

Amos Chapter 4

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[0 : 00] For our own lives. Amos 4 verse 1 page 919. Hear this word you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria.

You women who oppress the poor and crush the needy. And say to your husbands bring us some drinks. The sovereign Lord is sworn by his holiness.

The time will surely come when you'll be taken away with hooks. The last of you with fish hooks. You will each go straight out through the breaches in the wall. And you'll be cast out towards Haman.

Declares the Lord. Go to Bethel and sin. Go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning. Your tithes every three years.

Burn leavened bread as a thank offering. And brag about your free will offerings. Boast about them you Israelites. For this is what you love to do. Declares the sovereign Lord.

[0 : 59] I gave you empty stomachs in every city. And lack of bread in every town. Yet you've not returned to me. Declares the Lord. I also withheld rain from you.

When the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town. But withheld it from another. One field had rain. Another had none. And dried up. People staggered from town to town.

For water. But did not get enough to drink. Yet you have not returned to me. Declares the Lord. Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards.

Destroyed them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees. Yet you have not returned to me. Declares the Lord. I sent plagues upon you.

As I did in Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword. Along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with stench of your camps. Yet you have not returned to me.

[1 : 54] Declares the Lord. I overthrew some of you. As I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick. Snatched from the fire. Yet you have not returned to me.

Declares the Lord. Therefore this is what I will do to you Israel. And because I will do this to you Israel. Prepare to meet your God. He who forms the mountains.

Who creates the wind. And who reveals his thoughts to mankind. Who turns dawn to darkness. And treads on the heights of the earth. The Lord God Almighty.

Is his name. Yes. Who is. Like the Lord. No one. Surely. No one. Compares with him.

Full of grace. And mercy. Turn then to Amos. And chapter 4. The chapter we read. Just a few moments ago. Amos chapter 4. Page 919.

[2 : 52] We're going to. Look at this chapter. Really as. Amos gets into the nitty gritty. Gets down into the real. Work. Of proclaiming the word of God.

Declaring the word of God. To the people of Israel. Remember they were the northern tribes. On the country. There was Judah in the south. Which center was Jerusalem. And Israel in the north. The center was Samaria. They'd been separated. Really after the. Son of. Solomon. Split the nation. And they had gone very different ways.

Israel tended to be far. Worse than Judah. But in the end. Judah. Contracted that sin. From its brothers and sisters. In the north. And went the same way. But it's to Israel.

Particularly. That. Amos was sent. Even though in fact. He was from the south. A southerner. Can you believe it? A southerner. Coming to the north. And preaching. And telling them.

[3 : 47] What they should be doing. Well. It's happened before. Thank God. I wonder if you've seen. I'm sure you must have at some time. Those newspaper cartoons. Just sometimes on the front.

I don't know which newspaper. The Times or the Telegraph. Are saying. And one of the old sort of pictures. You often get. Is the. Is the. The street preacher. With a sandwich board on. Have you

seen those sort of cartoons.

The street preacher. And on his sandwich board. That's like a board on the front. And one on his back. He's got on the front. The end of the world is nigh. Which means the end of the world is near. And on his back.

He's got. Prepare to meet thy gods. Well. Whether there ever actually existed. Sandwich board men like that. I'm not sure. I guess they must have done. But if they did.

They took their lead from Amos. Because here in chapter 4. Amos says just that. In verse 12. Prepare to meet. The AV would have put.

[4 : 41] Thy God. Your God. Prepare to meet. Your God. And this comes at the end. Or near the end of this chapter. Of chapter 4.

And it raises two very important questions. The first question it raises. Who is this God. Who speaks and declares. And why must we prepare to meet him.

Why must we get ready to meet with this God. Who is he like. That causes us and moves us. To meet with him. Well. The message of Amos is really a message.

Which like all the prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah and many others as well. Really can be summed up in a very simple phrase. Return to God. Turn back to God. Get right with God.

It's very much the message of the gospel. That we preach in our day and age. Is this. There is a God who can be known. And to whom we are answerable. And we need to return to him. Come to him with faith.

[5 : 39] And obedience. And love. But. In spite of all the prophets that God had sent. In spite of Amos as well being sent to.

