

Amos Chapter 5 v 1 - 17

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[0 : 00] Hear this word, Israel, this lament I take up concerning you. Fallen is virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land with no one to lift her up.

This is what the Sovereign Lord says to Israel, Your city that marches out a thousand strong will have only a hundred left. Your town that marches out a hundred strong will only have ten left. This is what the Lord says to Israel, Seek me and live. Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba, for Gilgal will surely go into exile, Bethel will be reduced to nothing. Seek the Lord and live, Or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire. It will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.

There are those who turn justice into bitterness, and cast righteousness to the ground. He who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns midnight into dawn, and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out over the face of the land.

[1 : 24] The Lord is his name. With a blinding flash he destroys the stronghold, and brings the fortified city to ruin. There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court, and detest the one who tells the truth.

You levy a straw tax on the poor, and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them.

Though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses, and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent, and take bribes, and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

Therefore, the prudent, keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil. Seek good, not evil, that you may live.

Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good, maintain justice in the courts.

[2 : 34] Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy, on the remnant of Joseph. Therefore, this is what the Lord, the Lord God Almighty says.

There will be wailing in all the streets, and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep, and the mourners to wail. There will be wailing in all the vineyards, for I will pass through your midst, says the Lord.

Well, if you'd like to have your Bibles open, to Amos and chapter 5, we read just a little while ago, page 920, page 920 in the church Bible, Amos chapter 5.

What do you think is the most difficult? To give bad news, or to receive bad news? Which is the harder?

Does it ever get easier for a doctor to inform her patient that they have been diagnosed with cancer, that is inoperable, non-treatable?

[3 : 44] Does it ever get to a point where they can't say that without grief and sadness in their hearts? Can any patient, any person be prepared enough for the results of their blood tests to come back and tell them that they have a debilitating and fatal illness?

I don't know which is harder. I don't think either is easy. The prophet Amos had a very difficult task. He was called by God to diagnose a terminal illness amongst the people of Israel. A terminal illness that was going to result in their destruction at the hands of the Assyrians.

Result in a great loss of life. Result in them losing the land that God had promised to give them.

Result in them being taken en masse away to exile for many, many years.

Some of them never, ever to return. This terrible illness was due to their own sin. They brought upon it themselves this curse that caused this terrible tumor, this canker as it were, to swell up to such a size that there was only one solution that God could bring and that was to lance the boil.

[5 : 12] to destroy. To destroy. They had no hope of human recovery. No one they could look to. Nobody who could help them.

So sorrowful is their situation, so sad and grievous is the circumstances in which Israel was in this day that Amos is called to sing a lament to them at the beginning of the chapter.

Hear this word Israel, this lament. It's a song that would be sung at a funeral or awake. A song of sadness. A song of grief. So devastating was the destruction that must come upon them that even the strength of a thousand soldiers marching from a city would be cut down by 90%.

Only a hundred might remain and even a town that sends out a hundred would only come back with ten. It really was a devastating, terrible situation.

The lament that Amos was to sing was about a young girl, fallen is virgin Israel, a young unmarried girl. The people of God were like that young unmarried girl, fallen, broken, destroyed, never to rise again, deserted with no one to help.

[6 : 49] It's dreadful, isn't it? It's dreadful, the results of sin. It's dreadful, the results of rebellion against God. Let's never think in any way that the world would have us believe that somehow sin can be just an easy bit of fun, something that you can just indulge in and walk away with no consequences.

There are always consequences for sin, either in this life and the next, but especially in the next. However, in spite of that bleak picture, in spite of that song of lament, in spite of that declaration of destruction with so many, suddenly, as it were, bursting into that darkened room, into that dungeon, into that bleakness, there comes these words of the Lord in verse 4.

Seek me and live. Though there is no human help, no army that can help, no power, no authority, no country, there is no one who can come to their aid, yet they can still find help from God.

They can still find help from the Lord. Three times in this passage that we read, God calls them to seek and live. There in verse 4, seek me and live.

