

Prayer

You are the King of Glory O Lord!
 Bless all Your people throughout the world who delight to praise Your Name,
 Lift our souls in joy and fellowship, and in unity of praise and thanksgiving,

.....
 Let the testimony of our praise be always on our lips and in our hearts
 May we who are your servants bless Your Holy name!

AMEN!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Music

Pray that the use of music will grow and develop within the world and within our churches, and that it will be performed for the glory of God who has given people this great gift.

On-going prayers

- *Pray against the widespread misuse of recycling within the world*
- *Thanks God for the joy of fellowship and sharing God's good gifts*
- *Pray for people whose lives have been ruined by unemployment*

Meditation

Are we available when the Lord requires us?

Or, being otherwise occupied,

Do we fit the needs of the Kingdom of God

Around our personal social calendars?

Are we available when the Lord needs us?

Or, being far too tired or sometimes lazy,

Do we stall, and put off His work 'till tomorrow

Because we don't want to do it today?

Are we available when the Lord needs us?

Or, being otherwise minded,

Do we imagine that the things we normally do

Are more important than the call to holy living?

Are we available when the Lord needs us?

Or, being blind to the things of the Kingdom

Do we hold on to the greater temptations of the world

Because we've long since sold our souls?

But the Lord still calls, and awaits our response

And we can always turn back to His love; if we will.

Bible Study - Amos 4:1-5

¹ 'Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on the mountain of Samaria! You women who oppress the poor and crush the needy, and who say to your husbands, "Bring wine and let's drink!" ² The Lord GOD has sworn on His holiness that look, the time is coming when they will pull you away with hooks, yes, the last of you with fishhooks! ³ You will be dragged by the straightest route through the breached walls, and you will be flung out into Harmon,' says the LORD.

⁴ 'Come to Bethel and sin; to Gilgal, and add to your rebellion; bring your sacrifices each morning and your tithes every three days; ⁵ bring a thanksgiving offering of leavened bread, and proclaim freewill offerings. Tell everyone about them, as you love to do, O people of Israel!' says the Lord GOD.

Review

Amos launched his prophetic 'word of the Lord' against the people of Israel (see previous studies) with the most extraordinary courage and boldness. Our reading today continues with a further announcement of the judgement of God (4:1-3) and giving other reasons why God was about to judge His people with ferocity (4:4,5). The audacity and bravery of Amos was something quite extraordinary; nothing had been seen like this in Israel since Elijah had stood up to the prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) a century and a half before. He was prepared to stand in front of the people against whom he spoke God's crushing word of judgement (2:6-16), and both deliver the Word entrusted to him and justify his actions as a prophet of God (3:1-8). The people who heard Amos speak were doubtless seething at what he said, because he had the temerity to tell them that God's ultimate judgement on them would be the decimation of war (2:13-16 and 3:9-15). For the rest of the book of Amos, this background helps us to explain all the prophecies he spoke, and if we keep it in mind, then we will be able to correctly interpret Amos' powerful and damning 'Word of the Lord'.

At the beginning of our passage today, Amos' words rounded on the profligate women of northern Israel (called 'Samaria', after its capital city). What he said was shocking because it was a direct insult. Yes, in this prophecy Amos calls the women of Samaria 'cows' (4:1)! 'Cows of Bashan' were a reference to the cattle reared in the north eastern regions of Israel, on the far side of the Jordan and the Lake of Galilee. The region was famous for its fatted cattle, which provided the best animals for ritual slaughter at the sanctuaries and beef for eating. Amos compared the rich women of Samaria to the fattened cows of Bashan, awaiting slaughter! It is hard to think of a more insulting way to address women!

Amos continued using exceptional words. He spoke about God's own sworn promise, made 'on Himself' (4:2) that the rich women of Samaria who had little to do in life except enjoy themselves and get drunk (4:1) would be the victims of war. This terrible picture painted by Amos sounds appalling, and it is; indeed, there are accounts of wars outside of Scripture which speak of the same practice Amos describes in this passage (4:2,3). An invading army would fling ropes with large 'fishhooks' into the crowds of people (including women and children) fleeing in the streets of a defeated city, dragging people alive back through the streets and out through the city walls (4:2,3). Such were the horrors of war in ancient times.

But what was the reason for God's wrath executed on such a scale? Amos had already laid general charges against Israel because of social injustice and religious offence (2:6-8), but in these verses, he spoke about God's outrage at these things. Bethel was arguably the main religious sanctuary in northern Israel and was used by kings and people alike as a place to worship God (see also 7:10), but it was corrupted by the worship of Ba'als. It was an affront to God that He should be worshipped alongside a pagan fertility god and the people of Israel did not know the difference! With cutting cynicism Amos said 'Come to Bethel ... and sin!' (4:4), mentioning also the sanctuary at Gilgal as a parallel example of the rebellion of God's people. He continued by citing the religious duties that people 'loved' to perform (4:5) and with a touch of sarcasm added 'tell everyone about them ...' The people were not embarrassed about their religiosity and their false worship of God, they enjoyed it!

It is by no means clear how Amos managed to get away with saying such things as this directly to people who did not understand that they were doing anything wrong. Why should anyone listen to this raging prophet? Whatever happened, we have to assume some knew that what Amos said was true. Perhaps his bold ability to speak out emboldened others who felt the same about Israel but had no voice; perhaps the poor people of the land. As we will find out, Amos was able to prophesy for a short period of time in Israel, but he did not have long. His powerful message was too much for most people, particularly those in authority (7:10f.)!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What horrors of war are inflicted upon people today, and is it ever right to think of them as judgement from God?
2. Do people go to worship God today and still harbour sin in their lives? Discuss examples of this.
3. How do people 'show off' their faith today in inappropriate ways, and how can you make sure that you do not do this yourself?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This passage of Scripture reminds us yet again of the danger of becoming so wrapped up with the ways of the world and the riches it provides that we fail to honour our Lord properly. I find it hard to comment on these passages of Amos day by day, but Amos spoke directly to the heart of those who thought they were

following God, and I cannot believe that his words were intended just for past times. Great vigilance is required of us all to prevent us from becoming wrapped up in our own little worlds and being content to live as if we alone matter to God and to each other. Our Lord is always calling us on to other things; to higher things and to greater challenges. Satan loves to keep us trapped in our world, but we must hear Amos' words and realise that God is calling us on.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Tomorrow, you will probably be going to worship the Lord in some way together with other people. Remembering Amos' words 'come to Bethel ... and sin!' (4:4), spend time in prayer asking the Lord to enable You to go to worship tomorrow in a true state of worship.*
- *Pray for God's people that they do not fall into sin as the people of Old testament times did. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work amongst God's people to bring light into the church and into the world.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, save us from becoming so wrapped up with our own lives and our own work that we do not give to You or to listen to Your voice. Bless us we pray with a spirit of discernment so that we may hear Your words of warning when we forget You, and bless us with Your presence, we pray: AMEN