The people were unwilling to return to God. They would not return to God. They decided that they would just carry on. And ignore God's word.

But the reality is that you cannot avoid meeting God. Every single person who has ever lived. Will meet with God. Either they will meet with God in mercy.

Through the gospel. By coming to him in faith. Through the Lord Jesus. And returning to him and receiving his forgiveness. Either they will meet with him then. Or ultimately they will meet with him in judgment.

Because there is set a day. The Bible tells us. Which God has appointed. When men and women will be judged. Before God. God's. Their unwillingness to return to God.

[6 : 39] May well have been. Because they did not fully comprehend. What he was like. I don't mean that they didn't have the word of God preached to them. I don't mean that they never heard the things of God.

But in their minds. They had a wrong understanding of God's. They had a wrong thinking concerning God. And wrong thinking concerning God. Will always mean.

That people will be deterred from seeking God. If we view God wrongly. If we view him in a way which is not true to himself. Then we shall never want to know him.

Or seek him as we should. We live in a day. Which is declared to be the post-modern world. Here in the West. It means that we live in a world.

Where there are no absolutes. No absolutes to the matter of truth. There is no absolute final answer. Concerning anything in life.

[7 : 37] Especially when it comes to God. And so we can have our own view of God. And it's just as true. As any other person's view of God. Our own philosophy.

Which is just as correct. As anybody else's philosophy. There is no absolute clear. Defined truth anymore. And to say that there is. Is intolerance.

Unacceptable. Arrogance. And so on. And yet. The Bible is very clear. That there is one God. And he has revealed himself.

In a particular. Clear. Absolute. Way. I'm sure your mind turns to this question. Why do so many people.

Have an indifference. Towards the things of God. And of Christ. Why is it that so many people. Have no desire. Or interest to think. Or to talk about. The things of God. Isn't a large part of the problem.

[8 : 37] Dear friends. That in general. The church. By that I mean. The whole church. The church. As a whole. Has given either. A very mixed. Or confused. Fear of God.

Or at worst. A distorted. And totally false. Fear of God. A few years ago. There was a book. Which came out. Called The Shack. It was extremely popular.

And what was so sad. Was that many. Even Christians. Thought it was a good book. To give to non-Christians. To read. Hoping that it would stimulate. Them to seek. After God.

God. But the God. That is represented. In the shack. Is nothing like the God. And Father. Our Lord Jesus Christ. See the popular view. Of God.

The view. That has always been. The greatest desire. And the greatest. Picture of God. Has been. That. Longing. That God.

[9 : 33] Is like. Us. But it goes. All the way. Through history. Psalm 50. In verse. 22. 21. When you did. These things. This is God speaking.

I kept silent. In other words. They sinned. When you did. These sinful things. I kept silent. You thought. I was exactly like you. That's the sort of God. People want. Isn't it? A God like us.

A God. Is not too bothered. About sin. Really. A God. Is quite laid back. About the choices. We make in life. As long as we don't hurt anybody.

Do what you like. Choose what you like. Live how you like. But everywhere that we turn in the Bible. From beginning to end. We find.

That we are confronted. With God himself. Or his prophets declaring. I am not like you. God is not a man. That he should lie. And so on. Unless God.

[10 : 32] Is God. Unless he is the God of the Bible. Unless he is completely. And totally. Different. In the best possible way. To us. Then he's not a God. Who's worth knowing.

He's not a God. Who's worth trusting. He's not a God. Who's worth worshipping. And believing in. And loving. These people.

Had a wrong view of God. And therefore. They had no. Concern to turn. To God. We thought last week. When we looked in chapter 3.

Particularly. How God. Was stressing to them. The reality. That whatever he says. He will do. And he has promised them. That there will come judgment. He's promised them.

That as they continue. In this course of sin. That they cannot. Avoid. The inevitable conclusion. That they shall be judged. And punished. For their sin. But the truth is.

[11 : 27] That even though. That was declared to them. They would not believe. In turn. They ignored God's. Warnings. They kept on.

Going. In the way they were going. Like a ship. Heading to the rock. With a. With a foghorn blaring. And the. Lighthouse shining. And the. And the. And the. And the. The. The.

The lighthouse keeper. Over the radio. Saying. Turn away. Turn away. You're going to crash. Just carrying on. To shipwreck. So we're going to answer.

