

Prayer

We praise you and bless You, Holy and majestic Lord. You stand above all the cultures, institutions, governments and organisations of the world with the authority of the only One who can make all things happen according to Your own will and purpose. We place our trust in You because You alone can make good things happen out of everything we experience day by day. All glory be to You! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Trees

Trees play their part in the cleanliness and gaseous balance of the air we breathe. Give thanks to God for the way that His creation, especially trees, works to support all forms of life.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for the support you receive from friends
- Pray for those caught up in the earthquake in Java
- Pray for children who suffer because of bad schooling

Meditation

I go out to do my daily work;
With the radiance of this day's light
Glowing on my every move:
The Creator knows my doing.

I thank Him for this opportunity;
He has selected me for a task
And in its doing I am fulfilled:
The Creator knows my being.

I focus to dispel my wandering;
The motivation of His presence
Directs my mind and rules this work:
The Creator knows my thinking.

I serve the only God for all my life;
His wisdom ever goes before
And all my graft is for His glory;
The Creator knows my working.

Bible Study - Amos 6:1-8

¹ 'How terrible it will be for those who are complacent in Zion and those who feel secure on Mount Samaria, and the leaders of important nations who are consulted by the house of Israel!

² Go over to Calneh and see, and go from there to Hamath the great, and then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you any better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory bigger than your territory, ³ you who put off the evil day and bring a reign of terror near?

⁴ 'How terrible it will be for those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch out in comfort on their couches, dining on selected lambs and specially reared calves, ⁵ who play around with songs accompanied on the harp and like David compose songs with instruments, ⁶ who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils; yet they are not sickened because of the collapse of Joseph!

⁷ Therefore they will now be the first of those who go into exile, and the festivities of the revelers will pass away.' ⁸ The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares the LORD, the God of hosts: 'I abhor Jacob's pride and hate his strongholds, and I will hand over the city and all that is in it.'

Review

If you followed the sequence of prophecies in Amos since the dramatic opening (chapters 1 and 2), then the general meaning of this passage will by now be familiar. Of all the prophets in the Old Testament, Amos was one of the boldest in speaking out against the lifestyle of those who claimed to be God's people and yet did not demonstrate godly living. Amos was appalled at the life of the elite rich which he saw around him and condemned supreme luxury as an offense against God and humanity. We have not read today about the plight of the poor and other problems in Israel; all that came earlier in Amos (2:6-11, 5:1-27). This passage is about God's wrath against the rich, and no rich person who uses their wealth to pamper a personal status and enjoy great luxury can avoid the consequences of this word of God.

Verses 1 and 4 begin with the ancient word 'woe', but because we do not use this word now, I have translated it by a small phrase 'how desperate it will be ...' to give the idea of a prophecy of doom, and Amos certainly prophesied doom and gloom for the rich leaders of both Israel and Zion (6:1). This is a fascinating verse, because although Amos had mostly spoken against the northern people of Israel, he included Zion at this point (meaning Jerusalem). God's word against the complacent rich was therefore not confined to the people of Israel alone, and what he described (6:2-8) was unacceptable to God wherever it was practiced (2:4,5).

Now, what was Amos complaining about in verses 2 and 3? If you read these verses in another Bible, you may be confused, but in the original Hebrew, what is going on is easy to understand, and I have brought this out in the translation. The rich leaders of the nations, by which Amos meant all the nations he had prophesied against (chs 1&2 - Israel and Judah and surrounding nations) practised a jealous rivalry, visiting each other in great pomp and ceremony only to eye up their potential rivals. If they spotted a weakness, they would take military action to exploit it, annexing land or capturing shrines or sanctuaries (which had special meaning for their people) and this led to bitter rivalries and terrible bouts of warfare between those nations. We know this to be true because it is found in 2 Kings, and because of Amos' earlier prophecies (chs 1&2). As it says in our text today; 'you who put off the evil day and bring a reign of terror near' (6:3).

Amos was appalled that the affairs of nations should be conducted in this way, and said so. He went on to prophesy further doom (6:4f.) to those who lived a life of luxury, protected from and conveniently ignorant of the social injustices which supported their good living (see 2:6, 4:1, 5:7,24 etc). Verse 4 is a description of living 'off the fat of the land', and verse 5 describes people toying with the music, and playing with the traditional songs and psalms of David. The impression is given that instead of honouring the spiritual importance of this scripture, they made up their own songs as they wished, and Amos would have none of this. Today, we may wish to be more moderate than Amos when considering the use of songs and psalms in worship (see, the advice in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16), but Amos sounds a clear warning against ignoring the songs of Scripture, the Psalms. This section of prophecy is drawn to a close with a further picture of luxury; bowlfuls of wine, the finest make-up and perfumed oils (6:6), and the conclusion of Amos that those who pamper themselves like this have lost touch with reality. They have become so desensitised to the needs of others that the collapse of their own nation causes them no distress (6:6)!

Lastly, Amos described the Lord's wrath at those who were blinded by wealth and power; when the nation was invaded such people would be led away into captivity first (6:7). Then he repeated the Lord's name in five different ways in order to emphasise God's unqualified judgement of destruction (6:8); 'I will hand over the city and all that is in it!' How can we read a text such as this and remain unmoved? Amos laid bare the obscenity of the poverty gap as it may be found in any nation, and although he did not condemn possessions and wealth as such, he came very close to it. He could see the powerful temptations by which wealth cosssets people within an ungodly lifestyle which is ignorant of reality and real need. We must listen to Amos today, for both church and society lie under this judgement of God's Word. God has granted us salvation in Christ, but we cannot use this glorious fact as an excuse to ignore these issues of truth and justice.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In what ways do the rich ruling elite of your own country behave as Amos describes here?
2. In what does Amos describe in this passage the wealthy in general, as found in your country?
3. How can the church best handle the wealth that it possesses? What principles should guide our judgements about what we do with wealth as a church?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This passage of scripture is profoundly disturbing particularly for those who have relative wealth. Even as a westerner, though not wealthy by western standards, I feel somewhat condemned by Amos' extraordinary description of callous wealthy indifference. I do not enjoy the extravagant wealth of many people, but I know that I have so much more than many in the world. I recognise, however, that my primary call is to be obedient to the Lord in using everything He has given to me.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *How does this passage make you feel? Each of us must accept that the first step towards a Godly understanding of wealth and our responsibilities in the world are to admit that we are answerable to God for how we practice and apply whatever God has revealed to us in His Word. This is our awesome responsibility*
- *Pray about the gap between the rich and the poor in your country. Pray that God will work through His people to bring a responsible and practical balance of wealth to your country and the world*

Final Prayer

Praise You, Lord God, for Your Light is life to me, and by Your Light in Jesus Christ I am saved and delivered from sin. Fill me even now with Your Light, so that I may live for You and help to bring Light into this world of darkness. I ask this in the Name of Jesus, the Light of the World. AMEN
