

Prepare to Meet Your God

Let Justice Flow

Amos 4:1-13

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(Story with Video)

I once had an ordinary dog. He didn't require much attention and was easy to neglect—but I sure loved him. I was busy with lots of other things, important things, personal things, and often forgot about the dog. He often went days without receiving food or fresh water. The neighbors, noticing this, began to care for my dog without my consent. They made sure he had fresh food and water when I was too busy to notice. One day one of the neighbors told me what they were doing, and I was outraged. "I'll take care of my own dog," I protested. But I didn't—so they did. Realizing I was just too busy, I decided to allow the neighbors to take care of my dog. However I started to notice they weren't doing it quite right. They were using cheap dog food and not making him obey and encouraging bad habits and behaviors. When I shared my concerns, they offered to let me do it myself. After all it was my dog. I quickly backed down and let them continue doing it their way. Sure I cared for my dog, but I was very busy with important stuff. I continued to be troubled about how they were caring for my dog, so I organized a petition drive in my neighborhood to force my neighbors to take care of my dog, my way. But few would sign it. Couldn't they see the injustice towards me and my dog in all of this? My dog deserved the finest care and they were unwilling to raise my dog, my way. Then I organized a picket line in front of my neighbor's house, protesting how poorly they were caring for my dog. When asked why I didn't care for my own dog, I simply told them, "That is not the point." And I went home. I even appeared before the neighborhood association to pass laws regulating how my neighbors should care for my dog. But I couldn't really rally the votes that I needed. That shouldn't surprise me since no one cares for my dog like I do. I came to realize that the only way my dog could be properly cared for, would be if I did it myself. But that was much too high a price for such an ordinary dog. So I guess I'll let the neighbors do it and hope someday they get it right—the way I would do it if I cared enough to get involved and take care of my dog myself.

You know it's easy to be critical of the government and social programs and organizations because they're really not doing it right. So, at the end of the day, it's a bit sobering to remind ourselves that God didn't call for the government to care for the orphan and the widow and the immigrant and the poor. He called the church—the people of God. You know, historically, the church has had some great moments; the church has had some very bad moments—this whole topic of social justice. I think one of the great moments would be William Wilberforce, driven by Christian principles, driven by his faith, ultimately rallying the church, spending pretty much his entire adult life convincing Great Britain that slavery was morally wrong. The great story is that the church changed the culture. One of the questions I find interesting, though, is, "Why did it take so long?" I mean, literally, it took Wilberforce his entire adult life to finally get those people to agree that what they were doing was simply morally wrong. Slavery was so intertwined into the economy of Great Britain that any time anything is so intertwined into the economy, it's amazing the degree to which we can rationalize and convince ourselves that something is right.

Very similar to our own story in this country—the turning of the American people to understand that actually owning and treating people as a commodity is simply morally wrong. Now we look at that today and we think, "How could people not see that?" But think about how much blood was

shed to finally get to the point where that was no longer practiced. The people in America, the people in Great Britain, they're not monsters. Most of them were good, religious people. How could they not get this? Even more recent to our lifetime would be the whole Civil Rights movement. We think about it today and we're outraged, "How could somebody possibly think that, based on the color of someone's skin, they should sit in the back of the bus? They should drink from a different fountain?" We are outraged when we hear that stuff and yet you think back and you think, "How much was necessary to get people to realize that it was simply morally wrong?" Those people weren't monsters. They were good, religious people. So what happens that we can't see those things clearly? One of the rather shocking stories of the church is the church in pre-World War II Germany. The question is, "Where was the church?" The overwhelming majority of the church sided with Hitler. A tiny remnant led by Bonhoeffer and a few others actually opposed Hitler. And you have to ask the question, "How does that happen—that the people of God could be so confused about what's right and what's wrong?" I think we make a very serious mistake when we think that could not happen to us. Isn't it possible that generations from now they'll look back and wonder how could we not see this moral injustice more clearly? And that's the question we're wrestling with. Is it possible that we just accept as normal what actually breaks the heart of God? And what is it that we need to back up and rethink in order to really be the church in the name of social justice—in the name of what's morally right?