Verse 6, seek the Lord and live. Verse 14, seek good, not evil, that you may live. Thankfully, in our day and age, many doctors and consultants, when they have to deliver the bad news of an illness or a cancer, are able to offer some form of hope.

[8 : 30] They're able to say, well, there is a treatment which has worked with others. Perhaps it will work with you. They can offer some percentage of chance that you might be able to come through this time and live longer.

But God isn't just offering them a chance. He's not just saying, well, perhaps or maybe or you could hope for or there's 50% that you could possibly get through this.

No, he says, seek me and live. It's a declaration. It's a promise. It's an absolute certainty. And isn't it so sad as we shall see here with Israel that in our day and age that promise is still declared to our world, our broken, our destroyed, our polluted, our corrupted, our suffering world, there still is a God who says, seek me and live.

There's still a God who declares to the gospel, seek the Lord and live. And yet, men and women don't seek the Lord and they don't live but they die.

don't we see here, dear friends, in the midst of all that God has said must happen, the bad news, the judgment that is going to come upon Israel, don't we see again the very heart of God, even in the pronouncing as it were of judgment, God also speaks mercy.

[10 : 02] Don't we see here, here is a God who is not untouched with feeling. He is not a God who is cold in his acts of justice.

He is not uncaring but from his heart there flows a tenderness, a mercy that grieves over sin and especially the consequences of sin.

we see it all the way through the scriptures, all the way through the Bible, even in the days of Noah in Genesis chapter 6 when God looked over the earth and he saw the wickedness and the evil of the earth we're told his heart was deeply troubled.

We see it especially of course in the example of the Lord Jesus Christ who is God himself who walked upon this earth. We're told of his attitude as he looked over Jerusalem a city that had deserted its God and itself was awaiting judgment.

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city he, that's Jesus, wept over it and said if even you had only known on this day what would bring you peace.

[11 : 20] Can we imagine for one moment that the God who so loved the world that he gave his one and only begotten son is unmoved, is unfeeling when he declares judgment and hell.

Can we think for one moment that this God who is so full of grace and mercy is not grieved because men and women are going to hell.

We know that in our day and age hell is not something to be spoken of. We do not hear people speaking of God in the same language as judgment and righteousness and justice.

Somehow in our day and age there is this tendency to make God to be simply purely loving. As if somehow within the majesty and the mightiness and the infinite nature of God love and judgment cannot exist together.

They must exist together in his heart and life. We try to rationalize God. We try to place him in a box of our own design in thinking of our own thoughts.

[12:35] Either men will curse God because he is a despot who calls down judgment on all people without any mercy or else they will pat God on the head and say what a lovely soft nature he is who turns a blind eye to all evil.

God is both perfect justice and he is perfect love at one and the same time without compromising either without either being weakened.

There is no God like our God. This is who he is whether we want him to be or not whether we like him to be or not whether we fully understand him or not he is mercy and judgment loving kindness and justice.

Let me ask you dear friends just this evening when was the last time that we were saddened and grieved about sin? When was the last time that our hearts were broken over the lost those who are hell bound?

When was the last time we grieved over the sin of our own lives of our own hearts as well as that of others? When did we weep at the thought of Jesus coming again with judgment upon those who are without Christ?

[14:17] Surely one of the marks of being a Christian, surely one of the characteristics that rubs off at least upon the heart of the Christian is that attitude of sorrow, of grief over sin.

Isn't that what God wants to bring about in us? Something of the very nature of Jesus who weeps over wicked Jerusalem. So we see that in the midst of anger, in the midst of judgment, there is mercy.

Even as God is, as it were, getting the forces of Assyria, the armies together, to come upon Israel and to bring judgment against them for their sin, even in that very moment, God is also calling out to them, stretching out his hands to them, seek me.

Three simple things that we see here about the help that the Lord provides. He is the only one who can help. He is the only one who can help.

Seek me and live. Turn to me, look to me, so that I can spare you and restore you. And then he says, don't look anywhere else. Do you see that in verse five?