Those two questions. What is God like? And why must we. Prepare to meet with him? From what the Bible says. Not my ideas. Not your ideas. Not. Not.

Anybody else's ideas. But what God has to say. Because he's the only one. Who knows himself. Isn't he? I can't tell you. What. Caleb is like.

[12 : 23] I can give you. A rough description. Of his handsome looks. And his fine hair. But I can't tell you. Everything about him. Only he can tell you. About himself. And so it is with God.

So let's see. What God has to say. Let's see. What he has to say. To his people. As he seeks. To call them back. To himself. So that they may be. Spared. And delivered. From the righteous.

Anger. And justice. That is coming their way. What does he say? Well. I think. Chapter 4. Verse 1. Is a wonderful verse.

In the sense. That it tickles me. Hear this word. You cows of Bashan. On Mount Samaria. You women. I don't mean to be funny.

He's calling these women. Fat cows. That's what he's saying. The cows of Bashan. Were the plumpest. Cows. Bashan was a wonderful. Grassy place.

[13 : 22] And the cows there. Were well fed. And large. And he's saying. To these sinful. And wicked women. You are fat cows. How can he get away with that?

Because he's God. It may sound as if. Perhaps God's coming down. To our human level. Of speaking. But there are times. When God has to speak.

In a shocking way. To get our attention. And he speaks to these. Women. Who were told. Oppress the poor. And crush the needy.

These were women. Who lived opulent. Lives. Luxurious lives. Off the back. Of the suffering. Of the poor. And the needy. And they were the sort.

That spoke to their husbands. Bring us some drinks. Doesn't mean that they were saying. From time to time. Can I have a cup of tea? They're not saying that. There's okay. Husbands.

[14:17] You can make your wives a cup of tea. Without doing any serious harm. To your relationship. It's a good thing in fact. No. More. They were doing something else. Basically they were saying. Get us more. We want more food.

And more parties. And more. Luxury. Remember when we looked in chapter 2. That one of the three sins. That God held against Israel.

Was this. They sell the innocent. Chapter 2. Verse 6. Second part. They sell the innocent for silver. And the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor.

As on the dust of the ground. And deny justice to the oppressed. They were people who. Squeezed. The poor. Fiddled them. And diddled them.

So that they could make their lives rich. And the wives put them under pressure to do that. I want a new milk.

[15:13] A new milk. A new milk out. I want more. And so God speaks against them.

They wanted to satisfy their beastly appetites. And force their husband to be more corrupt. And more dishonest. To bring them more. And more.

It's a saying isn't there. Behind every great man. There is a great woman. It's our truth as well. The history teaches us. That behind some evil men. Are evil women. We've got to be so careful.

How we use our influence. I'm not just directing that to you ladies. Who are wives. But I would direct it to you as well. Be careful how you influence your husbands. But dear husbands.

Careful how you influence your wives. And careful in all of our relationships with one another. That we do not encourage. Or in one sense maybe push. Or cause another to sin.

[16:13] To satisfy our desires. Our wants. Our pleasures. In doing so we may well bring upon ourselves the displeasure of God. Here we have guilt by association.

These women didn't go out and rob people. These women didn't go out and take people to court. They didn't do all those things. But they did them via their husbands.

And God holds them as guilty as those who crush the needy. There are such things aren't there. That you can. People can be arrested.

And can be charged for. For being guilty by association. They were involved in a crime. They didn't commit the crime. But they handled stolen goods. Or whatever it may be. And they are brought to account.

Getting others to do our dirty work. Doesn't make us innocent. Getting others to fire our bullets. Getting others to spread the gossip. God is not going to let them continue in that way.

[17:16] Hear this you fat cows. This is what the sovereign Lord has sworn. I'm making a promise now. It's not going to continue. The time is going to come when you're taken away with hooks.

All those luxuries. All those things that they wanted. That they lived for. Going to be taken away. There's that wonderful truth.

Isn't there in 2 Corinthians 9 verse 6. We reap what we sow. If we sow to please the flesh. We will reap destruction. If we sow to please the spirit. We'll reap eternal life.

What's going to happen? Well verses 2 and 3 tell us. What's going to happen to these women. These proud. These haughty. These greedy women. The day is coming. When they'll be taken away with hooks.