So one of the questions would be, "What are the obstacles? What are the things in our world, in our culture, that perhaps blind us to some things that we need to back up and rethink?" That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have your Bible, turn with us to Amos, Chapter 4. The first couple of chapters of Amos were around this formula that identified these war oracles. But starting in Chapter 3—Chapters 3, 4 and 5—it's a new formula and the new formula is: **Hear this word** because the Hebrew people were simply not listening. And for that reason the intensity level continues to ratchet up. The people aren't listening; the images get more graphic; clearly the intensity level is going up.

Chapter 4, Verse 1:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan ...

Well now that's interesting. If the people won't listen, reach for the cows. Who were the cows of Bashan?

**...who are on the mountain of Samaria,
Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
Who say to your husbands, 'Bring now, that we may drink!'"** (*NASB, Amos 4:1)

Who are the cows of Bashan? They are the women, specifically the wives—specifically the wives of the movers and shakers, the wives of the elite, the wives of the wealthy who have this insatiable appetite for *more*. Now in the ancient culture, wives didn't have a career; they pretty much stayed home. And if you were a wealthy wife, you really stayed home but you didn't do anything. Your servants did everything. So you sat around and you ate fancy food and you drank expensive wine, and you thought about what you wanted *more* of. The whole way that these women would get their status is based on what they had. So in order for their husbands to keep their wives happy, they had to satisfy this appetite for *more*. These women lived in incredible—even by today's standards—incredible luxury. So the wife is saying, "Bring me more wine; bring me more stuff. You know somebody over there got more stuff; I need more stuff. I've got to keep up." The reason for the

comparison is that the cows of Bashan were *the best of the best*. The pastures of Bashan were beautiful pastures, full of water and grass. It was everything a cow could want. And so basically *the best of the best* were the cows of Bashan. But there's probably also something to the metaphor that they are still being fattened for slaughter. So Amos is saying that these women who are driving their husbands to produce more and more are, in a sense, like these cows fattened for slaughter and that imagery is going to come up a little later in the text. So what do they do? They **oppress the poor; they crush the needy**. How do they do that? By saying to your husbands, "**Bring now, that we may drink!**"

Now I find this to be a very thought-provoking concept. What God is saying is: when these women have this insatiable appetite for more—more wine, more food, more stuff—they drive their husbands to produce more. "I've got to feed the appetite and, to do that, I must oppress the poor; I must crush the needy. I must advantage myself by disadvantaging the community in order to provide more and more and more.

Now one of the things I find so interesting is that this was 750 BC, but it could have been written yesterday. It describes a greedy consumer culture perfectly. And in our culture we tend to think, "As long as I can afford it, what's the problem?" The problem is: this appetite that is never satisfied; it drives people to want more and more and more. And as long as it's true, the food chain from top to bottom is going to be dramatically affected by that. We need more profits at the top so all the way down is *more*. We work the angles; we work the system; we work people; we cheat where we have to; we do what we have to, to advantage ourselves, to disadvantage the community, because we must feed the appetite. It's relentless. What God is saying is: when we buy into that greedy consumer way of life, we are contributing to that which oppressed the poor and crushed the needy. No one in the system can afford to disadvantage themselves to the advantage of the community because, "I am trying to feed the monster." And the demand never goes away. At some point you have to ask the question, "When is enough, enough, and isn't it possible that, somewhere along the way, I've been sucked into the current of the culture and perhaps I have to back up and regain some perspective?" Isn't it possible that somewhere along the way I've actually lost sight of the difference between a *want* and a *need*? Somebody once defined a *need* as something I've *wanted* for thirty days. There's something to that. What do I actually need?