[15:35] Don't seek Bethel, don't go to Gilgal, don't journey to Beersheba. What's he talking about? In each of those places there were altars of worship to false gods, the god of Baal and Asherah.

One of the great sins of this people had been this, that they had turned away from God, who had given them this promised land and provided for them and cared for them, and they turned to the foreign gods, the false gods of the nations around about them.

They tried to blend in and compromise with all the other countries, with all the other peoples. They looked to them for help, but they were no help.

They were part of the problem, not part of the cure. And now a judgment is at the door. They still will turn to these false gods. Aren't we stupid?

Aren't we foolish? That when we are in a fix, when things are broken, because usually of our own making and our own sinfulness and selfishness, when we're in a fix, what do we do?

[16:46] We turn to this person or that person, or we look to money to solve the problem, or we look to anywhere else. We don't look to the Lord. Not really.

God's invitation, seek me. And yet here is God's invitation, seek me. That's God's great desire, that's his great longing, it's his nature to be merciful, seek me.

He tells Ezekiel to preach this word, as surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.

Does God delight to judge? Not as much as he delights to forgive. Can't we sense in the words of the Lord God as he speaks through Amos, a pleading, an earnestness, a sense of genuine longing,

please accept my grace.

Please don't turn away. Please don't continue in this path. Don't seek Bethel, don't seek Gavgal, why not?

[18:00] Because ultimately they're going to be reduced to nothing as well. They can't help, they're powerless. And in the circumstances we find ourselves, in the troubles that we find ourselves, we thank God for friends and loved ones who help us, but ultimately they cannot deal with the great real problem and issue of our hearts.

They cannot comfort us when we mourn. They cannot lift us up when we are down. They cannot heal us and set us free from those things that destroy us.

See, firstly and foremostly, to seek the Lord and live means to recognize and acknowledge that we have turned away from him. If they were already seeking God, if they were already walking with God, God wouldn't need to say, seek me and live.

It's because they hadn't. It's because they'd sought everything else and they turned away. Because they turned their back on God, that God says, turn around and back to me. And the first way back to God, in one sense, is acknowledging doing wrong.

The Bible calls it repentance. It means turning from trusting in ourselves and trusting in our own goodness and trusting in other people and trusting in our works or our charity or whatever it is.

[19:18] It means turning around and turning back to God. For men and women to come to faith in Christ, the first thing is this, to acknowledge that we're a sinner in need of God's grace.

What about us as believers though? Aren't we just as daft? Aren't we just as foolish? Don't we find as well that our faith crumbles as difficulties and troubles come?

And instead of turning back to God, we turn to ourselves and to others. We'll do almost anything rather than crying to the Lord. Yet God's great desire and will for us is as Christians that we should repent.

See, repentance is not just one thing you do at the beginning of the Christian life. It's not just, you know, sort of your confession, as it were. You put it on a piece of paper saying, I've been sinful and bad, Lord, please forgive me, and we leave it there.

And then we never ever need to repent. No, that's not the case. The Christian life is always one of repentance and faith because we still get it wrong. We still muck it up.

[20:31] We still fall on our faces. We still sin. In Revelation and chapter 3, the Lord Jesus speaks to several churches, seven in fact.

Some of them he had to speak words of encouragement because they were really struggling. But others, many of them, he had to speak words of rebuke. And he says this to the church at Laodicea, those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.

So be earnest and repent. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come in and eat with that person and they with me.

He's writing to believers there. Repent. Those I love I discipline and rebuke, isn't that the case for those of us who are parents? Don't we lovingly rebuke our children when they do something which is harmful to them, which is going to cause them great sorrow and grief?

We don't just say, yes, go and play football in the middle of the motorway. Yes, that's fine. No problem. That's okay. We want you to have your freedom and enjoy yourself. That's foolish, isn't it?

[21:40] We love them. We say, no, that's not right. That is dangerous. That is wrong. And so God says, those that I love I rebuke. Dear Christian friend, we need to live lives of repentance.