I don't wish to be squeamish. But it literally meant that. The Assyrian army. When they took people captive. Would put through the bottom of their chin. A large hook. That's exactly what was going to happen to them.

[18:23] And more than that. They were going to be led out. Through the breaches in the wall. In other words. The walls of their opulent houses. Would be destroyed. And crushed. And they would walk over the rubble.

On their way to captivity. On their way. To Assyria. But if we thought that.

God calling. These Israelite women fat cows. Was surprising. Then we're in for another bombshell. Never think that God. Never think dear friends. That God just is going to.

Tow the line. To what we think he should do. Or think he should say. He is the God who is sovereign. And he says. What he chooses to say. And he does.

What he chooses to do. And we cannot. How can I put it this way. We cannot guess him. Or double guess him. Or work out. So he gets even more surprising.

[19:19] In one sense. What does he say. Go to Bethel and sin. What? Go and sin. He's telling them. He's encouraging them. He's commanding them. To go and sin.

Even more than they're already doing. Go to Bethel and sin. Go to Gilgal and sin. Yet more. That's the sort of God we want.

Isn't it? A God who will encourage us. In all the lusts. And the pleasures of life. A God who says. It's okay to please yourself. And to let your hair down. No. This isn't God giving them a carte blanche. To do whatever they want. It isn't God saying. I'm cool with your sin. And I don't mind it. Far from it. Things that God's encouraging them to do.

In sin. Are those very things. That have brought upon them. The judgment. And anger of God. Their sacrifices. And their worship. Those things we're told.

[20:14] They took pride in. Those things that they thought. Made them better than everybody else. Notice there. What he says. Burn leavened bread. As a thank offering. Brag about your free will offerings.

Boast about them you Israelites. This is what you love to do. But they aren't worshipping God. The sacrifices. The burnt offerings. That they are doing.

Are taking place. At temples. And altars. That they have built. To false gods. Bethel and Gilgal. Were the places where they had built. And established their own.

Sort of religion. Their own forms of worship. Again this was something that God. Had spoken against them. Hadn't he? But in chapter 2 verse 8. They lie down beside every altar.

On garments. Taken in pledge. In the house of their gods. They drink wine. Taken as fines. They were involved in idolatry. That was the problem with Israel and Judah.

[21:09] All through their history. If you read your Old Testament. You find it again and again. Judges is an incredible book. They seem to start off so well. And seem to be going.

Great guns with God. And then. Then their hearts are turned away. To some false god. Some idol. And they begin to worship that. And immediately God has to deal with them. And he sends them enemies.

Which punish them. And then they are corrected. And they turn back to God. And then they go on fine. For another few years. With one of the judges. And then they fall again. And what we are reading in Amos.

And many of the prophets. Near the end of the Old Testament. Are the last throws. As it were. The last efforts of God. To correct. And to bring back a people. Who seem intent.

On sin. See there comes a point. Dear friends. When God allows us to cut loose.

[22:04] From all restraining grace. And to run away. To our own destruction. That's what they are doing. That's what God is saying. Go on then. You are in sin. You have turned away. There seems to be no way back.

Just carry on. Off you go. These are very terrible words. They are reminiscent of the words of Paul. As he writes to the Romans. And talks about the sin in the world.

This is what he says. In verse 28 of chapter 1. Furthermore. Just as they did not think it worthwhile. To retain the knowledge of God. So God gave them over.

To a depraved mind. He let them loose. To follow their own lusts and desires. So that they do what ought not to be done. They become filled with every kind of wickedness.

Evil, greed and depravity. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. Gossip, slanderers, God haters. Insolent, arrogant and boastful. They invent ways of doing evil. That's 2,000 years ago.

[23:00] Sounds a bit up to date to me. Doesn't it? The worst thing that God can ever do to a person. Is to let them run their own course.

The worst thing that God can do to a generation. Is to cease restraining it from evil. It's a sign of his judgment. It's a sign.

Of his wrath. But God has frequently. Again and again. Sought to bring them back to his senses. And when we go on from.

Verses 5 and 6. Sorry, verses 5. We start to hear God saying to them. And telling them. Look. I've done all that I can. In one sense. I've sought to get your attention.