Several years ago the *USA Today* did a poll, a nationwide poll, and they found that Lincoln, Nebraska, has the second highest population of working mothers of any city in the United States—second highest! They also found that the top ten cities for working mothers were all in the Midwest and all towns about the size of Lincoln. So they began to investigate to try and figure out, "Why is that?" Their conclusion was: because in a place like Lincoln, Nebraska, we really don't see poverty like you see in New York City or Chicago, even the discussion of poverty is hard. There's Lincoln poverty; there's New York City poverty and there's India poverty. If you've never been to India, you've never seen poverty like poverty in India. It's staggering! It's unimaginable! Their case was that, in a place like Lincoln, you can be so shielded from the ugliness of the city that you don't even realize that it's going on. And so what we think is average, is actually far above average by national standards. So in order to live at that level, we have far more homes where both parents are working. Now let's push that a little bit farther. Lincoln Berean Church is not exactly located in the slums and many of us live in south Lincoln and we love south Lincoln; we love our city. But stop and think about it for a minute. I literally do not have to mix it up with the side of Lincoln that doesn't live like I live. I can eat at the fancy restaurants; I can shop in the nice malls; I can have my car fixed; I can do everything I want to do and then, with technology, we are more isolated; we are

more sanitized; we just remain distant from people who don't really live like we live. So we fail to realize how blessed we are. We just start to think that everybody lives like this.

This is the problem with greed. Nobody thinks they're greedy because we move in the circles with people like us. So we go to our friend's house; it's like our house. We ride in our friend's car; it's like our car. We do the same stuff that our friends do and we think that's average—that's how everybody lives. We have no reason to make contact with people who really don't live like we live. And so it starts to affect your perspective. You start to think: this is the way everybody lives and so we push harder and harder. We have this appetite: "I need more; I need newer; I need different." Listen to the commercials on TV. It's more, more, more...newer...different...and it creates this appetite that is relentless. And as long as that is the case, as long as we live that way, we are contributing to a system that ultimately oppresses the poor and crushes the needy.

One of the big concerns I would have today is what it's like for young couples and young families to grow up in this culture and to remain so sanitized, so removed from people who don't get to live like you. Couples in their twenties think they need to have a house that's nicer than their parents bought in their fifties—and they just think that's normal. I have to have this car; I have to have this house; I have to be in this neighborhood. My kids have to be in these activities; I have to do this. It's normal—it's how everybody lives—but, at some point you have to ask the question, "Is that the right way to live? Do we really need all that?" One of my great concerns would be how many young couples and families do not ultimately live their value system. They would say, "These are things we value," but they will never live those values because they are going one hundred miles an hour. We have to have this home; we have to have two jobs; we have to have two vehicles; our kids have to be in these activities; we have to run...run...run. And, at the end of the day, we're exhausted and we are stressed out. We are miserable and we will never ultimately live a value system. You're going to wake up one morning and your nice big house will be empty. Hope you enjoy all the empty rooms because they may come at a really high cost.

I do feel like Patty and I can speak with some credibility on this issue. In my first job as a pastor, I made \$12,000 a year. My benefits came out of that. I came home with \$700 a month, but our value was that Patty would stay home and raise the children. I'm not saying that has to be your value; I'm saying that was our value. It was really important to us and so we figured out a way to make that work. We bought a tiny little house; we drove really old cars. I always worked a second job. We had three girls piled up in one tiny bedroom and we were really, really happy. I'm not asking you to feel sorry for us. Those were great years! We were very happy because we were able to be a family, to be a family together, to live together, and to love together. Regularly we would sit with the girls at the kitchen table and say, "Girls, you need to understand we will never be able to keep up with the people around us. You're never going to have the stuff that the people around you have. But what you get in exchange is this: We get to be a family and we get to love together; we get to live together." They would not trade that for anything. At some point you have ask yourself, "Is it possible that I'm getting sucked into this culture—this greedy consumer culture where we are starting to think we need more; we need to live at this level; we need new; we need different?" And at what point do we step out of that and say, "It doesn't have to be like this? We could really live our lives differently and we could live at a different level." If the people of God are not going to say, "No," to the greedy consumer culture, who will? If we as the people of God are not leading the way, who will lead the way? When we participate in a greedy consumer culture, we indirectly oppress the poor and crush the needy. That's what he's talking about. Verse 2:

The Lord God has sworn by His holiness,

This is a really unique statement. As a matter of fact it's very rare. God is saying He's putting up His character as collateral to guarantee He's going to do what He said He would do. The holiness of God would be the set-apartness of God, the other-than-ness of God. It's the essence of God's theme. God is saying, on the basis of My character and who I am, I'm going to put that up as collateral to guarantee you that I am going to do what I said I'm going to do. The following statements are very graphic:

**“Behold the days are coming upon you
When they will take you away with meat hooks,
And the last of you with fish hooks.
You will go out *through* breaches in the walls,
Each one straight before her,
And you will be cast to Harmon,” declares the Lord.** (Vs. 2b-3)

Now clearly, by the female pronouns, He is still talking to the cows of Bashan and He is saying, “You have lived lives of luxury to an immoral degree and crushed the poor and afflicted the needy so you’re going to be hauled off.” The images there—like the **meat hook**—there’s a lot of discussion, “What exactly is that referring to?” It’s possible it’s referring to these big rings or hooks that you would put in the lip or the nose of a cow and then they would tie them all together and they would lead them away that way. There’s also some other images that are pretty graphic. Let’s just say it’s a really ugly imagery. The idea of a **fish hook** is not referring to slinging a Zebco 202 out and catching somebody by their shirt and dragging them out of town. It would be more the idea of what we would call a harpoon. If you think of maybe two men walking and there’s a harpoon, shoulder to shoulder, and in between you have fish and they’re harpooned through the gills and they’re hanging off this harpoon. That’s the imagery. It’s very graphic—that these women are going to dangle from the harpoon, like the fish dangle from the harpoon.

The last part—the idea of *going straight through the walls*—is just the walls will be so torn down that you don’t have to go out the gate. You just go straight through the walls because they are full of holes. And then the idea of being **cast to Harmon**; nobody knows exactly what that means. Harmon is a place. What exactly was the reference, we’re not quite sure. Probably the graphic part of the imagery is the Hebrew word for **cast** because it was used consistently for *casting corpses* into a pile. So it’s probably saying that as these women die along the way, they will just take them and cast the corpses into a big pile. Again it’s very graphic imagery.

One of the questions we would ask of the text is: why is the imagery so graphic? The farther you get into Amos, the more graphic it becomes; the more intense it becomes. And I think the answer is simply because they won’t listen and God is saying, “How graphic do I have to get before someone will listen to me?” Verse 4:

**“Enter Bethel and transgress;
In Gilgal multiply transgression!
Bring your sacrifices every morning,
Your tithes every three days.”**

Now I think, starting in Verse 4, Amos is anticipating this response from the people: “We are shocked, Amos. We don’t know what you are talking about. We’re overwhelmed. I mean we’re good religious people. We love God. We would never oppress the poor. We don’t know what you’re talking about.” So Amos is going to get really sarcastic. As a matter of fact most

theologians believe that what Amos is actually making fun of is the call to worship that we used at the beginning of the service this morning from Psalm 95, where you enter into the presence of God. “Enter in with singing; enter in with joy.” Amos says, “Hey, enter into the presence of God and sin. Enter more into the presence of God and sin some more.” Dripping with sarcasm when he says, “**Enter Bethel...**that was the king’s sanctuary. That was the fancy place that the king put together where the movers and shakers, the social elite gathered. They gathered there to be religious. They gathered there to be noticed. The Who’s Who in social circles gathered there. It’s where Jeroboam the first put a golden calf and Jeroboam the second, who was the king of Amos, left it there. So they would come and they would do their religious thing—impressing everyone, trying to convince everyone that they’re really good people. But Amos, dripping with sarcasm says, “Hey, have at it. Enter into the presence of God and sin.”

