amos had spoken, telling the king that *“Amos is raising a conspiracy against you”* (v10). He is exposed to temptation (v12). The priest tells Amos that he would have a far easier life back in the nation of Judah. He is treated to intimidation (v13). In essence Amaziah is declaring, *“Do you know where you are, Amos? This is the king’s sanctuary and*

*the temple of the Lord. Who are you to stand up to us in this place?!"*

Yet Amos' response is a great encouragement to us. In verse 14 he effectively says, *"I don't get paid for this, you know. This is not how I earn my living. I have a perfectly well paid job back in Judah, but I'm using my holiday allowance to come here and warn you. God told me to come and preach here and so I have. Oh and by the way, here's God's Word to you personally in verse 17."*

We may find this last verse a shock, but it is a reminder that those who claim to speak for the Lord are held to a higher standard: *"Not many of you should become teachers . . . because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly"* (James 3:1). Amos is a great model for many of us. The Lord does not always call people from their present line of work in order that they might deliver God's warning of judgment, but God does call all of us, shepherds and fig cultivators and schoolteachers and taxi drivers and decorators and lawyers, to tell people about Jesus where he has placed us.

**Reflection: Ask the Lord to give you courage to keep speaking of Jesus, even when you are misrepresented, tempted for a quiet life and intimidated by influential figures.**

Day 26 [24<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: How do You Deal with Injustice Thrown at You?**

Amos 8:4-10

After the fourth vision there is an interlude (Amos 8:4-14) before the fifth vision comes in Chapter 9. It serves to build tension, but also returns to one of the dominant themes of the book: **INJUSTICE**.

The slight shift here is that Amos is not attacking the elites of society but the merchants. He accuses them of wanting to *"do away with the poor"* (v4) – a kind of social cleansing. He quotes them in verses 5-6, revealing that they sit in church longing for the service to be over so they can get back to earning money unscrupulously in order to turn the poorest of society into their slaves. Does that still happen in the modern West? Certainly some London borough councils are accused of replacing social housing with more expensive private property and then rehousing their tenants outside of London. Social cleansing still takes place.

We may not trouble ourselves with such things, but God does: *"I will never forget anything they have done"* (v7). It is as if God gets out His highlighter pen when He says, *"The Lord has sworn by himself"*. What wonderful comfort to those who receive no justice in this life. God will never forget anything the wicked have unjustly done. Verses 8-10 describe the judgment that fell upon Israel in 722 BC. Yet for us now it is also evocative of Good Friday:

A day when people gathered for the religious festival of Passover

A day when darkness darkened the earth as the sun went down at noon (v9)

A day when the ground split open as Christ died, much like the land trembling (v8)

A day when God the Father mourned His only Son (v10)

Again we are faced with choosing a day of darkness – either trusting in the cross or facing the darkness of judgment when Christ returns: a day when God will not forget any injustice done.

**Reflection: How does the knowledge that God will never forget injustices help you to bear with injustice now, either against you personally or on a larger scale?**

Day 27 [25<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: Despise Not the Faithful Preaching of God's Word**

Amos 8:11-14

Here, a different sort of judgment is described. It seems to be describing events after the calamitous judgment upon Israel depicted in Amos 8:7-10. When people have lost everything and there is nowhere else to turn, then they will attempt to seek God's Word (v12) – yet in vain. It is not that all the Bibles have been stolen, but rather there will be "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (v11). There will be no faithful preachers. God's judgment upon a nation who had rejected His Word is that He will withdraw faithful preaching.

The young (v13) are particularly highlighted as being vulnerable as a result. This may be emphasizing that even the strongest in the nation will faint and fall. Yet I wonder if there is also an element of gullibility. When there is a famine of the Word of God, the vacuum normally gets filled by other forms of religion or spirituality. Young people are perhaps particularly susceptible to trying new things and seeking out new experiences and adventures (that is generally a strength and a weakness). Here the young are prepared to '*swear by the sin of Samaria*' – probably a reference to the pagan god worshipped before Israel arrived (2 Kings. 17:30-33). Some worshipped the golden calf at Dan if they wanted a physical, tangible religion they could see and touch.

Although it seems likely that this passage follows on in time from Amos 8:8-10, the fact that Amos describes 'days' in Verse 11 rather than '*the Day*' hints that perhaps this can happen at other times in history. It is certainly the case that up and down our land there seem to be many churches where there is a famine of hearing the Word of God faithfully proclaimed.

**Reflection: Do you cherish the preaching of God's Word, when you hear the Word of the Lord? If you take it for granted, can you see how devastating it would be if the Lord sent a famine of it?**

Day 28 [26<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: How to Escape God's Judgment?**

Amos 9:1-10

This is the fifth and final vision of the book and the stress is on no escape. God declares explicitly, *"Not one will get away, none will escape"* (v1). You can try digging down to the depths of the earth or you can try climbing up to the highest heavens (v2). You could try hiding on Carmel, the highest mountain of the region, or you could try hiding at the bottom of the sea (v3). The outcome remains: no escape.

Once again we are given an overwhelming image of the Lord of creation in verses 5-6. He only has to touch the earth for it to melt. The Israelites cannot evade Him. Indeed, in verse 7 God now views them as no different to the Cushites or Ethiopians. God is saying that their behavior is so miserable that they have become nothing more to Him than any other nation. Yet still there remains hope for some. There will be a remnant of Israel (see Day 14 Devotion) who pass through God's sieve (v9) and are safe.