I've sought to do everything I could. To get you back to myself. To turn you away from your sin. Verse 6 and following.

[23 : 55] We have that repetition, don't we? Of what God has done. And then. Yet you've not returned. Pardon me. You've not returned to me. Declares the Lord. Over and over and over and over again. And there's an escalation as well.

Isn't there? In the things that God has done. It's bread or water or crops. God has taken from them. Withheld from them. Certain material things.

From time to time. Hoping to gain their attention. Hoping that they would see. That this is the Lord's hand upon them. And repent of their sin. Often it had worked. In earlier times.

In the book of the Judges. You read through. They were 10 years under the Philistines. But at last they cried unto God. And he sent a deliverer. But their hearts have become so hardened.

Their lives have become so steeped in evil. As if it is the norm. That no matter what God does now. No matter how many prophets he sends.

[24 : 51] No matter what chastisements he sends. They will not turn. They will not repent. Chapter 3.

We saw how God spoke to his people. Show that they should listen and return. Now we see that God's actions. In the hope that they would return. I wonder.

Have you ever been in a very noisy room? Perhaps it's a party or reception. Or something else we go on. You're trying to get the attention of somebody. On the other side of the room. And so you try perhaps to shout to them across the room.

And the noise deafens. They can't hear. And then perhaps you bang on the table. Or something to try and get their attention. But still they don't hear you. And don't turn to you.

And so you signal to them. Or wave with your hands towards them. And still they don't see you. A whistle. All you can. Eventually in the end. There's only one thing to do. You've got to go and physically lay hands on them.

[25 : 50] As it were. Not in the biblical sense. In the sense of grabbing hold. Lay hands on them. You've got to go to them. And shake them in one sense. And speak to them. And take them.

And God reminds his people. That all through history. He's been seeking to attract their attention. Over years and years. And decades and centuries. Using all sorts of different events.

And still they've ignored him. God's complaint. To his people. Is yet you've not returned to me.

All that I've done. Remember God had reminded them. Back in chapter 3. Of how he'd saved them. And rescued them from Egypt. And from their enemies. And blessed them. And brought them into a promised land. And done them good.

But still they ignored him. And would not listen to him. So now God has to do. More. Painful things. What should God have expected them.

[26 : 47] To turn back to him. When he did these things. And we'll look at them in just a moment. Well because this is exactly. What God had said. If you can.

Keep your finger there. And turn with me to Deuteronomy. In chapter 28. Deuteronomy. In chapter 28. This is where Moses gives the law. And he assures them of blessings for obedience.

And curses for disobedience. It's page 205. Page 205. This is the word that was read to them.

Every Sabbath day. This is the word they would have heard. The law. The Pentateuch. Read to them again and again. They should have known. They should have understood. What was happening to them. Was the work of God.

To bring them to repentance. To show them that they were out of line. Deuteronomy chapter 28. Verse 15. However. If you do not obey the Lord. Your God. And do not carefully follow all his commands.

[27 : 45] And decrees. I'm giving you today. All these curses will come on you. And overtake you. You'll be cursed in the city. And cursed in the country. Your basket.

And your kneading trough. Will be cursed. What has God said here. That he's done to them. In Amos chapter 4. I gave you empty stomachs. In every city.

And lack of bread. In every town. But you didn't return to me. I've said to you. I'm going to take away your bread. And your food. To show that you're in sin. They ignored him. Later on.

In Deuteronomy. In chapter 28. Verse 24. The Lord will turn the rain. Of your country. Into dust and powder. There'll be no rain.

What's the second thing. In verse 7. I will withhold rain. People will stagger. From town to town. For water. Not get enough to drink. I told you. Most of us know.

[28 : 40] The story of Elijah. Three years. There is no rain. Why? Because God had said. That would happen. When the people deserted him. What does God say. Later on then.

No rain. I'll strike your gardens. And vineyards. With blight. And mildew. Amos 4. And chapter 9. Verse 9. Crop failure.

Deuteronomy 28. Verse 22. The Lord will strike you. With wasting disease. With fever. Inflammation. Scorching heat. And drought. With blight. And mildew. Which will plague you. Until you perish. The crops would fail. Verse 10. I sent plagues. Among you. As I did in Egypt. Over in Deuteronomy.