Gilgal was another place of worship. “**Enter into Gilgal** and sin some more.” Basically what he’s saying is, “Hey, God’s not buying it.” When he talks about **...bring your sacrifices every morning**, you have to understand that the average person could afford to bring a sacrifice once or twice a year. This was a huge investment for an ordinary family. But these extremely wealthy people would come and bring their sacrifice every day because they had more than they knew what to do with. And they would try to pawn that off as a very religious thing. “I love God so much that I bring a sacrifice every day.” All week long they crush the needy and they afflict the poor and they accumulate masses of wealth. But then they bring a little bit to God in order to create the impression that they are very religious people.

He says, “**Your tithes every three days.**” The tithe for the poor was required once every three years. But they are so compassionate towards the poor; they bring one in every three days. Again they would have said, “We are so compassionate; we are so caring for the poor that we bring our tithe every three days.”

“Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened.” (Vs. 5a)

A thank offering was an offering that said, “God you have blessed us in so many ways, we just want to let you know that we are so thankful.”

**“And proclaim freewill offerings, make them known.
For so you love to do, you sons of Israel,”
Declares the Lord God.”** (Vs. 5b)

A **freewill offering** was whatever I chose to bring beyond what was required. But what Amos says, is that you do that in order to be seen; you do it in order to put up a show; you do that so that people will notice you and think you are really religious. I think all of us would know that churches all over America are filled with good religious people. There are certain churches where the movers and the shakers and the social elite go. They go to be noticed; they go to be seen and they do their religious thing because they are trying to convince everybody that they are really good people. But all week long they crush people; all week long they advantage themselves by disadvantaging the community; all week long they oppress the poor and crush the needy and then on the weekend they do their little show. What Amos is saying is, “Hey, bring it on. Give it your best sell because I am telling you that God’s not buying it.”

Starting in Verse 6 it’s just this recitation of all the ways God has tried to get their attention. I would say it goes back over generations. The phrase to look for is God continually says, “*Yet you*

have not returned to me.” I’ve tried everything in my play book and you still don’t change. You still don’t return to me—which leads to the *Therefore*.

“But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities...

He’s not saying there that I provided good dental care in every city. It’s actually a Hebrew phrase that means they were starving; there was no food. It says that you went through a period of famine.

**“...I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities
And lack of bread in all your places,
Yet you have not returned to Me,” declares the Lord.
Furthermore, I withheld the rain from you
While there were still three months until harvest. (He’s talking about drought.)
Then I would send rain on one city
And on another city I would not send rain;
One part would be rained on,
While the part not rained on would dry up.
So two or three cities would stagger to another city to drink water,
But would not be satisfied;
Yet you have not returned to Me,” declares the Lord. (Vs. 6-8)**

What he’s talking about there is: in times of drought and famine those cities that were doing right, doing justice, God would bless. And so people from all of these other cities that were in drought and famine would stagger to these cities in order to stay alive. But it still wouldn’t sink in that this was what God blesses and this is what God judges. They simply wouldn’t change. They kept going through the same cycle.

**“I smote you with scorching wind and mildew;
And the caterpillar was devouring
Your many gardens and vineyards, fig trees and olive trees;
Yet you have not returned to Me,” declares the Lord.
“I sent a plague among you after the manner of Egypt;
I slew your young men by the sword along with your captured horses...that would be war,
And I made the stench of your camp rise up in your nostrils;
Yet you have not returned to Me,” declares the Lord.
“I overthrew you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,
And you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze;” (Vs. 9-11)**

He’s talking about a stick, like in a campfire. And the stick is on fire but before it burns up, He pulls it out. So it’s got all the markings of being burned and scorched, but He pulls it out before it burns up and He says, “I did that and it still didn’t get your attention.”

Verse 12 has the *Therefore*. So God is saying, “For generations I have tried everything in my arsenal to get your attention. But you won’t listen; you won’t change.