Repentance that we might be restored. Repentance that we might live. And that's the next thing we see here as well. God is the God who gives us help and he's the only one who can help us but also he's the God who gives us help that we don't deserve.

We don't deserve for him to be merciful. We don't deserve for him to be gracious to us. We don't deserve for him to care for us. We have to repent because we're sinners.

Look how God highlights the sins of the people here in these verses. Three times again. He says, there are those, first of all in verse 7, those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground.

verse 10, there are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court, detest the one who tells the truth. Verse 12, there are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

[22 : 59] All of our sins are known to God. As we've seen, as we've gone through in us, there was this separation as it were in society. Instead of God's people loving and caring one another, the rich were oppressing the poor, they were robbing them.

And when they took the rich people to court, there were people who turned a blind eye and took bribes. And so the poor were oppressed and put down. There was no justice and righteousness. There was nothing good. They were rotten to the core. The reason why we must repent, dear friends, is because we have sin to repent of.

And because judgment is coming soon. verse 6, seek the Lord and live or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire. It's a warning, isn't it?

Repent now and be spared. Do something right now. Seek the Lord and live now and you can be spared all the heartache and the suffering and the sorrow.

[24 : 01] But continue. Continue in the way you're going. Continue in your own way, doing what you think is best, pleasing yourselves has only one end.

Grief. God says, seek me and live.

And then he turns it up a bit. Seek the Lord and live. Most of you will know that as you see in your translation it's got capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D.

It's the Hebrew word Yahweh or Jehovah in the Latin. It's the covenant name of God. It's the name that God gave to Moses. It's the name that God gave to his people to say this is how you can know me.

He's saying I am the covenant keeping God, the God who has made promises and bowed myself to you in an everlasting covenant of love. It's not just seek me but seek the Lord, your Lord, your Savior, the one who has done everything for you.

[25 : 21] Seek me and live. Seek me and live because you must not forget who I am. Verse 8, I'm the creator.

Pleiades is an open star cluster. Those of you who are into astronomy may know that. And Orion, a constellation of stars. God made these things.

He's the creator of all things but also he's the one who orders all the universe. He turns midnight into dawn and darkness, darkens day into night.

He calls the waters and pours them over the face. All that happens in nature does not happen because of mother nature. No such tosh. All things happen because of the God of nature who orders all things.

But notice, he doesn't just order the things of the universe in nature but he orders the things of people as well, of humanity. With a blinding flesh he destroys the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin.

[26 : 25] His hands are involved in the affairs of men and women. Therefore, don't think that God can just stand idly by and look at what's going on where wickedness and evil is being carried out amongst his people and do nothing.

He must act. There are some people of course who won't act. Notice there in verse 13 the prudent, the ones who are going to keep their noses clean and keep out of trouble keep quiet in such times. They know that if they were to stick their oar in, if they were to stand up for righteousness and justice they'd be slammed down. Don't think God's going to do the same.

Don't think God's going to turn a blind eye to evil. Don't think he's just going to keep stum. When he sees wickedness taking place he's going to do something about it. He is not indifferent to sin but rather he's a God who acts with judgment and he will act in his choosing in his time in his way.

These people were wicked people and yet to them God holds out his hands. He says the same to them through the prophet Isaiah to the same people. He says all day long I've held out my hands to an obstinate people.

[27 : 51] Isn't that amazing? He's a patient God. You see there's going to come a day dear friends when every single person who's ever lived in this world including you and I will stand before a holy God to be judged.

and there shall not be one person there who will be able to say God you never gave me a chance. God you never gave me an opportunity.

No one who will be able to say God you treated me unfairly. Not one person. Not you not me. There's none with any excuse.

We see here in God's third encouragement to seek him. That's what he means by saying seek good and not evil.

We see again that God's help is given and given again and again and again. We see there the perseverance of God.

[29 : 03] He doesn't give up does he? Isn't that wonderful? He doesn't give up. He doesn't say well that's it. You've had your chance and they had their chance throughout thousands of years. They had their chance with the prophets and the law and everything else but God doesn't give up.