Verse 27. The Lord will affect you. With the boils of Egypt. With tumors. Festering sores. And the itch. From which you cannot be cured. The cure. Curses of Egypt.

[29 : 40] Amos in chapter 4. And verse 11. I overthrew some of you. As I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. There will be. Fighting. And enemies.

Again. God has said. In Deuteronomy 28. Verse 25. The Lord will cause you. To be defeated. Before. Your enemies. I've done these things. You see.

There's a progression there. First of all. No food. No. We still won't turn back. To the Lord. Doesn't it remind you again. Of those plagues. In Egypt.

With Pharaoh. What did God do. To begin with. Turned. The Nile. To blood. No. I won't release the people. And let them go. Okay. It's going to get worse. You're going to have. Toads.

Frogs. No. I'm not going to. Let the people go. It's going to get worse. It's going to have flies. And that's. It's not good. And it got worse. And worse. Didn't it. There's a progression. Do you see. The mercy of God.

[30 : 35] In this though. Isn't God patient. Isn't God gracious. Yes he is. Because he doesn't strike them. With enemies. That they're killed. To begin with. He leads up to it.

He works up to it. He gives them time. To repent. And to turn. And to seek him. Until at last. At the very. Nth degree. In one sense. When nothing else will work. Then he has to come down. Heart.

In all these things. God has been merciful. Even there. In verse 11. You were like a burning stick. Snatched from the fire. In other words. I allowed you to be. I allowed you to be.

Singed in the fire. Of suffering. But I didn't let it consume you. And still. You won't. Turn to me. C.T. C.S. Lewis. Spoke about pain. And suffering. And he said. God. Whispers to us. In the comforts. Of life. He speaks to us.

[31 : 37] No. He whispers to us. In the pleasures of life. He speaks to us. In the. In the. Troubles of life. But he shouts at us.

In the pain of life. He shouts. It's his. Foghorn. It's his. Loudspeaker. So isn't it surprising.

It's not surprising. Then we get to verse 12. Therefore. After all this. After all I've done. After all my mercy. After all my patience. This is what I'll do. This is what I'll do. You'll have to meet with me.

In judgment. And then we have this. Wonderful. Self description. Of God. Don't we. In verse 13. What is God like? We should prepare.

To meet him. Because he is the God. Who judges sin. We should prepare. To meet him. Because we must all meet him. And face him. In mercy or judgment. We can't avoid that. And because when.

[32 : 35] In our lives. God has given us. Chance and chance. And opportunity. Again and again. To turn to him. And seek him. He's not withheld. His voice. But what is this God like?

He's the God who creates. Supreme creator of all the world. He's the source of all wisdom and knowledge. He's the God who actively orders each day.

Dawn to dusk. He's the God who is present in every place of the world. He treads on the heights. He's the one and only God almighty. How are we to prepare the people that we meet with?

To meet with God? How do we get across to them the importance of preparing to meet with God? Surely it's by telling them the truth about who this God is. About what he's like.

The temptation has always been. And many as we know. Even ourselves at times attempted to dumb down God. To play him down. Play down his justice. Play down his holiness.

[33 : 43] Play down the day of judgment. Play down hell. Let's make him a bit more palatable. To the 21st century. Make him a bit more acceptable. To our neighbours. But actually instead of doing them good.

We're doing them harm. They're never ever going to be interested and concerned with meeting a God. Which is just like the sort of God they want. The God that they like. Unless we portray him and speak.

And show him to be the God who he truly is. Men and women will have no interest or concern. How will they get that true vision of God?

By living our lives. Observing us. We are God's letters to the world. You and I are God's messengers to the world.

How do we live and behave? We thought about it this morning. About the fruit of our lives. Showing that we are real disciples of Jesus. Which begins with obedience. Seeking to do his will.

[34 : 42] Living for him. In love and mercy. Patience and kindness. Our lifestyle choices say a lot to the world around about us.

Surely isn't it going to be our prayer dear friends. Above all else. Lord. Let people see Jesus in me. Let them see the reality of who you are in my life.

Can't and shouldn't hide a light under a bucket. Set it up on a hill. That all may see its light. Let's pray together.

Let's pray together.