**“Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel;
Because I shall do this to you,
Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.”**

That is a very sobering statement. “For generations I have tried everything in my arsenal. You will not listen; this is all I’ve got left. Prepare to meet your God.” Verse 13:

**For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind
And declares to man what are His thoughts,
He who makes dawn into darkness
And treads on the high places of the earth,
The Lord God of hosts is His name.**

The final verse is the imagery of a storm. It’s morning; it’s supposed to be light but instead it’s getting dark. You have the thunder; you have the lightening; you have the God of creation forming this storm. If this was May or June it would really be helpful because you could go out and you see the storm coming. The clouds start to build and you start to hear the thunder and you start to see the lightening, and you know this is going to be a doozy. And what Amos is saying is, “God’s on the horizon. If you listen you can hear the thunder; you can see the lightening and you are about to get the storm of your life because you just wouldn’t listen.” It’s a very sobering message.

Again the Minor Prophets are very intense. The more they don’t listen, the more graphic the image is; the more intense the message becomes. So what do we do with the message? What do we do with what Amos is saying? Well let’s start where the text ended. With this idea of accountability, there is this trend for people to believe that because God is a God of grace, there will be no accountability. “I’m free to do as I please. I can fool the people around me; I can pass myself off as a really good religious person. No one would know the difference. And because of grace, I’ll just scoot through—no accountability.” I’ve got to tell you that the New Testament really disagrees with that. God holds us accountable.

So the logical question would be, “What are you saying? Are you saying that if we don’t straighten up, somebody is going to drag me out of town on a meat hook?” I don’t know. I don’t know how this works out. I’m thinking it probably won’t look like it looked in 750 BC. But here’s the question you have to wrestle with: Is that really the point? I mean is our thinking that if you convince me that if I don’t change my ways God is going to drag me out of town on a meat hook, then I’ll maybe rethink some things. But if God’s really not going to whack me, I’m not really going to sweat it. Is that really what our relationship with God has deteriorated down to? Doesn’t it matter enough that this breaks the heart of God? I’ll guarantee you that God feels about this today the way He felt about it in 750 BC. It offends God as much today as it offended God then. And even if God is not going to whack you and drag you out of town on a meat hook, doesn’t it matter to us that this breaks the heart of God? Isn’t that enough to say, “I really need to think about some things and maybe make some changes.” It’s easy to listen to this message of Amos and think, “He’s talking about somebody else. He’s talking about the movers and the shakers. He’s talking about the wealthy; he’s talking about the powerful—and that’s not me!” And so we cheerlead on the message and say, “Man, lay it on them because they are crushing me and they’re oppressing me and they need to hear it.” But we have to understand, social justice is about the fact that we are in this together. It’s about everybody coming together. Our communities are filled with people who are working the system, who are advantaging themselves to the great disadvantage of the community, who are taking money that doesn’t belong to them. They are cheating; they’re working the system. They have figured out the angles; they’ve figured out how to work the programs.

I saw a story on the news this week that those that are taking government money—unemployment and such—actually are now making more per year than the average person that works. There are

thousands and thousands and thousands of people who have figured out how to work the system. This is a pretty good gig. I can stay at home, make more money and collect a check—but I am perfectly capable of getting a job. Friends, that is stealing. That is advantaging myself to the great disadvantage of the community. For every penny you take that way, that is a penny that is not available for people who actually need help—and everybody pays the price for that.

If your employer is paying you for eight hours of work and you truly only give six hours of work, that is stealing. That's working the system. And somehow that difference has to be made up and everybody pays for that. If you call in sick and you're not sick, that's stealing; it's working the system. It's advantaging yourself to the great disadvantage of others and everybody somehow has to make that up and pay. No matter who you are, you have to think about it. What does this look like in my world? There is this sense of entitlement. I can rationalize it; I can justify it; I have it coming. But we have to think about what does it mean to do the right thing? What does it mean to be in this together? What does it mean to disadvantage myself in order to advantage the greater community?