He perseveres as he perseveres with you and me. How many of us came to faith later in life perhaps? We'd heard the gospel many times and we'd rejected it or been indifferent to it and then there came a point when God ultimately broke in.

because God is persevering we should be all the more willing to receive his word and do it. Not test his patience.

Not put it off for another day and say oh well when I'm a bit older. You've got no guarantee that you're going to get older. The people here this was their last chance saloon.

This is their last opportunity. This is the eleventh hour. God is saying judgment is coming. It's around the corner. You can hear the stampeding of the hooves of their chariots.

[30 : 10] Now will you act and seek me? And they still were saying well no no we'll be okay. We'll be alright.

In fact God is with us. Do you notice that? Verse 14 Seek good not evil that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you just as you say is there a false confidence in God.

The confidence that God was with them when he wasn't. How many people think that God is with them because they lived a nice life. They haven't hurt anybody because they were christened or baptized or went to church or have got Christian family or friends.

How many people are putting it off to the last minute hoping that they'll have time at the end. You see the perseverance of God dear friends that again and again he pleads with them not once not twice but three times to seek him and live.

Here's the rub for you and me dear friends. How many times am I willing to pray for the salvation of the lost? How many times will I storm the throne of God and say Lord save?

[31 : 30] And how many times will I keep on persevering with the lost and sharing the gospel with them? Or have I written them off and said Lord well they're never going to be saved.

They're always going to be hard hearted. Don't we learn a lesson from God that he perseveres? And as we've said all the way long we say as we come to the end here dear friends the help that God gives.

The help that only he can give. The help that we don't deserve. The help that he keeps on offering again and again. It's a life giving help. A life saving help.

There's a promise isn't there attached to each of these things. Seek me and live. Seek the Lord and live. Seek good and not evil that you may live. when we come to Christ we pass from death to life.

And the wonderful thing is that the help that the Lord gives it's not a bandage as it were on an open wound. It's not just a bit of a fixer upper. It's not just a sort of a making things a bit better.

[32 : 44] Kissing it better as mum used to do when you grazed your knee or whatever it is. It's not simply putting a sticking plaster over a broken arm. It's real. It's life compared to death.

And what so many of our neighbours and friends and relatives, the people that we share the gospel with do not realise is that they are living in death. Spiritual death which will lead to eternal death.

They're not living at all. But if they seek the Lord then they can live. Then they can live now and eternally.

Then they can live life to the fullness. Wasn't it Jesus himself who says the thief comes to destroy and to kill and to rob but I have come what? I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Abundant life, eternal life, fullness of life. All that these people lived for in Amos' day, all the things that our friends and family live for in this day, they're worthless, they're meaningless, they're empty, they're just like Gilgal and Beersheba and Bethel, they're false, they never satisfy, they never give what they promise to give, promise much and give nothing.

[34 : 03] Seek me and live, says the Lord. There's a transformation that takes place in the life of a person who seeks the Lord.

No longer do they live for that which is evil, they hate evil and they love what is good. That's the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. They seek to maintain justice in the courts.

As Amos brings this section to a close, what do we see? In one sense we have stark contrast. Seek me and live, be delivered, enjoy fellowship with me, be changed and transformed as you turn away from your sin to me.

But then at the very end, therefore this is what the Lord Almighty says, the alternative is this, wailing in the streets, cries of anguish in the public square, people weeping and mourning in the vineyards and the farms as God passes through their midst.

God's stark, stark contrast, isn't it? The question, dear friends, is before us as well, what will we do? Seek the Lord and live? Reject the Lord and die?

[35 : 18] And haven't we got a message? Dear friends, we don't like receiving bad news and we don't like having to give bad news, but dear friends, we've got something which is the greatest news, good news to the poor, good news to the wicked, good news to men and women, boys and girls.

There is a God in heaven and he helps and he can be found and he can be known and he can change death to life.