Those who sought the Lord and said, *"We find our security in You, not in ourselves and Mount Samaria"* (in contrast to those in Amos 6:1) are saved. Those who said, *"Disaster will not overtake or meet us"* (v10) would face the sword of judgment. This is devastating and yet I cannot help read verses 2-4 without thinking of the difference it makes to believe in Christ. There should have been no possibility of any of us escaping from God's judgment. Now, in Him, there is no possibility of losing His love: *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38-39).

**Reflection: How does viewing the Lord as One who melts the earth with His touch and One who lets no sinner escape cause you to give greater thanks for the One who did not escape the wrath of God on the cross?**

Day 29 [27<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: A Day of Judgment But Also a Day of Hope**

Amos 9:11-15

What a change of mood in these last five verses! This is clearly not the same Day of



Judgment that Amos has spoken about for most of the book. It is a day of hope. It may be helpful to list some of the different ways those of us living this side of the cross understand the Day of the Lord when reading an Old Testament prophet:

**Near future**

Day of judgment inflicted on Judah by Assyria (722 BC).

**Hopeful future**

Judah's return from exile in 539 BC

**Far future**

Cross as the Day of Darkness (AD 33), after which nations bear God's name in the church so that people from every tribe and nation become Christians.

**Far hopeful future**

We will be planted in the New Creation, never to be uprooted.

These five verses actually contain two promises. In verses 11-12, the Lord promises to restore His people. There is a sense in which this has been the whole purpose of the book of Amos. The Lord warned Israel of destruction so that through this there might emerge a people genuinely trusting in Him. When the book of Amos was read by the neighbouring nation of Judah in the years following 722 BC, the purpose would have been the same: to produce a people trusting in the Lord. That purpose remains for us.

These two verses are quoted in the New Testament, at the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:16-17, when the disciples discuss the terms on which Gentiles could enter the church. James cites them to say that the tent or shelter of King David was being repaired by the greater David, Jesus Christ. Here is a prediction that Gentiles would join the church equally with Jews through faith in Jesus. People of all nations would bear the name of Jesus.

**Reflection: Have you had the great privilege of meeting with Christians from very different cultures and nations? It is a wonderful blessing that, although we may appear very different, we are united in the one Saviour. What a joy that is!**

Day 30 [28<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: God's Wonderful Promise to Believers**

Amos 9:13-15

What a magnificent picture. The Lord promises to renew His creation in the future. Here is a depiction of the New Creation that God will create when Christ returns. Amos takes the language of blessing from Deuteronomy 28 and exaggerates them wonderfully. The picture is of blessing overtaking judgment. Before the farmers can harvest their crops,

others come along and plant the next crop. Before the vineyard owners can process one season's grapes, the next season is ready to grow. Indeed, there is so much wine it flows down from the hills like a river. No doubt the quality of it would make the finest wines of the 21st Century taste like vinegar. This is an unheard of, impossible, unprecedented plenty.

In these days there will be no more talk of austerity in the news, and no more fears that bust will follow a boom. This peace and prosperity cannot come to an end. Not only is this a reversal of Israel's catastrophic destruction by Assyria in 722 BC, but it is a permanent state of affairs. Perhaps the best line in this promise is verse 15: *"I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted"*.

We need to know that this future is guaranteed to those trusting in Jesus Christ. We need to know that future prosperity is guaranteed in order to liberate us from a materialism that tries to accumulate wealth now. We need to know that God will bless us in ways never seen on this earth so that we do not try and build heaven now. Never, not once in the New Creation, will we ever think sacrifices made in this life were not worth it. We will enjoy our permanent home with our spectacularly generous God and be thrilled for all of the ways we have served Him in this life.

**Reflection: Dwell upon this picture of the New Creation until you have a massive smile on your face and a song in your heart! How will this truth liberate you to serve the Lord today?**

Day 31 [29<sup>th</sup> September 2020]

**Meditation: How Will You Respond?**

Amos 5:1-27

The book of Amos is a call to seek the Lord wholeheartedly. It is a call to trust in Him, not your own resources, nor your religious habits. It is a trust that is seen in a concern for justice and righteousness.

What changes would you like to make in your life?

**Has your view of the Lord shifted a little?**

He is the Almighty Lion who roars (Amos 1:2); He is the Creator of all that exists in this world (Amos 4:13); He is the One who ruins the strongest city in a flash (Amos 5:8); He is the One who touches the earth and it melts (Amos 9:5); and He is the One who will sieve and shake everyone who has ever lived (Amos 9:9).

**Has your thankfulness for Jesus grown?**

He is the One who was crushed for us; who gave His strength for us; who was stripped naked for us (Amos 2:13-15). He is the One who faced God's judgment on the Day of the Lord – a day when there was darkness at midday not light. He endured darkness when He

only deserved light (Amos 5:18–20). He is the One who cries out and begs for us to be shown mercy, constantly interceding for us on the basis of His perfect life and that He is risen from an atoning death (Amos 7:1–6). He is the One who endured exile so that we can be planted in the New Creation forever (Amos 9:4, 15).

### **What will change in the way you ‘seek the LORD’?**

Have you been challenged about the place where you find security? Have you been made to think about why you go to church and how you honour the Lord there? What will it mean for you to let justice roll on like a river and righteousness be like a never failing stream?

**Reflection: What resolutions will you make having read through the book of Amos?**

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