What would happen if, in the business world, we began to think differently? It isn't just driven by profits so that people could have more money and more stuff and more status. What if there was a different way to do this? What if it was possible that those who have been blessed at the top of the food chain would actually spend a week with one of their most faithful, loyal employees, that gets paid a fraction of what you get paid? Then remember what it's like to sit down at the kitchen table and say, "We don't have enough money." We can't go on vacation. We can't pay our bills. We are really going to have to think through some things. Our kids can't be in these activities." Those are really hard discussions. And while that's going on with really good people, do we really need more summer houses and more stuff? Or is it possible to back up and say, "You know there is a different way to do this." And couldn't we make decisions that are better for everybody to the greater good of the community and reward people who have been good to us and are making good decisions? I think all of us need to ask ourselves the question, "Is it possible that living day in and day out in a greedy consumer culture, that it's possible, that maybe I've lost a little perspective? And because everybody that is around me is living the same way I've really lost track of the fact that I really don't have to live at that level. That's really not what defines life and happiness and maybe I need to back up and rethink some things. Maybe there is a better way to live. Maybe there is a way to live out our values that will ultimately be what my heart longs for but would require serious changes.

Think of it like this: Let's imagine that we're going to have a little meeting—as your pastor, we're going to have a little meeting and so you are going to lay everything out for me. I'm going to find out how much money you make; I'm going to find out how you run your business. I'm going to find out how you treat your employees; I'm going to find out how you work for your employer. I'm going to find out how you work the system; I'm going to find out how you do your taxes. I'm going to find out how you spend your money; I'm going to find out how you live your life; I'm going to find out all your luxuries—I'm going to find out everything. Is there anything that you would possibly think, "Maybe I'd like to change that and rethink it just a little bit before we have our little meeting?" At the end of the day, there will never be such a meeting with me. It's really not my business. You are not openly accountable to me. We'll never have that conversation. But just because you aren't ultimately accountable to me doesn't mean you're not accountable. As your pastor and someone who generally cares about you, I just need to tell you, "Prepare to meet your God."

Our Father we are thankful this morning that You love us. Lord, You love the oppressors. Lord, You aren't bringing judgment because You are mean. You are bringing judgment because Your people are self destructing. Lord, I know the people in this room this morning; they are good people. They want to do the right thing. But, Lord, it's hard. It's hard when we live in the midst of a culture that is so other than how you've called us to live. Lord, again we ask that You give us eyes to see, to see the world as You see it, to see what grieves Your heart, to see if perhaps this greedy consumer culture has affected us more than maybe we thought it had. Lord, I pray that we would take seriously the call and do justice and prepare to meet our God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Prepare to Meet Your God

A Study in Amos

Let Justice Flow

Amos 4:1-13

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Who do you believe at the end of the day will be held accountable by God to care for the orphan, widow, immigrant and poor? Why?
2. Do you agree or disagree with this statement from Henry David Thoreau, “Most of the luxuries and many so called comforts of life are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.” Why?
3. Do you think it’s true that the more you have the more you want? Why or why not?

Bible Study

1. Review the basic concept of social justice. What does it mean to “do justice” and what does it mean to be “righteous” as it’s used in Amos and Proverbs?
2. Read Amos 4:1. Who are the cows of Bashan? What are they guilty of? How do they oppress and crush the poor?
3. Who are the cows of Bashan today? Do we struggle with confusion over wants and needs? Why is this so hard to see in our own lives? Do our appetites for more lead to injustice in our social fabric as a community? Why or why not?
4. Read Amos 4:2, 3. Why do you think the language is so graphic?

5. Read Amos 4:4, 5. In what ways might Lincoln be similar to what was happening in Israel in Amos' day? Is it possible our churches are filled with religious people who have convinced themselves they are "good religious people" all the while either oppressing people directly in our community or simply turning a blind eye to the injustices around them? How do we make sure those verses don't describe us?
6. Read Amos 4:6-13. Basically God had done everything imaginable to get the people to repent but they did not return to God so He promised to send a storm (war) to deal with them. Is the issue really about whether or not God will do the same to us (in other words must we be threatened to consider change) or realizing this matters a lot to God and we should really take this message seriously?

Application

1. How serious is God about this issue of social justice? What does that mean to us then?
2. How do we begin to evaluate our own consumer appetites and process whether we need to make some changes or not? See if you can come up with some helpful suggestions as a group.
3. In what ways do people take advantage and work the systems today for their own advantage? In what ways is that also doing injustice to a community?